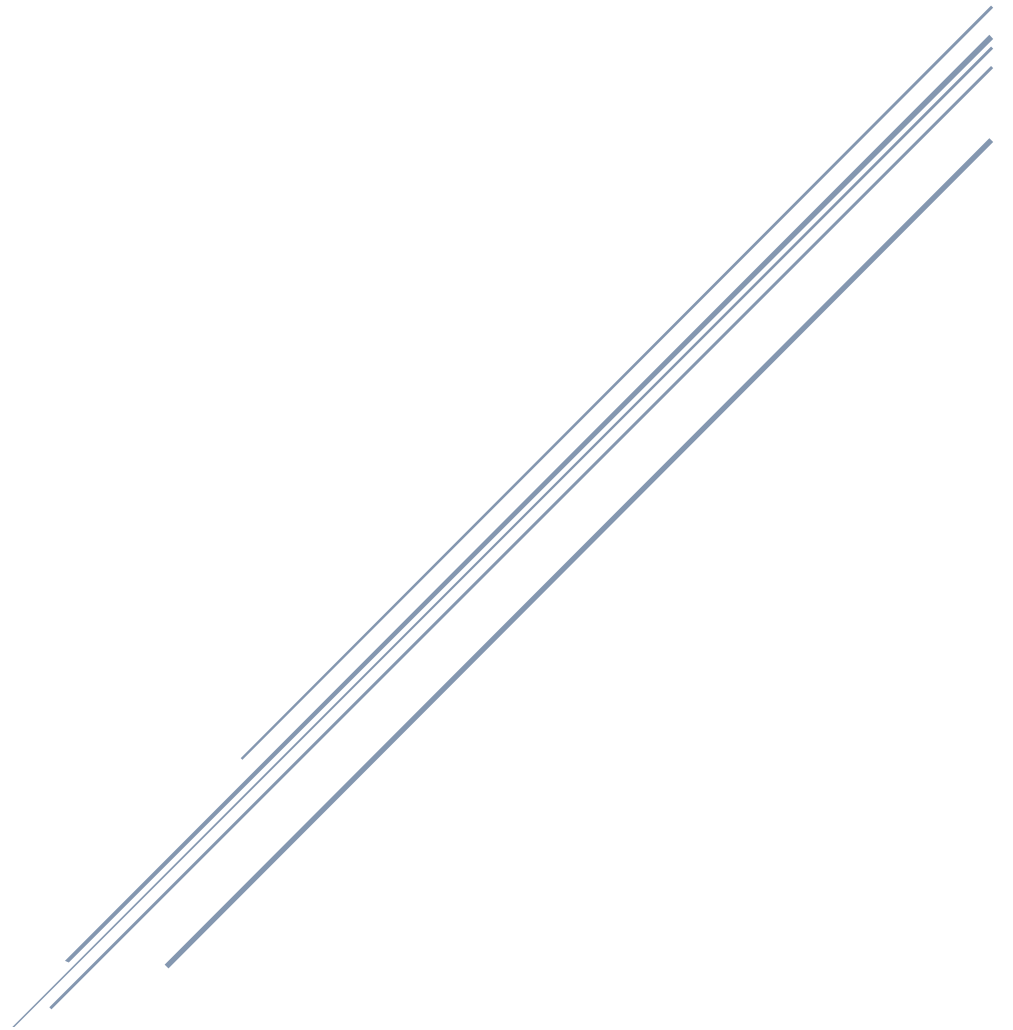


SATISFACTION IN MERGED MUNICIPALITIES

A case study in the north of the Netherlands: measuring the influence of possible factors affecting the changed satisfaction of the citizens of two villages in a merged municipality.



Final version

Bachelor thesis

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Summary

The process of merging municipalities has consequences for the citizens living in these municipalities, since the approach of the merged municipality can differ from the former municipality. This can cause consequences for the citizens on various levels. For example, it affects people's satisfaction for the new and the value they give to the municipality itself. One of the factors influencing the satisfaction can be a change in public services provided by the municipality. This research provides insight in the way public services can influence the general satisfaction of the new municipality in two villages. Since other factors might have had more influence than the public services, these have additionally been included. One of these is the move of the City Hall which both villages had in common. Another factor is for each village specific, the renovation of the village centre for Lemmer, and the arrival of an ASC in Balk. In the survey, different questions have been asked about their satisfaction of the former and new municipality and the different factors indicated above. 50 surveys have been conducted in Lemmer and 42 in Balk. Through descriptive analysis and the use of different non-parametric statistical analysis the following conclusions have been found: First, the general satisfaction about the new municipality was significantly lower than the former municipality. Second, the general satisfaction regarding the public services was significantly lower than the former municipality. Third, the relocation of the City Hall had a statistically significant impact on the difference of satisfaction of the municipality. For the factors specifically chosen for each village (ASC and renovation), there cannot be concluded whether these had a significant impact on the change of satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

In the last few decades, the process of reforming the local government has been carried out in several countries (Hanes, 2015). In the Netherlands, some municipalities of similar size have been merged together into larger municipalities. A steady decline has been recorded in the number of municipalities for a long time (Allers & Geertsema, 2016).

This has also been the case in the province of Friesland in the north of the Netherlands. Since 2014, the former municipalities of *Gaasterland-Sloten*, *Lemsterland*, *Skarsterlân* and a part of *Boornsterhem* (the village of Terherne) have merged into the then called, *De Friese Meren* (Tweede Kamer, 2012). In 2015, the name was changed officially to its Frisian translation, *De Fryske Marren* (Tweede Kamer, 2016). Hereon, the Frisian name will be used throughout this thesis.

In the Netherlands, the municipalities provide a wide range of public services (Allers & Geertsema, 2016; De Ceuninck et al. 2010). These public services are important to ensure the livability of the city or region. The local opinion about the quality of public services is important, since it greatly determines the liveability of a village (Putra & Sitanggang, 2016). This research seeks to investigate how this influences the opinion of the citizens about their municipality. Since factors can influence the opinion of the citizens, these will also be taken into consideration. These factors will be addressed in the theoretical framework.

The thesis has been structured according to the following format. Under heading 2, the research problem is presented along with the corresponding research question, and the selection process of the two villages. Under heading 3, the relevant theories in literature are reviewed, establishing the foundation for the questions asked in the survey. The following chapter discusses the used methodology. The results will be discussed under heading 5, which contains descriptive analysis and the use of non-parametric tests, the results are supported by the literature. Heading 6 and 7 contain the conclusion and the discussion with recommendations for further research. In the appendices, the survey and its English translation can be found.

2. Research areas and research problem

2.1 Selection process of the two villages

Before the selection of the two villages, a meeting was held with the alderman of the new municipality, Durk Durksz and Yde Wierda of communications on the 6th of March. During this gathering, different villages were discussed to determine which were interesting to investigate in this research. According to Durksz and Wierda the fusion went harmoniously. However, the people of the former municipality *Lemsterland* could be considered a bit more ‘critical’ towards the merger. In a first instance, *Lemmer* and Terhorne were selected. However, after determining more factors Terhorne was replaced for the village called Balk, which belonged to *Gaasterland-Sloten*. An overview of the municipalities merging together can be viewed in figure 1.

In the meeting, Durksz and Wierda were enthusiastic about the renovation of the centre of Lemmer, they believed that this had a positive influence on the perception of the villagers for the new municipality. Therefore, the satisfaction of the citizens of Lemmer on this renovation will be investigated.

In the research of Kushner and Spiegel (2005) about amalgamations, one

community was more opposed to the merger than others. From the research was concluded, that this community was less satisfied with the merger than other communities. In the interview with the alderman on the 6th of March, he described the citizens of the former municipality of *Lemsterland* more “critical” towards the merging process. The citizens of the municipality *Gaasterland-Sloten* were defined as more *easy-going* by the alderman. Because of these different perceptions on the citizens of those two municipalities, it is interesting to see whether this becomes clear from the answers of the surveys. Balk was the former capital of this municipality, therefore Lemmer and Balk have both in common that they were the former capital of their former municipality. In figure 2 the research areas are defined. The zipcode 8561 belonging to Balk, and 8531 and 8532 belonging to Lemmer.

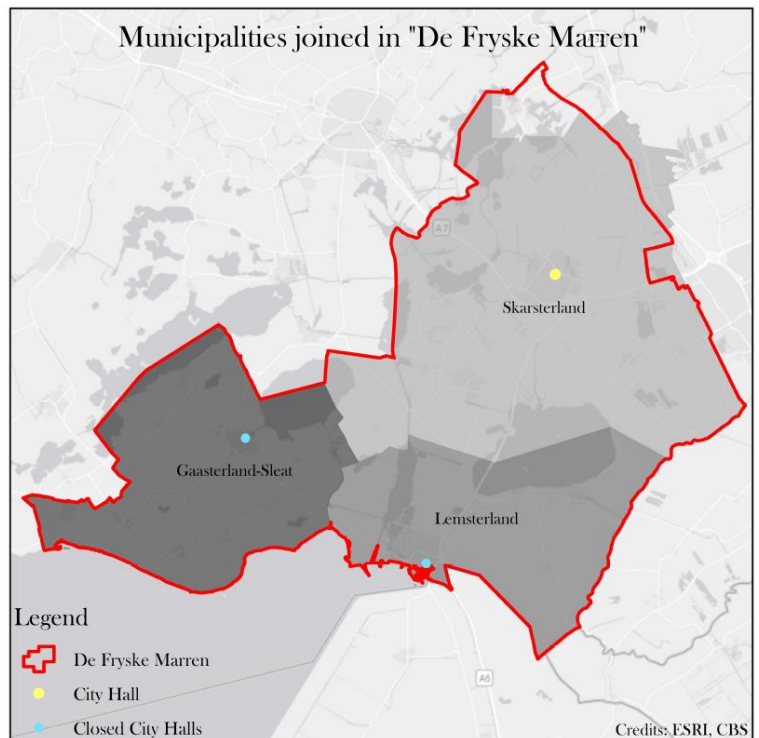


Figure 1: Former municipalities joined into De Fryske Marren

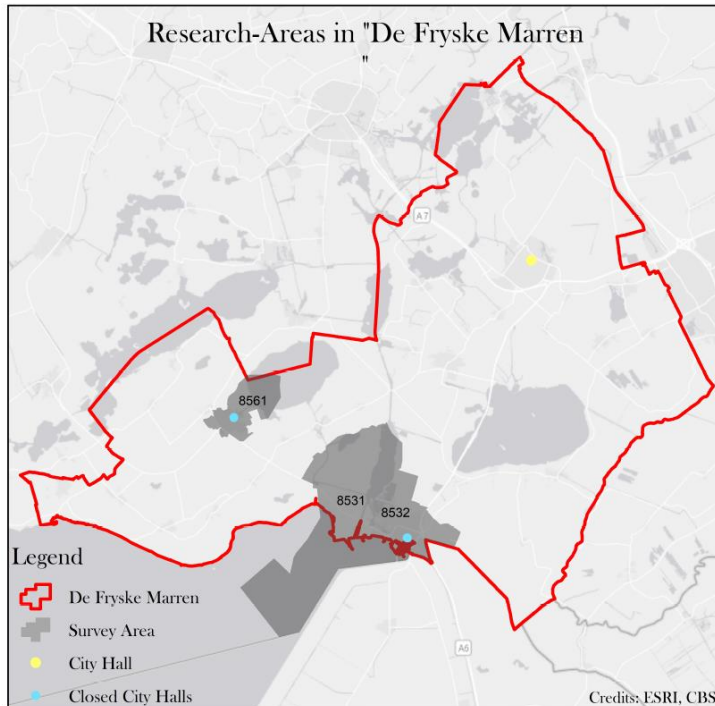


Figure 2: Research areas, Balk and Lemmer

2.2 Research question and problem

The possibility exists that the merging process of different municipalities will affect the distribution of public services and the public service delivery. The City Hall, which provides the public service delivery, has been relocated to another village. Even though, there are still service points available in the two villages, where some of the services are met. These service points have very limited times of opening and do not function completely as well as a City Hall would. The goal of this research is to investigate if these factors influence the opinion of the citizens towards the new municipality. Two villages that are known to have had changes in the public services will be compared, which are Balk and Lemmer. Both villages had their City Hall relocated to a different village. Moreover, the influence of another factor will be taken into consideration, such as the arrival of an asylum seeker centre (ASC) in Balk (Del Grosso, 2016) and the renovation of the city centre in Lemmer. The justification for the selection of these influencing factors will be given in the theoretical framework. This has led to the following research question:

“How did the citizens of Balk and Lemmer perceive the public services and the relocation of public service delivery, and did it influence the value they give to the new municipality since the merger of 2014?”

In order to answer the research question, the following set of questions have been formulated:

- Did the redistribution of the public services influence the opinion of the citizens and Balk and Lemmer of the new municipality?
- Did the relocation of the City Hall influence the opinion of the citizens of Balk and Lemmer on the new municipality?
- Did the refugee centre or the renovation of the village centre influence the opinion of the citizens of Balk and Lemmer on the new municipality?

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Distribution of public services

Being a larger municipality comes with a great deal of benefits. First, they have the capacity to carry out redistribution within the municipality. Second, the municipality can profit of scale economies and have the benefit of providing at a lower cost the public services (Yamada, 2016). Where a bigger municipality have a lower unit cost for providing of public services, this is the contrary for a smaller municipality (Yamada, 2016). Larger municipalities have also more access to expertise (Dollery & Crase, 2004). However, smaller municipalities also have a benefit. They have the possibility to anticipate better on their citizen's preferences concerning the public services (Yamada, 2016). Third, a variety in preferences could lead to a rise in spending. The merged municipality could adapt to the highest standard of public services in that field in the municipality (Allers & Geertsema, 2016).

Yamada (2016) states that a merger of municipalities practically always has consequences in the distribution and allocation of public services. As a former smaller municipality can be gulped down by a bigger municipality, and therefore losing their primary public services as their importance decrease in the merged municipality (Yamada, 2016). An important factor in a new municipality is the uniformity of the public services, as the former municipality may have had very heterogenous levels of public service. As pointed out by Allers & Geertsema (2016), citizens can be very disappointed when the public services they value are downgraded through the merger.

Through this research, valuable feedback can be gathered from the citizens of both villages taken into analysis. Because of this feedback, the municipality can value how well they are meeting their needs (Zagorie et al. 2017). Furthermore, the feedback can be used to improve service quality. When the quality of the services is not well perceived it will result in dissatisfaction (Zagorie et al. 2017). Therefore, it can be concluded that a link exists, between the quality of the services and the satisfaction of the citizens. The

public services referred to in this research are the services that have local benefits and are provided locally (Dollery and Crase, 2004).

In the literature, it has been stated that a merger has influence on the distribution of public services. Moreover, it is clear that the citizens can be pleased or disappointed with the new municipality changes in the distribution of the public services and thereby, downgrade or upgrade the value of these public services. And therefore, affected the opinion of the citizens on their municipality. This will be investigated in this research.

3.2 Centralization public service delivery

The citizens of Balk and Lemmer have lost their City Hall, and now need to travel to Joure to visit the City Hall, as stated earlier. The location of the City Hall in *De Fryske Marren* can be found in figure 2. Kushner and Siegel (2003) mention the following, smaller units of local governments, or in this case the former municipalities, can maximise consumer choice. According to De Ceuninck et al. (2010) the local government can be seen as a *service provider* in the Netherlands. As mentioned previously, larger municipalities have more access to specialist skill, which should lead to higher administrative expertise (Dollery & Crase, 2004).

For elderly, the relocation of the City Hall may influence their satisfaction, as the functional limitations increase with age and are becoming more common. Many elders have obtained one or more of such limitations, and this can influence and complicate travelling (Sundling et al. 2014 cited in: Sundling et al. 2016). Furthermore, in research conducted by Kushner and Siegel (2005) citizens were less satisfied when their municipal council was removed from the village centre and placed in a different location.

3.3 ASC and Renovation

Kushner and Siegel (2005) defined the satisfaction of the citizens through the rate of their appreciation of the outcomes of the government. These outcomes are dependent on the outputs produced by the government, which are measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. The change in quality of the output depends on the subjective judgements of people. Kushner and Siegel provide an example of whether an outcome that may not improve satisfaction of the citizen. "For example, construction of a new road would be an output, but if it was constructed in the wrong place or in a substandard manner, then it might not produce an improvement in outcomes or citizen satisfaction." (Kushner & Siegel, 2005, pp. 74-

75). In the case of Lemmer, the renovation the village centre can be seen as an output, as it can increase or decrease the satisfaction.

Jacobsen (2006) stated that the arrival of refugees can be a social burden on the host community. Refugees from Syria, Eritrea and Iraq are living in the ASC in Balk (Del Grosso, 2016). As this is quite an impact, the citizens in Balk, are asked their opinion of this arrival and if it has changed their opinion of the municipality. However, it can also result in positive outcomes for the society, when the refugees are living productive lives (Jacobsen, 2006).

3.4 Conceptual Model

In this research, the geographical and policy aspect come together in the the following conceptual model (fig. 3). Distribution of public services can influence the value people attribute to public services themselves, and overall, the general value they give to the new merged municipality. As external factors, such as the arrival of the ASC or the renovation of the city centre may influence the value they give to the municipality, those have been added in the research and in the conceptual model. As these factors do not apply to both the villages, they have been added separately.

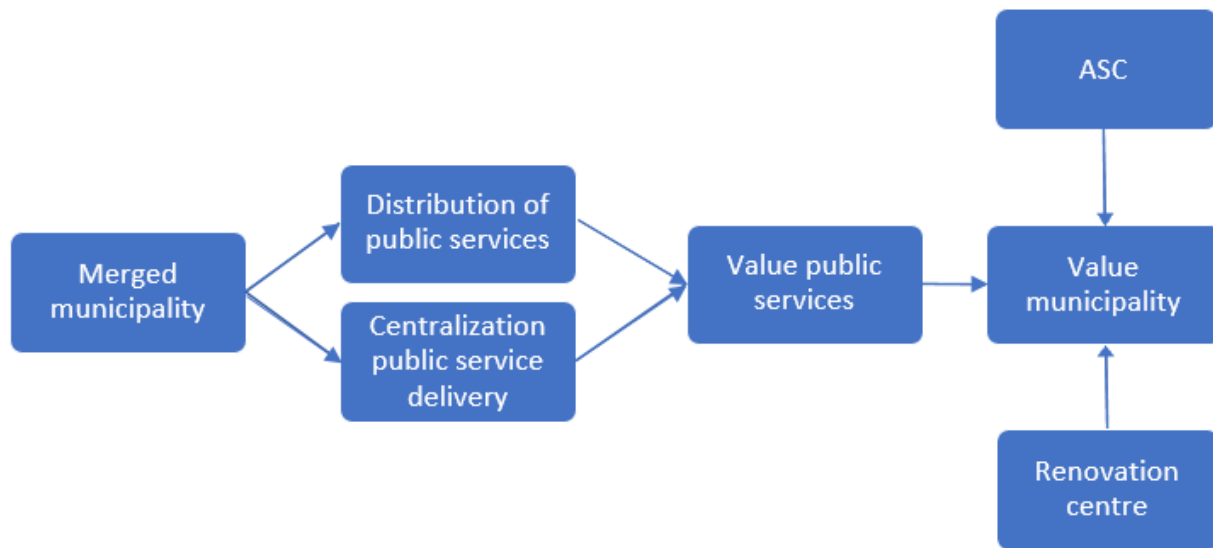


Figure 3: Conceptual model

4. Methodology

4.1 Research method

The purpose of this research is to investigate how redistribution of public services and a relocation of the City Hall has influenced the opinion of the citizens about their municipality. In this research, primary data will be collected through surveys (Clifford et al. 2010). Surveys are useful to gather people's opinions or positions about something. Usually, satisfaction surveys are used to externally measure the service effectiveness of the municipality and local governments (Drew et al. 2016; Kelly & Swindell, 2002). Since the merger a specific change has happened in the villages, the arrival of a refugee centre in Balk, and the renovation of the centre in Lemmer. Therefore, a specific question according to these events has been added.

Via a survey, it can be analysed whether the appreciation of the public services has changed since the merger. Using the outcome variables, we can analyse whether the citizens have changed their appreciation for the public services and the municipality before and after the merger. For the multiple-choice questions in the survey a fixed Likert scale has been applied for the answers with 5 different options. Via these answers can be differentiated if the opinions of the citizens have changes through the merger. According to Clifford et al. (2010) having an odd number gives space for a neutral middle value. If the respondent does not have a strong opinion on the matter the possibility to check a neutral answer is available (Clifford et al. 2010). The survey has been divided into three subjects corresponding to the sub questions. In the following diagram (fig. 4) has been laid out the corresponding questions in the survey to the sub questions in this research.

Sub-question	Survey Questions
Did the redistribution of the public services influence the opinion of the new municipality?	Satisfaction municipality before 2014 Satisfaction municipality after 2014 Satisfaction public services before 2014 Satisfaction public services after 2014
Did the relocation of the City Hall influence the opinion on the new municipality?	Relocation City Hall influence on satisfaction public services Relocation City Hall influence on satisfaction municipality

Did the refugee centre or the village centre renovation influence their opinion on the new municipality?	Renovation village centre influence satisfaction municipality Arrival refugee centre influence satisfaction municipality
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Figure 4: Schematic overview of the sub questions and the survey questions

Besides these questions, also demographic questions such as age and gender have been asked. Also, the zip code, before and after the merger, was included in the survey. By executing the research in this way, it can be guaranteed that respondents indeed live in the specific village. Furthermore, a few additional questions, such as if they still see a bright future with the current municipality, and what specific thing has changed their opinion has been asked. The latter being in an open question format.

4.2 Data collection

Data have been gathered through online surveys and door-to-door surveys, this approach has been adopted since using only internet surveys can result in sampling bias (Clifford et al. 2010). Online surveys have been distributed via social media, in particular using 'Facebook'. The online survey has been made through Google Docs. The decision to opt for the internet was made on the advantage of fast distribution and minimal investment of the interviewer (Clifford et al. 2010). The advantage from door-to-door surveying has been done to secure that there is no under-representation of disadvantaged populations (Clifford et al. 2010). Different neighbourhoods in both villages have been surveyed, the different streets have been chosen through observation. Both streets with villas and social housing have been addressed. Clifford et al. (2010) mentions that open-ended questions are less likely to be fulfilled by respondents when the interviewer is not present, which also was a determining factor to survey face to face as well. Another benefit is the possibility to clarify a question if needed (Clifford et al. 2010). Moreover, the possibility to engage and discuss more about the research, which can give some further insight and provides useful for the discussion.

4.3 Data analysis

Through the statistical program, SPSS and Microsoft Excel, the analysis has been done. In the dataset two groups have been distinguished, the respondents from Lemmer and the respondents from Balk. The dataset consists mainly of nominal and ordinal data. As the data mostly are ordinal, non-parametric tests are used to analyse whether there is a correlation between the different variables. First, the data will be

analysed descriptively. Second, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test will be executed to distinguish whether there is a significant difference in the satisfaction of the former and the current municipality. Thereafter, the same test will be executed to measure if there is a difference in the satisfaction on the public services in the former and current municipality. The other factors, change of City Hall, arrival of ASC and renovation of the centre, were questioned in the survey whether it had a positive influence on their opinion of the municipality. Via the Spearman correlation coefficient, it will be distinguished whether there is a correlation between the different variables. For all the tests, the confidence interval of 95% will be used. Thus, an outcome is significant when $p < 0,05$.

4.4 Reflection on data

Measuring the satisfaction of their municipality and public services was conducted in a different way than the other factors (City Hall, ASC, renovation). Regarding the satisfaction of the municipality and public services, the respondents were asked how satisfied they were with these factors *before* the merger. In the following question, it was formulated the same but regarding the *current* satisfaction. The other factors, the respondents were asked whether the relocation of the City Hall had affected their opinion on the municipality. This also applies for the other factors (see also appendix 1 and 2). For the factors, City Hall, ASC and renovation it can be analyzed directly whether it had affected their change of municipality satisfaction. For the public services, the analysis can only be done indirectly. The difference in the formulation of the questions will not have influence on the statistical testing in SPSS.

Furthermore, analysing some of the answers of the respondents, it may have suggested that some saw the relocation of the City Hall as a public service, hence answering with the City Hall in mind when filling in the public services closed-end questions, which may result in correlation. However, this correlation has not been determined via the Spearman correlation coefficient.

4.5 Ethics

The survey contains personal questions of age, gender and zip code. To guarantee the identity of the respondent only the first four numbers of the zip code are asked, to determine and secure that the respondents live in Balk or Lemmer. The answers of the respondents have been kept confidential and are only used for this research. This also has been stated at the start of the survey to reassure the respondent.

5. Results

In total 92 surveys have been gathered and filled in, however some did not fill in the two open ended questions at the end of the survey. However, this does not have consequences for answering the research question. The answers on the open-ended questions are merely to reflect for possible reasons for the change of satisfaction in the two villages. From the 92 surveys, 42 were collected in Balk and 50 in Lemmer. In both villages, the percentage of surveys filled in by women was higher than by men. In figure 5, an overview about the total surveys fulfilled, and the percentage of women and men is provided. The average age of the respondent is 50, the oldest respondent was 89 and the youngest 15.

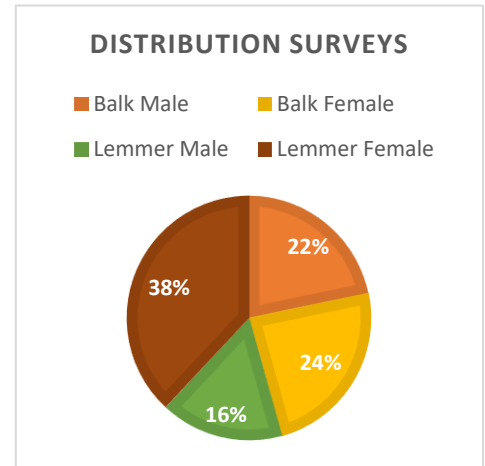


Figure 5: Percentage surveys filled in by female or male in Balk and Lemmer

5.1 Satisfaction Municipality

In the survey was asked how satisfied the respondent were with their former municipality and their new merged one. The respondents in Balk were asked to think about their old municipality, *Gaasterland-Sloten*. In Lemmer it concerned the former municipality *Lemsterland*. Both groups also responded to the question how satisfied they were with the current municipality, *De Fryske Marren*. As the respondents in both villages had a different former municipality, the results regarding these questions have been displayed separately in the following figures. In figure 6, the satisfaction of the respondents in Balk, in percentages, before and after the merger is displayed. In general, it clearly shows a decrease in the satisfaction of the respondents. Figure 7 shows decrease in the satisfaction as well, this time regarding

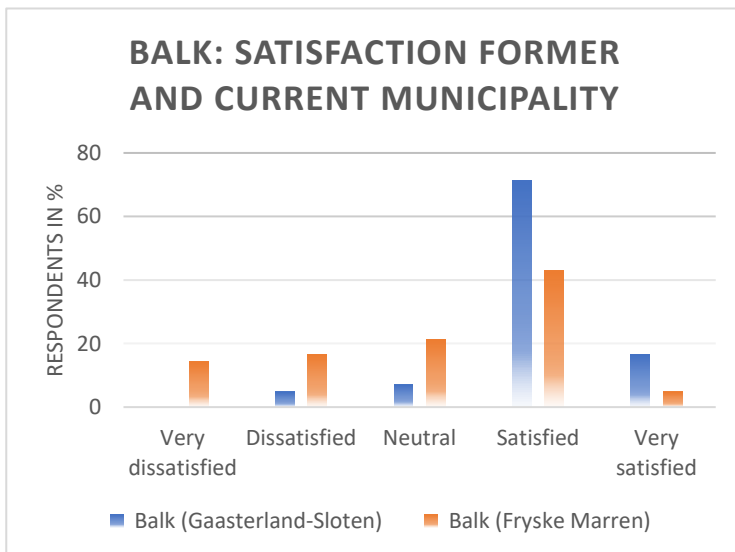


Figure 7: Respondent's satisfaction old and current municipality in Balk.

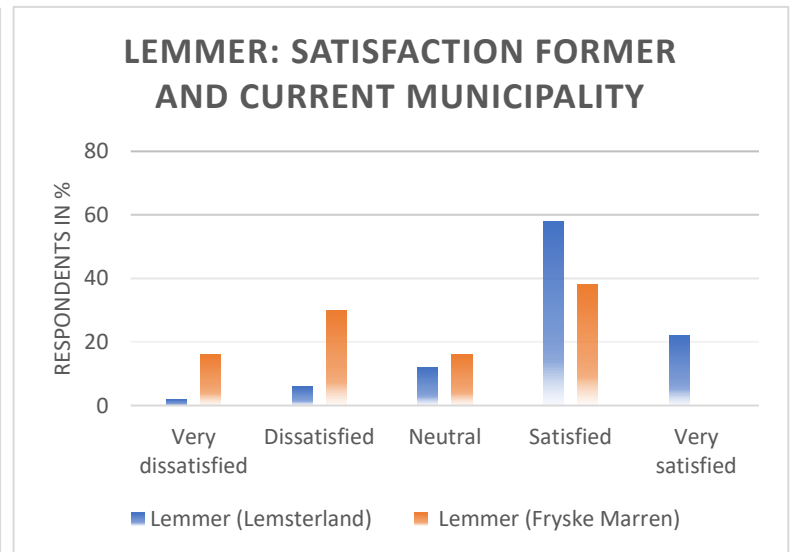


Figure 6: Respondent's satisfaction old and current municipality in Lemmer.

the respondents living in Lemmer. Both figures show both villages had a considerable decrease in satisfaction.

For statistically measuring whether a difference exists in satisfaction of the citizens before and after the merger the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test has been made. This has been done for both Balk and Lemmer separately. In both cases the H_0 can be rejected, as for both the $p = 0,000$. This means that there is a significant difference between the satisfaction of the municipality before the merger and after the merger. In both Balk and Lemmer the mean dropped almost a full point, as the mean for Balk was $M = 4,0$ (for merger) and $M = 3,1$ (after merger). In Lemmer it went from $M = 3,9$ to $M = 2,8$. It can be concluded that the people are less satisfied with the new municipality than with their old municipality. This has also been confirmed by executing the test for the overall population (both Lemmer and Balk), again $p = 0,000$.

For measuring if there is a significant relationship between the satisfaction of citizens of the municipality and the residential area of the respondent, the Mann-Whitney test has been executed. The null hypothesis is the following: there is no significant relationship between the satisfaction of the municipality and the residential area of the respondent. This null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and therefore is accepted, after executing the test, where the $p = 0,205$. This means that there is no statistically significant relationship between the residential area of the respondent and their satisfaction for the municipality.

Two additional questions in the survey were open ended questions regarding specific changes that had influenced their opinion. In the open questions, an often-heard reason for why their satisfaction had decreased is because of less involvement possibility with the municipality and less communication. Also, Allers and Geertsema (2016) pointed this out, the “public opinion is often hostile to amalgamation, but that does not necessarily stop it. Hostility is usually based on the fear of losing influence on local matters” (p. 665). The alderman of the current municipality also pointed out that that the residents of the former municipality *Lemsterland* were more ‘critical’ about the merger. However, some positive outcomes were supported by stating that the merged municipality was more professional.

The rest of the sub chapters will discuss the variables that possibly affected the change in satisfaction of the two groups (Balk and Lemmer) on the municipality. Via the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient, it was determined that there is no correlation between these variables and their effect on the satisfaction.

5.2 Satisfaction public services

The satisfaction of the respondents on the public services is displayed in figure 8 and 9. Similar to figures 6 and 7, a decrease of satisfaction can be noted in both villages, this time concerning the satisfaction of the public services in the municipality. There are considerably more respondents less satisfied with the public services in the merged municipality.

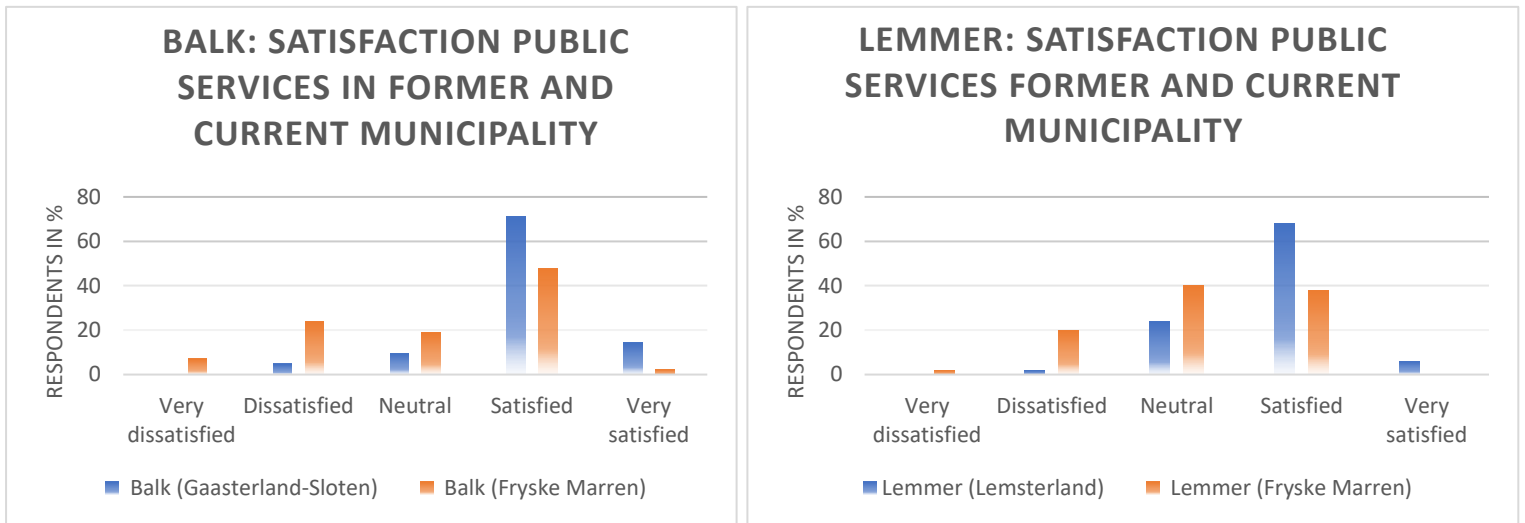


Figure 9: Respondent's satisfaction of the public services in former and current municipality

Figure 8: Respondent's satisfaction of the public services in former and current municipality

The Wilcoxon signed ranks test has been used to measure whether this decrease in satisfaction is statistically significant. First, the signed rank test has been executed for all the respondents (both Balk and Lemmer). The tests for both Balk and Lemmer were significant, overall the tests were also significant with a $p=0,000$. This means that there is a significant difference in the satisfaction of the public services before and after the merger in both villages. The satisfaction for the public services in Balk had a mean of $M = 3,95$ before, and $M = 3,14$ after. For Lemmer it went from $M = 3,78$ to $M = 3,14$. The general satisfaction of the citizens in both villages are equal after the merger, and in Balk the citizens were slightly more satisfied with the public services than Lemmer.

Both the satisfaction of the municipality as the public services decreased with the merger. This may indicate that there is a link between those two factors. Which confirms the statement made by Dollery and Crase (2004), as mentioned in 3.1. In the open-ended questions, it was often mentioned that the citizens were not happy with the City Hall. The results regarding the City Hall are dealt with in the following paragraph.

5.3 City Hall

In the survey, the question was asked whether the move of the City Hall from their village to Joure had a positive influence on their opinion of the current municipality. Looking at the descriptive statistics, the relocation of the City Hall did not have a positive effect on their opinion of the current municipality. Of the respondents, 56,5% (taking both Balk and Lemmer into account) said that it did not have a positive impact on their opinion of *De Fryske Marren*. Of the rest of the respondents, 35,9% answered *neutral* indicating that the relocation of the City Hall had not affected their opinion of the municipality. Only a few, 7,6% said it had a positive impact. These numbers are similar for both Lemmer and Balk separately.

Some feedback was provided by the respondents via the closed-ended questions. The respondents advised the municipality to either return the services provided by the City Hall to their village, or have longer opening hours in the service centre in their village. This response was given by respondents from Balk and respondents from Lemmer as well. Positive feedback by respondents was sporadic, only one respondent mentioned being happy that the municipality got rid of the *ugly* City Hall.

It can be concluded that the citizens were not happy with the move of the City Hall. This can also be supported by the results of Kushner and Siegel (2005) in their research about citizen satisfaction in municipalities. They also concluded that citizens were not happy that their municipal council was removed from the centre of the village and placed in a county building. Whereas in their research it meant a ten minute longer drive, for the citizens in Lemmer and Balk it is significantly more amount of time to travel to Joure.

5.4 ASC and Renovation

5.4.1 ASC in Balk

In the survey, a question was asked whether the arrival of the ASC has had a positive influence on their opinion of the municipality. This question has only been asked the respondents of Balk. Many respondents answered that it did not have had any impact on their opinion of the municipality (35%). 42,8% respondent that it had a negative, and 21,4% thought it had a positive impact on their opinion of the municipality. This would suggest that the ASC had not significant influence on the difference of satisfaction in Balk.

In the open-ended question to which specific change had influenced the value they give to the municipality, it was frequently mentioned that they liked the arrival of the ASC as it gives a sense of community. Some did not like the arrival of the ASC, however an often-asked answer was whether it had influenced their opinion on the municipality, "*Where else do they need to go to?*" which resulted in a *neutral* answer on the survey. However, other respondents specifically mentioned in the open-ended

questions that they disliked the arrival of the ASC. Someone specifically mentioned the way of decision making of the municipality regarding the ASC. However, the respondent mentioned various factors which had influenced his opinion on the municipality, not only the ASC. It could not be distinguished which factor specifically had the most influence. Furthermore, it has also been the case that a respondent specifically said that he was not happy with the ASC. However, this did not reflect in the respondent's answers regarding the satisfaction of the municipality.

5.4.2 Renovation in Lemmer

In the survey, a question was asked whether the renovation of the village has had a positive influence on their opinion on the municipality. This question was specifically for the respondents of Lemmer. Of the respondents, 24% answered that it did not have an impact on their opinion of the municipality. 30% said it had a positive impact, and 36% answered that it had a negative impact.

Other response in Lemmer was that they did not like how the renovation of the centre had turned out. However, it was also mentioned that some did like the renovation of the centre. A respondent specifically said that the renovation had changed his opinion on the village centre. This also reflects in his answers on the other questions, the respondent was *neutral* regarding the City Hall. His satisfaction regarding the municipality also changed from dissatisfied to satisfied. However, most respondents who were negative regarding the renovation, were negative to the other factors as well. Therefore, it could not be distinguished which factor had the most impact regarding the satisfaction change. However, it was often when the respondents did not like the renovation, it was its effect on the traffic situation. It was deemed *dangerous* and *unclear*. One respondent mentioned that the Municipality does not listen to the input of its citizens. The results confirm the statement of Kushner & Siegel (2005), which was mentioned in 3.3. In the case of Lemmer, the outcome *renovation* could be perceived negatively or positively and therefore decrease or increase the satisfaction. Respondents perceived the renovation differently, but often did correspond to their satisfaction of the municipality.

5.5 Extra data

The respondents were asked if they still saw a positive future with their village belonging to the new municipality. Almost half (46%) responded that they still saw a positive future, and 25% percent looked at it negatively, the rest did not have an opinion. However, if the hypothetical possibility would be given to return to the former municipality, half of the respondents said yes. And only 17% said they would not like to return to the former situation.

6. Conclusion

This research investigated how the citizens of the two villages Balk and Lemmer perceive the public services and relocation of the public service delivery (City Hall) and whether it had influenced the value they give to the new municipality since the merger of 2014. Another factor for each village specifically has also been taken into consideration, this was the arrival of the ASC for Balk. For Lemmer the renovation of the centre had been taken into account. The respondents of the two villages were considerably more satisfied with their old municipality (Gaasterland-Sloten for Balk; Lemsterland for Lemmer), than opposed to their current municipality, which is *De Fryske Marren*. The difference in satisfaction has statistically been proven through a non-parametric test. The feedback provided by the respondents and results of this research could be useful for future merging processes in the Netherlands.

First, the satisfaction of the public services in the old and the current municipality has been investigated. With the use of descriptive data, it was concluded that there was a drop of satisfaction in both the two villages. This confirmed the hypothesis that the satisfaction of the public services can be linked to the satisfaction of the municipality.

Second, both villages lost their City Hall in the process of merging into the new municipality and now need to travel to another village which does not belong to one of their former municipalities. In the survey, the citizens were asked whether this had influenced their satisfaction of the new municipality and the descriptive results show that it had. Furthermore, in the open-ended questions it was often mentioned that the respondents were definitely not happy with the relocation of the City Hall, suggesting to return the City Hall to their village.

Third, for both villages a factor was specifically chosen that might have had an influence on the value the citizens give to the municipality. The recent change for Balk was the arrival of the ASC and for Lemmer the renovation of the village centre. The respondents were quite even in their answers, many liked the arrival of the ASC, and many stood neutral in the statement whether the arrival had influenced their opinion on the municipality. A large group did however dislike the arrival of the ASC. However, the open-ended questions provided some interesting insight. Some respondents stated that they were happy with the arrival of the ASC, as it gave a sense of community. Generally, the renovation of the centre was similar received as the arrival of the ASC in Balk. However, the figures between the different responses differ less. Again, the largest group of respondents filled in that the renovation had influenced their opinion on the municipality negatively. Nevertheless, this does not differ considerably from the respondents who filled in the opposite chose a neutral option. However, these results do not correspond to the statement made by the alderman during the interview. The alderman stated that, even though the

citizens of Lemmer were critical at first towards the merger, they were happy with the renovation of the centre.

It can be concluded that the satisfaction of the respondents in both Balk and Lemmer had decreased significantly. Both the satisfaction of the public services and the relocation of the City Hall had affected this change. Some people did not like the arrival of the ASC and others praised it, which is also the case with the renovation of the centre of Lemmer. Therefore, it cannot be said that these last two factors had a similar impact on the change of satisfaction then as the City Hall or public services did. The change of satisfaction was mostly determined by the public services and the public services delivery by the City Hall. However, in general, the respondents do see a positive future with *De Fryske Marren*.

7. Discussion and recommendation

There is the possibility that some changes in local policy already were implemented before the merger (Allers & Geertsema, 2016). Therefore, the effects of these changes could already have influenced the opinion of the resident on the old municipality, even though they belonged to the new municipality policies. Furthermore, there is the problem that the answers given were made retrospectively. As it was not possible to approach the people before the merger, the questions of their opinion of the new municipality could have impacted their satisfaction of their former municipality. This problem has also been emphasized by Kushner & Siegel (2005).

There is a significant relationship between the satisfaction of the municipality and the satisfaction of the public services. However, services which are not provided by the municipality may well be interpreted by the respondents as such. Therefore, this may have influenced the opinion of the respondents. To research whether a change of public services does have a significant impact on the satisfaction, additional research needs to be done, where specific changes in the public services are presented to the respondents.

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Appendix 1: Survey (Dutch)

Een korte inleiding

Deze enquête is onderdeel van een afstudeerproject van Geziena Oenema, aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Het onderzoek richt zich op de waardering voor de gemeente van de dorpbewoners in Balk en Lemmer. Door deze enquête in te vullen helpt u mee met het onderzoek. Het zal ongeveer vijf minuten kosten om deze enquête in te vullen. Alle informatie zal vertrouwelijk blijven en alleen gebruikt worden voor dit onderzoek.

Kruis aan of vul in het antwoord dat van toepassing is op u. Bij de meerkeuze vragen kan maar **één** antwoord aangekruist worden

Geslacht: Man / Vrouw / Anders

Wat is uw geboortjaar? _____

Wat zijn de eerste vier cijfers van uw postcode? _____

Woonde u voor 2014 ook al op deze postcode?

- Ja
- Nee
- Nee, maar wel in hetzelfde dorp.

Mocht u voor 2014, niet in het zelfde dorp hebben gewoond, dan houdt de enquête hier voor u op.

Hoeveel komt u in aanraking met de openbare voorzieningen in uw dorp?

- Nooit
- Soms
- Regelmatig
- Vaak
- Altijd

Bij de volgende vragen wordt er gevraagd naar de waardering over de publieke voorzieningen en uw gemeente.

ZO = Zeer ontevreden | O = Ontevreden | N= Neutraal | T= Tevreden | ZT = Zeer tevreden

	ZO	O	N	T	ZT
Hoe tevreden was u met de openbare voorzieningen in uw dorp <u>vóór</u> de fusie in 2014?					
Hoe tevreden bent u met de <u>huidige</u> openbare voorzieningen in uw dorp/gemeente?					
	ZO	O	N	T	ZT
Hoe tevreden was u over de gemeente <u>vóór</u> de fusie in 2014? (Gaasterland-Sloten voor Balk, Lemsterland voor Lemmer)					
Hoe tevreden bent u over de <u>huidige</u> gemeente? (De Fryske Marren)					

Sinds de fusie heeft u moeten veranderen van gemeentehuis (nu geplaatst in Joure). In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stellingen: Sinds mijn gemeentehuis in Joure is geplaatst, heeft dit mijn tevredenheid positief beïnvloedt over de voorzieningen .					
Sinds mijn gemeentehuis in Joure is geplaatst, heeft dit mijn tevredenheid positief beïnvloedt over de gemeente					
Lemmer: In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stelling: Sinds de vernieuwing van het centrum, is mijn mening over de gemeente positief beïnvloedt.					
Balk: In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stelling: Sinds de komst van het azielzoekerscentrum, is mijn mening over de gemeente positief beïnvloedt.					
In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stelling: Ik zou terug willen naar de situatie vóór 2014, voor de fusie.					
In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stelling: Ik zie de toekomst positief in met het dorp behorend tot de gemeente <i>De Fryske Marren</i> .					

Welke specifieke verandering in uw dorp heeft uw waardering over de gemeente veranderd sinds de fusie?

Als u iets zou mogen veranderen qua publieke voorzieningen in uw dorp, wat zou dat dan zijn?

Ik wil u hartelijk bedanken voor het invullen van de enquête, die is hierbij afgelopen. Indien u geïnteresseerd bent in de uitkomsten van dit onderzoek, kunt u hieronder uw e-mailadres opgeven. De uitkomsten van dit onderzoek kunt u gedurende de zomer verwachten.

Appendix 2: Survey (English translation)

A short introduction

This survey is part of the graduation project of Geziena Oenema, student at the University of Groningen. The aim of the research is to investigate the satisfaction of the residents of Balk and Lemmer on the merger of the municipality. By completing this survey, you assist in this investigation. It will take a few minutes to complete this survey. All data will be kept confidential and only used for this research. Cross or fill in the answer that applies to you. In the multiple-choice questions only one answer can be ticked.

Gender: Male / Female / Other

What is your birth year? _____

What are the first four digits of your zip code? _____

Was this also your zip code before 2014?

- Yes
- No
- No, but I lived in the same village.

If you did not reside in this village before 2014, then this is the end of the survey.

How often do you get in touch with the public services in your villages?

- Never
- Sometimes
- Regularly
- Often
- Always

In the following questions you are asked for your satisfaction of the public services and the municipality.

VD = Very dissatisfied | D = dissatisfied | N = Neutral | S = Satisfied | VS = Very satisfied

	VD	D	N	S	VS
How satisfied were you with the public services in your village before the merger in 2014?					
How satisfied are you with the current public services in your village or municipality?					
	VD	O	N	T	ZT
How satisfied were you with the municipality <u>before</u> the merger in 2014? (Gaasterland-Sloten for Balk, Lemsterland for Lemmer)					

How satisfied are you with the <u>current</u> municipality? (De Fryske Marren)					
Since the merger, you had to change from City Hall (now located in Joure). To what extent do you agree with the following statements: Since the City Hall has been relocated to Joure, this has had a <i>positive</i> impact on my satisfaction of the public services					
Since the City Hall has been relocated to Joure, this has had a <i>positive</i> impact on my satisfaction of the municipality					
Lemmer: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Since the renovation of the centre, my opinion on the municipality has been <i>positively</i> influenced.					
Balk: To what extent do you agree with the followin statement: Since the arrival of the refugee centre/asylum seeker centre (AZC), my opinion on the municipality has been <i>positively</i> influenced.					
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I would like to return to the situation <u>before</u> 2014, before the merger.					
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I see a positive future with my village in the municipality <i>De Fryske Marren</i> .					

Which specific change in your village has influenced your satisfaction on the municipality since the merger?

If you were able to change something in the public services, what would it be?

This is the end of the survey. Thank you very much for helping me with my survey. If you would like to hear the results, you can fill in your email here. You can expect the results in the summer.
