International students entering the student housing market in Groningen

Bachelor project Human Geography & Urban and Regional Planning

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Publication date: January 21st, 2018

Summary

In recent years there has been a significant increase of international students in the city of Groningen, a city of around 200.000 inhabitants. National news reported about international students who couldn't find a room. By using mixed methods, this study examines the effects of the increase of international students on the student housing market in Groningen. The quantitative method, a survey, shows differences between Dutch and international students in their search for a room. The main difference was found to be a difference in access to the market. Also differences between short and long term arrivals within the group of international students are shown. The qualitative method, an analysis based on interviews with international students and main stakeholders, provided firsthand information and experiences. Both methods strengthened each other's results and helped clarify the essence of the problematic situation. The paper ends with conclusions, and advice for further research on similar cases.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Recently, there has been national media attention about it being difficult for international students to find living space specifically in the city of Groningen (NOS, 2018). In Groningen and other university cities in the Netherlands, students usually do not live on a campus but rent their room or apartment in the city (Nuffic, 2018). The population of the city of Groningen is around 200.000 (CBS, 2018). While the total amount of students in Groningen has, in the last couple of years, been fairly stable around 55.000, the amount of international students has significantly increased the last decade (RTV Noord, 2018[a]). Figure 1 shows that of the two higher education institutes, it's mainly the University of Groningen (UG) that has attracted an increasing amount of international students (Groningen City Monitor, 2018). In the year 2010 the University of Groningen had around 2000 international students, degree mobility and credit mobility students combined. Nowadays, this number has increased to 6000.
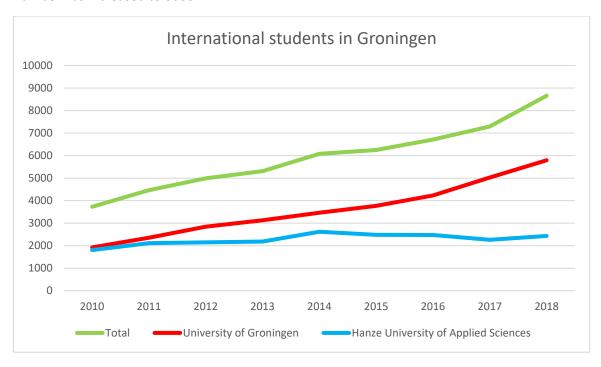

Figure 1: Number of international students in Groningen (Data: Groningen City Monitor, 2018)

The discussion about responsibilities

By law, the University of Groningen is not responsible for student housing, as universities are not allowed to provide student housing (Sikkom, 2018). However, the University of Groningen and the Hanze University of Applied Sciences do have an agreement with SSH Student Housing which is a significant actor in the student housing market. It's a non-profit student housing corporation which rents out approximately 2000 student rooms, studios and apartments in Groningen to international students only (SSH, 2018). The agreement means that the educational institutions communicate the amounts of expected international students to the SSH, which helps getting a room for almost every international student, according to the University of Groningen. However, local newspapers and websites continually report about difficulties that arise from the many international students entering the housing market, who are not always able to find a room. Some opinion-makers and political parties (Lijst Calimero, 2017) state that while the universities are not responsible by law, they bear moral responsibility for the amounts of students that are welcomed.

1.2. Research problem

The aim of the research is to describe issues in the student housing market in the City of Groningen and the surrounding region, caused by an increasing amount of international students coming to study in Groningen. The findings could contribute to developing solutions for problems in the student housing market, in Groningen and in other student towns, related to the increasing number of international students. The following central research question arises:

- **What are the effects of the increase of international students on the student housing market in Groningen?**

The following secondary questions have been formulated:

1. What are the views and experiences of the most important stakeholders on the current student housing market, in light of the growth of international student enrollment at the two institutions for Higher Education in the City of Groningen?
2. What problems in finding housing have recently arrived international students in the City of Groningen experienced?
3. What differences between Dutch students and international students have occurred in their search for a student room in Groningen?

1.3. Thesis structure

The research problem stated above is treated in the next chapters. The core of this study consists of two main parts which can be recognized in the chapters 3 till 6:

- A quantitative part. A survey which mainly helps answering secondary question #3.
- A qualitative part, formed by conducting and analyzing different interviews. This will mainly help answering secondary questions #1 and #2.

First, a theoretical framework around a conceptual model will be presented. The chapter Methodology explains how the quantitative and qualitative data were acquired and processed. The results consist of two chapters, a quantitative and a qualitative one, which will report and analyze the outcomes of the used methods. The paper ends with the conclusions where the outcomes of the research are summarized and linked back to theories, and conclusions are drawn in regards to the research questions.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter provides a theoretical framework around the conceptual model (figure 2). This research is about real estate markets, which are similar to markets of other goods, as there is an interaction between demand and supply on the basis of price. However, there are also some aspects that distinguish real estate markets from other markets. Those differences as well as some specific attributes of university towns will become clear in this chapter. Finally, the focus is put on the case of Groningen where the situation and stakeholders are explained.

Conceptual model

The conceptual model as composed in figure 2 shows the main variables of the research and their interrelationships. The model consists of the main blocks 'supply', 'matching' and 'demand' and other related concepts. The three main blocks visualize a basic market mechanism of supply and demand, where changes can occur to 'match' the supply and demand. Another factor in the model is discrimination, which can be seen as a byproduct of imbalance between demand and supply.
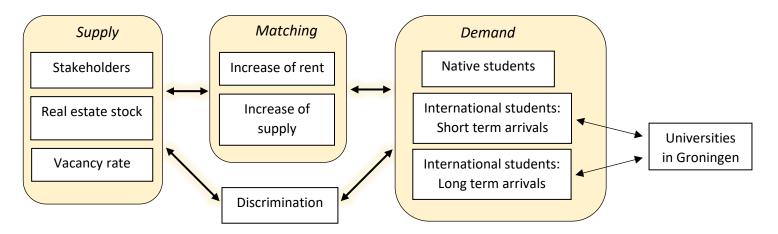

Figure 2: the conceptual model

2.1. *Housing market in medium to large cities*

Characteristics

Harvey & Jowsey (2004, p.26) explained that 'the real estate market' is an abstract aggregated of many sub-markets. Two main sub-markets are the buying and the rental housing market. This research focuses on the latter, as students usually opt to rent a room or small apartment (Nuffic, 2018). Two main sub-markets within the rental housing market are private housing and social housing. The former can be seen as a market with free competition. The latter is usually owned by the government or non-profit organizations, and usually aims to provide affordable housing for those who need it (Lennartz, 2013).

Other important characteristics are that real estate is not movable, and the supply is largely dependent on the standing stock as described by Blank & Winnick (1953). They referred to the standing stock period, which is the market mechanism during a period in which no new construction occurs. Only in the longer term, the construction period, newly supplied buildings are somewhat included in the market mechanism (Blank & Winnick, 1953). Harvey & Jowsey (2004, p.318) confirm the dominance of the standing stock and state this has the following implications:

1. In the short period (which may be many years) the only immediate solution to the problem of a housing shortage is to restrict demand to the limits imposed by the fixed stock.
2. In fully-developed urban areas, the price of old houses determines the price of new houses. Thus the land price is a residual, and high land prices do not restrict the supply of housing.
3. If 'needs' are not covered by the number of dwellings available, resources must be diverted into house construction.

Concluding, the most relevant characteristic of the housing market in this research is that the matching between demand and supply can work sluggish (Harvey & Jowsey 2004, p.27). This means that adjustments in supply, demand and price can take a relatively long time.

Imbalanced market

Because of this sluggish matching a housing deficit can occur. Bowie (2017) wrote about London, a large city, where a crisis of housing supply occurred. Another example, from the Netherlands, is that real estate agents have reported about a strong increase in rental rates in medium sized cities (Pararius, 2018). This would be explained by the conceptual model (figure 2) that the demand has grown relatively to the supply, which reflects in the increase of rent.

A distinction also has to be made between demand and need. 'Demand' refers to the economic concept of what people are able and willing to pay for housing, while 'need' is about whether existing accommodation falls short of the required housing (Harvey & Jowsey 2004, p.330). When the demand for public housing exceeds the available supply, this is called excess demand (Geyer & Sieg, 2013).

On the contrary, real estate developers always have to watch carefully to not over-develop the city, as explained by the 'real estate cycles' described by Wheaton (1999), because it's not profitable to build for vacancy.

Differences in access to housing

A relevant theory for this research is the possible difference in access to housing markets between different groups. A relationship between income inequality and access to housing for low-income renters 'at market rent' was shown by Dewilde & Lancee (2013) in a study about housing in Europe.

Levy-Vroelant (2010) showed that as the imbalance between supply and demand increases and excess demand occurs, housing becomes an increasing issue especially for vulnerable groups. The Council of Europe (2008) published policy about housing policy and vulnerable social groups, but stated that the definition of these vulnerable social groups heavily depends on the context.

Gatekeeping and discrimination

DeSena (1994) linked statistical data on residential segregation with the informal practices of individuals. She described local gatekeeping practices happening through informal housing networking which reduced the access to the housing market for certain groups.

Closely linked to the concept of gatekeeping is the idea of discrimination. A recent study of Murchie & Pang (2018) provided evidence on how landlords in the United States treat rental housing applicants different based on their background. They showed variations across gender, race, religion, sexuality and family status. An older study from Gray (1983), showed evidence that students in general pay more than non-students for equal housing. The reason given for this is that landlords are increasingly able to choose the 'most desirable tenant' while students are often not the most desirable.

According to Carlsson and Eriksson (2013), discrimination in the rental housing market can create economic inefficiencies and unfair individual outcomes. Discrimination is difficult to measure as, according to Dymski (2006), especially through using survey or administrative data, it is often impossible to separate the effects of discrimination and unobserved factors.

2.2. University towns

There are significant differences between university/college towns, and other types of cities as described by Gumprecht (2003). His study was based on American college towns, which were roughly defined as "any city where a college or university and the cultures it creates exert a dominant influence over the character of the community" (Gumprecht 2003, p.51).

While, according to Ong et al. (2013), in the United States approximately 50% of all enrolled students live on campus, this is not the case for Groningen. Like most other Dutch university towns, Groningen does not have university owned accommodation. Students usually rent their room or apartment in the city (Nuffic, 2018).

Rental housing for students can be seen as a specific sub-market (Harvey & Jowsey 2004, p.26). Students have specific preferences and needs, like low costs and living together with other (La Roche et al., 2010). Mielke & Schuh (1995) mentioned that a significant element for a successful study is adequate residence, and that in a student town, quality is just as important as quantity.

Increasing demand

Over the last decades, there has been an increase in international student mobility which has been unevenly spread (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014), possibly causing increasing demand in popular student towns. The recent book of Cairns et al. stated the following: "The accommodation issue, we should add, can be one of the biggest challenges for exchange students should universities not provide enough space in dormitories." (Cairns et al., 2018, p.113).

There have been different factors fueling the international student mobility, like the Erasmus scholarship (European commission, 2018[a]) and the Bologna Process (European commission, 2018[b]). According to Teichler (2012), the Bologna Process aims primarily, without explicitly stating so, to increase two types of student mobility: for degree mobility from other parts of the world, and temporary mobility between European countries. In this study, it makes sense to make a division between short-term arrivals (up to 1 year) and long-term arrivals (more than 1 year), as the impact on the real estate market could be different between these groups. Because the short-term arrivals occupy a room for a shorter time and might look for different types of accommodation, like furnished rooms.

2.3. The case of Groningen

Now, a brief explanation follows about the situation in Groningen which is mostly based on news articles and other publications. It is mentioned that a housing shortage for students has been a problem for several years, but mostly for the past two years (DvhN[a], 2018).

In the case of Groningen, the groups that have the most difficulty finding affordable housing could be called vulnerable groups (Levy-Vroelant, 2010). Based on the news coverage about international students having to sleep in tents (RTV Noord, 2018[b]), this group could be seen as a vulnerable group. Since 2015, SSH Groningen has provided student rooms exclusively for international students, (SSH 2018) and has regular consultation with both universities about their agreements.

Covenant and stakeholders

Very recently, a covenant got signed by the main stakeholders regarding the issue. It aims to structurally improve the matching between the demand and supply for student housing (Gemeente Groningen, 2018). The following parties signed the covenant and are seen as the main stakeholders in this research:

- The Municipality of Groningen
- The University of Groningen (UG)
- The Hanze University of Applied Sciences
- Lefier housing corporation
- Nijestee housing corporation
- De Huismeesters housing corporation
- Stichting Studenten Huisvesting (SSH)
- Groningen Student Union
- Erasmus Student Network

Discrimination and gatekeeping

The earlier mentioned concept of gatekeeping (DeSena, 1994) might play a role for certain groups, like international students, as several media have reported about the 'Dutch only' issue (OOG tv, 2018). Recently a campaign has started against the this issue (DvhN[b], 2018), which is a part of the earlier mentioned covenant (Gemeente Groningen, 2018).

All above-mentioned theories and concepts are taken into account for the research of the Groningen case. The following chapter about methodology, attempts to explain how this will be put into work.

3. Methodology

3.1. Chosen methods

In order to answer all research questions, data were collected by both quantitative and qualitative means in the form of a survey and interviews. The purpose of using mixed methods is to be more confident with results and their interpretation. This is also known as triangulation (Clifford et al., 2010, p.536).

Because the research aims to draw conclusions about large groups of students, a survey was carried out to determine differences between Dutch students and international students in their search for a room. This survey gives mainly quantitative answers to secondary question 3, but the free comments of respondents also give insight in other topics.

To gain more information about the case of Groningen and to eventually confirm survey results, different actors were interviewed. Background information could have also been gathered from news-articles and other literature, but the decision to do interviews was made to improve research quality as the information is gathered firsthand, more specific and more in line with the survey. These interviews were mostly used to answer secondary research questions 1 and 2.

3.2. Survey

15 questions were asked about country of origin, current postcode, monthly rent and details about students' quest for a room and their satisfaction with the results. The list of questions can be found in attachment 1.

These questions had the aim to show possible differences in access to the housing market between *Dutch* students and *international* students, and between short and long term arrivals within the group of international students.

Sample

The survey sample of 196 respondents was achieved in November 2018 by distributing a paper version (116) of the survey as well as an identical online version (80) available through Google Docs. The questionnaire was always filled in by the students themselves without help.

Most of the respondents (85) to the paper version of the survey filled in the questionnaire during the break of a lecture in the first year's course Statistics 1 from the Faculty of Spatial Sciences at the University of Groningen. Another large part of respondents (28) was sampled during a meeting of exchange students, where the coordinator helped by distributing the survey. Three remaining surveys were filled in by first year students in a bar.

The online version of the survey was accountable for 80 respondents. It was distributed in several ways at the same time, which enhanced a 'random' distribution in the student population. First of all, friends were approached who were involved in the introduction of first year students in different faculties of Groningen University. They shared the survey link with the first year students. Next to that, the survey link was shared in several relevant Facebook groups like *Erasmus Groningen 2018/2019* and *Student rooms Groningen*.

By far most of the students could fill in the survey with ease. However, some respondents who live with their parents mentioned some trouble filling in the survey. In hindsight, it would have been better if at question 6 this option was added: "with my parents (you can skip all next questions except 14 & 15)".

Analysis

A consideration was made between using the program SPSS or Excel to provide outcomes for analysis. Finally, both were used. The decision was to produce crosstabs in Excel because of the ease of use and interpretation. Afterwards, interesting results have been tested in SPSS in order to make statements about the statistical relevance of differences found.

3.3. Interviews

As stated in the introduction, local media had reported about a housing shortage in Groningen specifically for international students. In order to gain firsthand knowledge about recent problems and experiences, six interviews were conducted:

- 4 international students, of which 2 got a room from SSH, and 2 found a room in the private market.
- 2 of the main stakeholders, namely RUG and SSH.

Proceedings

While by no means representative for the population, the interviews gave firsthand and deeper insight in the situation with student housing in Groningen. The interviews with students took place at the Zernike campus in Groningen, in reserved rooms. The interviews with two main actors took place at their offices. Before the interview, participants were asked to read and sign the 'informed consent form' (attachment 4) which they all did. The audio of these interviews was recorded to improve the processing quality.

To structure and fuel the conversation, three different interview guides were made (attachment 3). One for the international students, one for the RUG spokesperson and another guide for the SSH spokesperson.

The six interviews were not fully transcribed and coded, as only the main messages were used for the analysis. These messages can be read in attachment 4. The analysis is formed by highlighting common and different experiences of the participants. The interpretation is supported by characteristic quotes from the interviews.

3.4. Ethics

This research has some attention points in terms of ethics. Maintaining the privacy of both the respondents of the survey as the participants of the in-depth interviews was of high importance. With this in mind, in the survey only the first four numbers of the postcode were asked, which on the other hand was a sacrifice of data quality. Participants to the interviews were asked to read and sign a consent form (attachment 4) and all interviews were anonymized to maintain privacy.

Positionality

The positionality of the researcher has to be recognized (Clifford et al. 2010, p.35), especially for the interviews. Being a Dutch student who lives in Groningen myself, the participants could have assumed I was prejudiced and they might have given different answers to me than they would to someone not involved in the situation. Also, reporting (either negatively or positively) about the University of Groningen as a stakeholder in the situation had to be done with care, as I as an author was writing about the institute I am part of. It was important to clearly separate facts and opinions, which is important in all studies but especially in studies about recently societal relevant topics like this one.

4. Results survey

The sufficient amount of 196 cases provided freedom of analysis. While the survey was meant for students who started their study in September 2018 in Groningen, it was also filled in by 31 students who had already been studying and living in Groningen for one or more years. For them, in some questions it was unclear if it was about their current situation or when they first came to Groningen some years ago. To improve accuracy and keep the results true for the 2018 situation, students who were not new in Groningen have been filtered out in most of the analysis. 165 useful cases remained, from which 66 were Dutch students and 99 were International students. These 165 cases are used for the analysis, unless mentioned otherwise.

In most of the analysis a comparison is given between the groups Dutch students and international students. Sometimes, there is also a clear difference between other groups, like short stay and long stay arrivals within the group of international students. In most parts of the analysis a crosstab is given to show the main results, supplemented with a graph which shows refined results.

4.1. Paid rent

First, the paid rent is compared between the groups Dutch students and International students. Students who live with their parents are left out here, because they usually don't pay rent and often don't live in Groningen. On average, Dutch students pay €386 per month and international students pay €438. While the survey gave respondents the freedom to fill in their exact rent, three rent categories were chosen to clarify the results: monthly rent below €380; between €380 and €460; above €460. This resulted in the crosstab shown in figure 3. The graph in figure 4 shows a refined category layout of five groups: monthly rent below €300; below €380; below €460; below €540; above €540.

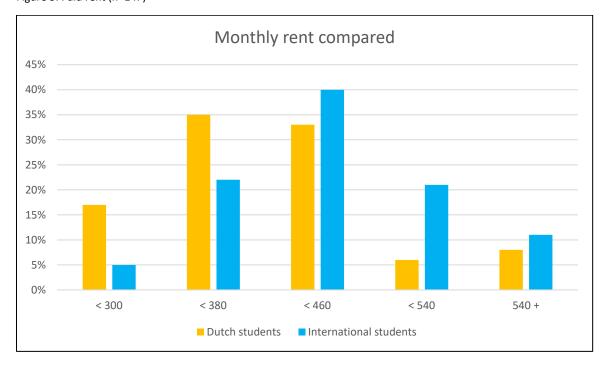|	< €380	€380 - €460	> €460
Dutch students	52%	33%	15%
International students	28%	40%	33%

Figure 3: Paid rent (n=147)

Figure 4: Paid rent (n=147)

The results show that in the sample, Dutch students generally pay less for their room than international students. By performing a Chi-Square test which turned out to be significant at an alpha level of 0.05, the same can be concluded for the population. It has to be mentioned here that the interviews revealed international students often choose for furnished rooms which are more expensive, but also save the students costs of investing in furniture. This and other possible differences in room quality can have an effect on the results.

With question 8, the respondents were also asked about their opinion about the rent relative to the qualities of the room. This resulted in 52% of international students finding their room (way) too expensive, compared to 40% of Dutch students finding their room (way) too expensive.

4.2. Found a room on time

Students were asked whether they found a room before the start of their study year, which started at September 3rd 2018. The percentages in figure 5 show that more international students found a room on time than Dutch students. However, this needs interpretation. Dutch students can more often commute from their parents and might consciously choose for this option, which several respondents mentioned in their comments to the survey. International students don't have the option of commuting, which could mean they have a higher 'need' for a room than Dutch students.

	Yes, on time
Dutch students	58%
International students	83%

Figure 5: Students who found a room before the start of the study year (n=165)

So, actually 17% of international students did not find a room on time. At the time of data collection, which was in November, all international students found a room. 18 out of 66 Dutch students still did not find a room at the time of data collection.

4.3. Duration of search for a room

One of the more interesting outcomes were differences in duration of the search for a room between Dutch and international students. This seemed to be a relevant factor in determining the difficulty of finding a room. Here, students who did not find a room yet in November were filtered out which accounted for 18 Dutch students being excluded. This was done because of the assumption: who did not find a room yet in November, commutes from their parents to study.

	Searched longer than 3 months
Dutch students	6%
International students	20%
Short term arrivals	13%
Long term arrivals	28%

Figure 6: Duration of search for a room (n=147)

Figure 6 contains the percentages of students who searched longer than 3 months to acquire their room. For Dutch students this percentage is 6%, while for international students this is 20%. The Chi-Square test turned out to be significant at an alpha level of 0.05, so international students have a significantly higher change to have to search longer than 3 months, than Dutch students.

Short term and long term arrivals among international students were also compared. While figure 6 shows long term arrivals in the sample had a twice as high change to search longer than 3 months, the Chi-Square test proved this to be not significant for the population.

Using the same data but with all 5 selectable categories, the graph in figure 7 was made. This clearly shows the different distributions of the two groups, which is confirmed by a significant Chi-Square test. So, Dutch students tend to have to search less long to get a room than international students.
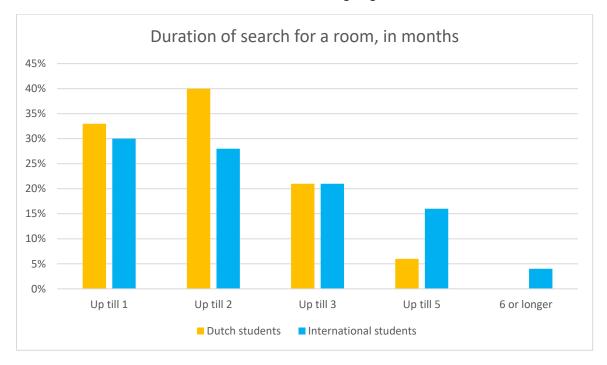

Figure 7: Duration of search for a room, in months (n=147)

The fact that Dutch students usually find a room quicker than international students, reflects a common thread found in the interviews, where international students who did not manage to get a room immediately through SSH, struggled for months to find a room. An additional difficulty for international students is their higher need for a room than Dutch students, as international students cannot commute from their parents.

4.4. Location

As students were asked to provide their postcode, the approximate location of their residence could be used as a variable. Based on the postcodes, three different zones were chosen as shown in figure 8: City center; a first shell surrounding the city center; outside of the shell. This allowed to compare the groups of Dutch students and international students with each other to show differences in residence location. Again, students who still live with their parents are excluded from the figure.
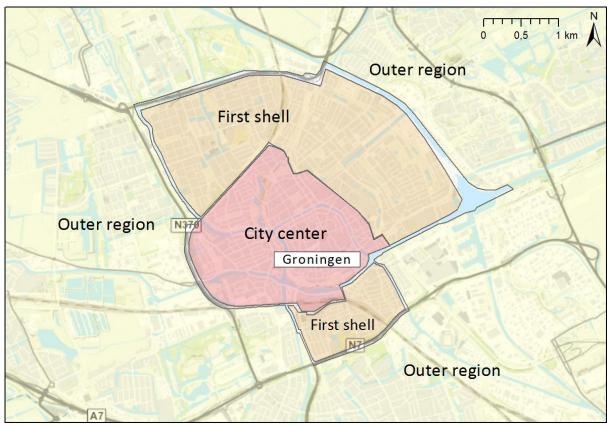
Figure 8: Map (basemap source: Esri, 2018)

The table in figure 9 corresponds with the map in figure 8, and shows the difference in distribution through the city between the groups Dutch students and international students. These findings were statistically relevant as the Chi-Square test showed to be significant at an alpha level of 0.05.

	City center	First shell	Outer region
Dutch students	45%	49%	6%
International students	30%	43%	27%

Figure 9: Location of residence (n=140)

It shows Dutch students are more likely to live in the city center of Groningen than international students. The shares living in the first shell are fairly equal. At last, international students are much more likely to live outside of the shell. This is especially interesting because earlier findings showed that international students generally pay more for their room than Dutch students.

4.5. Willingness to move

Students were asked whether they would move if they found something cheaper. They answers are shown in figure 10. Students living with their parents or who cannot move because of a fixed contract are excluded, hence the sample size of 103. Long term international students are significantly more willing to move than Dutch students, which indicates they are not satisfied with their current room.

	No	Yes, most likely	Yes, for sure
Dutch students	45%	48%	7%
International students	20%	46%	34%
Short term arrivals	23%	53%	23%
Long term arrivals	16%	39%	45%

Figure 10 (n=103)

4.6. Discrimination

All previous questions show clear differences between Dutch students and international students finding a student room. Often, international students experience a disadvantage compared to Dutch students, which could be explained by differences between groups in their access to the market (Dewilde & Lancee, 2013).

The last substantive questions of the survey asked the students whether they experienced discrimination. Discrimination could be a possible explanation for the difference between the groups. However, according to Dymski (2006), discrimination is very difficult to measure as it's often impossible to separate the effects of discrimination from unobserved factors. The survey question provided the results shown in figure 11.

	Yes, experienced discrimination
Dutch students	19%
International students	51%
Short term arrivals	30%
Long term arrivals	76%

Figure 11: Did you experience discrimination? (n=147)

About half of the international respondents responded to the question with 'yes, I experienced discrimination'. Within the group of international students, there's also a notable difference between short term arrivals and long term arrivals which is shown in the two bottom rows of figure 10. The former usually being exchange students from within Europe, the latter usually being degree mobility students who can come from all over the world (Teichler, 2012). Of the long term arrivals 76% answered 'yes', which is 2.5 times as high as the number of short term arrivals who experienced discrimination, who answered 30% 'yes'. Both the difference between international students and Dutch students, and between the two groups of international students were tested to be significant at an alpha level of 0.05.

How to interpret these percentages is up for discussion. The respondents were not asked about what they felt discriminated against and what their norms were about discrimination. This and other details surrounding the situation in Groningen became more clear during the interviews, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

5. Results interviews

As mentioned before, 6 interviews took place, from which 4 international students and 2 main stakeholders in the student housing market in Groningen. The summaries of the participants' answers can be found in attachment 4. In this chapter, the most relevant results are highlighted, supported by a quote from the interviews and linked to the theoretical framework. The results from these interviews serve to supplement the results from the survey.

5.1. Interviews with international students

The four international students that were interviewed all had their own experiences in finding a room in Groningen. Student 2 and 4 both made use of SSH Student Housing for international students that they were informed about by their Erasmus coordinator from the University of Groningen. Student 1 and 3 were also informed about SSH Student Housing by their Erasmus coordinator, but for different reasons did not make use of this opportunity.

Common thread

These interviews portrayed a common thread, which reflects the survey results: International students who obtain an SSH-room are fine, but the students who miss that one opportunity usually encounter problems in finding a room. Various examples of these problems are: paying more than necessary, trust issues on the internet, not getting answers, simply not finding a room and having to couch surf. These stories are indicators that currently in Groningen there is an excess demand (Geyer & Sieg, 2013), and the supply doesn't match the need (Harvey & Jowsey 2004, p.330) for housing. This mismatch between demand and supply of housing is emphasized by quote 1 from student 4:

> *"I know people that are homeless here in Groningen. They stayed to do their degree obviously, because they can't afford to go home you know, they've made it this far. They didn't get a house in time and they're just sleeping on their friends sofas. You know, moving from sofa to sofa, moving from house to house, because they don't have any other options."*
> Quote 1: Student 4, timestamp 8:50.

Specific problems

The results of the survey indicate that international students have disadvantages in finding a room. The participants of the interviews were asked to explain their main problems. One of the problems, explained by student 3 in quote 2, is that it's hard to trust people on the internet when searching for a room. The student felt vulnerable being an outsider, and came across many messages on the internet warning for certain renters and landlords who should not be trusted. This is consistent with the statement of Cairns et al. (2018), that the accommodation issue is one of the biggest challenges for exchange students.

> *"The trust, this was like the biggest obstacle because even when you see the post, you're trying to find what's wrong with it. Like it's too good to be true. I saw so many warnings on Facebook that people paid money and didn't get it back; lots of them. The trust and the fear that you can be scammed. You already feel vulnerable because you're an outsider, and then you have this situation that you can't trust anybody there. Yeah, it's that hard."*
> Quote 2: Student 3, timestamp 8:10.

A problem several participants experienced, is that some renters mention: 'no international students' or 'Dutch only'. This practice can be seen as gatekeeping, as described by DeSena (1994). Student 1 in quote 3 mentioned this as the biggest problem encountered:

> *"The problem specifically with estate agents was they would specify on certain apartments: not for international students. So obviously they want the Dutch students, I don't really know why. It was just quite difficult to find because there is a lot of international students here, and then the housing only want Dutch students."*
> Quote 3: Student 1, timestamp 5:19

The students were asked if they saw any logic behind the discrimination, as mentioned by Murchie and Pang (2018). Some students said: *no, discrimination is unacceptable*. Other students said: *I can understand that people have preferences about who they rent their house to or about who they have to live together with*. Student 3 for example, said the following (quote 4):

> *"Yes, I can understand it. It's their house and they have to feel comfortable there. It's not like an employee who is searching for a person to work for him. It's your private space, so I think it's important that you really have who you want."*
> Quote 4: Student 3, timestamp 16:58

Comparison to other cities

The above mentioned struggles could occur in any city when people search for a room. So, the participants were also asked to compare the situation in Groningen to other cities they have lived. As depicted in quote 5, Student 3 talked with fellow students who went to other European cities. According to student 3, these other students clearly did not experience similar problems, which emphasizes the excess demand (Geyer & Sieg, 2013) in Groningen.

> *"Fellow students from my home university also went to do an Erasmus exchange and they did not have these issues. They went to German and Polish cities and it was very easy for them to get a room. They said to the university: I will come. The university asked: do you need dorms? Yes, okay, we'll put you in. And then they could go there."*
> Quote 5: Student 3, timestamp 17:37

5.2. Interviews with two main stakeholders

The results from the interviews with international students indicate that there indeed is a student housing shortage in Groningen, which is explained through Geyer & Sieg (2013) their theory about excess demand. To gain more knowledge about the causes and possible solutions, two of the main stakeholders were interviewed. Their views and experiences provided a lot of useful knowledge about the effects of the increase of international students on the student housing market in Groningen. While both participants were very helpful and welcoming, here it was chosen to keep them anonymous. These persons were interviewed:

- A housing policy officer, from the University of Groningen (from now on named UG)
- A team manager, from Stichting Studenten Huisvesting Groningen (from now on named SSH)

Supply and demand

Both participants confirmed that the existing accommodation for students falls short of what's required, one could say it does not match the need (Harvey & Jowsey 2004, p.330). In Groningen, new student accommodation buildings are being build but according to the spokesperson from the UG, the supply of rooms lags behind the demand (quote 6). This is consistent with the characteristic of real estate markets described by Harvey & Jowsey (2004, p.27), that the matching between demand and supply can work sluggish.

> "The market will always react delayed. In reality there's a period of about 2 or 3 years between development of the demand and the development of the supply. This difference will always stay, so as long there's a situation with a growing amount of students, the market will always lag behind. Once the number of students has stabilized, the market can also stabilize. Nobody is going to build for vacancy."
> Quote 6: Housing policy officer UG, translated from Dutch, timestamp 42:00

One of the examples of newly built student housing in Groningen, is the 'Upsilon' tower from SSH which can be seen as a matching supply to the high demand for student housing in Groningen (Quote 7). Mentioning that quality is as important as quantity, is consistent with Mielke & Schuh (1995) and La Roche et al. (2010). With other accommodations being planned (RTV Noord, 2018[c]), a real estate cycle as described by Wheaton (1999) can be recognized in this sudden peak of development.

> The new Upsilon tower is a great impulse for the quantity as well as quality of student housing. It's a great building that accommodates 465 international students, it's a great example of a building we should have more of.
> Quote 7: Team manager SSH, translated from Dutch, timestamp 26:21

Discrimination

Both participants acknowledged the discrimination issues in the private rental housing market, where many landlords and student houses only want Dutch tenants (quote 8). This corresponds with the local gatekeeping practices through informal housing networking described by DeSena (1994).

> "Another problem in the private rental housing market, is that many student houses maintain a 'Dutch only' policy. I'm ashamed of that, in my opinion it's pure discrimination and we should do something about that if Groningen wants to be an international community. And we do want that, because Groningen does not mean much without students."
> Quote 8: Team manager SSH, translated from Dutch, timestamp 10:50

SSH Groningen serves international students exclusively. As Dutch students are not able to rent a room from SSH Groningen, this can also be seen as a form of discrimination. However, the SSH justifies this with the thought of helping a vulnerable group (Levy-Vroelant, 2010). This also creates a sub-market within a sub-market (Harvey & Jowsey 2004, p.26). The SSH-spokesperson explained why they exclusively rent to international students in quote 9:

> *"It's our goal to serve the international students. Because the other student housing corporations did not even have their website in English. Also, their supply of rooms often does not fit the needs of international students. There is a need for the type of rooms we provide."*
> Quote 9: Team manager SSH, translated from Dutch, timestamp 3:10

Shared responsibility

Both stakeholders mentioned the importance of shared responsibility (quote 10). During this study, the main stakeholders in student housing found a solution in creating shared responsibility by a covenant. This will help the process of increasing the student housing stock develop orderly, as the parties who signed it can hold each other accountable for honoring their commitments.

> "We together feel responsible for the problem. A covenant will be signed next week by the municipality, both universities, three student housing corporations, the SSH and two student unions/networks. Together we make agreements about: new construction, the 'Dutch only' problem, and managing the peak period of demand."
> Quote 10: Team manager SSH, translated from Dutch, timestamp 14:30

6. Conclusions

6.1. Conclusions of the research

The results of both the survey and the interviews show that international students often end up in less advantageous housing than Dutch students. It's likely that the general cause is a disadvantage in access to the housing market, as described by Dewilde & Lancee (2013). The access to the housing market is measured with different indicators retrieved from the survey. On average, international students pay more for their room, while they are also more often residing in the outer regions of the city. Also, they generally have to search longer for their room.

Differences are also shown between short and long term arrivals within the group of international student. One of the significant results was that long term arrivals are more willing to move house as they are less satisfied than short term arrivals, and usually experience discrimination more often. An explanation for this could be that degree mobility students (long term arrivals) often come from farther regions, as mentioned by Teichler (2012), and have more cultural differences than exchange students (short term arrivals) who come from closer countries. Another reason could be that exchange students are better informed about SSH, resulting in degree mobility students being more dependent on the private housing market where discrimination can occur more often.

The interviews gave insight in which problems international students experience when looking for a room. The participants mainly mentioned: not knowing where to look because they don't speak the language, uncertainty when looking online for rooms, not getting the response they expected, paying more than Dutch students and having to search longer to get a room. All of this reflected a disadvantage in access to the housing market (Dewilde & Lancee, 2013).

The question how big of a role discrimination plays is hard to determine with certainty, as it's difficult to separate effects of discrimination and unobserved factors (Dymski, 2006). However, asking respondents directly about it showed that half of them experienced discrimination. Comments obtained from the survey, as well as participants of the interviews mentioned the 'Dutch only' issue where international students are not allowed to apply for the room. These practices are known as gatekeeping (DeSena, 1994) and are criticized by the two spokespersons of stakeholders who were interviewed.

These stakeholders shared the opinion that the situation around student housing in Groningen needs improvement, as the supply lags behind the increasing demand (Harvey & Jowsey 2004, p.27). They mentioned the problems will not simply solve themselves by market forces, but active planning has to take place. Their main solution was to create shared responsibility. This was recently done by making an agreement, a covenant, between the most important parties involved. The interviewed stakeholders were convinced that by creating shared responsibility, the problematic situation will get solved eventually.

Concluding, it can be said that the increasing amount of international students coming to the city of Groningen has resulted in an excess demand, a situation explained by Geyer & Sieg (2013). This is not solved overnight as the matching of supply to demand in real estate markets works sluggish, as described by (Harvey & Jowsey). The international students themselves seem to suffer the most from this situation, because of their lower access to the student housing market in Groningen.

6.2 Reflection and recommendations

A relatively strong point of this study was the use of mixed methods. The combination of a case analysis by interviews and confirmation of findings by a survey created more reliable results through triangulation. At the same time, the use of mixed methods impeded the possibility to perfect both methods. If more time had been available, this would have been less of a problem. A research strategy of higher quality also could have favored this research in the limited amount of time.

Another competence of the study was the sufficient amount of survey cases. Having nearly 200 cases made it possible to specify the results without analysis problems. However, the analysis could have been more extended if the questions had been designed better. A recommendation for further research would be to include more variables like gender and the exact postcode. For privacy reasons and to keep the questionnaire concise, it was decided to not ask for these properties. However, asking for this and more information like from which platform the respondent obtained there room from, could add value to the research. Another advice would be to not largely dependent on the response of one faculty, in order to randomize the sample more.

All in all the research showed insights in the situation of a housing deficit. The results also put the recent news coverage in perspective, by providing firsthand information and factual data.

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Attachment 1. Survey

Survey: the student housing market in Groningen

Dear student,

Thank you for taking 3 minutes to answer this survey. I am a student at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences of the University of Groningen. For my bachelor thesis, I study the housing market for students in Groningen. All data is processed anonymously and treated confidentially.

If you have questions, feel free to contact me at p.m.steenkamp@student.rug.nl

1. What country are you from?

   ☐ The Netherlands

   ☐ Other: _____

2. Do you study in Groningen?

   ☐ Yes, at the University of Groningen
   ☐ Yes, at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences
   ☐ Yes, at another institute
   ☐ No

3. For how long will you study in Groningen?

   ☐ 1 year or less
   ☐ Longer than 1 year

4. Is this your first year as a student in Groningen?

   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No, 2nd year
   ☐ No, 3rd year or more

5. What is the postcode (only 4 numbers) of your current residential address in Groningen (or nearby town)?

   _____

6. What is your living situation?

   ☐ Single room / apartment
   ☐ Student house with 1 to 5 other students
   ☐ Student house with more than 6 other students
   ☐ Student hotel
   ☐ Hostel

   ☐ Other: _____

7. How much rent (including energy and water) do you pay monthly?

   _____

8. Given the size and quality of the room and the facilities, what do you think of the rent?

- ☐ It is cheap
- ☐ It is reasonable
- ☐ It is overpriced
- ☐ It is very overpriced
- ☐ I don't know

9. If you could find another place to live that would be 25% cheaper than your current rent, would you move? (regardless of size and quality)

- ☐ No, I have a rental contract that I cannot end.
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, most likely
- ☐ Yes, for sure

10. How long did you search to get a room in Groningen?

- ☐ Less than 1 month
- ☐ Between 1 and 2 months
- ☐ Between 2 and 3 months
- ☐ Between 3 and 5 months
- ☐ 6 months or longer

11. Did you find a room (right) before the start of your studies in Groningen?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

12. Did you experience discrimination based on nationality during the search for a room?

- ☐ Yes (please answer the next question)
- ☐ No (you can skip the next question)

13. If Yes: how would you rate the discrimination?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Almost no discrimination	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	severe discrimination

14. Do you have any other comments about student housing in Groningen?

_____

_____

15. Do you have any last comments about this survey?

_____

_____

Attachment 2a. Interview guide, international student

Thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Philip Steenkamp, I am a bachelor student at the University of Groningen. For my thesis, I study the housing market for students in Groningen. I would like to ask some questions about your experiences on the housing market. For example: how you managed to find a room.

The interview will be processed anonymously. I would like to record the interview to make it better to process. And you already agreed with this. If at any moment you would like to stop, that's no problem.

Any questions before we start?

Opening questions:

1. Can you tell some basic information about yourself? Like, where are you from?
   a. Your living situation before being a student in Groningen
2. How old are you?
3. You have a room now? How did you, finally, manage to find a room?
   a. How long did it take?

Core questions:

1. Did you have problems in finding a room in Groningen?
   a. What kind of problems?
2. Are you satisfied with your current room?
3. Have you seen news articles about the housing market in Groningen?
   a. (a lot of negative reports) Do you think the situation is bad?
4. Do you think the University is responsible for providing rooms for international students?
   a. To what extent?
5. Do you know about SSH? (Stichting/foundation, 60 years)
   a. Do you live in an SSH-room?
   b. What do you think about SSH?
   c. Are they doing a good job?
6. Do you know about kamernet? (Website to advertise rooms and find rooms)
   a. Have you made use of Kamernet?
   b. What were your experiences with Kamernet?
7. In your search for a room, did you experience discrimination?
   a. Towards international students?
   b. Can you think of an explanation? Why do people discriminate?

Extra questions:

8. What do you think? Is the situation in Groningen worse than in other European cities?
9. What do you think could be improved in regulating the housing market for students?
10. Do you have any questions?

Attachment 2b. Interview guide, University of Groningen

Bedankt voor het meewerken aan dit interview. Mijn naam is Philip Steenkamp, ik ben een bachelorstudent aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, de faculteit Ruimtelijke Wetenschappen. Voor mijn thesis bestudeer ik de markt voor studentenhuisvesting in Groningen. En vooral wat betreft internationale studenten. Ik interview verschillende betrokkenen.

Het interview wordt opgenomen, zodat ik het beter kan verwerken.

1. Kunt u iets meer over uw taken vertellen?
2. U bent ook accountmanager van de SSH, wat houdt dat in?

De reden dat ik u interview, is dat ik voor mijn thesis meer wil weten over de situatie rondom studentenhuisvesting van internationale studenten. Het aantal internationale studenten aan de RUG is binnen 10 jaar zo'n verdrievoudigd. Is ongeveer 6000 als ik het goed heb. (cijfers van Groningen City Monitor).

Kernvragen:

3. U heeft vast wel gehoord over de media-aandacht, voor internationale studenten die geen kamer konden vinden. Wat is uw mening over deze kwestie?
4. **Wie is verantwoordelijk voor huisvesting studenten?**
    a. **Formeel gezien?**
    b. **Volgens u?**
5. In hoeverre denkt u dat internationale studenten zelf verantwoordelijk zijn?
6. **Misschien is de RUG niet verantwoordelijk, maar: Wat is de visie van de RUG op het gebied van studentenhuisvesting?**
7. Kunt u meer vertellen over de samenwerking met de SSH? Wat is hun rol hierin?
8. Wat is de rol van de **gemeente**?
9. Waarom werkt de RUG eigenlijk alleen samen met de SSH, en niet andere providers?
10. Wat denkt u dat de SSH anders zou kunnen doen?
11. Doet de RUG nog andere dingen, naast de overeenkomst met SSH?
12. Heeft elke faculteit een eigen commissaris hiervoor?
13. Kunt u meer vertellen over Kences? het Kenniscentrum Studentenhuisvesting
14. *Preliminary results laten zien*
15. Wat denkt u van de 'discriminatie'?
16. Denkt u dat het kamertekort een blijvend probleem is, of dat het vanzelf wordt opgelost door marktwerking?

Extra vragen:

17. Heeft u misschien nog vragen?
18. (contact bij gemeente?)

Attachment 2c. Interview guide, SSH Student Housing

Bedankt voor het meewerken aan dit interview. Mijn naam is Philip Steenkamp, ik ben een bachelorstudent aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, de faculteit Ruimtelijke Wetenschappen. Voor mijn thesis bestudeer ik de markt voor studentenhuisvesting in Groningen. En vooral wat betreft internationale studenten. Ik interview verschillende betrokkenen.

Het interview wordt opgenomen, zodat ik het beter kan verwerken.

1. Kunt u iets meer over uw taken vertellen?
2. Wat is eigenlijk het doel van de SSH?
   a. Het is een stichting. Hoe zit dat precies? Geen winst?
   b. Sinds wanneer actief in Groningen?
3. De SSH, biedt in Groningen zo'n 2000 kamers en studio's aan. Exclusief voor internationale studenten toch? Allemaal gemeubileerd?

Kernvragen:

4. Dit jaar en vorig jaar was er media-aandacht, voor internationale studenten die geen kamer konden vinden. Wat is uw mening over deze kwestie?
   a. Volgens de meeste mensen die ik heb gesproken is een disbalans tussen vraag en aanbod. Ziet u dat ook zo?
   b. Misschien opgeblazen door media?
5. **Wie is volgens u verantwoordelijk voor huisvesting studenten?**
   a. **Formeel gezien?**
   b. **Volgens u?**
   c. **Iemand van de RUG had het over 'gezamenlijke verantwoordelijkheid'**
6. In hoeverre denkt u dat internationale studenten zelf verantwoordelijk zijn?
7. Accepteert de RUG meer internationale studenten, dan dat er plaats voor is in de stad?
8. Kunt u meer vertellen over de samenwerking met de RUG?
   a. Wat is hun rol hierin?
9. Het aanmeldmoment voor internationale studenten is volgens mij op 1 mei. Klopt dat?
   a. Is dat het enige aanmeldmoment?
10. Kunt u meer vertellen over de Upsilon toren?
11. Wat is de rol van de **gemeente**? (toestemming geven voor nieuwbouw?)
    a. De gemeente
12. Denkt u dat het kamertekort een blijvend probleem is? Of wordt het nu opgelost door de nieuwbouw? en eventuele marktwerking?
13. Klachten over de kwaliteit? Communicatie met buitenlandse studenten?
14. Wat denkt u van de 'discriminatie'?

Extra vragen:

15. Kunt u meer vertellen over Kences? het Kenniscentrum Studentenhuisvesting
16. Heeft u misschien nog vragen?
17. (contact bij gemeente?)

Attachment 3. Interview consent form

Interview consent Form

Research project title: The student housing market in Groningen

Researcher: Philip Steenkamp

Please confirm that you're a voluntary participant. You have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time. You agree to let the interview be recorded. The audio will be used to transcribe. These transcripts will be anonymized.

Signature: Location:……………………………Date:……………………….2018

Attachment 4. Interviews: summaries of the participants answers

Student 1 (27 minutes):

Me and my friends did not make use of the SSH moment of the 1st of May Because we would hear in June if we were accepted to come study in Groningen. We would have to pay deposits and put our names down and do all that, in the middle of preparing for our exams.

I managed to find a house with my friends 1 day before the start of the study year, to rent from October. So, the first month we had to do couch surfing. We were lucky to finally get something via Facebook after putting a lot of effort in searching for 3 months. The house is in a village a few kilometers from Groningen but I am satisfied with it.

One of the problems we experienced was that real estate agent often state: "not for students" or "not for international students". They want the Dutch students, I don't really know why. It was difficult to find something, because there are more international students than available rooms.

The preferences of house renters, to not get international students is understandable, because of stereotypes. People might think the different language and culture will not work, or international students might party and destroy the place. And I understand the preferences, because I would sure have precautions about who I would live in my house. However I think it's a bit excessive that they only want Dutch students, or certain criteria, for example people looking only for Spanish speaking girls.

I was aware beforehand that there was a student housing shortage in Groningen, but not to the extent I experienced. When I arrived in Groningen, one of the persons of our Airbnb showed us a news article about the situation. They translated it to Dutch for us and then we realized how big the problem is. It's a bit excessive that people have to pay money to stay in a tent or boat.

I would not say the university is responsible for providing rooms. University owned student housing is not possible in the Netherlands. But I think the university could take more responsibility in warning students about the situation. The university should also consider reducing the amount of students they take in. A lot of responsibility about housing lays with the municipality, maybe they could cooperate better with the university.

While I don't have a room from SSH myself, I have seen some of them. Sometimes the quality doesn't seem worth what you pay for it. They're not very well maintained. It gives me the impression that SSH is not there to provide something for students, but just to make money. I have heard stories of pigeons in kitchens. There should be a decent base level of livability.

I know about the website Kamernet.nl. I paid for it, payment is necessary to comment on rooms. I don't think I got an email back at all. The market seems overloaded, and Kamernet does not seem the most efficient way to find a room.

Student 2 (16 minutes)

For me, it was no challenge to find a room in Groningen. The Erasmus coordinator notified me about the SSH-housing procedure. I could just choose one of the international houses. Click on the right time, pay some fees immediately. It was pretty quick but it was fine. I am satisfied with my room. The location is really good and it's nice to have housemates. The only problem is that we share 2 toilets with 12 persons. But the price seems right because the room is furnished as well.

I did read the local news about the situation. International students seem to have a hard time finding a room sometimes. I also saw about demonstrations against the university being announced on Facebook. It seems the capacity of the housing market is too low for the amount of students coming to Groningen. Also, sometimes neighbors don't like students living next to them. I know the housing crisis is a sensitive topic.

Of course I think the university is responsible for providing rooms. When you invite so many students in, you have to provide basic accommodation or better advice of how to find accommodation. I don't think the university has full responsibility, but partly at least. I understand that you as an individual are independent and should find your place. The current situation showed that this did not work for everyone.

The University does have an agreement with SSH which is nice. The problem is that it's sold out really early. If you are on time, you might get a room. But after that's full, you have a problem. I have a friend from Mexico who naturally is not an Erasmus student, he did not know about SSH. But one of my housemates from Singapore, did know about SSH and made use of it.

I did not experience any discrimination myself as I found my room really quick via SSH. I also did not hear from my friends about any discrimination. One of my good friends (international student) lives in a house boat owned by a Dutch person.

Where I am from, it's very easy to find a flat to rent. The city is more sprawled than Groningen and it's not a student city, but more a tourist city. I did see some new high rise being built in Groningen for students. This might partially solve the problem for the next few years, at least it's something.

Student 3 (21 minutes)

I was prepared. The Erasmus scholarship was enough to pay the higher rents here, but still I had to work a bit more beforehand to pay for everything around it, like groceries.

I started my search for a room on the internet and Facebook. I also found websites that seemed good in the first place. But then you understand you have to pay for their services and I was like: never mind. I just waited a little bit more. I was not in a hurry because I did not understood at first how difficult the situation is here. So, I started looking for a room at the beginning of the summer, but more intense searching starting from July while i had to be here at the end of august, so a little late.

The exchange coordinator did send us an email that we should apply for the SSH. So I went to their site but I did not know you had to wait in a row and click very fast, in order to get a room. So I went on the site half a day later, and only the expensive rooms were left. For me, €500 a month was too much.

On Facebook, there were a lot of groups for room advertising. I also saw a lot of warnings about scammers. Then I realized how hard it is to find a room in Groningen. I needed to find something, so kept searching and writing messages to people. It was a long journey. After two months of searching i wanted to give up. But in the end I had two options via Facebook, I got lucky to get a quiet place where I live together with some PhD students. I got chosen out of a hundred other people.

The biggest problem during my search was the trust. I did not know who to trust on the internet. This was the biggest obstacle for me, the fear of being scammed. You already feel vulnerable because you're an outsider, and then there's this situation.

I haven't seen news articles about the student housing in Groningen, but I did see things about this demonstration against the university. I also heard a lot about the situation from other students here, and also lecturers. The university has to understand that when they invite so many people, they have to make sure there's enough living space as well. I heard about many people who gave up studying in Groningen here because they couldn't find a room. I also heard from a girl who's only option was to live with a teacher, so she did that but was not happy about it because she did not really have her own place.

I know that a lot of international students live in houses from SSH but I don't really know how it is there. I think they are doing a good job by providing many rooms to international students. If somebody would have told me how bad the situation in Groningen really is, I might have tried better to get a room from SSH. I think the information the University gives could be better, they advised the SSH-rooms but did not stress enough how hard it is to find a room elsewhere than from SSH. Maybe the University doesn't want to scare future students away.

I did experience some discrimination towards international students, but probably not as much as people from outside of Europe, like India. The only form of discrimination I experienced was seeing a lot of posts on Facebook that said 'Dutch girl only'. I heard some guys complain that many houses only want girls, maybe because they are cleaner. So maybe for foreign guys it is even more difficult to find a place, because people have these stereotypes in their heads. But I can definitely understand that people have preferences about who will live in their house, they have to be comfortable with it as well.

From what I have seen, I think the situation in Groningen is worse than most other European cities. Colleague students from me that also do the Erasmus programme in other European cities, also in other Dutch cities, did not experience the same issues in finding a room that I had.

Student 4 (26 minutes)

Where i am from in the UK, there's an abundance of houses. There are big houses in the countryside. Everyone has a garden and plenty of space. In the UK I already lived in a student house for two years. When I wanted to come study at Groningen, they suggested to make use of the SSH-housing, and stressed you have to register on the 15th of March at 9 o' clock and if you didn't do it then, you were not going to get a house.

I was an hour late because of a small accident, so I was left with very little choice. I still got an SSH-room on time and it was here when I got in Groningen. But it was still stressful because of the short registration period and that seeming the only option to get a house.

One of the problems I ran into is that I found housing in Groningen really expensive. I had to pay over 1000 euros to SSH for reserving a room. They were not clear on the website what this is for, but it was mandatory for getting a room. It is still not clear to me if I will get my 1000 euros back or not. Also, I think the rent is very high for what you get.

The quality of the room is not very good, there's gaps between the windows and the wallpaper is coming off. The kitchen and bathroom are disgusting and worn out. There are no smoke alarms, and the security is lacking. Anyone could just walk into the building and find an unlocked kitchen to break into. Still, the room I have is better than nothing.

I saw the temporary tents for students in front of the sports building. I did not realize people were actually living in there, and was honestly horrified. If I came here and did not have an own room, also because of the small culture shock, it would have been scary and hard to adapt.

It's bizarre that students who try to contribute to society are homeless. I know students that are homeless here in Groningen, but stayed to do their degree obviously, because they afford to go home after they made it this far. They are sleeping on their friends' sofas, moving from house to house because they don't have other options. So still now, in November, there are homeless students.

I think the University is 100% responsible for providing rooms for international students. They invited them here and told them they have the facilities to accommodate them. Maybe it's different for native students who are able to commute from their parents, but if you're coming from another country you obviously need somewhere to stay. It should be the University's responsibility to reserve enough housing for the exact amount of students. The University is already reserving some rooms via the SSH but it's not enough, as we can see.

Housing is definitely a basic human right. I did not have to make use of other websites like Kamernet. But from what I have heard, advertisements saying 'Dutch only', I think it's discriminating. Compared to the student city in the UK where I am from, the situation in Groningen is very bad as there is so few options to get a room.

Yes, I can kind of understand the discrimination. It's their house and they have to feel comfortable there. It's not like an employee who is searching for a person to work for him. It's your private space, so I think it's important that you really have who you want.

Fellow students from my home university also went to do an Erasmus exchange and they did not have these issues. They went to German and Polish cities and it was very easy for them to get a room. They said to the university: I will come. The university asked: do you need dorms? Yes, okay, we'll put you in. And then they could go there.

Policy officer, University of Groningen (45 minutes)

I am a policy officer from the University of Groningen who deals with student housing. The University is by national law not responsible for the task of housing students while at the same time, nowhere is mentioned who is responsible for it. This creates vagueness about who is responsible. Here in Groningen we solved this by saying: the educational institutions, municipality and housing corporations have a shared responsibility. Only with shared responsibility you can manage and adjust the issues right. From this perspective, the university cooperates in discussions and planning for student housing. In this cooperation, the university takes the role as an advocate for the students. That's the reason why there are some UG employees with the task of student housing.

This shared responsibility has until now not been by contract, but in practice, the cooperation is clearly visible. Recently a national action plan for student housing has been established. Next to that, this month a local covenant will be signed by many different parties, to express shared responsibility and to create more possibilities for student housing. From then you could say the shared responsibility is written down by contract. You can look at the covenant as an agreement, but no legal tasks are determined.

Within a decade, the amount of international students in Groningen has more than tripled. This can be explained by several things. First of all, the University has been providing more programmes in the English language. By now, a large part of the studies is in English which opens the possibilities for

international students to participate. Transforming studies to English is a conscious decision because we think in the end this will improve the quality of education and graduates, as science and the labor market are international phenomenons. Also, worldwide there has been an increasing amount of students willing to study abroad, and Dutch universities score pretty good internationally. You cannot ignore the increase of international student mobility.

A side effect of more international students, is that more student housing is needed. I have this function within the University since 2002. Back then, almost all international students were exchange students instead of full programme students from abroad. There were not as many courses in the English language. At that time the housing of international students was managed independently by each faculty. From 2003, the University decided this had to be managed centrally by a foundation. Since then, demand and supply were pretty well balanced. Only for especially the last two years, we experienced more demand than supply. On one side, the increase of international students was higher than expected. And on the other side, building corporations had to deal with restrictions from the government which made them less powerful. Because of that, they could invest less in student housing. All of this resulted in a mismatch between demand and supply.

The problem mostly exists at the start of the study year when there's a peak of students who need a room. We have catered this problem by organizing temporary peak accommodation. The final responsibility lies with the international student themselves, because he or she will sign the rental contract and pay for it. But prior to that, the question is: how is the supply and how is the information about the supply. From the roughly 40.000 student rooms in Groningen, a very large part is private housing. So, not from corporations but from house owners. Groningen has a relatively low percentage of corporation owned rooms compared to other student cities. This market of private housing is harder to regulate.

The University of Groningen and the Hanze University of Applied sciences have an agreement with SSH. We ask SSH to provide student rooms before the start of each semester for the newly coming international students. Newly coming international students often want a room for a short period, preferably furnished, and it's hard for them to find something like that from abroad. You could say they form an apart segment of the housing market and SSH supplies in this. It's called short stay contracts and is different than regular rental rooms. The rental contracts are for one or two semesters. Beforehand the Universities indicate to SSH how many international students are expected. The SSH tries to meet this given demand. The last two years, the SSH could not meet the demand because the capacity was not available for the increased amount of international students.

Also, this amount of international students was not expected. We need to move more towards using multiple year prognoses. We already did this but are working on it. The shorter term prognoses will make place for the longer term prognoses. Prognoses have already been made together with the municipality to project the need for student housing. Also, there has been a national research from Kences, but these always lag one year behind and take international students less into account.

The municipality is the only agent in this case who can fulfill a coordinating role. The municipality is finding out they should do that more than in the past. The municipality is dependent on information from both Universities and suppliers of housing, but the municipality does not build themselves. They form policy and give a framework. The municipality did put effort into regulating the room renting. On one side that's the requirements a renter has to fulfill. On the other hand the municipality regulated the amount of rental rooms that is allowed to be registered per street and neighborhood. Because of these policies, there are many streets in the city that are limited and cannot increase the amount of rooms rent. On the other hand the municipality is dependent on private initiatives.

The amount of students in Groningen is a very uncertain factor, it's hard to predict how this will develop in the future. That's one of the reasons private investors have been lagging behind the demand.

About the topic of student housing, everybody can and is allowed to find something about it. Some people in the media and political parties propose solutions that are unfeasible. For now, the short stay concept with SSH is the best solution and Groningen couldn't do without it. Yes, if a big ship loaded with gold would pass by, a lot of things could be solved.

Generally, rooms for international students are more expensive than rooms for native students. This is because: Dutch students have easier access to the markets and manage to find the cheaper houses. But also: renting at SSH is not only paying for the room, but you also get it furnished and there's cleaning of common rooms. So, often international students pay more than Dutch students, but also get more for it. In the media this is often overlooked.

About the discrimination. Discrimination is never logical, but I can understand that it takes more effort to communicate with a housemate who doesn't speak the same language. The easiest way is to look for someone who speaks your language. But at the same time, I find this very shortsighted. More than half of the Dutch students are involved in English study programmes so their study environment is already international, and for vacation people like to go abroad. But when students have the opportunity to get a foreign experience in their house, they look the other way. In practice, the disadvantages are more talked about than the advantages of getting diverse people in your house. So, this discrimination issue is for a large part maintained by Dutch students themselves.

The housing shortage is temporary, but won't solve itself. The housing market always reacts delayed. There's might be a period of about three years between the development of the demand, and the development of the supply. Realizing new buildings takes time. This difference will always exist, so as long as the amount of students is growing, the market will keep lagging behind. Once a stable situation is reached, the market can also stabilize. The students behavior is very hard to predict, especially the international component, so it's impossible to predict the developments on the long term. Also, nobody wants to build for excessive vacancy. Maybe we should be satisfied with a well working peak accommodation system. This would make the situation and its problems more manageable.

Team manager, SSH student housing

I am a team manager and spokesperson from SSH Groningen. The SSH is a national student housing corporation since 1956. Since 2015, SSH came to Groningen and here it provides housing only for international students. There are 2000 renting units and the majority of these units is rentable for either one or two semesters. After that, the students have to move out.

The goal of SSH, being specialized in student housing, is to provide students in sufficient housing. Our statement has always said that SSH exists for a target group who cannot provide for housing their selves. We work together with the other three corporations Lefier, Huismeesters and Nijestee and with the two universities.

Why only international students? SSH has a complete international website similar to a booking website. Because the other corporations were lacking in this and did not even have English websites and also their rental units did not meet international students' needs, we decided that SSH should focus on the group of international students only. All short stay rooms are furnished, which is useful for students who come study for one or two semesters.

Actually, in Groningen we don't own a single brick. We rent the buildings from other companies, and only do the management and renting to international students. The owners of the buildings want to make some profit, but feel like they could not do themselves what SSH does.

We have indeed noticed the media attention about international students who cannot find a room. While there has been attention for the housing shortage, we are at the same time worried about the quality of the housing. The quality issue gets underexposed because there's more attention for the shortage. When SSH came to Groningen in 2015, we started with buildings that were to be honest very poor in quality. So nowadays, our stance is that there should be invested in the quantity of student housing, but just as important is the quality of the housing and service. We think there should be invested in student houses where the kitchen and living room are shared, as many international students have indicated to find the social interaction important.

The housing crisis is the result of several coincidences and causes. Partly, it's a peak problem. In September, the problem is the most present and is partly solved during the study year. Another problem is that in the private market, student houses mention 'Dutch only' when looking for a tenant. In my opinion this is pure discrimination and this should be solved. Groningen is an international community because we cannot do without international students. We cannot allow these 'Dutch only' practices. In the near future, there will be a campaign about this problem.

I know the prognoses about student numbers are not very reliable as it's hard to predict the future. I think we should not point at the University and blame them for the situation. We could turn it around and see the possibilities the educational institutions generate. Keeping in mind the demographic decline in some regions in the North of the Netherlands, it's important to keep young high educated people coming to the university. It's logical the Universities aim at international students. I think that we, as the youngest city of the Netherlands, should be proud of this internationalization. We should facilitate this instead of pointing our fingers at the Universities. Learn from some problems that have occurred, and don't stop the internationalization.

This month the SSH and all other parties involved will sign a covenant. This shows the intention for shared responsibility. We will work together to cope with the problems that have occurred.

Problems that the covenant tries to solve: which measures have to be taken, looking to build new apartment blocks, tackling the 'Dutch only' problem, coping with the peak period of demand with good temporary housing instead of tents. The covenant assigned tasks to parties specialized in certain issues.

Also, the SSH tries to be as transparent as possible and welcoming to other stakeholders to communicate to find solutions. (some examples were given in the interview) This attitude is an important attribute of shared responsibility.

One of the issues that returns each year for us, is that political student parties and other groups approach us with the same complaints every year. This is because they switch boards every year, and the solutions we came up with together get forgotten and the knowledge does not get transferred to the new board.

Another interesting discussion is that you could say: students who come to study in Groningen, are 18 years and older and choose for this 'adventure' themselves. In principle, they are responsible for themselves. You could expect from them to manage their own. On the other side, we know that the reality is unrulier than that theory. Often, these students go live on their own for the first time, are insecure and don't know and don't have perfect access to the housing market. And when student

houses maintain the 'Dutch only' policy, the international students never supervene. We, SSH, think this is a vulnerable group that has to be helped provided in their basic needs.

The new student buildings that are being built right now in Groningen will help greatly solving problems. In terms of quantity as well as in terms of quality. The new Upsilon building managed by SSH is a great example. We should have more buildings like that. When all parties who signed the covenant act responsible, I am convinced we will solve the current problems.

There is one moment of application for the SSH rooms. We settle this date in consultation with the University of Groningen and the Hanze University of Applied Sciences. Actually, for us it does not really matter when the date is. We ask the universities when all the rooms should be put online. The UG has many faculties, and different types of international students. The degree mobility students sometimes know too late (in June) whether they come to Groningen to apply for SSH rooms. It's hard to find one publication moment that fits everyone. Until now, the UG has always chosen for one moment of publication of the rooms. If it would be up to is, it might be better to have multiple moments of publication.

About the 'Dutch only' problem when students search for a new tenant. The human side of the situation is that when people come home, they want to feel like home. Talking in your native language (Dutch) is easier for many Dutch students, which makes them feel more like being home. Still, with our future campaign about this issue we hope to convince more Dutch student houses to not discriminate and also see the advantages of having international housemates. When Dutch students go study abroad, they also don't want to be discriminated.