

Place attachment in a mobile society

Understanding the relations with place among students

A qualitative study about place attachment of HE students from the Netherlands towards their university town



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Abstract

Modern society is a society on the move. People go to work, they travel around the world or move to another town in search for better opportunities. It can be argued that places do not hold the same value as before and could be less important to people nowadays. An underlying assumption is that there exists an opposition between mobility and place attachment. Yet, a growing body of research suggests that place matters to people and have shown the importance of place attachment. In the light of these contradicted premises, students' place attachment is an interesting topic. Students are characterized by high levels of mobility. This study explores the development of place attachment towards the university town of non-local students from the Netherlands. Besides, it examines whether mobility has influence on the student's place attachment. The research was conducted in Groningen, the Netherlands. Ten students were asked to photograph places that play a significant role in their lives in the university town. These, along with questions about their development of place attachment were discussed in semi-structured in-depth interviews.

Findings show that the student's place attachment runs in a s-curve: from the relatively slower development of place attachment in the transition period, to a high increase of place attachment during their studies, and at last a stagnation or stabilization of attachment in the end stage of student's study time. This development differs between the students, due to personal characteristics, such as migration history and milieu of origin. Despite the differences in personal characteristics, they all experienced the 'student culture.' This shared meaning shaped the student's place attachment and their view towards the city. The city of Groningen fits their needs as a student, and facilitate their student lifestyle, which positively influenced their attachment. When time passed, the curve of place attachment stagnated or stabilized. This could be explained by that multiple students experienced a disruption in their social world. Additionally, the students are influenced by a society whereas mobility is common, moving to other places is easier. Therefore, the students knew the city was important for study purposes and their student lifestyle, but when finishing their study, the city is not seen as suitable. Consequently, they had a more loosening tie with Groningen, because they knew they will move in the future. This does not mean they are not attached towards their university town, but the curve of their attachment will flatter as time goes by.

Keywords:

- Place attachment
- Tripartite model
- Mobilization
- Students

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Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Background

Modern society is a society on the move. People go to work, they travel around the world or move to another town in search for better opportunities (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014). Globalization plays a relatively big role in this movement. Economic, political, cultural, and social developments create an increasing interconnectedness between geographically distant places.

As a consequence, it could be argued that places are not what they used to be (Clifford et al., 2008). In the 1930s, Hartshorne (1939), one of the most influential geographers, emphasized in his book, that the geography's aim was to study 'areal differentiation', and describe the differences between people and places around the world. According to him, the world was a fascinating mosaic of places (1939). However, due to the modern globalization this changed rapidly. Hence, the world-famous sociologist Castells (1996) saw things very differently. The globalised production, trade, mobility, culture and digitalization has made the world a 'global village.' The barriers of places have diminished, and at the same time the mosaic of places too. The homogenization of places signals for Castells the end of places (1996). As a consequence, he points out a redefinition of place: contemporary societies must be understood more in terms of mobility, flows, and networks, and less in terms of stable, bounded units, such as local communities and nation-states (Castells, 1996).

The trends regarding modernity, globalization, virtualization, and fast speed of everyday life could undermine people's meaningful relations with places (Lewicka, 2011). Relph's (1976) classic work, which introduced the concept of 'placelessness' explains that due to the globalizing world, there is a growing homogeneity of places. Places lost their uniqueness in the cultural landscape, so that one place looks like the next. Considering the increased mobilization, globalization, growing homogeneity of places and loss of their cultural distinction, there is a growing interest among scholars towards people's relation with places: is place still important to people? What happens to people's emotional bonds with place in a society increasingly characterized by mobility? The meaningful relation with places of people is also known as place attachment. Place attachment refers to the affective bond between individuals and their environments (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Lewicka, 2011). From the viewpoint of globalization and the growing mobility, it can be argued places do not hold the same value as before and could be less important to people nowadays. An underlying assumption is that there exists an opposition between mobility and place attachment (Gustafson, 2001; Lewicka, 2011).

Yet, a growing body of research suggests that place matters to people. Place attachment is a fluid and dynamic concept. People can have multiple strong attachments to different places, with some evolving over time (Gustafson, 2001). This notion contradicts the belief that place attachment and mobility cannot coincide. Strong place attachment was believed to be characteristic of immobility and low place attachment reflected higher rates of mobility (Relph, 1976)

It is important to point out a paradox: despite the growing number of homogenous places and interconnectedness, places have not lost their meaning, but their importance actually may have grown in the contemporary world (Gustafson, 2009; Janz, 2005; Lewicka, 2011). Multiple studies have shown the importance of place attachment these days. Being away from home, or the increasing mobility of people, makes home ties more salient, and paradoxically it may add to maintenance of local identity, rather than its disruption (Guiliani et al., 2003; Lewicka & Banka, 2008). Furthermore, a quantitative study of Gustafson (2001) in Sweden with highly mobile people, also known as, cosmopolitans, shows that the local ties are not significantly weaker than less mobile persons and therefore not locally disconnected and still attached to their hometown. This is in line with a relatively older research of Harvey, who saw this paradox already in the 1980s. According to Harvey (1989) our living environment is changed rapidly by external forces (globalization, and uncertainty), our need to create a sense of place as "secure and stable" and therefore the need for place attachment is heightened. At last, to echo Relph's classic work, he refers to the fact that being human is also being in and with place:

to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and know your place” (Relph, 1976, p. 1).

Albeit, it has been acknowledged that the theories do not contradict each other. However, this demonstrates that type and strength of place attachment vary and depend on different factors, associated with places (scale, physical, characteristics) and people (age, residence length and socio-economic status) (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Place attachment is context-dependent and differs per person and place. The globalization trends in place attachment itself is fascinating. What happens to people’s meaningful relationships and emotional bonds with place in a society characterized by mobility and globalization? The changing world needs a different perspective of place attachment, and new trends among place attachment have already emerged, such as qualitative differences in place attachment: multiple place attachment, place attachment on higher scales, and virtual places. Besides, Gustafson (2014:46) states in his book: “...we need to study how mobility and mobile persons may disrupt, alter, or reinforce identities, attachments, and meanings.”

In the light the above quote of Gustafson (2009) and from a globalization viewpoint, students’ place attachment is an interesting topic. Students are characterized by high levels of mobility. They are young people that move between regions for the uptake of a university study. Additionally, nowadays many students take the opportunity to study abroad for a time (Sage, et. al., 2011). On the one hand, according to Chow & Healey (2008) university students loosen their emotional and cognitive connections with a place when they have firm plans for their future. On the other hand, homesickness is frequently experienced among students (Brown, 1992). This is in line with Harvey’s (1989) theory about the need of creating a “secure and stable” place, to decrease the feelings of homesickness. These theories create different questions about students and their relationship with place during their study: Is the city where they study just seen as a university town, or are there other perceptions of the city during their study time? What meaning do students accord to their study town? Are the students attached to their university town in a certain way, and how? Or is it just an adaptive relationship for their future goals?

Students’ place attachment is a subject that is rarely studied. The number of earlier studies is low, and most of the literature regarding place attachment and students is focused on the University campus rather than the city or the area (Chow et al, 2008; Moghisi et al, 2015; Qingjiu & Malikia, 2013). In the Netherlands, many students do not live on a campus and are living in a student dwelling throughout the city. This led to wonders how students perceive and develop place attachment in the Netherlands. Therefore, the theoretical relevance of this study is to address this gap in the literature, investigating the place attachment of students towards their university city.

This study is a case-study about the city of Groningen, in the Northern part of the Netherlands. Groningen is one of the youngest cities in the Netherlands. There are proximity 60.000 students in the city of Groningen, whereas 33000 students living in the city (Gemeente Groningen, 2015). They play an active role in the city life and contribute to the vitality of Groningen. A significant part of the students is from the Netherlands, and especially the Northern part of the Netherlands. The city slogan of Groningen is: *‘Nothing tops Groningen.’* However, is this the case? A lot of students leave the city after they graduated to move, for instance to the Randstad (Venhorst et. al., 2011). According to, Venhorst et al., 40 percent of the graduates of University of Groningen move to the Western part of the country in 2011, whilst 29 percent stay in the city of Groningen. This same trend applies to Applied Sciences students of the Hanze Hogeschool in Groningen, except they move to other regions. Thus, the majority of higher educated (HE) students leaving Groningen after completed their studies. Their underlying motivation is better (economic) opportunities (De Groene Amsterdammer, 2017). According to Venhorst et al. (2011) attachment plays a role in the migration pattern of graduated students. Hence, it is interesting to study the city of Groningen, because a strong place attachment might also result in an increase in students’ willingness to settle in the Groningen. This might be a way to bring intellectual, social, and financial resources to the area. Besides, in general place attachment could lead to improved well-being, thriving and growing communities in the city (Lewicka, 2011; Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

1.2 Research problem

This case-study of Groningen elaborates on the qualitative values of place attachment of a mobile group, namely students. The topic of student bonding with their environment is an interesting one. As noted above, students are a highly mobile group. Mobility and place attachment are seen as an opposition to each other. On the other hand, it is argued that mobility could make home ties more salient, and paradoxically it may contribute to maintenance of local identity, rather than its disruption (Lewicka, 2011).

This study defines students as: non-local students from the Netherlands. This based on different bodies of literature. First of all, international literatures distinguished between research of international or national students, because of the assumed large differences in attachment. Both students do have in common their loosening ties with a place regarding their future: going to college, or after studying, looking for a job. However, there is a big difference: when the demands of adjusting to the new place increment, both domestic and international students realize that a dislocation from the old routines and places has happened. Most literature calls this phenomenon ‘homesickness’ by domestic students (Fisher & Hood, 1987; Fisher et al., 1985), but there is a different term by international students, namely ‘culture shock’ (Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008; Furnham, 1997). This, because of the differences in culture and language. This research chooses and will only research domestic students. Second, this study focusses on non-local students, who do not live with their parents, and live in Groningen, to really understand the relation towards a university town, and not to the town they grew up in. The last requirement is they have to live in Groningen at least for two years, because as literature state: length of residence could play a role. Additionally, fresh non-local students, who live in Groningen, are in a period of intense transition from home to university. According to the study of Chow and Healey (2008), who researched freshmen at two different moments in a period of five months noted already a difference in as regards to place attachment: during the 5 month of the study it became evident that participants sense of place did evolve through the transition. To tackle the transition from home to a university town, the students have to live at least two year in Groningen. Additionally, due to the requirement of living longer than two years in Groningen, this research could show the process of place attachment, from the transition till this very moment.

The aim of this study is to understand the students’ attachment and relation with place with the university town Groningen. This could be valuable knowledge for policymakers in a city. Place attachment can lead to an increase of student’s willingness to settle in the city. This is relevant, because students bring intellectual, social and financial resources to the city, which are important for the city and the surrounding area. In additional, place attachment can lead to improved well-being, thriving and growing communities in a city (Lewicka, 2011; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). This study may give better insight how and why students will stay (or not) in Groningen as regards to place attachment and can use as a tool to let higher educated stay in the city region, what is an important resource to the city. According to Venhorst et. al. (2011), attachment plays a role in the migration pattern of graduated students. To study the relation of place of students towards their university town, the following main question will be answered:

Research question:

How do non-local students from the Netherlands develop place attachment towards their university town?

The main research question will be answered with the following sub-questions:

- Which individual - and shared meanings, and personal characteristics of students shape their attachment towards their university town? (Who is attached?)
- What kind of places (physical and/or social) in a university town are students attached to, and what are the perceived and valued qualities of these places? (To what are they attached?)
- Which affective, cognitive, and behavioural factors do play a role in development of place attachment of students towards their university town? (How is the attachment manifested?)
- What role does mobility play in the student's attachment towards Groningen?

1.3 Thesis outline

Chapter two present the theoretical framework and underpins the analysis of this research based on international literature. Chapter three discusses the choices made for this study concerning the research methodology: the qualitative methods, and ethical considerations. In chapter 4, the findings will be presented. Thereafter the study results will be discussed relating with the literature, and a reflection is given in chapter 5. At last, in chapter 6 the research question will be answered and recommendations for urban planning and future inquiry will described.



Figure 1.1: Overview thesis

Chapter II: Theoretical framework

2.1 Place

What exactly is a place? Is it merely a location or a unique ensemble of culture and nature, or could it be something more (Clifford et al., 2010)? First of all, in human geography is a distinction between two concepts: space and place. About forty years ago different human geographers turned their attention to the difference between space and place (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1993). Human geography is not only ecological science, but also social science, and deals with the multi-faceted interrelationship between landscape and society or individuals. Two important scholars are Tuan (1977) and Relph (1976), give a great contribution in defining space and place. According to them, space can be described as a location, without any value added to this space. In contrary, place is more than just a location. Place incarnates the experiences of people and is understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning. (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1993). This meaning ascribed to a place can be achieved through individual, social or cultural processes (Low and Altman, 1992). Additionally, the meaning and bonds between people and place, is known as place attachment and will be elaborated on in the next paragraph (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

2.2 Place attachment

Place attachment is a multi-faceted and dynamic process. Place attachment is not static, it changes in accordance with changes in the people, processes, activities and places (Brown & Perkins, 1992). There is a diversity of perspectives and disagreement on its definition. This plurality and the competing theories about place attachment are elaborated by Lewicka (2011) with an extensive review of literature. Her review shows that place attachment as a source of scholarly work is alive and well and has gained much scientific attention in recent years. The interests of place attachment may have resulted by globalization, mobility and environmental problems. (Lewicka, 2011; Gustafson, 2009;2014). These trends increase the awareness that person-place bonds have become relatively fragile. However, the growing interest of place attachment accumulated the plenitude of definitions too. The application of place attachment to many perspectives has led that place attachment is a multi-faceted concept. It cannot be explained simply through a causal relationship. Instead, it depends on a reciprocal relationship between experience and behaviour. Besides, place influences behaviour, but behaviour influences place too. However, despite the competing theories, generally place attachment is described as a concept '*that implies affective bonds between people and their surroundings*' (Gustafson, 2009; Lewicka, 2011; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Altman & Low 1992, Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014).

Due to numerous varying opinions on the definition and components of place attachment, models have been scarce. Little empirical progress has been made compared to what was known forty years ago. (Lewicka, 2011). Therefore, references to classic works, such as Tuan (1977) and Relph (1976) are still relevant and can be easily applied in recent studies. The main progress is been made in measurement tools and the application of the concept of place attachment (Lewicka, 2011). A noteworthy conceptual framework is the Tripartite Model, by Scannell and Gifford (2010) (figure 2.1). They identify three dimensions that facilitate the bonding between people and place: person, place, and process (PPP-framework). In other words, *who* is attached, to *what* they are attached to and *how* they are expressing their attachment? The following paragraphs will explore these dimensions in a context of student place attachment.

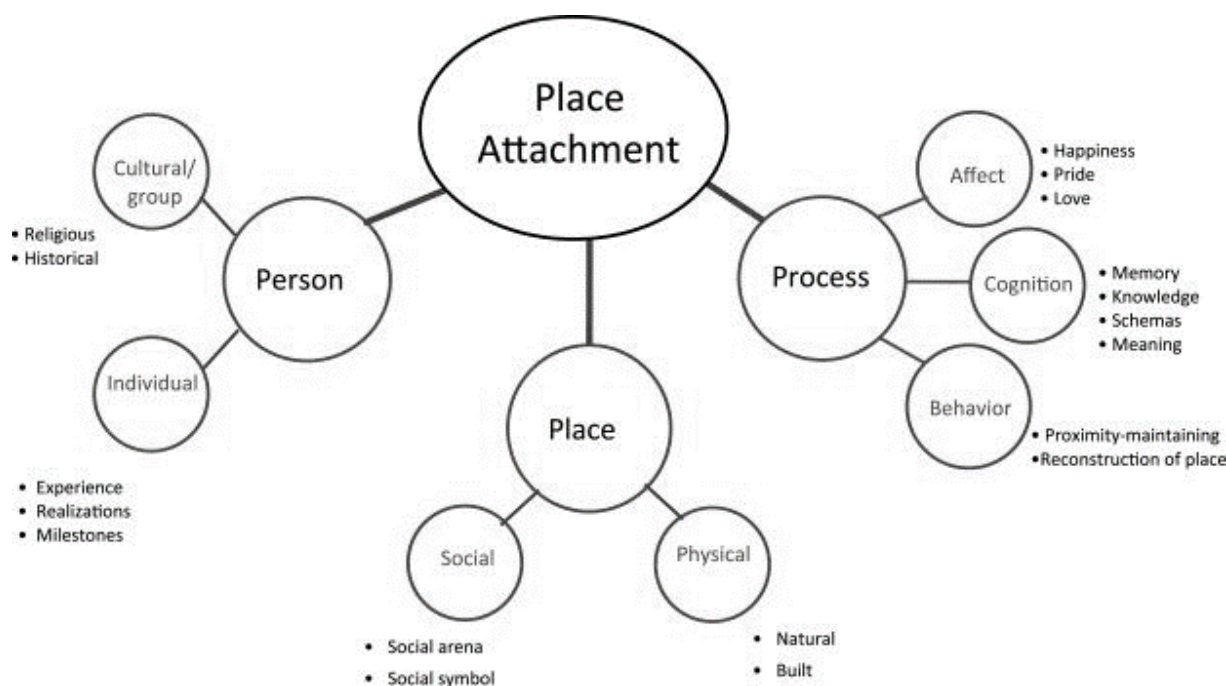


Figure 2.1: The tripartite model of place attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

2.2.1 Person Dimension

Scannell & Gifford (2010) emphasize that both individuals and groups develop attachment to a place. Individually, it involves the personal connections to a place. People personally bind themselves to a place and even identify with it, also known as place-identity. Thus, who we are can also include where we are (Scannell & Gifford, 2014). Places become meaningful from live-trajectories and personally experiences, “such as realizations, milestones and experiences of personal growth” (Scannell & Gifford;2, 2010). Studying and living in Groningen could be an experience or milestone that could create Groningen as a meaningful place for students. The student experience is identified as significant in human development as the time when children become adults and begin their lived experience, develop their own identity and determine their own values without the immediate influence of parents (Chicering & Reisser, 1993).

Another aspect of the individual person dimension of place attachment are the characteristics of the person himself. Scannell & Gifford (2010) do not elaborate the characteristics of the person in their framework, but other scholars do emphasize the importance of personal characteristics that can shape their place attachment (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Lewicka, 2010; Hashemnezhad et al., 2012). Place attachment is different among people. People select and attach place due to their conscious inclinations that result from personal characteristics and factors (Hashemnezhad et. al. 2012). Different socio-demographic factors are for instance, age, gender, and migration background. As regards for age, older people are often found more attached than younger people. This could be linked with the length of residence, because older people move less than younger people (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Lewicka, 2010). Additionally, Hay (1998) who noted that people who had been born in a place reported a higher sense of place than people who had lived there longer but had moved there later in life. So, regarding place attachment of students towards the university town, all students in this research are not born in Groningen, and this could influence their place attachment.

An addition socio demographic factor that could influence place attachment is gender. Multiple scholars researched the gender in place attachment and women report being more attached to their home than men (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010). Within ‘traditional gender roles’ women usually spend more time home, due to maintenance and raising children. This could result in stronger place attachment. Nevertheless, considering this research it is not likely that the women students

are more home, than the men students. However, it could argue that due to societal pressures, men are less willing to express feelings of attachment and emotions (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001).

The third personal characteristic is the socio-geographical background of the student. Their milieu of origin, whether it is a city or a rural village and its geographical distance, could play a role in the attachment process. The transition of a student from a rural village to a university town, could be more challenging, than a student who lived already in a city before moving to a university town. (Wiborg, 2004; Ganss, 2016). Also, the geographical distance could play a role, and the frequency students go to their former home or other places. A study of Vidal et al (2010) shows that students with higher mobility, who travel on weekends or long holiday seasons to other places, show lower attachment towards the university town, than students who stay in the city for the whole week. Besides, their life path based on their migration history whether they moved a lot, or not, could be a factor that influence their attachment and identity towards the university town (Gustafson, 2001; Lewicka 2011; Feldman, 1990). Considering place identity, Feldman (1990) suggested that in a mobile society, people shift from identity to concrete places, to a new form of identity, called 'settlement identity.' He means identity to general classes instead to specific places, such as 'mountain person' or 'urban- or rural person.' Besides, place attachment developed relatively fast while place identity required much more time (Hernandez et al., 2007). At last, studies of individual with a high migration history suggest they see 'home' more at a generic nation level, which may or may not include a specific community of origin (Hughes & Allen, 2010).

At a group level, attachment to a place are symbolic meanings shared of a place among members. Places are derived from religious, historical or other cultural meanings (Scannell & Gifford, 2010) For instance, the residents of Groningen who identify themselves with the Martini Tower, a historical tower in the city. Or regarding students, their 'student culture' could have influence on the meaning and attachment towards different places, such as the university, or a specific bar where the student drinks take place. Besides, there are many student communities and (student) sports-, culture clubs in Groningen. Joining these communities, could influence their place attachment towards the university town. Research show that joining a community can ease the place attachment process (Quinn & Adger, 2015) Additionally, it is interesting to know what role the group dimension does play a part in the place attachment, and how it influences their attachment towards the city. Individual- and group-level attachment may overlap and could be a combination of both.

2.2.2 The place dimension

The second dimension of place attachment is the place dimension. What is about the place that they are attached to? There are different features of a place that can support or hinder place attachment. Scannell and Gifford (2010) distinguishes the place dimension in two levels: the social and physical qualities of a place. Also known as social bonding or nature bonding (Scannell and Gifford, 2010).

There is a debate among environmental and social scholars that place attachment occurs due to social ties and relationships rather than the physical characteristics of the place itself. Urban sociologists (Woldoff, 2002; Lalli, 1992; Hunter 1978) argues that place attachment is mainly social. Much of the research is focused on its social aspects with the underlying thought that people who facilitate social relationships and group identity are more attached to places. Additionally, attachment to a place means attachment to those who live there and to the social interactions that the place affords them, and spatial bonds symbolize social bonds. Social experience binds people in place and make them feel attached to place that represent social interaction (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). An example of a place could be a coffeeshop where students interact with each other, or a place where they hang out with their close friends. According to Scannell & Gifford (2010) the social dimension of place is distinguished in two parts. First, the place as an arena for social interactions. And second, as a symbol for one's social group. Thus, part of social place bonding involves attachment to the others with whom individuals interact in their place, and part of it involves attachment to the social group that the place represents

However, Hidalgo and Hernández (2001), argue that the focus on social dimension neglects the importance of physical aspects of the environment in place attachment. They studied place attachment of college students based on different scales and dimensions and found out that the social aspects were stronger than the physical, but both social- and physical qualities affected place attachment of a person. This in line with Scannel & Gifford (2010) who emphasize the physical qualities of a place: the built- and nature environment. Physical characteristics could provide resources or amenities to support one's goals. For instance, parks, bars, and universities.

Social bonding and nature bonding in place attachment are interconnected (Raymond & Weber, 2010). The physical characteristics of a place provides the container for social experiences and the bonds which form through these experiences (Lewicka, 2011). The Noorderplantsoen, a park in Groningen, could be important place for a student, because of the nature itself, and the enjoyment of the greenery in the park. On the other hand, it may also be a place where the student meets other people and the park is seen as a place for social interaction. In other words, social- and nature bonding may overlap, could both be present at the same time, and are related to each other.

A further research of Lewicka (2011) shed light on the qualitative differences in place attachment. Different places satisfy different needs. A place may serve social needs, recreational needs, studying needs, and/ or sporting needs. Attachment to primary residences may often depend on social ties, or the social level in the place dimension of the framework of Scannell & Gifford (2010), and whereas physical characteristics and amenities of a place may be more important for attachment of leisure purposes. This is in line with the physical level of the place dimension of the tripartite framework. In other words the study suggests that among persons with multiple place attachments, qualitative differences may exist between different places, and develop different types of attachment, than long-time residents (Lewicka, 2011) For instance, students may develop different attachments towards their university town, than the town they grew up in.

Place attachment can centre on a variety of place types of different scales. Place attachment bears no regard to the size and can take place at various scales, such as home, university, a city or even the world (Gustafson, 2009). This study researches place attachment of students towards their university town. However, place attachments vary in their spatial scale. From relatively small (i.e. their room in the student house), medium (a park), or large, as the university town itself. This research focus on all scales, with a maximum scale of the university town. According to different scholars, scale does seem matter for place attachment in a U-shaped pattern. Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001), mentioned a U-shaped relationship between scale of place and strength of place attachment: The neighbourhood tended to attract less emotions than home or city. Thus, place attachment, is usually, but not always, stronger from city and home, than for the neighbourhood (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Scannel & Gifford, 2014).

At last, the word 'home' is mentioned multiple times in this framework, and it is an important place that needs to be explained. A home and feeling home, is closely related with place attachment, because when feeling at home, one feels attached. (Chow et. al, 2008). A home is one of the most common places to feel attached to and to identify with (Blunt, 2006; Chow et al., 2008). However, the meaning of home and its scale could differ. Mostly, home indicates the centre of everyday life, the location where one dwells and an important place to be with family and friends (Blunt, 2006). This may indicate that home is connected to the house, but Hopkins (2010) argues that home may range further than the house or the place where one lives. As noted above the scale of place attachment may vary, which also applies to home. Therefore, the meaning of home is subjective and could differ per person. The place 'home' is related with home-making practices. This behavioural expression of place attachment will be discussed in the process dimension (2.2.3).

2.2.3 The process dimensions

The third dimension of the framework is the process dimension: *How is the attachment manifested?* It involves the way of becoming attached to a place and the emotions connected to that place through

affect, cognition and behaviour (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). This dimension is especially for this research of great importance, as it explores *how* place attachment is experienced and developed by students. The dimension is divided in three psychological aspects of place: affect, cognition, and behaviour. People's feelings about place are part of the emotional dimension, their beliefs and view about place shape the cognitive dimension and their function in a place is a symbol of behavioural dimension of place (Hashemnezhad et al., 2012; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). The followings will address the three aspects.

Affect (Emotion)

Affect involves the emotional connection of an individual to a particular place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Human geographers describe place belongingness in emotional terms. For instance, Tuan (1974) describes this connection as *topophilia*, what means: love of place. Relph (1976) defined similarly place attachment as the emotional bond with an environment. Relationships with a place can involves a series of emotions from love, happiness, and pride. However, Scannell. & Gifford (2010) do not address it in their framework, but emotions related to place are not necessarily positive. For instance, homesickness, caused by a disruption in place attachment, and leaving a familiar environment, could evoke sadness, anxiety, and confusion. As aforementioned, homesickness is frequently experienced among students towards their hometown when going to college (Brown, 1992). Another example could be (study) stress. A large-scale research from the Groninger student's association (2019) shows that a big part of those studying in higher education, reported symptoms of stress and anxiety (Groninger Studentenbond, 2019). This could be a negative emotion linked with place attachment towards a university town.

Cognition

Our ties to place are also cognitive. Cognition is seen as a psychological aspect associated with memories, beliefs, meaning and knowledge that makes a place meaningful (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). It is about the construction of bonding to a place and its meaning. As aforementioned, one can grow attached to a place where memorable or important events occurred. By memory, people can create place meaning and connect it to the self (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Cognitive factors include the meanings which people percept from a place. Thus, we cannot call place attachment just as an emotional sense about one place, it is also a cognitive structure which one person can give a linkage to his meanings. Cognitive aspects will be led to spatial perception, so people know the environmental elements and use them to navigate their way. Besides, as one become attached to a place, they develop a mental representation of that place. This mental representation of a place is organized into sets of cognitions, or schemas. For place attachment, the schemas contain information about features common to the types of place to which one may become attached. An important place for someone, may be a kind of place schema of place-related knowledge, meanings, and beliefs, which represents the special character of the place and its personal connections to it (Scannell & Gifford, 2014). Thus, a place is a mental representation of someone based on their own perceptions and schemas. An example of a cognitive component in a schema, could be familiarity. According to Fullilove (1996), to be attached, is to know the details of the environment.

Behaviour (Action)

The third aspect of the psychological process dimension of place attachment is the behaviour of an individual, which attachment is expressed through actions. Scannell & Gifford (2010) point out the importance of "proximity-maintaining behaviours." The underlying assumption is to remain close to the place of attachment and is expressed by residing for a long time in a certain place. However, as noted before, this is not always the case. Individuals can have multiple place attachments, and do not necessarily live in the attached place (Gustafson, 2009). Besides, people do often visit the places they are attached to, for instance, people go to the same vacation spot every year. Another interesting perspective is the research of Case (1996), where he showed that being away from home makes people recognize the importance of home. It can increase their appreciation to their home, so that they do not take their home as taken-for-granted. It could be assumed when students study abroad for a couple of

months and afterwards return to their university town, they appreciate their university town more.

Another behavioural expression when people are relocating (moving, being away from home) is that they try to maintain a bond by looking or creating similar aspects of their old place in their new environment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). A clear example is that people often interact with people from the same country, region or hometown in their new environment. However, not every behavioural expression is about moving and staying close to the place of attachment. Scannell & Gifford (2010) elaborate behaviour only as proximity-maintaining behaviour, and barely describe behaviour *in* place that manifest and expresses place attachment. A practice that is related to attachment *in* a place is homemaking. A home is a process and is engaged with building and maintaining the feeling of home (Dayaratne et al., 2008). According to Cresswell (2004:82): “places are never finished but constantly produced through the reiteration of practices.” In other words, homemaking is a continuously process. Chow et al. (2008) researched the transition of young people from their hometown to a university town and mentioned that the practice of homemaking is important. Practices of homemaking are for instance, establishing and maintaining social relationships, maintaining physical and sensory continuity, and being in control. Through homemaking one binds him or herself to a place, and become attached to it (Chow et al., 2008). It is a continuously process, and not only present when someone has a new environment. However, at moments of transition, when the bond with home becomes threatened, practices to make a home become more highlighted (Dayaratne et al., 2008; Chow et al., 2008). Considering students’ place attachment, a highly mobile group, homemaking could be an important behavioural expression of place attachment. The mobility of students regarding place attachment will be elaborated in the following paragraph (2.4).

2.3 Place attachment and mobility

In modern society, mobility and moving is the rule rather than exception. It is becoming rare for individuals to die in the same location where they were born (Lewicka, 2011). Interesting, about the Triparite framework is that mobility barely is elaborated (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). They do touch upon mobility, but only in combination of journeys, and staying close to the place of attachment, but do not take more long-term forms of mobility into consideration. As noted above, students are characterised by high levels of mobility. They are young people, move between regions for the uptake of university study. Additionally, nowadays many students take the opportunity to study abroad for a time (Sage, et. al., 2012). As regards of students’ place attachment, their (long-term) mobility could play a role in the development of attachment towards their university town. Therefore, mobility will be considered in the conceptual framework of this research, as an influence on place attachment.

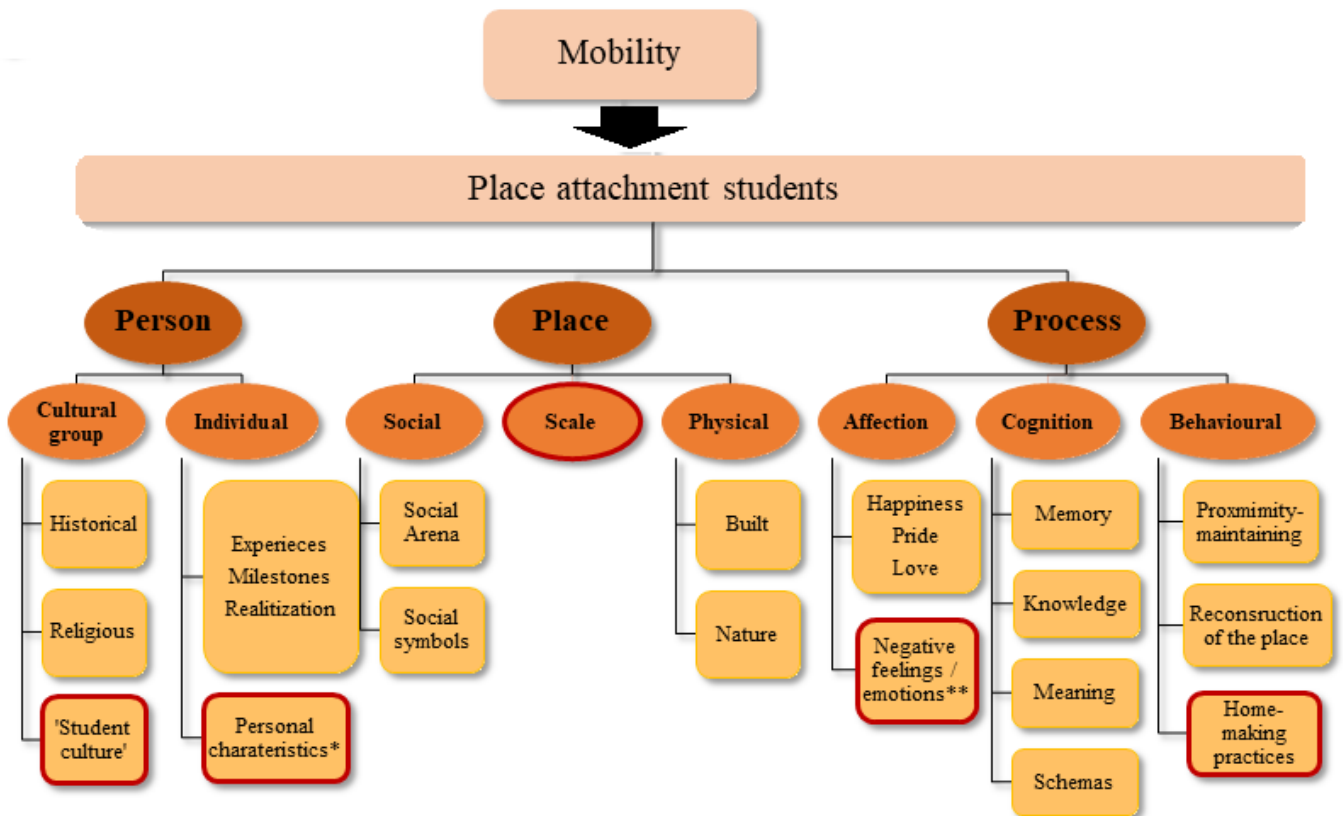
Mobility is an important influence on place attachment, and is highly debated among different scholars (Lewicka, 2011; Gustafson, 2001; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Brown, 1992). Does mobility hinder attachment? On the hand, it is argued that places do not hold the same value as before and could be less important to people nowadays. An underlying assumption is that there exists an opposition between mobility and place attachment (Lewicka, 2011). the debate about mobility and place attachment is closely related with the notion of time. As already been noted, time influences place attachment. The longer the length of residence, the higher the number of everyday interactions and the greater the social network involvement. Mobility and place attachment are often seen as to opposites, because of the factor time. Regarding the context of this research time is a dimension that could influence the students’ place attachment towards their university town. On the other hand, there is a paradox: despite the growing number of homogenous places and interconnectedness, places have not lost their meaning, but their importance actually may have grown in the contemporary world (Gustafson, 2009; Lewicka, 2011; Janz, 2005). This is in line with the research of Case (1996), that people will value their home more if they are not home for a while. Another finding of different scholars was that the higher increments of attachments occur in the first years of residence. Thus, that the relationship between length of residents

and place attachment is not linear, and that the curve of the place attachment became flatter afterwards (Lewicka, 2011)

At last, Gustafson (2009) highlight the concept of multiple place attachments. This form of place attachment is possible, if not common. One consequence of mobility is that mobile persons may develop and sustain attachment to multiple different places. Several studies show that non-permanent residents may develop strong emotional bonds to other places than their “primary” homes. Such as, people with multiple dwellings and seasonal migrants (Gustafson, 2014, Stedman, 2006). Considering students’ place attachment, Scopelliti (2010) shows that students could have multiple attachments. For instance, they could be attached to their former residence, where they lived before, they studied, and are attached to their new home in the university town. O’Kane & Owens (2009) argue that as a result of mobility, students may find themselves in ‘in-between-ness’ positions. This means that they are in an ambivalent situation of belonging: having the feeling they both belong and do not belong at the same time.

2.4 Revision conceptual model and expectations

At this point all relevant theoretical concepts of this study have been discussed and deepened. Therefore, the conceptual model can be made. The conceptual model defines this inquiry and shows which concepts are studied and how these different concepts relate to each other (Baarda et al., 2005). The conceptual model shows the relationship between mobility and place attachment. Additionally, it visualizes the dimensions which place attachment consists of: person, place and process. In figure 2.2 the revision of the conceptual model is shown. This model is based on the Tripartite model of Scannell & Gifford (2010). However, multiple adjustments have been made to fit the model into student’s place attachment. The modifications are outlined in red and based on different international literature described in the theoretical framework in this chapter. First, the ‘student culture’ and personal characteristics are added in the person dimension. Furthermore, the notion of scale is included in the place dimension. Third, the negative emotions/feelings, and home-making practices are considered in the process dimension. At last, the influence of mobility on the student’s place attachment towards their university town is included in the conceptual model. This, because students are a highly mobile group, and this could play a role in their attachment towards the university town. All these factors will be researched in a qualitative way: semi-structured interviews strengthened by photographs. The expectation of this study is that the findings correspond with the literature and therefore the conceptual model. However, this model gives a quite ideal situation, and in reality, it is more complicated. Place attachment is highly personal and dynamic, so it could be that some cases differs from this model.



* Personal characteristics: age, gender, milieu of origin and migration

** Negative feelings/emotions: stress, anxiety, homesickness etcetra

Figure 2.2: A revision of the Tripartite model, adapted from Scannell & Gifford (2010), revised by Sara

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter presents the information of the methodology and ethical considerations of this study. Firstly, the research design of this study is presented followed by the data collection method. Secondly, the research of the participants and an overview of the participants that took part in this research will be elaborated. Thirdly, the ethical considerations are explained and at last the data analysis will be covered.

3.1 Case-study approach

This research uses a single case-study approach. Case studies can be used to explain, describe, or explore events in the everyday contexts in which they occur. The case study approach is useful in capturing information on explaining how, what, and why questions (Yin, 2003). Not much is known yet about the place attachment of students and how and why they feel attached to their university town. The case study approach seems to be the most appropriate approach in this research because it is useful for answering these questions more in-depth.

It is possible that this study lacks generalizability, because of the single case-study approach. (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The results of this study cannot be applied on the larger population. Nevertheless, the results of this study can be extended to other cases which have similar circumstances or characteristics. Therefore, this study prefers to talk about transferability, and not about the generalization of the results. Additionally, this is not seen as a disadvantage, because of the aim of this qualitative study is a deeper understanding of place attachment and not generalizing.

3.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research in place attachment is relatively ‘new.’ Much of the early work of attachment was typically measured by surveys, using variables such as length of residence and satisfaction (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014). However, in the 1990s there was a growing interest in qualitative terms of place attachment. Rather than searching for causal explanation and prediction, an interpretive approach to research processes that humans use in constructing and interpreting their world, and perceptual, cognitive and affective responses to the environment became more important (Bruner, 1990). Yet, many studies use quantitative measures of attachment to examine how strongly people are attached to places. In such studies the underlying thought is, due to the globalizing world, migration and place attachment are seen as two opposites, and mobile persons are less attached to places than long-term less-mobile residents (Gustafon 2009). The longer the length of residence, the higher the number of everyday interactions and the greater the social network involvement. However, this view is not completely right. Hence, it is important to have insight in the qualitative differences in place attachment (Seamon, 1993; Stefanovic, 1998). Additionally, quantitative measures, such as place attachment scales, focuses on the differentiation among people and the generalization of place attachment, but they are little suited for measuring what places mean. The meaning of place is a link between the place’s physical properties and the strength of emotional bonds with it. In order to understand the attachment of a place, one must first identify its meaning, and therefore qualitative research is more appropriate (Stedman, 2006). Mobile persons may perceive places as meaningful for different reasons and develop different types of attachment than long-term residents (Savage, et. al., 2005). Considering this study, students are a highly mobile group. Besides, the aim of this study is to understand the students’ attachment and relation with place with the university town Groningen. Therefore, qualitative approach may be more suitable, to understand subjective meanings that cannot be captured by quantitative measures.

Qualitative research assumes that there is no one ‘truth’ or ‘reality’, but the individual’s perception is important and what counts. Hence, multiple perspectives and realities, as well subjectivities are accepted. (O’Leary, 2010). It is about the observation and experience of an individual, and not the ‘objective’ phenomenon. According to Crotty (1998) it means that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in the same phenomenon. However, findings of the research should be trustworthy, validate, and transferable to other settings or groups. Therefore, a clear description of the

context, selection and characteristics of participants, data collection and process of analysis is given in the following sections.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 In-depth interviews

This study is related to the peoples' stories and their experiences. As mentioned above, qualitative methods could provide an insight into how people make sense of their life stories which is difficult to be gained with other methods (Liamputtong, et. al., 2007). In this regard, the primary data has been collected by semi-structured interviews: those are interviews, or conversations with people but in ways that are self-conscious, orderly, and partially structured (Clifford et. al, 2011). The interview guide (Appendix III) includes every concept of the conceptual model, but the questions are open, so there is room for the participants to tell their story their attachment towards Groningen. It is likely that literature has not covered all aspects yet. In this study, the participant's own answer might therefore add interesting information and insights to this subject. The interviews were face-to-face, this involves human interaction and is a way of exchanging information that can be difficult to obtain through other methods of data collections, such as telephone conversations or survey (Cresswell, 2007)

Concerning semi-structured interviews is that no interview can be exactly repeated. The interviews are dependent on the (emotional) circumstances of the participants, for instance happy, tired or sad, or dependent on the physical circumstances, for example a noisy or a quiet environment. The circumstances of another interview with the same participant will always be different from the first one, and therefore the results will be different. Consequently, the validity of interviews may be called into question, because it is likely the participants give different answers in different circumstances (Flowerdew et al., 2005). Nonetheless, as aforementioned, subjectivities are acknowledged in this study. It is about the observation and experience of an individual, and not the 'objective' phenomenon. Besides, instead of being objective, this study aims to obtain a detailed understanding of experiences and meanings of place attachment of students and it is recognized that these are influenced by time, setting and the researcher herself (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). All interviews were conducted within a location appointed by the interviewee. By meeting the participant, in a, for them, familiar environment you create an informal and casual atmosphere in which the gap between the researcher and the respondent is minimalized (O'Leary, 2010). The more comfortable the participant, the more likely they reveal the nature of their lived experiences (Carpenter, 2003).

3.3.2 Photo elicitation

To explore place meaning and attachment in-depth interviews are. However, by focusing purely on a narrative, it is possible that this method may miss important data about the attachment of a person to a place. Photographs could sharpen the participants' memory and trigger responses that might lie submerged in verbal interviewing. Therefore, this study will use a visual method, namely photo elicitation. Each participant has the opportunity to take their own pictures to communicate their experiences of Groningen. Manzo & Devine-Wright (2014) mention in their book that with research-taken photos it is harder to understand the world of the participant. Besides, taking your own pictures will decrease the existing power differentials. Van Auken et al. (2010) mention that the photographer becomes the "expert" in demonstrating what is special about one's place, rather than needing to react on the researcher questions. Additionally, photographs taken by the participant could create a collaborative bond, because they invest actively in this research.

In this research, photos were taken prior to the interview. The participant must take at least three photos of places they think are important to them in Groningen. This could be a public place, but a picture of their "home" is also allowed. Homemaking is a practice of attachment in a place. Through homemaking one binds him or herself to a place, and become attached to it (Chow et al, 2008). As aforementioned, a picture is worth a thousand words and it facilitate deep interviewing experiences. The data derived from a photo is different than "word and numbers." They reflect the participants' point of view, their

experiences and can also act as a memory. This helps the participants to sharpen reflections on their experiences and resultant discussion (Loeffler 2004). Photographs also capture a greater amount of detail than participants can remember on their own. Images can evoke deeper elements of people's experience than words alone to provide a greater understanding of the concept under study (Loeffler 2004).

3.4 Research participants

This section focuses on the participants of the research. First, 3.4.1 gives a definition of the term 'non-local student from the Netherlands,' and an overview of the respondents. Then 3.4.2 discusses upon the way of recruiting the participants.

3.4.1 Defining non-local students from the Netherlands

This study defines students as: non-local students from the Netherlands and is based on different international literature. First of all, many international literatures distinguish their research to international or national students, because of the big differences in attachment. All students do have in common their loosening ties with a place as regards to their future: going to college, or after studying, looking for a job. However, there is a significant difference. For instance, when the demands of adjusting to the new place increase, both domestic and international students realize that a dislocation from the old routines and places has occurred. Most literature calls this phenomenon 'homesickness' (Fisher & Hood, 1987; Fisher, Murray, & Frazer, 1985). by domestic students, but there is a different term by international students: 'culture shock' (Fritz et al., 2008; Furnham, 1997), because of the different culture, language etc. For this research is chosen to tackle this difference and only research domestic students. Besides this study focus on non-local students, who do not live with their parents, and live in Groningen, to really understand the relation towards a university town, and not as a town you grew up in. The last requirement is they must live in Groningen at least for two years, because as literature states: length of residence does play a role. Additionally, fresh non-local students, who live in Groningen, are in a period of intense transition from home to university. According to the study of Chow and Chow & Healey (2008), who researched a longitudinal study of freshmen at two different moments in a period of five months noted already a difference in as regards to place attachment: during the five month duration of the study it became evident that participants sense of place and place identity did evolve through the transition. To tackle the transition from home to a university town, the students have to live at least two year in Groningen. An overview of the participants is shown in table 1.

Number	Name	Age	Study in Groningen	One-liner about the respondents
1	Frank	24	Master Socio-Spatial Planning (RUG)	<i>"Feels easily at home."</i>
2	Anoek	24	Minera, Art Studies	<i>"From rural to arty city girl"</i>
3	Tessa	25	Master Healthy Ageing (Hanze)	<i>"Living between two places: The Amsterdam & Groningen girl"</i>
4	Stijn	22	Master Socio-Spatial Planning (RUG)	<i>"He can live everywhere and nowhere, as long he has a social network..."</i>
5	Sjouke	24	Master-Social Planning (RUG)	<i>"The Frisian Stadjer*"</i>
6	Laura	22	Master Environmental Infrastructure & Planning (RUG)	<i>"The Albertus* girl, from the Randstad"</i>
7	Riemer	25	Master Communication (RUG)	<i>"The traveler: always on the road..."</i>
8	Vera	23	Master Heritage (RUG)	<i>"From not feeling at home in Groningen to, getting much positive energy from the city"</i>
9	Marieke	25	Master Environmental Infrastructure & Planning (RUG)	<i>"Feels in place in Groningen, and wants to stay here"</i>
10	Sanne	22	Bachelor Nutrition & Diet (Hanze)	<i>"Likes the city, but miss the nature..."</i>

Table 3.1: An overview of the participants

3.4.2 Participant recruitment

Qualitative studies use purposive recruitment procedures. Thus, selecting persons who have specific characteristics, who have particular experiences that are insightful for the study and who could provide in-depth data on the research topic (Clifford et al, 2010). The recruitment of people to participate in this research consists of a variety of strategies. First of all, one of the strategies used in this study is the face-to-face recruitment (Clifford et al, 2010). The researcher went to different universities to talk with potential participants. Another strategy to recruit participants is via the internet, because the internet expands the possibilities for recruiting participants (Carpenter, 2003). This technique is combined with the snowball sampling. Further participants are recruited through asking for referrals. Multiple participants came up with potential participants for the interview. Based on their suggestions I contacted the potential participants by e-mail. The participants received an e-mail with detailed information about the interview and this study. The e-mail contained the informed consent, information about the outline of this study and an explanation of the photo assignment. All participants agreed with the photo assignment and the informed consent. After the confirmation of the participants, we set a date for the interview.

3.5 Ethics

When approaching an interpretive methodology in qualitative studies, researchers gather personal information such as, individuals' stories about their experiences of places, personal meanings attributed to various events or experiences, private collection of memories and personal opinions and narratives (Clifford et al., 2010). For this reason, the ethical considerations of this research are addressed in this section, namely, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and positionality.

3.5.1 Informed consent

Part of doing research is considering the ethical issues that research does or might involve. In qualitative research studies must provide a confirmation that each participant has agreed to be part of the research, without being coerced. Informed consent is an essential part in validating the fact that participants have an understanding of the purpose of the research, are fully aware of their involvement in it. (O’Leary, 2010). Participants received the informed consent of this research through an email. The consent form read by participants was written in Dutch, however an English form can be found in appendix (II). Before the interview the informed consent was explained again, and the topics of the interview were identified. Questions could be asked at any time of this process, just as withdrawing from the research. The participants were asked to sign the consent form only at the end of the interviews.

3.5.2 Confidentiality

A different part of ethical agreements is that this research is confidential. This means that the participants are anonymous for readers and that their identity is protected (O’Leary, 2010). Qualitative research has a personal nature, and explores personal views, -stories, considerations, and perspectives. If this is requested by the participant, the researcher is obliged to guarantee anonymity (Hennink et al., 2011). The recordings of the interviews were only used by me. After transcribing, the recordings were erased. Transcripts were kept for analysing and stored on my computer to which only I have access. Participants were asked for permission for publication of the photographs they had taken. This was necessary as the photographs might contain personal information. All participants agreed with this.

3.5.3 Positionality

In qualitative research, most data is a result of interactions between participants and a researcher. Conducting interviews means using the self as a research instrument. A researcher may possess numerous social characteristics which influence the study, either in positive or negative ways. It is important to reflect on who you are and how your own identity will shape the interactions that you have with your participants. This is also known as recognising your *positionality* and being *reflexive* (Flowerdew, 2005). Questions of gender, class, race, nationality, politics, history, and experience shape our research and our interpretations of the world, however much we are supposed to deny it. Therefore, you must know and learn from your position, and being aware of your position.

In this study, the researcher is a part of the target group, or also known as an ‘insider’: being a member of the student population of Groningen, being in the same stage of life, and being familiar with the environment and student way of life. Sharing a similar identity or the same background to your participants could have a positive effect. According to Flowerdew (2005) being an insider could facilitate the development of a rapport between the interviewer and the participant, and therefore producing a rich, detailed interview based on empathy and mutual respect and understanding. Besides, it could be easier to build a rapport with your participants and conduct interviews if your project is linked to your own interests. However, being part of the same target group as a researcher could have a negative side. The researcher could ‘pre-understand’ information, based on his own experiences, and can lead to identify a problem too early, without delving deeper to examine all data, or fail to recognize a problem that exists. Besides, the researcher could ask subjective biased questions to guide the interview, instead being an objective researcher. However, it is important to be aware of your positionality as a researcher and aware of the consequences that the researcher has a similarity with the participants (Asselin, 2003). Thus, it is of great importance to understand how the researcher may have an impact on results and how this can be reduced throughout the study in order to collect accurate results. However, it is incredibly hard to become impartial when researching (Lindsey 2001), as there will always be a factor that may influence results.

3.6 Data analysis

After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed in the computer programme, Atlas.ti. Transcribing was done after the interview, so the conversation was still fresh in memory. Baarda et al. (2005) point at the risk of forgetting details, which increases the risk of subjectivity and bias, which is higher the longer one waits with transcribing an interview. Furthermore, most of the interviews were virtually conducted. A significant advantage of Skype is that you can record the interview: the voices, but the also the video footage. This helped me to transcribe the interviews *and* to note the verbal emotions of the participants.

Data were analysed by deductive codes, which were based on different international literature and the conceptual model. Not every finding was defined by the literature. Therefore, new inductive codes emerged based on the interviews. This allowed the discovering and uncovering of relevant themes (O'Leary, 2010). After the coding, the interviews were analysed and compared with each other to research if there were any differences or similarities. The main results of the interviews are strengthened by using quotes and photographs.

3.6.1 Analysis of the photographs

The photographs of places in Groningen were taken by the participants and were discussed during the interviews. These discussions have been transcribed and examined in Atlas.ti. The analysis of the photographs was focused on the meaning's students wanted to communicate through the pictures. However, due to the COVID-19 not every photograph is taken by the participant. Consequently, not every photograph was a mean to communicate about a certain place. Nonetheless, the photographs were still were useful for triggering memories and feelings about different places in Groningen. Besides, the photographs had no fixed meaning. The same place could be photographed by different students for different purposes and reasons, and therefore the ascribed meaning of a place is selective and subjective. Thus, the photographs were seen as a representation, and used to express their meaning about a place. Therefore, the analysis of the photographs was focused on these representations, perceptions, and meanings about the places.

Chapter IV Findings

Interviews, along with photographs showed the “richness and complexity” of the development of place attachment towards a university town (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014). In total, ten students living in Groningen, with the age from 21-26, participated in the in-depth interviews and the photo assignment. The structure of this chapter is based on the conceptual model and in the order of the research questions. First the person dimension (4.1) will be elucidated, thereafter the place dimension combined with the photograph elicitation (4.2). Thirdly, the process dimension will be explained, based on affection, cognition and behavioural (4.3). At last, the mobility influence on the students place attachment will be explained.

4.1 Person

Place attachment is personal. People got their own stories and life path, which influences their place attachment. Every story differs and therefore, the development of place attachment differs per person. Hence, different experiences and quotes will be showed in this paragraph to strengthen the results. At first, the personal characteristics will be explained, and thereafter the individual and shared meanings of the students that shape their attachment towards the city.

4.1.1 Personal characteristics

Noticeable, are the influences of the personal characteristics of the students, the milieu of origin, geographical distance, and their migration background, that plays a role in the place attachment of the students towards Groningen.

Milieu of origin

All students did not grow up in the city of Groningen. The students moved to the city for study purposes. Their former homes do differ from each other, and it is notable that their milieu of origin plays a role in the development of their place attachment. Moving from a rural village to the university town is experienced as relatively more intense, compared to the respondents from another city. Different respondents indicate that the transition from their rural village towards the ‘big city’ was a substantial change in their lives. The noise, the people and the crowded places. It was not only moving to another place, but also to a completely different environment. For instance, one respondent lived all his life in a rural village in the province of Frisia. When he moved to Groningen, his first room was at one of the most crowded places in Groningen, namely the Grote Markt (market in the centre of the city):

Sjouke: “I had a lot of struggles with the noise, and the number of people on the streets. I am from a small village, so you have little noise, only the chickens of the neighbours. ha-ha. And in Groningen, I lived on the Grote Markt, one of the most crowded places in Groningen. The windows in my room were with single glass. I knew the whole Martinitoren [tower in Groningen], song from memory, and I could not sleep... The first nights I stayed at my friend’s place, because he lived outside the city centre, so I could sleep more easily. Besides, the people on the street, it was so crowded, I had to get used to it..

Interviewer: How did you experience the crowded places?

Sjouke: I liked all those people, but on the other side it was also very intense. I just was not used to that. When you walk in a supermarket in a village it is very quiet, and now it is just very busy. I experienced it very differently, but you get used to it.”

However, the transition from rural to the city of Groningen went quite smooth by most of the participants. Every participant mentioned that they see Groningen not as a city, but as a big village. They compared Groningen to other cities, such as Amsterdam and Utrecht, and most of them see Groningen as different from those cities. In their frame of reference, the city is compact, small, and everybody knows each other somehow. A new place always takes some time getting used to, and the transition from rural to a city could even take more time, but due to the characteristics of Groningen, this transition

was not experienced as difficult by most of the participants. For example, Anoeck, a girl from the small village in the province of Groningen said:

Anoeck: “I had a bit ‘rural feelings’ here. I liked that it felt like a city, but at the same time it was also a small city, you know a lot of people, and everybody knows each other, it felt like a big village.”

Additionally, coming from a rural village, is not only noticeable in the transition period, but also in a later stage of living in Groningen. The participants who lived once in a rural village before moving to Groningen, do value nature and green a lot. When I asked them about what they miss in Groningen, most of them mentions the green and open landscape of their former home:

Anoeck: “A garden! I just find it annoying that you really must go to a beach or park when the weather is nice. In my village I can just go outside and walk the dog. So, yeah... I miss that.”

Sanne: Uhm... yeah, I miss the nature and the quietness in the city. I really value nature, so I think it has something to do with where I come from, the rural...

Tessa: When I am home at my parent’s place, we always go for a walk in the forest. I grew up like this, so I think that is why I think walking is still important to me, and I really love walking in nature.

Considering the participants with a city background, there was only one student who mentioned that she missed the beach in Groningen. Her former hometown was near the beach, and she was there quite often. Furthermore, it did not come forward that the participants from a city background miss the nature in the city.

Not only the physical appearance of the city environment differs from the rural environment, also the people living inside the city. The people are more open-minded and diverse, compared to the people in their former homes. Despite the transition, and getting used to the crowded streets, most of the participants like the lively city, with variety of people. Some of the participants feel like they have developed in being more open-minded, because of all the diverse open-minded people in the city. One of the participants still goes back every weekend to his former home to play soccer. He mentioned that he lives in two different worlds and when he compares himself with his friends who still live in the village, he feels different:

Sjouke: Students are much more open and extrovert. In the village everything is conservative, and everyone knows each other. So, I have learned to be more open too. The people from Dronryp are living in a bubble, they are really focused on each other. Students are much more open for new contacts and getting to know new people. You really notice this difference, and when I am in the village, I do miss sometimes the more depth in conversations...

The participants of who their former home is a city, experienced this self-development too, because they feel Groningen is more diverse, and progressive, then their former home. However, the participants who are from another city do not mention that much about the transition regarding the crowds, people, and noise. They used to it already because they are from another city.

Geographical distance

The second factor that could influence the place attachment towards the university town is geographical distance. I refer here to the distance from their former home to Groningen. According to the literature, the geographical distance could influence how often the students go to their former home or other places. Besides, students with higher mobility, who travel on weekends or long holiday seasons to other places, show lower attachment towards the university town, than students who stay in the city for the whole week (Vidal, 2010). Most of the participants are from the northern- or middle part of the Netherlands. This could be, because most of the students in Groningen are from the northern- or middle part of the Netherlands (Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen, 2014). It is shown in the results that many students

went home every weekend, for family, friends and/or work in the first years living in Groningen. This is more easily when their former home is nearby, and the geographical distance is small. However, an exception is one participant, she is the only participant from the western part of the country. Even she went every weekend to their parents, and former home despite the geographical distance. She mentioned that every student she knows went to their former home in the weekend, and they travelled together every Friday and Sunday. In this way, geographical distance is not a factor that causes differences how often the students go to their former home, because most of the participants travelled home every weekend in their first year in Groningen. It could be part of the student culture: in the weekends many students are not in Groningen, only from Monday till Friday. Thus, the geographical distance has no influence on the frequency the students go to their former home and is more related to the student culture.

But the key question is still not answered. Does going back every weekend towards their former home hinder the student's place attachment? This is intrinsically linked with mobility, and will be discussed in the mobility paragraph of this chapter (4.5)

Migration history

Another important factor that could influence the development of place attachment towards the university town Groningen is the migration history of the students. The migration history is intricately linked with the factor mobility. I will touch upon the migration background related with the place identity in this paragraph, more will be further discussed in the mobility paragraph (4,5).

Each participant differs in their migration history. Several participants only moved to the city of Groningen. And multiple participants, lived in different cities, travelled the world, and moved many times in their lives. This difference in migration history has an influence on the place attachment of students. An important part in the person dimension linked to the migration history is self-identification of a place, also known as: place identity. The more the people moved in their lives, the less they identify themselves with places, or identify themselves different as regards with places. When the participants moved more than once, it is noticeable that the place identity is less present. It could be that they never lived long enough to identify themselves with a place, or the combination of all their place identities where they lived is too much, and do not identify really with any place anymore. For instance, Stijn, he moved three times before he lived in the city of Groningen. He mentioned that he does not identify himself with places, and do not feel like it. When I asked him if he feel like someone from Groningen (Stadjer) he said:

Stijn: "No, I do not have that feeling with places... Even... I am born in Zwolle, I have many connections there, and have spent a long time of my life there, and yet I do not feel like someone from Zwolle. I think I never going to have that with places, I feel like someone from the Netherlands, that's it."

Stijn do not identify himself with a city, but more at country level. This is in line with the research of Hughes & Allen (2010), who indicate that people who moved a lot, do not identify with a specific community of origin, but more on national level. However, other participants do not identify themselves with Groningen either. They do not call themselves a 'Stadjer' (someone from Groningen). They do not feel they can say they are a Stadjer, because they do not live long enough in the city, and do not know everything and everyone in the city. For example, Laura, a student who is from the Western part of the Netherlands:

Laura: "No, I am not a "Stadjer" And I think, despite how much I like the people here, it is different for me. You are not fully a part of it...not that they consciously shut you out, it feels still different. It is a complete different vibe and attitude than the Randstad, I think I can never become a real "Stadjer," you will always be import..."

Besides, some participants feel a combination of two identities. The place where they come from, their roots, and the place they live now. A combination of two place identities is a participant who called

himself: A Frisian Stadjer (someone from the province of Frisia, living in Groningen). Also, Sanne mentions that her roots still have an important role in her identification:

Sanne: I do not know, I feel like someone from Groningen, but Drenthe is still in me, I am raised like that. So, the Drentse culture is also a part of me, and that will never go away. But I can tell that I already feel a bit of a “Stadjer.”

This combination of identities could be linked with the in-between position of the participants. The participants who only moved once before they live in Groningen, and thus, lived in the place where they were born, and the city of Groningen, have the 50/50 feeling of place identity, such as the Frisian Stadjer, or the combination of Drenthe and Groningen.

Nevertheless, the participants do call themselves a ‘Groningense student’ [a student who lives in Groningen]. This seems a different form of place identity. According to the literature, a form of place identity is the ‘settlement identity’: identify yourself with the general classes of places (Feldman, 1999), but this form of the students place identity is different from that. It seems like a form of place identity, related with their student lifestyle. This is intricately linked with the individual and collective meaning of a place, and the student lifestyle. This will be explained in the next paragraph (4.1.2).

4.1.2 Individual and shared meanings

It is hard to separate individual meanings, with shared meanings, and often they do overlap. When is something individual, and has no influence of others? Most of the time others are involved in your individual meanings. Therefore, the individual and shared meanings will be elucidated in one paragraph. The individual meanings are linked with the experiences, realizations, and milestones of the respondents. The shared meanings are the symbolic meanings shared of a place among members and is meaningful as determined by group members (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Both meanings are personal and differ per person.

There is a common thread in the interviews, based on self-development and the stage of their lives: becoming an independent adult. Creating their own identity and determine their own values without the immediate influence of parents (Chickerking & Reisser, 1993). This important stage in your life happened for all students in the city of Groningen. The city and its people shaped the individual meaning of the students and plays a crucial role in their development. This is visible in the interviews. The students felt like Groningen is an important part in their life. For instance, the participant who is from a small village in Groningen, and always has felt a bit different than the people living in her village. She thinks Groningen opened a world to her, that fits her more:

Anoek: “I am from a traditional village. I have traditional family members, and I am someone more progressive, with left-wing thoughts. I was always a bit the scapegoat in the family, not in a negative way, my family loves me, and I love them, but I was different. But I do notice, here in Groningen, that more people do have the same thoughts and ideas as me, and that gives more connection to the city. I feel like more people understands me, and can talk about everything, I feel freer.”

This quote is significant, because it shows her self-development, and how Groningen contributed to this development. Besides, she felt more attached to the city because she met people who are alike. Another important meaning that can develop and influence the place attachment of the students is the student experience itself. This is both an individual- and shared meaning. Student experience includes individual meanings, such as personal experiences, realization and milestones and personal connections to the city in a study related way. But it is also a shared meaning because it is part of the ‘student culture’

The individual meaning ascribed as being a student which has influence on the place attachment, entails their study progress, realizations, and experiences. Having a goal in life, and getting better in something you like, is an important factor in the attachment towards a place. When you feel you can develop yourself, you feel more in place. This was especially noticed when a study did not go that well. As

example, a number of respondents choose in their first year a study what beforehand looked like a suitable study for them, but once studying it turned out it was not. In that time, the students felt out of place in Groningen. They quit their study, kept studying and were feeling not great that time or experienced a high level of homesickness. They could not experience the student lifestyle like their friends or other people did in Groningen. Therefore, their attachment towards Groningen could not develop, and they even did not like Groningen. For instance:

Laura: Well... when I did the wrong study, I passed almost no exam. Your place is insecure in Groningen, can I stay? Or not? When I did a new study, and I really liked it, I passed everything, got great grades, it contributed that I could stay in Groningen, it felt like my place, and it felt good!

Mostly, individual experiences and milestones are socially related, linked to relations and social networks. Every participant answered the question about important experiences that developed their attachment towards Groningen in a social nature. Getting new friends, developing strong relationships with people, having a relationship. For instance, a participant mentioned in the interview that he really got to know the city, when he met new friends. *'You learn the city from inside and out, and get new experiences made by these friendships.'* Additionally, Stijn said that having a girlfriend is also a way to see and experience the city from a new perspective and do things you normally do not do in the city, for instance a picnic in the park. All these social elements add a new dimension in the relationship of the students towards the city and stimulates their attachment towards Groningen.

Creating new social relationships is closely related with the shared meanings of the student culture. Multiple students joined a student association and/ or -community when they arrived in Groningen. Being part of these communities influences their relationship with Groningen, and their view towards the city. Numerous respondents joined a student community, named Albertus. Nevertheless, they both experienced this community different. One participant already knew people in the city of Groningen. She liked knowing new people, but she could always fall back on her existing friends, and this student community was for her an extra dimension of her existing life in Groningen. But the other student did not know anyone in Groningen and did not know the city. Therefore, her life in Groningen was her study and Albertus, especially in the beginning. When I asked her about her development in Groningen, she answered:

Laura: "Uhm... I think the city only gave me opportunities. I am not the same person, when I was 18. I am incredibly happy about that. And of course, joining Albertus, really shapes you, and how you develop. That was more negative in the beginning... it was a hard time, finding friends, rejection, insecurity... but in the end, I am still with the same friends, and they are really good friends. We experienced the same things in Albertus, and they certainly played a very important role in my life and development. It made me a better person, and a more social person.

Interviewer: Okay, and as you said, you were shaped by Albertus, did Albertus also shape the way you see Groningen?

Laura: I think... in the beginning Albertus was the only thing for me in Groningen, I saw the city through the Albertus-glasses, ha-ha. But it has become more nuanced now. Especially, when I got more contacts outside Albertus. And I focused more on my study, but it is still very important to me."

As she says, she watched Groningen from her Albertus-view. Albertus shaped her, her meanings, her friendships and her view towards Groningen. This 'community bubble' influences her attachment towards Groningen. Caused by this, her attachment towards Groningen was strengthened, but only the part of Groningen that fitted in the community. Knowing the city outside this 'community bubble' was withhold. However, this influence decreased over time, and she now lives outside the city centre, met new people from the study, and broadened her view towards Groningen. She experiences this change as positive, but Albertus is still an important part of her life.

All these experiences show the differences in attachment, and relationships towards Groningen. As noted above, social life is important in their attachment towards Groningen. This creates new social relationships, but also can include joining a community. Additionally, self-development is an important influence on place attachment, this can be study-related, development in your social life, or personal development

4.1.3 Conclusion: person dimension

All in all, the person dimension in place attachment is influenced by different factors: their personal characteristics, such as milieu of origin and migration history, Geographical distance is not a factor in this study, because every participant went back to their former home sometimes, despite the distance. Even the participant, whose former home was the most distant, went back every weekend. This is influenced by the student culture: it is common that students are not in Groningen in the weekends and go back to their former home. Individual and shared meanings do play an important role in the attachment towards Groningen. The meanings do shape their perspective towards Groningen. This paragraph showed that the experiences and meanings considering place attachment are personal and differ per person. It was also shown that personal- and social development is a significant part in place attachment.

4.2 Place

The second dimension of place attachment is place. This dimension is about the perceived qualities of a place what could develop the place attachment of the students towards their university town. This paragraph will be supported with the photographs the students took prior to the interviews. It is important to keep in mind, that a few photographs could not be taken by the participant, because of the COVID-19 virus. The photographs are the places which play a significant role in their lives in Groningen. First, their view and valued qualities on a city scale will be discussed, thereafter the places the student's value from a social and a physical perspective, and at last the most valued place in Groningen will be explained, namely their home.

4.2.1 City-scale: Groningen

This paragraph is about the perceived values and views of the students towards Groningen from a city-scale perspective what can influence their attachment towards the city. Thus, how do they see and value Groningen in general? To answer the question, the students had to describe the city in a few words or sentences: What is the first thing that came to mind when they were thinking about Groningen?

Different words were used to describe Groningen. However, several identical words came forward every time. The most used word is: '*student city*.' All students felt like Groningen is a student city, and that the city put effort to make the city as suitable as possible for students. This have a positive influence on their attachment, because they felt the city is made for them and their lifestyle, and offers a lot that is in their interested, for instance, the nightlife district, the different coffee bars, cultural activities, festivals and much more. When I asked them about the hotspots in Groningen, all participants were positive, because there is always something to do in the lively city of Groningen. Multiple students mentioned that different activities, such as Keiweek (Introduction week) and Noorderzon (a music/cultural festival) are initiatives of great importance. It brought them new friends and knowledge about the city and increased the bond between the people and the city.

Other words who are related to each other are: compact, small, cosy, big village. These features are related to the physical qualities of Groningen. The students thought it is a positive thing about Groningen that the city is not that relatively big, because it feels cosier and less intense. For instance, one student likes walking, and thought that the walkability of the city is important to her. This gets her closer to the city every day. It gives her a "*familiar feeling, like it is my city*." Furthermore, the students from a rural village, felt that Groningen is a big village. In their frame of reference, they compared Groningen with their rural origin, and based on the size of the city and that everybody knows each other, they thought Groningen is a city that is familiar with their milieu of origin. Other students compared Groningen with

Amsterdam or Utrecht, and feel that Groningen is different, and unique, because of its size and cosiness. All students felt positive about the compact size of Groningen.

More words were said about the social qualities of the city: young, open-minded, diverse, familiar, and high-educated. The students felt comfortable about the fact that the city has many peers. This feels familiar, and making contact is more easily, because there are many people alike. However, the extent of open-minded people differs per participant. The students from a rural village felt that Groningen has open-minded and progressive people, compared to their former rural home. However, the students who lived in Amsterdam for study purposes, or goes to other cities regularly did think the city could be more open-minded. The people from Groningen are down to earth, and a bit narrow-minded, according to them. For instance, Tessa who compared the city with Amsterdam, said:

Interviewer: Do you have the feeling that you can be yourself in Groningen?

Tessa: Yes, however, you would be weirdly looked at, when you are dressed a bit different or special. And you do not have that in Amsterdam at all: Then it is like: Oh wow, what a cool glitter catsuit are you wearing!', or something, just saying. But I think in Groningen if you are a little different or alternative you are very special, in a negative way. So, then you might hold back a bit with being yourself....

Interview: Do you have that feeling?

Tessa: No, I am quite basic and standard ha-ha. But I do know that you would be judged more easily in Groningen..."

More participants mentioned that they are not different, or special dressed. And they did notice that Groningen is open-minded to a certain extent. If you are different, some people in Groningen are still a bit narrow-minded about that. However, it is not a hinder for their attachment towards Groningen, because they do feel they can be themselves, which is important for many students.

All in all, the students feel positive about Groningen. They feel the city is made for students, it is compact, cosy and many like-minded peers. Furthermore, they can be themselves, which is important to feel like home, according to the participants. This view of the city positively influences their attachment towards the city.

4.2.2 The photographed places

This part is about the most valued places of the students and which places play a significant role in their lives in Groningen. The photographed places are personal and are dependent on their lifestyle and living environment. For this paragraph, the most striking places will be elucidated, because not every place can be discussed. Noticeably, is that not every place what plays a significant role in their lives, is necessarily seen a place that plays a role in their attachment towards Groningen at first sight. An example is the university campus that provides different studies in Groningen, also known as the Zernike complex.

The pictures of Zernike are not made by the participants, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (figure 4.1). Nevertheless, the pictures show the core of the feelings of the students about this place. Zernike facilitate the study of different participants and is often used as a place that plays a big role in their lives. Nevertheless, multiple participants did not feel this play has influence on their attachment towards Groningen. Zernike does not feel like Groningen, it has no identity, is replaceable, and is not typical Groningen.



Figure 4.1: Zernike, the university campus of multiple students

Therefore, the university plays a significant role in their lives, but due the lack of the identity of Groningen, the students do not feel this place influence their attachment towards Groningen at first glance. However, multiple participants do acknowledge that Zernike plays a role in their social relations and is seen as the facilitator of their studies and social relations. For instance, a participant likes going to Zernike, not only for study purposes, but also for the social activities with his fellow students. He agreed that the physical appearance is not the trigger why he felt attached to Zernike, but because his social life there:

Stijn: “Yes I go to school very often. Also, for fun, actually when I did nothing for my study, I always went to college, because I just like being with people, and my study friends.

Interviewer: Okay, and why is this place so important for you?

Stijn: You get to know your friends there better, you really make something of it together, that is really nice. Especially, the experience of the computer lectures, that you are working on your project for 8 hours a day with each other. Besides, you also gain knowledge and develop yourself.”

Thus, it is noticeable that the students felt that Zernike did not play a role in their attachment towards Groningen at first, because of its place-less identity. However, by second thought the respondents did acknowledge that the place is indirect significant in their place attachment process, because it is a facilitator of their social relations and study-development, which is important in their place attachment process. Scannell & Gifford (2010) emphasize the importance of physical characteristics that could provide resources to support one’s goals. And that place attachment could be established by places as an arena for social interaction (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Thus, despite the place-less identity of the university campus, this place is still important in the development of their place attachment, because it is an arena for social interaction, and it facilitate the student’s goals.

Another interesting photograph is the Zernike food court (figure 4.2). This is a new canteen at the Zernike complex, and became special to the participant in a short amount of time. She mentioned that she feels more comfortable on the campus because of this place. And is seen an important addition for the campus. She likes this place, because it is a meeting point with her fellow students and friends and is important for her social world.

Laura: “It is really a new place, and I was just thinking, which place do I miss right now? And that is this place. It really sucks I cannot go to it now [COVID]. I do not have much with the campus itself, but I do have a lot with the people who are there. The food court is the place where I always meet with my fellow students, drinking, eating, chilling, talking etc. Really a great addition to the campus. In a short time, it has done quite a lot for me and for the campus.”



Figure 4.2: The Food court of Zernike

Both photographs, show the importance of social relationships in a place. Zernike is not seen as important by its physical appearance, but as a facilitator for social relations and the amenities to support the student's goals, for instance study-related development, which can positively influence their place attachment.

Most of the valued places in Groningen are seen as important, because of a combination of the perceived social and physical qualities. An example of a place that is important, because of its social- and physical qualities is the Noorderplantsoen, a park in the centre of Groningen.

Multiple students chose this place, as a place that has a positive influence on their attachment towards Groningen. However, there are differences in the motives the students choose the park as a valued place in Groningen. This shows the subjectivity of the ascribed meaning of a place. Multiple participants liked this place, because it is a meeting point of many students, but this is seasonal. The participants valued this place in the summer more, because many students are chilling and picnicking in the park:

Vera: People come together there, which really creates solidarity. When I sit there on a summer evening, I really feel the ultimate student in Groningen. Then I feel very connected to all the people sitting there, and the city itself.



Figure 4.3 Photographs of the Noorderplantsoen: two photographs to show the dynamic between the social and physical features.

Other participants valued this park, because it is a nice place to walk through and feels as a place to escape from the busy city life. This because of its physical qualities, namely the greenery and nature. But despite, the physical qualities, the participants still emphasize the important of the social aspects. They do not walk in the park for only its nature and rest, but also for its social qualities (i.e. watching people during their walk/ being surrounded by people). This is striking, because often parks are chosen by its physical qualities (Lewicka, 2011), but even for walking (leisure purposes), the park is important for its physical- *and* social qualities. This could be that students highly value their social relations. Feeling home in their university town was often linked with having a social world in Groningen, this will be discussed in the next paragraph about ‘home’ (4.3.2). Their social relationships are major in their life, and this could be expressed in the kind of qualities they value in places



Figure 4.4 ‘The bubble in Groningen’ according to Tessa, but also known as the city market.

Another place that is personal but do stand out is the weekly market in the city-centre. This place is also valued due to its social and physical qualities. According to a participant this place feels like home. It is a familiar place, and part of her routine. Every Tuesday and Saturday she walks to the market to buy some food, and watch people doing the same thing: *“People are in the same flow, this makes me feel calm, and a relax state of mind, this is really my moment.”* Furthermore, she thought this place is a bubble in Groningen: a defined place, with his own vibe, and people doing the same thing. When people ask her what she likes about Groningen, she mentioned the market every time. Tessa felt the market plays a role in her attachment towards Groningen, due to his physical characteristics (compact, defined, and its facilities), and social characteristics (people in the same flow).

The last place that will be addressed, is “the nightlife district” of Groningen. As aforementioned, this place came for different participants first to mind when they thought about the city and is the most photographed place of the participants. This place is valued, because of its unique social, and physical characteristics. First, the closing times are relatively late and you can go out every night in the city, this is not the case in other cities of the Netherlands, Second, it is compact, and every bar is near each other, so you can walk easily from bar to bar. And third, there is not much violence, especially from Monday till Friday, when most students are partying. These three unique characteristics is valued by the participants and is also suitable in their student lifestyles. Multiple participants choose this place as an important place in Groningen, and both acknowledged that this place plays a role in their attachment towards Groningen. Interesting, is that two respondents photographed the same place in the nightlife district, Poeleplein, a central square in the district. The reason for both participants is that the bars at this square are the start of their many nights of the Groningen party life. Furthermore, two quotes of the students about their feelings of the nightlife district:

Riemer: Well... I have been out many times. I learned a lot about myself, experienced a lot, and it may sound superficial, but I think this place is super important how you develop. And of course maybe it means less when you get older, I am not nineteen anymore, but yes it is a place with lots of memories, and that is still important to me, it is a place that evokes memories, what does play an important role in my life in Groningen.

Stijn: “In the cafes, I really got to know my friends well, and also met new people, experienced fun and the craziest things here....I have partied in many Dutch cities, but Groningen is by far my favourite city: it is unique because of its size, vibe, and closing times.”

To conclude, the photographed places are personal and depend on the living environment and lifestyle of the participants. Places that facilitate their workplace, their university, hobby's, and social world are all personal. The places which are discussed above, are places what have been photographed multiple times, or with noticeable characteristics. However, it is clear that most of the places are important and valued due to an overlap of social and physical characteristics. Besides, there is no place important for only for its physical characteristics. At last, it is interesting that the students often think that some places do not influence their place attachment towards Groningen (i.e. Zernike) at first glance, because it does not feel as Groningen. However, a place could positively influence their attachment by providing amenities to support their goals, or social relations, even when the place itself does not have an identity of Groningen.

4.2.3 Home

According to the participants, the most valued place in Groningen is also the smallest scale: their room or house, also known as their “home.” This is in line with the literature according to different scholars. Home is one of the most common places to feel attached to and to identify with (Blunt, 2006; Chow et al., 2008). However, what is a home according to the participants? How does that feel? And how does a home contribute to their attachment towards Groningen? When I asked the participants if they feel at home in Groningen at this moment, they all answered yes. This is an important finding, because when feeling at home, one feels attached (Chow et al, 2008). Interesting, is that all participants felt at home in Groningen, but not all participants said they were attached towards Groningen at first. However, feeling at home in Groningen is a major indicator of feeling attached. The participants saw attachment as something that strong that they do not feel yet, but when I said that feeling at home is also a form of attachment, they realized that attachment could take different forms and intensities. This eye-opener was of great importance for this study because they realized that they all are attached afterwards, but each in a different way. Notwithstanding, what a home means to them, and how they describe a home differs per person. Striking, is that home is not equal to their room/house. All participants felt that their room/house feels like home, but a home is often more than only their room/house. In Appendix I, the meaning of home of every participant is cited.

There are differences in the meaning of home of the participants. For instance, the differences in scale. Several participants described the feeling of home, at room/house level. For instance, one mentioned that he can create a room with his own identity, as a process, or another participant finally found peace in her own house. On the other hand, most participants described the feeling of home at city level. Additionally, the meaning ascribed to home differs per person (see Appendix I). Several participants focus on their social life, and that social relations are the most important factor on feeling home. Others are more individual-based and based on self-development, such as feeling at peace, feeling comfortable, being yourself, and where one can still learn something. Physical qualities were not mentioned in the interviews. The word familiarity and knowing the city is also a factor that is mentioned in feeling at home. At last, multiple students feel at home at more places outside their room in the city of Groningen. For instance, the Art school. It is a place that feels like home because she was there sometimes more than their own room. Another example is the house of the student community, Albertus. The respondent called this place her second living room, and that place felt also as home.

The differences in the meaning of home has influence on their attachment towards Groningen. All students feel at home in the city, but it is important to keep in mind that this means for each student different. However, the feeling at home is something positive in the eyes of the participants and has a positive influence on their place attachment. As aforementioned, feeling at home is closely related with place attachment, and has a positive influence on the attachment of the students towards their university town (Davane et al., 2008). At last, a home is a process, and is engaged with building and maintaining, the feeling of home (Davane et al., 2008). The process of homemaking will be elaborated in the next paragraph (4.3).

4.2.4 Conclusion place dimension

This paragraph showed the valued qualities of the student's meaningful places in Groningen. Most of the places are valued due to a combination of its physical and social features, such as the park and the nightlife district. The most important place is called 'home.' The students' meaning ascribed to a home is different in scale and definition. Most students describe the meaning of home on city level. Besides, the meaning of home includes their self-development, and social world, but differs per person. At last, all students feel at home in Groningen, and this is linked in a positive way with their attachment towards the university town, because when feeling at home, one feels attached.

4.3 Process

The third dimension of the tripartite model of place attachment is the process dimension. This dimension involves the way of becoming attached to a place and the emotions connected to that place. It consists of three parts: affection, cognition, and behaviour (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Place attachment is not static, it is a dynamic process. As noted above, it is the way of *becoming* attached, and is influenced by time. Place and place attachment are deeply personal and can evolve over time and space. However, time plays a role in place attachment, but it does not necessarily mean that the longer you live at a place you are more attached (Lewicka & Banka, 2008; Giulini et al., 2003; Gustafson, 2009). This study focusses on the student's place attachment from the transition, till the present, to show the process of place attachment of the students. In this way, we can answer *how is the attachment manifested?* This paragraph is divided in the same structure of the Tripartite model, and every element of the process dimension includes the notion of time, from the transition till the present.

4.3.1 Affection

Affection involves the emotional connection of an individual to a particular place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). These emotions could be positive or negative. The emotional connection of the participants towards Groningen has changed over time. It is notable, that during the transition and the participants lived in Groningen recently, the emotions are more negative than their emotions in the present. The main thread during the transition is insecurity and adaption. Multiple participants experienced homesickness or stress in the beginning of living in Groningen. This is mostly linked with the wrong study choice, as aforementioned. They could not experience the student life and had no purpose in their life in Groningen. A student experienced homesickness at a high level, and even moved back to her former home. Although, these negative emotions were not present at every participant. A new living environment can also be excited. It is a new chapter in their life and created a feeling of freedom. A participant called Groningen as '*a city of freedom.*' You can do what you want, and everything is possible. Every participant had to get used to their new environment and becoming independent. This is experienced as an insecure time because they did not know the city. However, most participants did not acknowledge this time as a negative time afterwards, but more as an adventure in a positive way. In the present, their feelings towards Groningen are more positive. Thus, this shows that time does play a role in the affective bond towards the university town. The positive feelings were also described in paragraph 4.2.1, about their view of Groningen. To be short, they felt the city fits their needs as a student. It is cosy, small, like-minded peers and there is always something to do. According to the students, their emotional connection, and thus part of their attachment, has grown towards Groningen on a city scale compared to the transition period. They felt stronger connected towards the city, because they have built

a life here, for instance their home, friendships, study, and work. However, two respondents had mixed feelings about their connection towards Groningen at this moment. On the one hand, they felt more connected and attached towards Groningen than in the transition period, so it has grown over time. On the other hand, their friends, who plays a big role in their attachment towards Groningen, moved to other cities. Therefore, they see the city different compared with a year ago. In their eyes Groningen is not Groningen anymore, because of the change in their social relations. As aforementioned, students are highly social beings, and caused by this social disruption, their attachment towards the universitytown is negatively influenced.

The affection towards different places in Groningen can also change: some places become more important, and some places less. This process depends on their lifestyle and stage of life. For instance, a new job, or joining a new community. This can develop a new emotional connection to a place in Groningen. On the other hand, this could also happen the other way around. That a place becomes less important. For instance, Laura, she feels less emotional connected with Albertus. In her first year she was strongly connected, and even dependent on Albertus. The community played a big role in her social life. After experiencing a new study, making new friends outside Albertus, she is less dependent of the Albertus, and her emotional connection has decreased.

The longer the students live in Groningen, the more emotions they have experienced. Not all emotions are positive. The negative emotions they have experienced are socially- or study related. For instance, stress, sadness about a breakup, losing friends, not passing an exam etcetera. Noticeably, that even experiencing all these negative emotions, they still feel that they have a positive emotional connection of Groningen, which invokes happiness, pride, and joy. A participant mentioned in the interview that she feels pride when her parents visit Groningen:

Laura: "...When my parents visit me, and we are doing lots of fun stuff, then my first thought is: This is my city, and I want to show the city to them!"

The interesting part of the negative emotions experienced by the students in Groningen is that it seems they do not feel negatively connected towards the city of Groningen after all. Even the participant who moved back to her former home, came back, and feels still positive connected to the city. An explanation of feeling positive connected towards Groningen, despite the negative experiences could be the physiological phenomenon: the rosy view. This inductive finding is plausible. Different scholars researched this phenomenon with place attachment (Hosany et al., 2016), and showed that that negative experiences reduce the enjoyment of the moment, these disappointments will fade (Mitchell et al. 1997), and people reinterpret their experiences in ways consistent with their original expectations. This means that negative emotions related towards place attachment are mitigated and the positive experiences magnified. This can lead to a positive bias. It is important to keep in mind, that the participants did not talk a lot about their negative experiences, and even there were negative emotions or experiences, this was not seen as something that could affect their attachment towards Groningen, and could be caused by the rosy view.

4.3.2 Cognition

The second part of the process dimension is cognition. This part includes the memories, beliefs, meaning and knowledge that makes a place meaningful (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). In other words, this is the mental representation of Groningen and its places based on the student cognitive schemas.

Multiple components of the cognitive bond towards Groningen are described earlier in the findings. They are not literally mentioned as cognitive factors, but many findings are intricately linked with their own mental representation of the city. For instance, the words the students used to describe Groningen, is part of their view, and mental representation of the city. Their views often overlap because they all see the city as a student city. All participants are all students. This means they are in the same stage of life, and experience mostly the same (student) lifestyle, which can lead to the same schemas, what

resulted in an image of Groningen as a student city. Groningen is seen as an important place for the participants. Its special character is based on their place-related knowledge and experience, meanings, and beliefs. The meaning ascribed to Groningen, is for instance a place what plays a role in their human development. According to the literature, studying and living in an university town is identified as critical in human development as the time when children become adults and begin their lived experience, develop their own identity and determine their own values without the immediate influence of parents (Chickerking & Reisser, 1993). Multiple participants think that Groningen is important to them, because they see Groningen as a city where a significant part of their lives occur. For instance:

Marieke: Because I really built something here. I really have a nice place to live in, I can really be myself and have found my peace, it has also been an important part of my life here and that means a lot to me. And I really don't want to leave here. I now really realize how important it is to find a place where you really feel at home and where you can find peace, which makes me feel even more connected to Groningen than before. That really plays a big role.

Laura: ...but I am very happy that I spent my entire student days here as long as possible. That's really part of me, I think I'll be back here a lot later. It is really a place that belongs to me.

Another component of the cognitive schemas of the students what plays a role in their attachment towards Groningen is knowledge about the city. The longer they live here, the more they know about the city. Gaining knowledge about the city and having a routine is one of arguments the students gave they feel attached to the city. Thus, in this case, time positively influences their place attachment. It feels familiar, and knowing the city everyday a little more, they feel more attached to more dimensions of the city.

At last, the view of the students towards Groningen is dynamic. It has changed during their student time in Groningen. To research this dynamic I asked the students if their view has been changed from the transition period until the present. All participants view the city still as a student city. But, at this moment the students know it is more than just a student city. During the years living here, they experienced more dimensions of the city. For instance,

Vera: "I like the city very much. But in the beginning, you just don't know it that well. And now I know every neighbourhood and street name. In the beginning, you are searching and now it really feels like my city. First, I was more focused on my neighbourhood, and the city centre. Now I have more connection with the city already, and with several neighbourhoods."

Another participant mentioned in the interview that his image towards Groningen has changed, but the city is also changed: more international students, busier streets, many coffee bars, and hotspots. He does not see it as a negative change. Besides the two participants whose social world is decreasing in Groningen, also experienced the dynamics of the city. Thus, it is important to keep in mind, that not only the person and its relationship with Groningen is dynamic, but the city can also change. Both has influence on their attachment, because if their relationship with Groningen and the city itself are dynamic, their attachment is also a dynamic process.

4.3.3 Behavioural

The third aspect of the psychological process dimension of place attachment is the behaviour of an individual, which attachment is expressed through actions (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

First, a common behavioural expression of the students when they came to live in Groningen is that they maintain a bond by looking or creating similar aspects of their former home in their new environment. The first similar aspect is socially related. The motives to study and live in Groningen was often, because friends of their former home were also studying in Groningen. Thus, when the students came to Groningen, their social world was often based on social ties from their former home. Multiple students lived in Groningen, in a house shared with friends from their former hometown. For instance, a

participant mentioned that in the beginning he was focused on his friends from his former hometown, because it was a comfortable feeling, and he did not know many people in Groningen. However, it is a process, as time goes by, he met new people from his study or soccer club, and his ties with people from his former hometown faded. Now he has a group of close friends he met in Groningen. Additionally, multiple participants still share a home with their former hometown friends. When I visit one of the participants his home, what is shared with his Frisian friends, the Frisian identity was clearly present. There was a big Frisian flag hanging in the kitchen, and photographs of their soccer club of their former hometown. So, despite he lives in Groningen, his house feels like a Frisian house, as a bubble in the city. This is a behavioural expression for looking similar aspects in the city based on their former hometown.

By most participants the urge to create similar aspects of their former hometown diminish the longer they live in Groningen. In the transition period it feels comfortable to lean on familiar things from their former home. But when time passed, Groningen become their familiar place, and feels more like home, so the need to reconstruct the place as their former hometown becomes less present. It is a process and is closely linked with the practices of homemaking. First, the students try to make a home with similar aspects of their former hometown, because it feels comfortable, but their meaning of home changes the longer they live in Groningen, and their home-making practises are less based on their former home, but on their “new” home, namely Groningen. This change of reconstruction the place shows that time is involved in their place attachment, and that the place attachment towards their former home become less, and their attachment towards the university town become stronger.

Homemaking is the second behavioural expression of place attachment. Through homemaking one binds him or herself to a place, and become attached to it (Chow et al., 2008). When conducting the interview, it was exposed that home-making practices are highly personal and different. It is a dynamic continuous process and can change easily. This is already noticed with the variety of meanings in home, expressed by the students in paragraph 4.2.3.

When I asked the students how they managed to feel home in Groningen, the common thread is based on social ties. Maintaining relationships based on their former home and creating new social relationships. Multiple students joined the introduction week in Groningen for creating new social ties, and/or joining different communities, such as committees at their study, or being an active member at their soccer club. Creating new relationships are important for homemaking and feeling home in Groningen. As Stijn mentioned: *“the feeling of making a home is that you sit on your couch and know you can call people to hang out with.”*

Another example of homemaking is having a room/house where you feel comfortable. A clear example of the importance of homemaking related to place attachment, is Marieke. She did not like her place, because it was exceedingly small, and she felt lonely in her room. Therefore, she was always on her way, visiting friends, studying, working and never at her own place. However, she did like the city of Groningen, so her attachment towards the city was present. Since she lived in a new house, she mentioned that she finally found her peace. She is more home, and likes being home. This change does her and, her attachment for towards city well. As she states:

Marieke: “I really don’t want to leave here. I realize how important it is to find a place where you really feel at home and where you can find peace. Which makes me feel even more connected to Groningen than before, it plays a big role.”

Considering time, the process of feeling home or attached towards Groningen differs per person. Multiple participants felt home relatively easy, and in a short amount of time. They were highly active in finding friends and gaining knowledge about the city. Besides, multiple participants acknowledge that studying plays a significant role in feeling home in Groningen. It creates routine, and it evokes familiarity in their environment. It also creates new social relations and contribute to their self-

development. That is why several participants, who choose the wrong study, felt out of place in Groningen and the process of feeling home took longer. Thus, studying is a significant home-making practice. Home-making practices are related with the feeling of home. Home-making practices has a major impact on the development of place attachment. In other words, when one feels at home, one feels attached.

The last behaviour aspect of place attachment is proximity-maintaining. The underlying assumption is to remain close to the place of attachment and is expressed by residing for a long time in the significant place. Nevertheless, what is a long time? Most students do live here around four years or longer. As noted above, it is long enough to create a meaningful relationship with the city. Most students travelled to their former home more than nowadays. First, the students travelled almost every weekend to their former home, and now this is approximately once a month. Their lives take place more in Groningen, the longer they live here. This is a reinforcing process. On the one hand, the students are more attached to Groningen, therefore they do not travel that much to their former home anymore. On the other hand, because they travel less to their former hometown, their attachment towards the city can develop more. For instance, Riemer, he mentioned in the interview the change from playing soccer in his former hometown, to playing soccer in Groningen was a real tipping point and has a positive influence on his attachment towards Groningen. Another interesting story is the story of one highly mobile participant. In a matter of speaking she lives in two cities; switching from Groningen and Amsterdam. First, she lived in Amsterdam for a year, then for a year in Groningen, she went travelling to Asia and South America, then she came back in Groningen, moved to Amsterdam and now she lived for two years in Groningen. However, she lives *mainly* in Groningen, in the weekend she goes back to Amsterdam for friends and parties. But the more she travelled, and the more she has seen of the world, every time she comes back to Groningen. Interesting, that she moved back to Groningen, despite their rich migration history. Thus, this refers that Groningen means something to her. This is proximity-behaviour, and is acknowledged by the participant, and even when she goes back every weekend to Amsterdam, she is happy when she is back in Groningen. Amsterdam is seen as escapism: a lot of parties, and distraction:

Tessa: I go to Amsterdam every weekend and lately I realize that I like to come back in Groningen. I didn't have that before. I am always on the go, but when I am back on my own room on Monday, I am happy with Groningen and living here.

Interviewer: And is it, because you have your own place and room here? Or also Groningen itself?

Tessa: No, also Groningen. I really like Amsterdam and it offers a lot and have a lot of friends there. I sometimes miss it during the week, but I think the city of Groningen is a really nice city. Amsterdam is really big, busy and chaos. But Groningen is really nice, and Amsterdam is fun for the weekend and a lot of distraction there, Groningen gives a bit of peace, and I am really settled here, and it feels like coming home!

Interesting about the student is, despite she is attached towards Groningen, and Groningen feels like home, she still goes to Amsterdam every weekend. This behaviour looks like that she is attached to multiple places and is intricately linked with place attachment and mobility. More of this matter will be discussed in paragraph 4.4.

4.3.4 Conclusion process dimension`

To conclude, the process dimension has shown how the attachment is manifested. Emotions, memories, schemas and knowledge have influence on their attachment towards the city and is expressed by behaviour. In general, most of the schemas are alike. This, because the students are in the same stage of life and have to a certain extent the same student lifestyle. Besides, all these factors are dynamic. Their mental representation of Groningen is enriched and changed during the years. Thus, time plays a role in process dimension of place attachment. Additionally, the focus on Groningen has become stronger over time: from finding similarities of their former home to, creating a home in Groningen. Which means the need for finding similarities of their former home is not necessary anymore, because Groningen has

become is their home. Groningen seeing as their home, and feeling home, is established by home-making practices. These practices are incredibly important, because it established the feeling of home, and as aforementioned when one feels at home, one feels attached.

4.4 Mobility

The last paragraph of the findings is about the influence of mobility on the place attachment of the students towards Groningen. Not every dimension will be discussed separately, in relation with mobility. Instead, this paragraph is about the influence of mobility on the students place attachment in general. According to the literature, mobility has an influence on place attachment. However, it is highly debated in which way mobility influence place attachment.

In the interviews it is noted that mobility plays a role in the place attachment of the students. First, multiple place attachment is common by the participants. Several students travel to their former home relatively often. However, the longer the students live in Groningen, the less they travel back to their former home. Besides, the migration history of the students plays a role in their attachment towards the city. This is already analysed in the person dimension in relation with place identity. As aforementioned, the students who only moved once, has a feeling of a 50/50 identity. This could be also linked with the multiple place attachment theory. It seems that the students who moved relatively little in their youth or lived their childhood a long time in one place, and then moved to Groningen for their study, still has attachment to their former home. For instance, one participant travels back to his former home in Frisia still every weekend, for soccer and his friends. Notwithstanding, he lives in Groningen for five years. He feels attached to both places, and even identify with both places. As aforementioned, he called himself the 'Frisian Stadjer.' It is not clear that travelling back every weekend hampers his attachment towards the city. It is more plausible that he is attached to both places, and this is not seen as a hinder in his attachment to one of the places, because one can feel attached to different places for different purposes (Lewicka, 2011).

The other side of the story are the students who moved a lot in their childhood. This long migration history is expressed different by each participant. One participant lived in Assen for a relatively longer time, but both her parents do not live there anymore. She moved a lot, she has a long migration history, and this has influence on her attachment towards Groningen. She even has moved that much, that multiple attachment does not play a role anymore, because she lived at too many places for that. However, she felt that she really tries to anchor in Groningen, as a feeling of stability. This is the city where she lives at longest, and she liked the stability. Another participant expressed his long migration history in a different way. He moved a lot, and he feels that he can live everywhere and nowhere, as long he has a social network. Thus, he is not place-bound. A long migration history has different expressions in attachment. On the one hand, someone can anchor themselves to a city, because in the need of stability. On the other hand, someone is not place-bound, and his ties with place are relatively more loose.

Multiple place attachment can also be present with different kind of attachments. Places can be valuable for different purposes. For instance, the highly mobile participant who is attached to Amsterdam and Groningen. She travels back every weekend to Amsterdam. First, she found herself in a 'in-between-ness' position with Amsterdam and Groningen. She was always on her way, and she felt belong and not belong with both cities at the same time. However, this is a process. As time goes by, the participant felt that she needed rest, because always being on the way costs energy. Lately, she leans more towards Groningen, and she feels happy about that. She finds peace in Groningen and mentioned that Amsterdam is a form of escapism: it is nice for the party's and fun, but nothing more. Thus, at this moment she feels attached to Amsterdam and Groningen, but each city for different purposes.

Another example is being attached to a place for recreational purposes. One participant feels attached to Giethoorn. A place near by his former hometown. Giethoorn is known as the 'Venice of the Netherlands' It is a place with many canals, and you can move through the village by boat. He feels attached to this

place, because in the summer he and his friends enjoyed themselves with sailing in the canals and swimming. Another student has the same kind of attachment with the beach, near her former hometown. Before she lived in Groningen, she went to the beach quite often. She missed the beach in Groningen, and she felt attached to the beach for recreational and relax purposes.

At last, it is interesting in this paragraph to show the future plans of the students in relation with Groningen and their attachment. As aforementioned, all students do feel attached to the city, but it takes in different forms. However, this attachment does not hinder students to move to another city. Most students see the city of Groningen as a suitable city for studying. As a participant mentioned, she is happy that she studies in Groningen, and Groningen means a lot to her, but even then, she wants to go back to her roots (Randstad). Thus, for study purposes and for its facilities that suits the student's lifestyle, the city is important to her, and in this way, she feel attached to it. Other participants want to move to another cities, because of career opportunities. For instance:

Sjouke: I feel connected to Groningen, but not to the extent that I want to live here all my life. You experience so many things here, because of the people, the nice atmosphere, the bars, activities that are here. That makes me feel connected... I don't care where I live, I want to do something I like [career], and from there I want to see what's useful in terms of travel time. Maybe I want to live in a city first, but if I have children, I think I want to go to a village or outside the city, but yes, I don't know.

Additionally, there are different motives to move from Groningen, such as living in the countryside, move to places where your friends live, travelling the world etcetera. These are all different motivations to leave the city of Groningen and are linked with the mobilized society we live in. Despite their meaningful relation with Groningen, travelling and moving to other places are common.

Nevertheless, there are participants who do not want to leave Groningen *if* they can find a job here after studying. They feel attached to Groningen and like the city, and therefore enough reason to stay in the city. They feel that the city still can offer their needs, despites they are not students anymore. However, they will stay *if* they find a job. If not, and they find a job elsewhere in the Netherlands and they will move. For instance:

Interviewer: "Now as far as you can tell, do you want to stay in Groningen? Why?"

Riemer: Yes, if I manage to find a job where I can fulfil my ambitions. Uhm... if not, I do not want to stay.

Interviewer: Finding a job is a significant factor?

Riemer: I think in the end it definitely is. If you do not develop yourself, then you hinder yourself. I think that can have negative consequences and frustrations.

Interviewer: Okay, are there any other factors that do play a role?

Riemer: Well, my friends, I have built a life here. Then you have to start all over again. And when you study, making friends is easier, if you go to work it is a different structure..."

Thus, career opportunities play an important role to stay or not to stay in Groningen by most of the participants. However, there is a significant difference between the participants. Multiple participants want to stay in Groningen if they can find a job. Thus, their attachment towards the city is present and play a role in their choice to stay in Groningen. However, if they cannot find a job, they will move. It does not mean they are not attached to Groningen, but pursuing a career is more important. Other participants want to move directly to another city, when they have finished their study, for pursuing their career and are less place-bound towards Groningen. This could be explained by the sloping curve of place attachment. Place attachment is seen by different scholars not as a linear process: it is at its strongest in the first years of living at a place, and its strength will slope afterwards (Lewicka, 2011). Thus, their attachment is stabilizing nowadays and therefore, the students are less bound to their university town. The students are influenced by a society whereas mobility is common, moving to other places is therefore easier. Besides, it could be, because the students know the city was important for

study purposes and their student lifestyle, but when finishing their study, the city is not seen as suitable. They are attached towards Groningen for the student lifestyle purpose. Consequently, they have a more loosening tie with Groningen, because they know they will move in the future.

Another side of the story is the push factor that the university town is also changed and could increase the urge to move to another place. This argument is strengthened, by the scenario of two participants. Their attachment towards Groningen was relatively high, and their friends did play an important role in this attachment. However, this attachment is highly dynamic, and could change. In the present, the participants experienced a downgrade in their social world in Groningen, because their friends have moved to other places. Consequently, this negatively affects their place attachment.

4.4.1 Conclusion mobility

All in all, mobility and attachment are not necessarily opposites from each other. The participants are attached to the city, despite they highly mobile character. Interesting, are their expressions about attachment towards the city, which are positive and seems like a meaningful relationship. But when I asked them about leaving Groningen their answers were clear: most of them wants to leave Groningen. Thus, mobility could have an influence on the intensity and dynamics of their attachment towards Groningen. The students can move easily to other parts of the Netherlands, to pursue their career or for other purposes. Therefore, the students are to a certain level attached and are not place-bound to pursuing their purposes. These developments hinder the place attachment of the students towards Groningen, because they know they will leave the city, what lead to a more loosening tie and form of attachment. This will not say the students are not attached towards Groningen, because they are, but the intensity and the purposes of the attachment differs.

Chapter V Discussion

This chapter will discuss the results and interpret these in the context of existing literature. First, the results will be discussed in order to the Tripartite model: person, place and process. Thereafter, the factor mobility will be explained. At last, the reflection on this study will be covered.

5.1 Literature and findings

5.1.1 Person

According to the literature, age, gender, milieu of origin, and migration history are personal characteristics that can influence place attachment (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Lewicka, 2010; Hashemnezhad et al., 2012). In this study, age and gender did not play a role in student's place attachment, because they are in the same stage of life and there are no traditional gender roles present. This was expected beforehand, because gender differences play a relatively small role by students compared to other groups. The other factors did play a role in the place attachment process of the students. According to the literature, the transition of the students from a rural background is more difficult than from a city background (Wiborg, 2004; Ganss, 2006). This is visible in the results of this study. To include the context of this case-study, the city of Groningen is seen as a 'big village.' Caused by this view and the city its 'rural' characteristics, the transition went relatively smooth. This difference could be because the literature studies relatively large cities (i.e. Portland). These cities could be experienced more intense, than the relatively small city of Groningen. Thus, the characteristics of the city itself also plays a role in the student's place attachment.

It is not visible in this study that geographical distance to their former home affects the extent how many times the students go to their former home, and influences their place attachment. The literature is based on America and Spain (Vidal, 2010; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001), whereas distance to their former home could be much larger. The Netherlands is a small country, so their former home is relatively close to their university town and is it relatively easy to travel to their former home.

Scannell & Gifford (2010) emphasize in the person dimension that place identity is an important factor. Who we are, can include where we are. Students are a highly mobile group, and migration history influences how the students identify with places. The results indicate that individuals with a high migration history identify more at generic nation level which is conformed in the literature (Hughes & Allen (2010). Feldman (1990) suggested that a mobile person shift from identity to concrete places, to a new form of identity, called 'settlement identity' (i.e. a rural or -city person). In the findings, this form of place identity is not present, but most students identified themselves with the university town related with their lifestyle; being a student. It is seen as a lighter form, namely "Groningse student" (A student from Groningen). Thus, the place identity of students is not based on only the place itself, or settlement identity, but more related to a lifestyle identity

Places become meaningful from live-trajectories and personally experiences, "such as realizations, milestones and experiences of personal growth" (Scannell & Gifford;2, 2010). Based on the findings, studying is a significant experience in the student's personal growth. Besides, multiple participants highlighted that the university town has become important to them, because in this town they experienced a significant period of their life, namely becoming an adult. This is in line with the assumption of Chickering & Reisser (1993) that the student experience is identified as significant in human development. Beforehand, it was not considered that the social relations of the students are highly valued. However, most of the experiences that were highlighted by the participants were socially related (i.e. new friendships, joining communities). The importance of the student's social network is noticeable in the entire study and has a significant influence on the student's place attachment. This is linked with another aspect of the person dimension, namely the shared meaning the 'student culture.' This factor was included in the revised conceptual model, because students were the chosen target group. This revision was needed and was significant to research place attachment. An interesting part of the 'student

culture' is joining student communities. This is partly discussed in the literature, assuming that joining communities can ease the place attachment process (Quinn & Adger, 2015). However, this only one side of the story. Students feel more attached towards Groningen, but only to a small part of the university town that fits in their community. Thus, a community can intensify their relationship with Groningen, but the results indicate that this relation is based on a small part of Groningen, withholding attachment on a larger scale towards the whole town.

5.1.2 Place

The second dimension of the Tripartite model is place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Interesting in this dimension is that at first glance multiple places were not seen as places that are important for the place attachment process. For instance, places were seen as 'place-less (Auge, 1992); without an identity, such as the university campus. According to Scannell & Gifford (2010), places can be important to support one's goals (i.e. facilitating study development). Besides, urban sociologists mentioned that places are significant as facilitator for social relations (Woldoff, 2002; Lalli, 1992; Hunter 1978). Thus, despite the lack of identity, places can still indirectly play a role in their attachment towards the university town. This was on second thought acknowledged by the participants, when they realize that places can also be important in their place attachment process, as facilitator of their study and/or social relations, despite its lack of identity. The places that were directly seen as significant places, are places with both social- and physical characteristics, regardless the qualitative differences of places and its related function. For example, the park and its leisure purposes (i.e. walking), was not only chosen by its nature (physical qualities), but also by its social qualities (i.e. watching people during their walk). This differs with Lewicka's (2011) study, who shed light on the qualitative differences in place attachment, highlighting that often places for recreational needs are important for their physical characteristics. The reason for this could be that students highly value their social relations. Feeling home in their university town was often linked with being part of a community in Groningen. Their social relationships play a major role in their life, and this could be expressed in the kind of qualities they value in places. However, the students do not undervalue the physical characteristics of a place and also consider these as significant. Therefore, this study is in line with multiple scholars (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Lewicka 2011; Raymond & Weber, 2010) that both social- and physical aspects of the environment are significant in the place attachment process.

The most valued place in their university town is home, but there are differences in meaning and scale. This collaborates with the literature, what mentioned the dynamics and subjectivity of home (Chow et al, 2008) This difference in scale is related with place attachment. Often the relationship between place scale and place attachment occurs in a U-shape, the neighbourhood tended to attract less emotions than home or city (Hidalgo & Hernandez. 2001). This is also applicable for the scale of home. The students described a home on house- or city scale, and a home can be more than a house where the students dwell. Besides, a home can be at multiple places in the university town, such as the house of a student community or an Art school, because of the time spending there and these places represent their social world. Thus, a home ranges further than the house, suggested by Dayaratne et al. (2008). Interesting, considering student's place attachment is the role of social relationships in the meaning of home. Most students described the feeling of home as something where they have social relations.

5.1.3 Process

The last dimension of the Tripartite model is process. According to Scannell & Gifford (2010), this part consists of three aspects: affection, cognitive and behaviour. Important in all aspects is the notion of time. Place attachment is a process, and highly dynamic (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Therefore, this study included the notion of time in every part of the process dimension.

Most findings in the dimension are in line with the literature. Nonetheless, there are several findings that add to our understanding and are relevant for the theoretical debate on place attachment. Emotions were included in the revised conceptual framework because negative emotions can influence the attachment of the students (Brown, 1992). However, these negative emotions were hardly present as an influence

on place attachment in the results. Even when the student's experienced negative emotions, it was not experienced as a negative influence on their attachment. However, in the transition period negative emotions (i.e. homesickness, insecurity) were more present than today. The main emotion was about insecurity caused by a wrong study choice. At that moment it hindered the attachment of the students, but in the present the students did not feel that this hampered their attachment towards their university town. This inductive finding is not elucidated in the literature, and this finding could be caused by the physiological phenomenon of 'the rosy view'. This means that negative emotions related towards place attachment are mitigated and the positive experiences are magnified (Hosany et al., 2016; Mitchell et al., 1997). This could lead to a positive bias and it is important to be aware of this bias. Several participants experienced a place disruption in Groningen, because multiple friends left the university town. This shows the dynamics of place attachment and the respondents' emotions. The students who experienced a disruption in their social world, felt negative emotions towards the city. As aforementioned, students are highly social beings, and this negatively affected their attachment towards the university town.

Another finding that needs specific attention is the view towards the city. The mental representation of students is highly personal, but there is a common thread in the cognitive schemas. All students viewed the university town as a student town. This is plausible, because they have experienced the same stage of life, and they all are students. Thus, this shared cognitive schema is linked with the shared meanings of the student's culture in the person dimension (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Additionally, their mental representation of the city is dynamic. The longer the students lived in Groningen, the more they got to know the city, and the more they felt attached. This is in line with Fullilove (1996). According to him, to be attached, is to know the details of the environment.

At last, the behavioural aspect of the cognition will be discussed. The behavioural expressions discussed by the literature are reconstruction of the place, proximity-maintaining, and homemaking (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Dayaratne et al., 2008). It became clear that time plays a significant role in the behavioural expressions. Considering the reconstruction of the place, multiple participants focused on friends from their former hometown in the beginning of their lives in their university town. However, by most participants the urge to create similar aspects of their former hometown diminish the longer they live in Groningen. When time passed, Groningen become their familiar place, and feels more like home, so the need to reconstruct the place as their former hometown becomes less present. The second behaviour are homemaking practices. This one is especially important, because through homemaking one binds him or herself to a place, and become attached to it (Chow et al., 2008). This is also visible in the results. The homemaking practices are highly personal, but in this study the common thread in homemaking practises is based on social ties. (i.e. creating new relationships, joining a community) and studying to create routine, that evokes familiarity with their environment (Fullilove (1996). The last behavioural aspect is proximity-maintaining. The underlying assumption is to remain close to the place of attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). This assumption is not entirely true for this study and cannot be applied for a highly mobile group. In the first years the students lived in Groningen, multiple students went home almost every weekend to their former home to stay close to their former home, but this decreased when time passed. However, a decreased proximity-maintaining is not necessarily equal to a loss in place attachment. It could be the place attachment became less and to the university town stronger, but it does not mean the students did not feel attached to their former hometown. It is not a competition between places, but one can be attached to multiple places. This is in line with the literature who acknowledge that due to the mobilized society relations with place change and that people can be attached to multiple places (Lewicka, 2011; Gustafson, 2009; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Brown, 1992). Here we come to the last part of this study, the influence of mobility to place attachment.

5.1.4 Mobility

Does mobility hinder attachment? This question is highly debated. In this study, there are differences in how mobility influences place attachment. On the one hand, a student with a long migration history tries to anchor in their university town, as a feeling of stability. This is in line with Harvey (1989), who highlighted the need to create a sense of place in a highly dynamic world. On the other hand, a mobile student feels not really place-bound, and is mainly attached to his social network. This is seen as social bonding, a form of attachment, acknowledged by urban sociologists (Woldoff, 2002; Lalli, 1992; Hunter 1978). Besides, multiple place attachment is common in this study. Multiple participants experienced that they feel attached to more places than their university town, such as their former home, a city where they lived before, or a place for recreational purposes. At last, it is clear that the place attachment of the students loosens when they are at the end of their study. This loosening of ties is confirmed by a large-scale study of Chow & Healey (2008). Considering their future plans, half of students want to stay in their university town *if* they can find a job. It seems place attachment plays a role, but their career development is more important. However, the other half wants to leave the city after finishing their study for different reasons (i.e. career, back to their roots, living nearby friends). Thus, they know they will leave the city, and this influences their attachment. This influence could be explained by the sloping curve of place attachment emphasized by Lewicka (2011). Place attachment is seen by different scholars (Hernandez et al., 2001; Lewicka 2011) not as a linear process: it is at its strongest in the first years of living at a place, and its strength will stagnate afterwards. To extend this premise, it seems student's place attachment runs in a S-curve: from the relatively slower development of place attachment in the transition period, to a high increase of place attachment during their studies, and at last a stabilization, or even a stagnation of attachment in the end stage of student's study time. This stagnation is visible in the results by multiple participants, caused by the loss of social relations in their university town. As aforementioned, students highly value their social relationships, and this negatively affects their place attachment towards the university town. The stabilization is linked with the insecure time when a student is at the end of this study. They do not know if they can stay in the city, because of their career opportunities, and there is a possibility that they have to leave the city for career purposes. Another cause of the stabilization could be because multiple students know they will leave the city and have a more loosening tie with the city in the end-stage of their studies.

5.2 Reflection on the research process

This study contributed to the aim of the study and gained significant findings to understand the students' attachment and relation with place with the university town Groningen. By doing qualitative research I gained a deeper understanding of student's place attachment.

Considering the COVID-19 virus the data-collection went different as was expected beforehand. First, recruiting participants was relatively difficult. Many students went to their former home, because of the virus. Second, the photo assignment was influenced by the virus and has been adjusted. Multiple places were not accessible, due to the pandemic. Thus, I asked the participants to take photographs of places if possible, otherwise they had to choose a picture from the internet. As a consequence, the aim of the photographs in this study has slightly changed. The photographs were still important in the interview itself, because it triggered memories and feelings of a place by the participants. However, it was not really useful anymore to strengthen the results of the interview, because multiple pictures are from the internet, and not from the perspective of the students.

Third, most of the interviews were conducted virtually (Skype), because of the restriction by the government of meeting people in real life. This form of interviewing had different consequences. The informed consent could not be signed in real life, therefore I asked the participants if they agreed with the informed consent after the interview, and they had to respond explicitly by saying "yes I agree" or "no, I do not agree." All participants agreed. Second, the risk by conducting an interview with Skype is the loss of non-verbal communication. However, building rapport can be established just as well as in face-to-face interviews (O'Connor, 2008). In this study, exchanging emails, and the assignment of the

photographs did facilitate this process. The participants were already connected with the study, due to the opportunity to take their own photographs. In this way online interviewing was not seen as a hinder in building rapport.

At last, in this study it was expected that the virus was as a form of place disruption. Place disruption means destruction of or threats to place attachment and place identity (Brown & Perkins, 1992). Due to the virus, the participants could not go to every place. Many places were closed, and this had an influence in the interview and this study. However, the virus was not perceived as a threat to their place attachment by the participants, but instead this disruption worked for the participants the other way around. The students were more aware of the importance of, and their feelings for these places. They realized what these places mean to them and appreciated the places even more. This awareness was seen as significant, because it strengthened the data in this study.

In total ten interviews were conducted over a period of 1,5 month. When the data collection process extends over time, there is a risk of variation in the interviews (Graneheim, 2004). This was also the case in this study. During the data collection, new insights about place attachment were acquired. For instance, the influence of the virus on places in Groningen. Consequently, the content of the first and last interview was slightly different.

At last, in this study the researcher was part of the target group. As aforementioned in Chapter 3 Methodology, I was fully aware of being an 'insider.' This was seen as a positive effect, because as an insider you can facilitate the development of a rapport with the participants (Flowerdew, 2005). However, it was acknowledged that the researcher could 'pre-understand' information and identify problems too early. Due to this awareness I did not ask guiding questions, based on my own experience. But after multiple interviews I pre-understand a phenomenon in the transition stage of the participants who lived before Groningen in a small village. Consequently, in one of the last interviews I caught myself of asking guiding questions, because of all the information I had about this phenomenon. This happened once in one of my last interviews, with a respondent:

Interviewer: It is a bit stereotyping, but did the city changed you as a person? In a rural village there live often traditional people, and in the city more open-minded. Did you experience that change with your development as a person?

Sanne: Huh no? No not all, I was not really the typical rural girl, and I was raised very open-minded... So, I did not change that much.

This question was based, due to the answers of different participants who did experience that change. My position was not neutral anymore, and I pre-understand a phenomenon, what did not exist in her case. All in all, this happened only once, and I was aware of my position in this study. Besides, it is hard to become completely impartial when researching (Lindsey 2001).

Chapter VI Conclusion

In this chapter the results are linked to the main research question and the sub questions so as to provide answers. Thereafter, the relevance and recommendations for urban planning and future inquiry will be discussed.

6.1 Answering the research questions

This research aimed to answer the question: *How do non-local students from the Netherlands develop place attachment towards their university town during their studies?* In order to answer this question, the sub-questions will be answered at first, with at last the answer on the research question.

6.1.1 Who is attached?

The personal characteristics; milieu of origin and migration history are characteristics of the students that influence their attachment towards the universitytown. People with a rural background had to adjust more to the city life and the transition was more intense than people with a city background. However, Groningen is seen as a city with the characteristics of a village: cosy, everybody knows each other, and small. Therefore, the transition went for all participants fairly smooth, and this positively influenced the attachment of all participants. Thus, the characteristics of the city itself also plays a role in the student's place attachment.

Migration history influences how the students identify with places. The results indicate that individuals with a high migration history identify more at generic nation level. The most common identification is related with their lifestyle; being a student. It is seen as a lighter form than identifying themselves as someone from Groningen (Stadje). Instead, they identify themselves as a "Groningse student" (A student from Groningen). Place identity of students is not just based on the place itself, but more related to a lifestyle identity.

The individual- and shared meanings based on life-trajectories and personally experiences, that shape the place attachment of the students are personal- and social growth. Personal growth is often linked with studying and its progress. When one feels he or she can develop himself, one feels more 'in place.' Besides, students are highly social beings. Therefore, social growth is significant, and consists of creating new social relationships, and maintaining friendships. This related with the shared meaning of the student culture. In this culture social relationships are highly valued, for instance, joining a student community. Joining a community can ease the place attachment process towards the university town, but this is limited. A community can intensify their relationship with Groningen, but it is possible that this relation is based on a small part of Groningen and withholds attachment on greater scale towards the university town.

6.1.2 To what are they attached?

The places directly perceived by the students as significant places as part of the place attachment process, were those with both social- and physical qualities. Examples are the park, market and nightlife district. The city itself is valued, because it fits their needs as a student, and facilitates their lifestyle. Unexpectedly, for recreational/leisure purposes (i.e. walking in the park), the social qualities were still important, instead of only the physical characteristics. This indicates again the highly social nature of students. The places that were not seen as important in the place attachment process at first glance, were the places with a place-less identity. Multiple university campuses felt not significant in the attachment process by the students at first, because it did not feel like Groningen. However, this place facilitates their goals, study progress and social relations, what is also important for the place attachment process according to the literature. On second thought this was acknowledged by the participants, and therefore, in this study these places are indirect also significant in the student's attachment towards the university town.

6.1.3 How is the attachment manifested?

The emotions of the students about their university town are highly positive. This could be caused by the rosy view and can lead to a positive bias confirmed by the literature. However, the emotions are dynamic. During the transition, the emotions were relatively less positive, and negative emotions, such as being homesick, and feelings of insecurity were more present. As time goes by, the emotions about the university town are more positive, for instance terms as pride and happiness were mentioned. The mental representation of students is highly personal, but there is a common thread in the cognitive schemas. All students viewed the university town as a student town. This is plausible, because they experience the same stage of life and student lifestyle. Thus, this shared cognitive schema is linked with the shared meanings of the student's culture in the person dimension. At last, the behaviours expressed by place attachment towards the universitytown are proximity-maintaining, reconstruction of the place and home-making practices. Home-making practices are the most significant behaviour in the place attachment process. These practices are related with feeling at home. When one feels at home, one feels attached. Different practises are, creating a house/room where one feels comfortable, making friends, create routine by studying, explore the city and gaining knowledge about the city.

6.1.4 What role does mobility play in place attachment?

Mobility influences the place attachment of the student's in different ways. Linked with the migration history it is shown that students with a long migration history responded different regarding place attachment. On the one hand, someone can anchor themselves to a city, because in the need of stability. On the other hand, someone is not place-bound, and his ties with place are relatively more loose. Multiple attachment is common by the students. The students are attached to their former home, their university town, or places for recreational purposes. Many students travel every week between two places. This does not mean they are less attached to their university town, but they feel attached to multiple places for different purposes. Considering their future plans, half of the respondents wants to stay in Groningen *if* they find a job. It seems place attachment plays a role, but their career development is more important. However, the other half wants to leave the city after finishing their study for different reasons (i.e. career, back to their roots, living nearby friends). Thus, they know they will leave the city, and this influences their attachment. These students have more loosening ties with Groningen, because they know they will move in the future when they are no students anymore.

6.1.5 How do non-local students from the Netherlands develop place attachment towards their university town during their studies?

Based on the findings, the development of student's place attachment runs in a S-curve. This is visualized in figure 6.1 to support this inductive finding. The transition period was seen as an intense and insecure time, whereas the attachment developed slowly. The transition period was relatively short by most students, but varies per participant. After this period their attachment developed relatively fast. Feeling home and feeling attached was facilitated by home-making practices. These practices were mainly based on social relations (i.e. joining communities, making new friends) Despite the differences in personal characteristics (milieu of origin or migration history), they all experienced the 'student culture.' This shared meaning shaped the student's place attachment. In this culture and lifestyle social ties are of great importance, and this could explain the highly social nature of students and plays a role in the development of their place attachment. Besides, the student culture has influence on their mental representation of the city, they all see the city as a student town. The city of Groningen fits their needs as a student and facilitate their student lifestyle. The student's emotions are highly positive about the university town, and positively influence their attachment. However, the city is dynamic, so is the attachment and its related emotions.

There is a variation in the curve of student's place attachment in the end-stage of studying. First, the curve could stagnate (the dashed line in figure 6.1). This could be explained by that multiple students experienced a disruption in their social world (i.e. friends moving out of town). Social relations are central in feeling attached, and this negatively influenced their attachment. Second, the place attachment

curve can stabilize (the continuous line in figure 6.1). Their future plans and the mobile society the students live in, plays a role in the stabilization of place attachment. The end-stage of the study is experienced as an insecure time. Multiple students want to stay in the university town if they can find a job. If they cannot, they will move. This insecurity hinders their attachment and therefore, the place attachment-curve will stabilize. If they stay, it is plausible that their attachment will increase, but this is not part of this study. Next, are the students who want to move anyways. The students are influenced by a society whereas mobility is common and moving to other places is easier. Therefore, the students knew the city was important for study purposes and their student lifestyle, but when finishing their study, the city is not seen as suitable. This explains the stabilized curve of place attachment, because they are attached towards Groningen for the student lifestyle purpose.

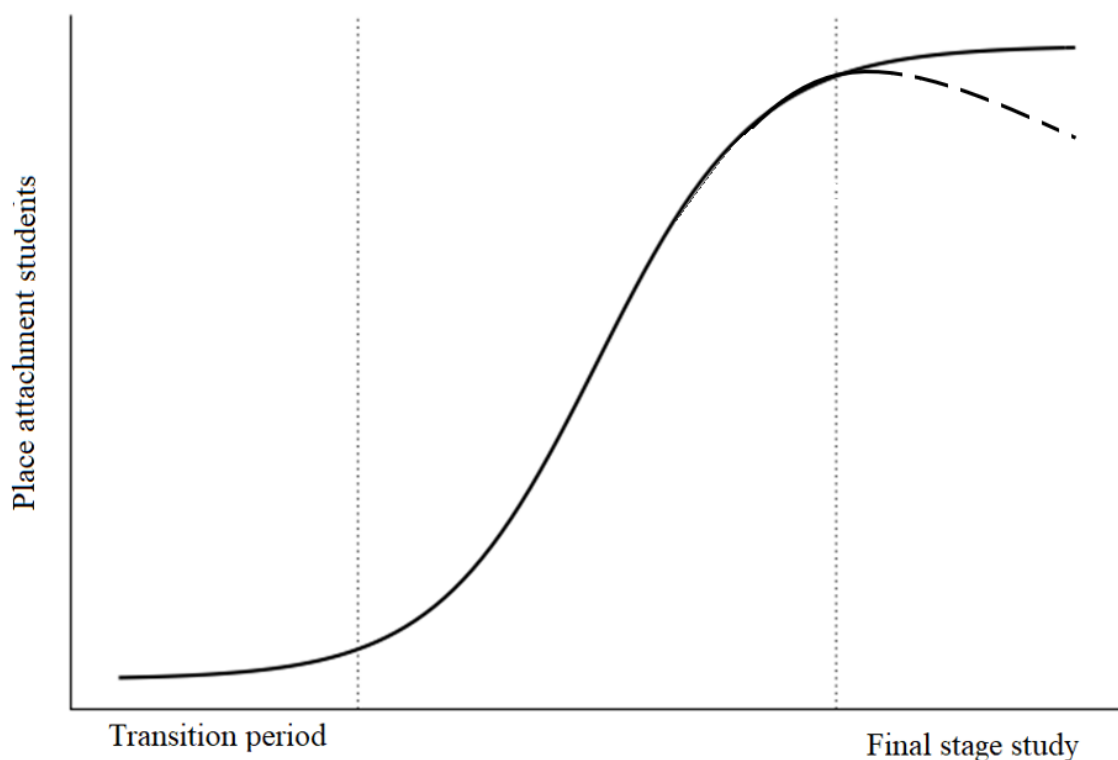


Figure 6.1: The s-curve of student's place attachment towards their university town

6.2 Recommendations and future inquiry

This study contributes to our understanding how students (a highly mobile group) are attached towards their university town. Urban planning is not only about solving issues considering the physical surroundings, but even (more) significant are the people living in the cities. People make the places. Thus, it is important to know, what does a place mean for the people? What kind of relationship do people have with its living environment? A relatively large part of the population in Groningen are students (De Groene Amsterdammer, 2017). Therefore, it relevant for the theoretical debate among urban planners understand their relationship with the university town, and how to improve it. Besides, place attachments should be seen as part of the data that is used in planning processes, as they hold great value in communities (Lewicka, 2011).

Based on the findings of this study, the students feel attached towards the university town. They feel positive about the city and its facilities because it fit their needs and lifestyle. This could positively

influence their motives to stay in the city. However, after graduation, the job opportunities are a crucial question. Literature suggest that it is important that the city and the university invest energy in creating an environment for innovations, and encourage and provide opportunities for the students to be part of the development of the area (Brown, 1992). Through this, students might create their own job opportunities and create an environment that enables them to stay in the north of the Netherlands. Students bring vast intellectual and social capital to the university town and many of them attach to Groningen for the study period. The question is, how to make more of them stay? This question is complex and different stakeholders could play a role in this part. The students do not feel there is much opportunity in the region of Groningen considering their career development. An important task for the university and the municipality of Groningen is to connect the students more with the working field in the surrounding areas, and to attract investment and jobs towards the North. These actions can evoke the feelings of the students that they have career opportunities in the North. For urban planning this means that it is important to strengthen the student's attachment by creating a study-friendly environment in the cities (Venhorst, 2011). This is already present in the city and highly appreciated by the students. However, according to the participants there is one crucial aspect that is not present in the city of Groningen. There are doubts that after graduation the city still fits their needs. The city is seen as a university town, but not as a town to live in after graduation. Most of the bars/clubs, activities and housing are focused on students. However, if the city wants to attract graduates, the city must adjust to their needs. Not only based on career opportunities, but also based on their preferable living environment and lifestyle. Thus, it is interesting for future inquiry to research the needs of graduates in the city, so the municipality could gain important insights in how to let the graduates stay in the city. When there is an overview and an understanding about the needs of the graduates considering their living environment, urban planners and the municipality can anticipate on these needs, so the students are more inclined to stay in the city after graduating.

Another interesting perspective for researching student's place attachment, is conducting walking interviews. The photo assignment of this study already sharpened the participants' memory and triggered responses that might lie submerged in verbal interviewing. Besides, a few interviews took place in a participant's room/house. I realized that being in the room/house of the participant sharpened his senses and memories about that place even more. Therefore, it is interesting for future inquiry to conduct interviews *in* places that are significant in the student's place attachment process. This could be done by walking interviews. Walking interviews considered a more intimate way to engage with landscape that can offer privileged insights into both place and self (Evans & Jones, 2011).

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Appendix I:

The meaning of home, according to the participants

Participant	The meaning of home	Scale
Anoek	“That I can be myself and be accepted for who I am and what I do. And that I can always go outside and feel safe on the street in Groningen. And uh ... I just have very nice friends. So, it makes me feel very much at home here.”	City
Tessa	“Just that you know where the nice places are, know who to call to drop by. Nice place for walking. Nice friends around me.”	City
Stijn	“I think really feeling at home is that you can sit on the couch, and you always have people around you who you can always call and build on, and always have fun. For me, that is feeling at home. So, more that I have social options.”	City
Sjouke	“I think feeling at home is I feel comfortable. And like my room, it has really been transformed from two black sofas and a table, to really your own place, and identity. You shape your place according to how you want it, and that takes a while, it is a process.”	House
Frank	“That I can really be myself and feel comfortable.”	City
Marieke	“” That I can find peace and be myself. And I also think I have a social network. And really think mainly about the peace, I was always someone who was never at home in my room, but more with others. I also felt more at home in my best friend's room than my own. That is why I never did my best in my room to make it cosy. Now that I live together, I have really found that peace. I like to be in my house, and also try my best to make it fun. Here I really found peace, also for myself. I am not always on the road. That does me well”	City and house
Riemer	“A place where I can be myself, where I can completely socialize, where I can still learn something”	City
Vera	“It feels more now that you get more energy from the environment and city. Walking through the city really energizes me. So, when you feel that, you know you feel at home. And the people who live there really make you at home. That is firstly your housemates, and then just your social environment. I think that's the most important thing. Now I also notice that more people are leaving, and now for the first time in my life I also think to go to Amsterdam. Well I never thought of considering that at all.”	City and house
Laura	“A home for me is that when I'm somewhere else, I just long to go back. I do not know if you take into account the COVID bias, if you look now with COVID, how many people go to their parent’s home, I have not that urge, I just love being here. That's why my house is also one pictures, I feel so comfortable there: chill house, chill place. “	City and house
Sanne	“Yes, a home for me is that I feel comfortable in the city. But also feel comfortable, a city where I just know everything, such as neighbourhoods and street names. That you can find your way, and that it is not too big, I really like that about Groningen. That you just know a lot of people, that is also a bit of coming home for me. And just a nice place to live.”	City

Appendix II

Informed consent

Agreement to participate - Research Ethics Committee (REC)

in research project:

Title: **The university town from the perspective of students: just a space or a place?**
Subtitle: *Place attachment of HE students from the Netherlands towards their university town:
Understanding the relations with place among students*

The aim of this study is to understand the students' attachment and relation with place with the university town Groningen. This could be valuable knowledge for policymakers in a city. Place attachment can lead to an increase of student's willingness to settle more permanent in the city.

- I have read and I understand the information sheet of this present research project.
- I have had the opportunity to discuss this study. I am satisfied with the answers I have been given by the researcher
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the study up to three weeks after interview, and to decline to answer any individual questions in the study.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential. Without my prior consent, no material, which could identify me will be used in any reports generated from this study.
- I understand that the anonymized data may also be used in articles, book chapters, published and unpublished work and presentations.
- I understand that all information I provide will be kept confidentially either in a locked facility or as a password protected encrypted file on a password protected computer.
- I understand this is a sensitive subject, thus I can always choose not to answer.

Please circle YES or NO to each of the following:

I consent to my interview being audio-recorded YES / NO

I consent to the map used for this research YES / NO

I wish to remain anonymous for this research YES / NO

IF NO

My first name can be used for this research YES / NO

OR

A pseudonym of my own choosing can be used in this research YES / NO

“I agree to participate in this individual interview and acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form and the research project information sheet.”

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

“I agree to abide by the conditions set out in the information sheet and I ensure no harm will be done to any participant during this research.”

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____

Please fill in the following information. It will only be used in case you want to be sent a copy of interview notes so that you have the opportunity to make corrections.

Email:
.....

Appendix III

Interview guide

Hi, my name is Sara, and I am a master's student at the University of Groningen (Spatial Sciences). I am doing my master's thesis about the experiences and perceptions of place attachment of students to the city of Groningen. This interview is about your experiences and attachment to the city of Groningen. How do you see the city of Groningen? And do you feel attached to the city? This may sound rather abstract, but the questions in the interview are clear and I guide you through it.

This interview takes approximately one and a half hours. I use my telephone to record this interview. I do this, so I can focus to you and the interview. I treat this interview confidentially. This means that I only have access to these recordings and I only use the recordings for my master's thesis. Participating in this interview is voluntary. You can always ask questions, also during the interview, and if you don't want to answer a question, or you want to stop for a moment, please let me know. Have you read the informed consent, and do you agree? To clarify: you can participate in this interview anonymously or you can use a pseudonym.

Before we start the interview, I want to ask you if you have been able to take at least three photos of places in Groningen that mean a lot to you (in a positive sense)? In addition, have you been able to think about experiences in Groningen that ensured that you got a stronger attachment with Groningen? (milestones, love, study etc.) And last: Is everything clear or do you have any other questions about the interview?

Now we can start. The interview consists of five parts. First, I will ask you some general questions about yourself. Afterwards we are going to talk about your time when you came to live in Groningen, and how you experienced that. Further, about how you see and experience Groningen at this moment, and your attachment towards Groningen. Next, we will discuss the photos about the different places in Groningen and discuss them. And finally, your future plans with regard to Groningen.

ENGLISH VERSION

1. Introduction

General questions

[take note of gender]

How old are you?

What do you study? HBO/ university? Bachelor/Master?

Where do you live in Groningen?

How long do you live in Groningen?

Can you name the places in which you have lived before living in Groningen? (migration background)

- Length of residence

- With whom?

2. The transition to Groningen

Before I want to know about your attachment towards Groningen nowadays, we are going to talk about your experience of the transition to Groningen. [Attachment is a process, factor time]

Why did you move to Groningen?

Why did you choose the city of Groningen?

- which factors (study, family, friends, proximity, the city itself etc.)

What was your image of Groningen before you start to live here?

(stories of friends/family/ news etc)

- Have you visit Groningen before you lived here?

How did you experience the transition from your home to Groningen?

- Feeling/experiences
- How did it feel leaving home?
- Was it your own decision to live in Groningen?
- How did it feel to live in a city?
- How was it to adjust to Groningen? What factors contributed to this?
- Did you already know people in Groningen? (What did that mean to you?)

Home making / home sickness:

- What kind of place (student-dwelling, apartment, house etc)?
- Were you satisfied with this place?
- How did you make this place feel like a 'home'?
- What did you do to make yourself feel comfortable and at home in Groningen?
- Did you get other habits or routines while you stayed here? Were you trying to find old habits or routines here? Can you name them?
- Did you join any associations? (student- sport etc.)
- Where their things you find hard to get used to? What would you do to cope with these things?
- Homesickness
 - Did you get back to your former home a lot?
 - Did you ever had the feeling to go back?
 - Did you miss anything here in Groningen?

3. Living in Groningen

Now you told me something about your experiences of the transition to Groningen, we are going to talk about your attachment towards Groningen at the moment.

Person /Process

Are there any experiences in Groningen what leads to a stronger feeling towards the city?

o milestones, realizations (for example: achievements in your study etc.)

We cannot talk about your whole experience here in Groningen, but maybe there are a few experiences you want to share that developed an attachment towards Groningen? And why? (examples accomplishments in the study, new friends, a job, internship, personal development etc.)

Do you feel you developed yourself while being here? In what way?

- Has Groningen created new opportunities for you in live, or barriers?

Do you feel home in Groningen? Did it take long to feel home here?

- Have you moved in Groningen since you lived here?
If yes, Why? What kind of place do you live know?
- What do you perceive as home?
- What do you to make a place feel like home?
- Are you satisfied about the place where you live? How come?

- Do you care about your living environment? For example, if there is a lot of mess on your street, do you have the urge to clean it? Or do you feel bad about it?
- Do you know your neighbours? Do you have interaction with your neighbours?
- Do you think you can feel at home anywhere? Several places? Or just one? How come?
- Do you miss anything there in Groningen? Do you feel homesick in Groningen? Are you going home to your parents/birthplace etc a lot?
- Do you still do the same study? Do you like your study?
- Have you friends in Groningen?
- Do you feel part of a community? Is this important to you?
- Do you feel you can be yourself here? How come?
- Are you a member of an (student) association, sport club etc.?
- If yes, are you active? Does it play a big role in your life?
- Do you think they help you feeling home in Groningen?

Are you happy to be back in Groningen, when you were away (vacation, family etc.)? Why(not)? How does that come?

What kind of emotions do you feel when you think of Groningen?

-Do you feel positive about Groningen?

Do care about Groningen? For example, if something happened, such as the [news article] does it affect you?

Can you describe the city of Groningen in one or two sentences? What comes to mind when you think of Groningen?

- What is in your eyes typical for Groningen?

Can you identify yourself with Groningen? - Do you feel as a real “Grunninger”?

The city slogan of Groningen is: ‘Nothing tops Groningen’ Do you agree?

Do you feel like your image about Groningen have changed in the last years?

Do you have the feeling Groningen is a place where you belong?

-Why (not)? Is there a place where to you feel attached the most? How come?

What does Groningen mean to you?

Place

Next, we are going to talk about the places in Groningen. I have asked you to make minimal 3 pictures of places in Groningen where you feel attached to or are important to you (positive emotions/feelings). Let’s discuss the pictures.

- **Photo questions:**
- What is on the picture? Where is this place? (for the map of important places in Groningen)
- What does it mean to you?
- Why this place?
- What do you do there?
- For how long is this place important to you? And how come?
- How do you know this place?
- Do you go there often?

- Do you feel anything particular when you are at this place?
- Do you hear or smell anything particular when you are at this place?
- Is this place important to you, because of the built/nature environment or the social environment? Or both?
- What experiences in this place contributed to your feelings towards this place?
- Do you think this place is replaceable? Is its typical Groningen or do you think you can find it also in other cities/locations?
- Do you think this place contributed to your attachment to Groningen? Or do you feel like home?
- Do you miss this place when you are not there for a (long) time?

Places in Groningen:

What is the most important place in Groningen for you at this moment? Why? What is the valued quality of this place?

Do you feel attached to Groningen? Why? (Social environment, physical environment)

- Do you like the people in Groningen?
- Do you like the 'vibe' in Groningen?
- What do you think of the nature (parks etc.) in Groningen?
- What do you think of the architecture in Groningen?
- Are there nice 'hotspots' in Groningen in your eyes?
- Do you enjoy your time in Groningen?

Do you think the attachment towards places changed in the years you lived here? Were there different places you are attached to than nowadays?

Do you have the feeling that you feel stronger attached to Groningen than two years ago? How come?

Are there more places that you feel attached to? (Parents' home, vacation places, homes of friends?)

3. Future:

What are your future plans?

- Do you want to stay in Groningen? Why?
- Do you want to move? Why?
- Are there factors playing a crucial role in the decision of staying or moving?

Do you have advice for the city of Groningen to make this place more attractive for students?

Final sayings

Is there anything you would like to add? Thank the participant for the interview. End of the interview.