
Finding housing in an unfamiliar city: an international student experience

A case-study of Groningen's student housing market

Bachelor's Thesis
B.Sc. Spatial Planning and Design

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Abstract: In recent years, the university town of Groningen in Northern Netherlands has been in the spotlight for being demographically the youngest city in the country due to its student population. Housing precarity has been of concern to mainly international students and therefore needs to be researched. Ultimately, qualitative and quantitative research is carried out with the aim to explore their expectation, experiences, and cultural differences. The study finds out that the studied characteristics, although proven to be of influence in the housing market, are not prominent factors among the Groningen student housing sector which ultimately calls for further research.

Keywords: International students, housing precarity, student housing, cultural differences, experiences, Groningen



Source: Groningen Centre, Rink, D.(n.d.) Unsplash.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Student dwellings in Groningen under pressure

In recent years, the university town of Groningen in Northern Netherlands has been in the spotlight for being demographically the youngest city in the country due to its student population (Independent, 2011). Its growth in inhabitants from 171,000 to 231,000 between 1995 and 2019 can be partially underpinned by the growing educational institutions (CBS, 2019). Groningen has witnessed enrolment records at the University of Groningen (RuG) rising from 20.000 students in 1994 to over 31.000 students in 2019 (University of Groningen, 2018; Stadclickt, 2019) and the Hanze Hogeschool's numbers reaching 28,000 (Hanze, 2020). These are expected to continue rising during the coming years and the increase in the quantity of incoming students will ultimately lead to a shortage of suitable housing (Van Huijsduijnen et al. 2019; RTV Noord, 2019).

Housing precarity has been of previous concerns, mainly for the ten thousand international students that reside in the city of Groningen (Stadclickt, 2019). This seems to be a rather negligible number compared to the total population of the city, but a scarcity in student housing has led to tough competition over the last years resulting in especially foreign students being affected and having to live in tents for instance (DutchNews, 2018). Continuous movements and protests have been triggered by the housing shortage in front of both the main squares in Groningen and institutional buildings, with the most recent one taking place on the Grote Markt in February 2020 (RTVNoord, 2020). Cooperation between educational facilities within Groningen and the municipality have been formed in efforts to alleviate the pressure on the housing market. Both, the Hanze and the RuG participated in housing projects, notably a 250 individual container residence on the outskirts of Groningen (TheStand, 2018). A previous similar attempt to accommodate international students was done in 2016, where an unused refugee centre was opened for six-teen euros per night as a temporary solution (El País, 2017). This was received well by the Spanish newspaper "El País", who made headlines for calling out the insufficient housing opportunities for international students in the Netherlands (El País, 2017). However, even though Groningen was somewhat praised for their approach, the city still came under ridicule for leaving the situation very much unresolved, with activists calling out for more seriousness and equitable prices pertaining to the situation (RTVNoord, 2020).

Furthermore, as Calvo (2018) points out, much of the studentification literature focuses on international students' post-arrival to a city meaning that little attention has been devoted to students' experiences of finding accommodation beforehand. Similarly, Sage et al. (2012) indicate that the lacking information of student populations in the spatial and temporal dimensions attests to the deficient data available nowadays, which hinders further analyses on a socio-spatial level. Scrutinizing international students' experiences of finding housing in the urban environment of Groningen could hence complement the prevailing literary lack of knowledge in student populations and offer a spatial approach to the housing precarity.

Ultimately, if students do not succeed in finding a suitable home, they face staying in deplorable conditions as well as at an increased travel time to continue to attend university (Fang & van Liempt, 2020). In extreme cases, students unenroll from university and explore other options, the latter being the last resort (Ukrant, 2018).

1.2 Aim and Research question

The current housing situation in Groningen brings forth a rising problem that poses a risk to students, in particular exchange and international students staying in the city long-term. Sherry et al. (2010) introduce the notion of vulnerability, indicating that especially international students in a foreign environment have the biggest exposure to this issue. Additionally, they most probably lack of cultural capital, being the knowledge of the local housing market practice, and cultural compatibility with the housing market by not being able to speak the domestic language (Fang & van Liempt, 2020). These researchers highlighted that such factors possibly lead to complications when looking for housing, which on top of a housing shortage in Groningen will in the end most likely turn out as a difficult endeavour for internationals.

Hence, this research aims to examine the first experiences international students had in the housing market when finding and establishing an accommodation in the city of Groningen. By doing so, a deeper understanding of the process could enable institutions and the government to come up with solutions that genuinely benefit themselves and most importantly, benefit foreign students. Leading to the central research question:

How does a shortage of student housing in the city of Groningen influence international students' first experiences of finding accommodation?

To answer the research question, the following secondary questions will be asked:

- 1) In what way does a shortage of student housing affect the accessibility of finding accommodation for international students?
- 2) What are the expectations and the experiences of international students when looking for student housing in Groningen?
- 3) How do the cultural differences of international students influence the search for student housing in Groningen?
- 4) How can international students' experiences contribute to innovative measures for policymakers and planners seeking to improve student housing in Groningen?

1.3 Reading guide

This paper starts by outlining relevant concepts and theories in Section 2, Theoretical Framework, in vision of answering the first sub-question and setting the foundation for this research followed by a conceptual model and hypotheses. Next, Section 3 illustrates the quantitative and qualitative methodology employed in this research. This section elaborates on the research design and the data collection. Section 4 discusses the results of the empirical research combined with a theoretical approach in light of answering the second and third sub-question. Lastly, Section 5 will close this paper with a conclusion and answer the fourth sub-question with a policy-oriented solution to the housing precarity in Groningen and offer an outline for future research.

2. Theoretical framework on housing international students

This section clarifies the key concepts in this study, including international students, expectations, housing shortage and cultural differences, based on a literature discussion. A conceptual model explaining their relations will be presented at the end.

2.1 International students' housing expectations

Much attention has been devoted to research on international students, yet little has been investigated about the initial process of moving to a city and their experience prior to arriving (Calvo, 2018). This research will focus on international students, who are defined as students moving abroad to obtain a degree (whether Bachelors or Masters) and on exchange students arriving for a study abroad period of 3 to maximum 12 months (European Commission, 2020).

In the context of finding housing, international student's level of education is believed to influence the housing options available and therefore shape their expectations and experiences (Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015). While age is a determining factor for students' housing trajectories, their economic resources also play a crucial role. One of the main characteristics of international students is that they can be portrayed as a 'migratory elite' because they rank higher than the average HES (High Education Student) from a socio-economical and educational perspective (Calvo, 2018). Similarly, he states that international students have a higher purchase power and can be referred to as European middle-class or higher. This then often leads to higher expectations in regards to finding accommodation. Such factors could help understand the preferred housing types international students tend to have and following the experience they get from the housing market in Groningen. Verhetsel et al. (2016)'s study of student housing in Antwerp, Belgium, confirmed this prominent tendency of students having higher expectations and opting for individual housing over shared housing. Unlike previous generations, expectations for personal space have become a key attribute in the house finding process (Verhetsel et al. 2016).

Despite this increasing trend in Western societies, the most common housing typology for students in the Netherlands was a room with shared facilities as of 2019 with a majority of 55% residing in them (Van Huijsdijnen et al. 2019). On the other hand, Eikemo et al. (2010) discovered that students' housing expectations and preferences often depend on two things, experienced housing situation and social class. Students generally seemed to have high standards and expectations for housing due to their willingness of paying higher rents particularly for better wi-fi, scenic view and optimal location (Eikemo et al. 2010). Nonetheless, high purchase power is not necessarily a guarantee for housing in foreign students' host countries, especially if a shortage in student accommodation is causing tenants to compete for a dwelling (Magni et al. 2019), such as in Groningen.

2.2 Housing shortage

The present housing shortage in Groningen could be understood through a similar trend that took place in Trondheim, Norway where Eikemo et al. (2010) studied the phenomenon of high pressure on the private housing market with student demand being high. The high pressure resulted in, to name a few, low-standard and lack of accommodation, doubtful renting contracts, high rent and distance of dwellings from campus. Magni et al.'s study about student's choice of accommodation (2019) confirmed the existence of these problems and clarified it was a common occurrence in several countries, including the Netherlands, since the housing market mostly dictates the housing prices.

Dutch universities are by law not allowed to provide housing, yet they collaborate with housing associations to ensure international students can be accommodated (Fang & van Liempt, 2020). These are however unable to house all of them, which leads foreign students to look for housing in the private sector marked by a housing shortage. This creates a tense competition amongst domestic and international students, the later ones struggling the most to find and maintain housing (Magni et al. 2019; Fang & van Liempt, 2020). According to these researchers who recently studied international students' housing experience in Utrecht, this is due to several disadvantages foreign students face once entering the housing market in the Netherlands. Firstly, foreign students are generally inexperienced and uninformed about the housing market. Even though information about accommodation and legislation documents are accessible online, these might only be available in Dutch and therefore less suitable. Fang & Van Liempt (2020) furthermore argue that local housing market practices require tacit knowledge, which online information is unable to provide. International students are then left in difficulties as they have to find housing from their home country considering most of them need accommodation before arriving in the Netherlands as they do not have a local social network. Additional disadvantages such as language barrier, discrimination and cultural background (Fang & van Liempt, 2020) will be discussed in the following sub-section.

2.3 International students' cultural differences

Students pursue their studies in a foreign environment because it allows them to experience throughout their stay a different culture, expand their social networks and improve cross-cultural knowledge and skills (Sherry et al., 2010). In the context of finding housing in the Netherlands, language skills could be an asset from the beginning of an international student's stay as speaking the local language could facilitate the house finding process. More worrying, international students reported having been subjected to linguistic discrimination for not speaking Dutch and had therefore experienced rejection from both, landlords and Dutch students during the house finding process (Fang & van Liempt, 2020).

Moreover, Sherry et al. (2010)'s research on international students in the Midwestern U.S.A, indicates that the most common cultural differences were the difficulties of adapting to new cultural norms. Their interviews point out that most misunderstandings relate to religion and behaviour. An interviewee explained that students from the same cultural background would connect with more ease than someone with a different culture. Such examples proved to be persistent within the studied population and it can nevertheless not be ruled out that cultural differences (e.g. religion and culture) could potentially play a role in the choice or supply of student housing in Groningen. Following Sherry et al.'s study, we can assume that international communities in Groningen such as the Indonesian or German community are believed to peer-support each other in the house finding process as well.

The cultural difference of international students was furthermore described by Sherry et al. (2010) with notions such as vulnerability – a challenge students in host countries are exposed to. Notably, financial exploitation, which results in scams and illegitimacy of communication. Fang & van Liempt (2020) further added that landlords detain a powerful position on the market and could for instance ask for higher deposits as international students were less prone to “fighting for their rights” (2020, p.3) in fear of landlords denying or cancelling rental contracts. Thus, these researchers also highlighted the unequal relationship between landlord and student in a tense housing market situation such as in the Netherlands. Another aspect foreign students were found to be vulnerable to was ethnic discrimination through “foreign-sounding” names when applying for housing (Fang & van Liempt, 2020). While many applications are nowadays digitalized through websites and written emails, field studies in the housing market were carried out by Auspurg et al. (2018) acknowledging that ethnic minorities

were less likely to be addressed and invited to viewings. All of which, could indeed cause international students' accessibility to housing in Groningen to be difficult and challenging.

2.4 Conceptual model

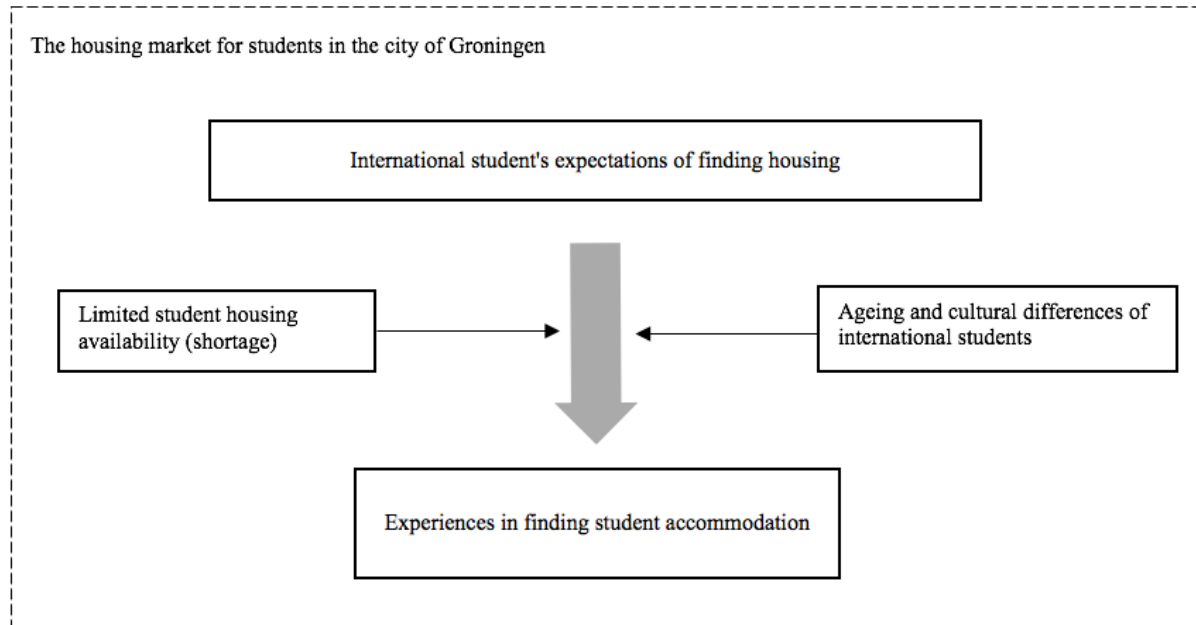


Figure 1: Conceptual model of the studied variables and their influences in Groningen's housing market

The visual representation, depicted as *Figure 1*, shows the link and potential influence of the variables studied in this research. International students arrive in Groningen with *expectations of finding housing*. Their house finding process is influenced by *the limited availability of student housing* in the city and *foreign student's cultural background and age*. The concept of *experiences in finding student accommodation* is at the end of the model as the intermediary variables determine what international students' experiences in the Groningen housing market will be.

2.5 Hypotheses

Based on the previously discussed theory and the conceptual model that has been established as *Figure 1*, the resulting hypotheses can be laid out:

- Firstly, international students' choice of housing is limited in Groningen which causes them to take any type of student accommodation.
- Secondly, the cultural difference of international students influences the choice of accommodation and narrows down the scope of housing.
- Thirdly, the age of international students influences the resulting experiences of finding accommodation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research approach

The nature of this research is explanatory with the aim to find out what international students' experiences in the student housing market are related to a housing shortage in Groningen. Thus, empirical research will be carried out. *Figure 2* frames the methodology applied to this research. The research is divided into three sections consisting of firstly, a literature review for the theoretical question. Secondly, applied qualitative and quantitative methods for the empirical questions and lastly, an explanatory section for the last sub-question which is planning- and policy-related. *Table 1* (see Appendix A) furthermore lays out the details of the research design.

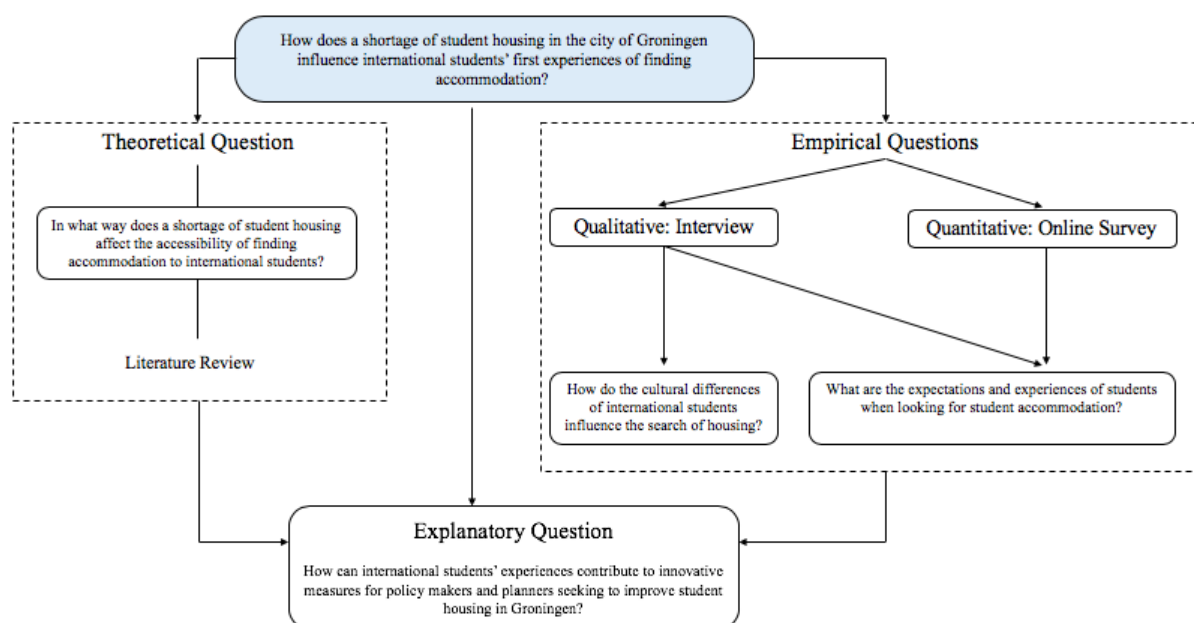


Figure 2: Representation of the research design and the methodology applied to answer the research- and sub-questions.

3.2 Research method 1: Literature review

The first sub-question aims to explain how a shortage of housing influences the housing sector for international students when they are entering the market. Thus, secondary data through a literature review is collected and key notions such as international students, housing shortage and cultural differences are defined and analysed. The literature brings the concepts into perspective for this specific research (Punch, 2014). The academic literature used is retrieved from search engines such as Google Scholar, Smartcat and articles' bibliography. The latter one is relevant for this research as only a few articles have addressed international student's experiences related to the housing market (Fang & van Liempt, 2020).

3.3 Research method 2: Quantitative and qualitative data collection

The empirical questions aim to discover international students' experiences and expectations, and the role of cultural differences during the house finding process in Groningen. Therefore, primary data is collected in form of an online survey (quantitative) and

in-depth interviews (qualitative). A mixed-method enables to combine the strengths of qualitative and quantitative research while balancing out their weaknesses (Punch, 2014). While the survey quantifies international students' experiences and expectations, the interviews focus on cultural differences by providing insightful reasonings that the survey is unable to do. Additionally, the target groups surveyed were incoming exchange students and international students residing in Groningen. The interviews however, were conducted with experts related to the student housing market in Groningen, such as real estate agents and a policymaker from an educational institution. This further explains the added value of using triangulation since respondents and interviewees were from different settings and thus, offer complementary perspectives for this research.

Investigating international student's experiences through an online questionnaire is deemed the most appropriate and convenient approach for an international population (Sherry et al. 2010), especially in times of Covid-19. Secondly, international students need to be addressed sensitively due to cultural differences to avoid sampling biases (Hughes, H. 2004). The survey (see Appendix B) consisted of 28 questions and five sections: personalia, expectations, experiences, cultural difference and reflection. It was carried out by an online platform Qualtrics, and distributed between May 21st and June 7th. Participants were recruited through the researcher's network by initially sharing the survey on WhatsApp, Instagram and Messenger. A so-called snowball effect was initiated, which led to the researcher's contacts forwarding the survey to their contacts and so forth. The survey was then posted on an open Facebook group used by international and exchange students in Groningen (see Appendix B.1). Since international students were the target group for the survey, a question on the country of origin was introduced which enabled to exclude participants who selected the Netherlands as this would bias the results. The survey would then close with an explanation (see Appendix B).

This paper furthermore draws on three in-depth interviews undertaken in June 2020 (see Appendix C) via phone, skype and email. Here, qualitative research is a suitable approach because it enables to deepen and investigate sensitive topics such as cultural differences with smaller samples (Burt et al. 2009).

The three interviews were sampled to achieve variation in expertise from the housing sector. Namely, by interviewing a policymaker from an educational institution and two real estate agents from different housing companies in Groningen. The intention is to gain knowledge about third parties' perception on international student's housing situation. Real estate agents from the housing market often are intermediate between landlords and students, and can offer substantial insight into cultural differences amongst the studied population. Alongside with a policymaker, knowledge on future solutions for the housing market in times of shortages can be provided as they are involved with legislation and regulations.

Two candidates were interviewed via phone. The third candidate required for the interview to be sent via E-mail (see Interview 3), which limited the researcher's possibilities to ask additional questions and to explain them if not understood by the participant. As a result, the interviewee's answers were broad with little information. Partial responses are indeed a major disadvantage mail questionnaires can cause (Burt et al. 2009).

3.4 Ethical considerations

During the data collection, two ethical issues arose, namely anonymity and confidentiality (Clifford, 2016). Both aspects were addressed at the beginning of the survey and the interview (see appendices B and C). Gaining approval from the community the data was collected from,

was indispensable. An explicit reference in the introduction of the survey was made to the final data being perhaps used or shared with third parties, such as policymakers and academic researchers in Groningen. By participating in the survey, respondents indicated consenting and understanding the scientific purpose of the research and the use of collected data. They were also informed about the results of the data being stored within the community of the University of Groningen. For the interviews, permission was asked to audio-record them in order to transcribe them. Any disclosing personal information from the interviews was removed. The researcher furthermore abided by the three key principles of ethical behavior: justice, beneficence/non-maleficence and with respect when conducting the interviews (Clifford, 2016).

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected dataset from the survey comprises 28 responses from 194 participants. Four participants however indicated being from the Netherlands which resulted in them being excluded as explained previously. This ends up with 190 valid participants. Each question had to be answered by the participant. The number of participants being over the statistical threshold of 30 respondents, allows the dataset to be analysed with SPSS. However, with an international student population in Groningen close to ten thousand, there are limitations to the representation of the data having been carried out on 190 internationals instead. Similarly, in line with the demographics of Groningen's student population, females and the sub-groups of Germans and Luxembourgish students are over-represented in this study. This is most likely due to the snowball effect used by the researcher's network when distributing the survey. Additionally, it is important to highlight that students' answers are based solely on their first housing experience in Groningen. There is no indication of when their experience dates from. Nonetheless, a majority (91,6%) of respondents indicated being between 18-25 years old. This allows to estimate that their first experience took place in recent years when the housing precarity of student accommodation in Groningen was already present and validates the purpose of this research. Nonetheless, the findings should still be nuanced and treated in compliance with the purpose of this research.

To answer the second sub-question: *“What are the expectations and the experiences of international students when looking for student housing in Groningen?”* descriptive statistics on SPSS will be employed to present international student's responses on what their expectations and experiences were since most questions are nominal variables. This allows for a descriptive analysis of the variables supported by the interviews. Possible connections between, based on the theoretical chapter will furthermore be explored.

For the third sub-question: *“How do the cultural differences of international students influence the search for student housing in Groningen?”* the dataset will be split into two groups and a one-way ANOVA will be applied twice.

The choice for this test specifically is due to a significant participation of German students ($n=49$) in the survey. One of the interviewees from the university pointed out that the German community of students followed very similar patterns to Dutch students in the context of finding housing in Groningen. This raised the inquiry as to whether the presence of German students would bias the results, and especially question nr.24 in the survey *“How would you rate your first experience of finding accommodation in Groningen?”*. This question offers a Likert scale (0-10) and is therefore an interval scale and hence, a dependent variable in a one-way ANOVA. In combination with question nr. 3 *“Where are you from?”* which is a nominal variable (=independent variable), the combination of both allow for a one-way ANOVA. If the

result turns out to be significant, the German population can be isolated from the remaining international students ($n=141$) which are then analysed separately to .

Curious to know what you will write here, because from the text it is still unclear which relationships will be tested concretely and why.

Both sub-questions are furthermore corroborated by the three interviews which were audio-recorded and transcribed. As mentioned previously, the third interview was filled out by the participant. Both interviews lasted between 9-20 min. The transcribed interviews were then analysed on ATLAS.ti and inductively coded.

4. Results

This section will present the results of the survey combined with the interviews to answer the second and then the third sub-question. This section is structured into these segments: sample description, expectations and experiences. cultural differences and lastly, universities' role in student housing.

4.1 Sample description

Participants ($N=190$) from 53 countries on a global scale completed the survey with 64 candidates being male (33,7%) and 126 females (66.3%). While the majority of respondents were women, both the RUG and the Hanze reported having a rather equal enrolment rate of both genders (with a higher tendency of women) which indicates that men are largely underrepresented in this study (Hanze, 2018; RUG, 2020).

Furthermore, a large majority of the respondents ($n=137$) were from EU/EFTA countries, while the remaining 53 respondents reported being from countries in Europe, North- and South America, Africa, Asia and Oceania (see Appendix B.1). Not surprisingly, the largest share of students in this study derive from countries such as Germany ($n=49$), United Kingdom ($n=12$), Romania ($n=10$) and Indonesia ($n=8$). A figure which is precisely in line with the provenance of most international students in Groningen's educational institutions (CBRE, 2015; RUG, 2020). However, the survey also recorded a prominent student population from Luxembourg ($n=11$) and Ireland ($n=8$), which can be understood as a bias linked to the distribution of the survey as explained previously.

Exchange students and international students staying in Groningen in the long-term accounted for 31 (16,3%) respectively 159 (83,7%). The most frequent age group was between 22-25 years old with 96 participants, followed by 78 students between 18-21 and lastly, 16 students being over 26 years old.

To scrutinize the impact of the student housing shortage in Groningen, participants were asked whether their first accommodation was located within or outside the city. 177 students lived within the city limits, while 13 students indicated living outside amongst which 8 were unable to find accommodation in the city. Despite this minority representing a mere 4,2%, it nevertheless stresses the willingness of them to resort to further options with increased commuting time to attend university as argued by Fang & van Liempt (2020).

4.2 Expectations and experiences

Research upon student's housing expectations in Western societies led to the premise that shared housing, i.e. any accommodation that does not require sharing facilities, was becoming

less prominent (Verhetsel et al. 2016) as international students were considered more affluent (Calvo, 2018). This assumption was however confuted by this study. While 41 students initially expected to be accommodated in a studio or a flat, 149 students were opting for shared residences with multiple people or student housing from the start of their house finding process. The outcome was similar to students' expectations: 28 students ended up in a studio/apartment, 9 students in "other" types of housing and 153 in shared accommodation making up 80,5% out of the totality. The presence of student housing such as SSH in Groningen (n=80) over shared flats with multiple tenants (n=73) is surprising, considering housing associations are limited and cannot comply with the high demand (Fang & van Liempter, 2020):

They [students] still expect us to have a room for them available when they come here. (...) The only thing is they don't have as much room as we need for all our international students. (Interviewee no.1)

This trend for first-year students in Groningen can however be explained by the availability of such rooms being online and oriented towards an international market (Fang & van Liempter, 2020):

So Non-EU students, they depend on housing provided by SSH. SSH is a corporation we have a contract with to provide housing especially for international students. (Interviewee no.1)

Participants were furthermore asked to allocate their intended budget for rent on a monthly basis and consequently also, the amount spent in rent in the end. Fig.3 and Fig.4 display the amounts (in €).

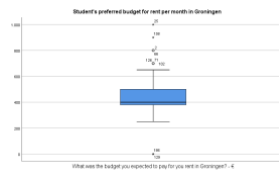


Fig.3 Student's expected budget for rent on a monthly basis in Groningen

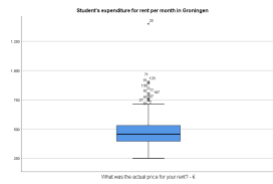


Fig.4 Student's rent for accommodation on a monthly basis in Groningen

Students on average paid higher rents than expected. While the average rent wanting to be spent was 446,3€/month, students ended up paying 485,5€ (see Appendix B.1 Table 3). According to Fang & van Liempt (2020), this is not unusual. In fact, as the start of the academic year approaches students are less reluctant in paying more (if possible) to secure accommodation. Their study furthermore underlined that students exposed to an unfamiliar housing market often chose a temporary dwelling, until they accustom themselves to the surroundings and are able to have better insight into the housing market (Eikemo et al. 2010). As such, the first hypothesis will be tested. Students were asked whether their first accommodation was a temporary option until they found one according to their requirements and standards. Contrary to the above-mentioned statement, the majority (56,8%) of the respondents denied it, which indicates that despite a student housing shortage they were able to find a dwelling deemed suitable to them.

Before continuing with international student's experiences in the housing market, it is noteworthy to highlight the presence of the German population in this study. The German community makes up for the majority of international students in the Netherlands and in Groningen (CBRE, 2015). They additionally have an elaborate network which facilitates their housing experiences:

German students, although international students (...) usually find their way on the housing market the way Dutch students do. So they don't depend on international housing (...) as other Europeans do.

Most Germans who come here live relatively close (...) across the border (...) they come for a day or a weekend and they start early (...) so they have their own network. (Interviewee no.1)

A 10-point Likert Scale (Q.24) in the survey asked respondents to rate their overall experience of finding accommodation. According to these statements, Germans can be assumed to have a different experience in finding housing than the remaining international population due to their cultural and geographical proximity to the Netherlands. As a result, the one-way ANOVA proved to be highly significant ($p = 0,012$) which indicates that the given rating between Germans ($n=49$) and Non-Germans ($n=141$) are not equal (see Fig 5).

ANOVA

How would you rate your first experience of finding accommodation in Groningen? 0 = the lowest; 10 = the highest.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	458,714	52	8,821	1,647	,012
Within Groups	733,965	137	5,357		
Total	1192,679	189			

Fig.5 Significant test of one-way ANOVA indicating the bias of international students' experiences due to presence of German students

The exact difference between both groups could be determined by a Post-Hoc test which however cannot be run for less than three groups. However, Germans having statistically a different experience leads to them being excluded from the following analysis on international's experiences. The dataset worked with will be n=141 from now on.

Students' experiences in the housing market are very much shaped by the expectations and the housing trajectory they undergo once they are exposed to finding accommodation in an unfamiliar market (Fang & van Liempt, 2020). As such, almost 87% out of the 141 students were able to find a dwelling before the start of the academic in Groningen. 70% were able to find a place before arriving to Groningen while only 17% were able to once they arrived in the city. These figures can be supported by the prominence of students using online tools to find accommodation such as the university website, social media platforms (e.g. Facebook), word-of-mouth and lastly housing websites. While the average student experienced a searching time of 2 weeks to 1 month (n=68), 38 students spent over 2 months looking for accommodation. These also included 19 students who unfortunately were unable to be housed before the start of the academic period. They had to resort to alternative options with the most popular one being staying at a friend's place, followed by hostels and accommodation provided by university. While university is said to provide alternative options for students in need, few seem to be unaware of it:

We also provide peak accommodation. So, if you haven't found anything, there's always a place to stay for the first couple of days or weeks. So, you can find something in Groningen. (...) We had three location for students to stay (...) from August until October. For two months. (Interviewee No.1)

On the other hand, surfing on the internet needs to be done carefully. It is not seldom for international students to fall victim to fake announcements and advertisement. While a majority of students make use of it, 47 reported having encountered false offers of rooms and scamming websites.

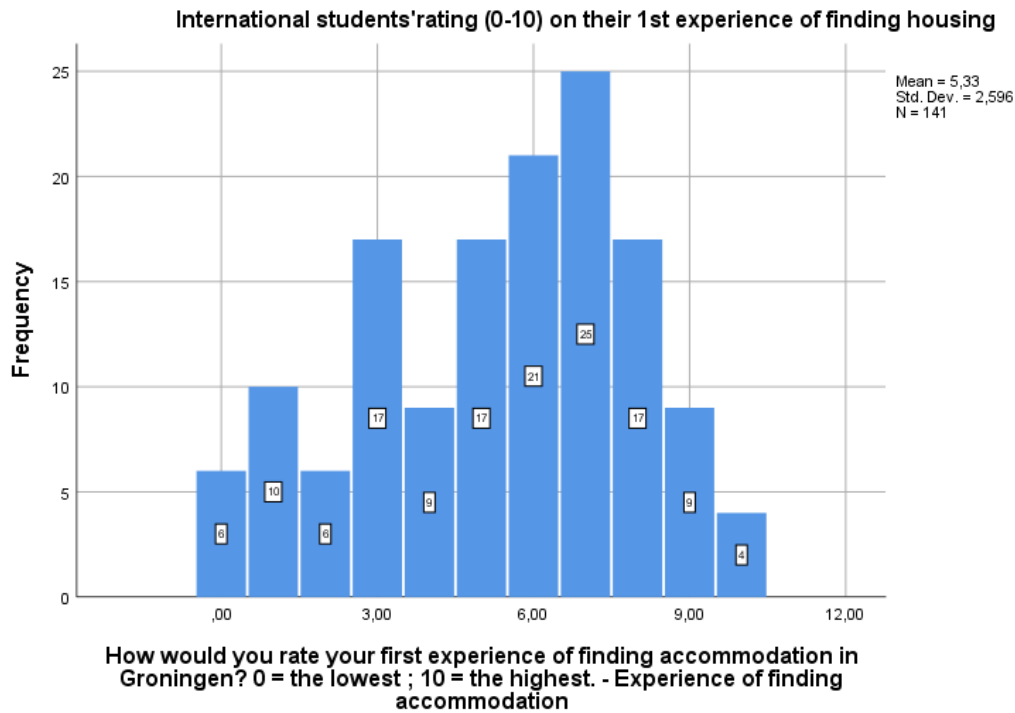


Fig.6 Rating of the house finding experience in Groningen

The overall rating of international students in the student housing market in Groningen can be considered to be two-sided. While the mean indicates a rating of 5,33 out of 10, the histogram ranges with opinions on both sides of the spectrum. Student's experiences can be qualified as having been either "good" and "bad", with a majority lying in between.

4.3 Cultural differences

Students' cultural differences have been deemed as a determining factor and barrier in the context of the housing market in the Netherlands as alluded to previously. Few students nevertheless faced language barrier issues with landlords or local citizens, with 37 stating "yes" compared to "104". Their cultural background did not seem to be a major culprit or hinderness in finding accommodation. Some international students however raised awareness about digital discrimination on social platforms with publications stating that rooms would only be given to local students or even only to students of the same gender. This clearly limits the availability of housing for international students.

4.4 Universities' role in student housing

Even though, most students were able to find housing before the start of the academic period. A astonishing majority reported not receiving enough information from educational institutions and wished for them to help out even more. Thus, 129 out of 141 students would have preferred universities to provide housing for new-comers such as exchange- and first-year students.

Do you believe university provides enough useful information about student accommodation?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	37	26,2	26,2	26,2
	No	104	73,8	73,8	100,0
Total		141	100,0	100,0	

Fig.7 Lacking information by educational institutions related to the market.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the expectations and experiences of international students exposed to the student housing market in Groningen for the first time. Although high expectations and rather positive experiences have been recorded, the overall rated experience by the studied population was deemed to be average. While cultural differences are proven to play a role in the decision-making for international students in the housing market, no clear evidence was recorded. Language barriers and cultural differences such as religion and origin were not present factors in determining housing for international students. Thus, further investigation with bigger samples need to be carried out in field.

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Appendix A – Layout of the research design

Table 1: Detailed research design and methodology

Questions	Type of information	Moment of retrieval	Source	How to obtain the data	Documentation method	How to analyse the data
1) In what way does housing shortage affect international students?	Insights from existing literature	March-May	Electronic academic database	Academic research engines	Document archive	Literature review
2) What are the expectations and the experiences of international students when looking for student housing?	Quantitative - responses from interviewees: - Data (e.g. country of origin; type of student).	Beginning of May-End of May	Retrieved from international students living and studying in Groningen at the time of research.	Online survey/questionnaire	Digital	Statistically with SPSS
3) How do the cultural differences of international students influence the search for student housing?	Qualitative: Information given by the interviewees	May-June	Retrieved from international students living and studying in Groningen at the time of research.	In-depth Interview	Recording & written down	Transcript and coding on atlas.ti
4) How can international students' experiences contribute to innovative measures for policy makers and planners seeking to improve student housing in Groningen?	Conclusive analysis from the results of the empirical questions, literature review and document analysis (e.g. policy).	June	Retrieved from the preliminary findings and from an electronic database	Policy documentation on student housing combined with the data and results of the research	Written down as content of the thesis	Analysis by combining the results of the research & literature reviews

Appendix B – Online survey

The online survey was created and shared through Qualtrics, an online platform that enables to create and send surveys on digital devices including smartphones (Qualtrics, 2020). This survey is composed of 28 questions divided into six different sections about the following topic: “*The 1st experience of finding accommodation for international students in Groningen*”.

The first section introduces the participant to the topic, the purpose, the researcher’s contact and an explanation on the use of the participant’s data. It is followed by these sections in order: Personalia, Expectations, Experiences, Cultural Differences and Reflection. For this particular survey, four types of answer selections were used: Single answer (shown as circles or a dropdown list), multiple answers (shown as checkboxes), text-based answers (shown as single lines) and a rating scale (from 0 to 10).

Furthermore, among the 28 questions, 5 questions were set up on Qualtrics to only be displayed if the participant selected a specific answer in the previous question (e.g. Question 6 only comes up if Question 5 was answered by “*Outside the city of Groningen*”). These questions are marked by a blue box in the survey with an explanation. Next, if Question 3 was answered by “Netherlands”, the participant was forwarded to the end of the survey with the following message:

Thank you for participating in this survey! You seem to have selected the Netherlands as your home country. This research is however only dedicated to investigating the experience of international students (non-Dutch) in Groningen as put in the introduction. The survey was therefore drawn to an end. Thank you for your understanding and your willingness to participate.

Start of the survey:

Introduction

Welcome! This survey will unfold the first experiences of international students and their search of student housing in Groningen. This survey takes about 7 minutes. Your input is highly valuable as academic institutions and policy makers in Groningen can make use of it to further investigate and improve the experience of international students when looking for housing in Groningen! You would additionally be aiding me in completing my study project successfully. If you have any questions, concerns or comments, please feel free to contact me by E-mail: m.r.lavana.perez@student.rug.nl

Informed consent

By participating, you agree that the answers will be used and stored for the purpose of this research only on the platform of the University of Groningen. The results may be shared with academic researchers and policy makers of Groningen. All responses are anonymous and confidential. This survey is on a voluntary basis.

Personalia

Q.1 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

Q.2 What is your age?

- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26+

Q.3 Where do you come from?

▼ Afghanistan (1) ... Zimbabwe (1357)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q3 = Netherlands

Q.4 What is your student status?

- Exchange student at an institution in Groningen
- Foreign student following a degree at an institution in Groningen

Q.5 Where is/was your first accommodation located?

- In the city of Groningen
- Outside the city of Groningen

Display Question 6 only:

If Q.5 = Outside the city of Groningen

Q.6 Do you live outside of Groningen because you could not find housing within the city limits?

- Yes
- No

Expectation-related questions

The following questions are based on your first expectations of finding accommodation in Groningen.

Q.7 What type of housing were you initially looking for?

- Studio
- Shared flat with multiple people
- Student housing (e.g. SSH)
- Apartment
- Other(s): _____

Q.8 What was the budget you expected to pay for you rent in Groningen? _____ €

Q.9 What type of accommodation did you end up getting?

- Studio
- Shared flat with multiple people
- Student housing (e.g. SSH)
- Apartment
- Other(s): _____

Q.10 What was the actual price for your rent? _____ €

Experience-related questions

The following questions are based on your first experiences of finding accommodation in Groningen.

Q.11 Please select, if you were able to find accommodation:

- Before coming to the city of Groningen
- Before the start of the academic year
- After the start of the academic year

Display Question 12 only:

If Q11 = After the start of the academic year

Q.12 Please select the option(s) you were housed at until you found an accommodation:

- Accommodation provided by the university (e.g. tent)
- Friend's place
- Couch surfing
- Hostel
- Other types of accommodation: _____

Display Question 13 only:

If Q11 = After the start of the academic year

Q.13 How much time did it take you to find accommodation after the start of the academic year?

- 1-3 weeks
- 1 month
- Over 1 month

Q.14 How much time did you spend looking for accommodation?

- 2 weeks – 1 month
- 1-2 months
- 2-3 months
- Over 3 months

Q.15 Please select the search engine(s) you used to look for accommodation:

- Housing websites (e.g. Kamernet, Funda)
- Local housing agencies
- Word-of-mouth (e.g. friends, family, acquaintances)
- Social media (e.g. Facebook)
- The Student Hotel
- Through an association (e.g. study, student, sport)
- Through the university website
- Other(s): _____

Q.16 How did you find accommodation in the end?

- Housing websites (e.g. Kamernet, Funda)
- Local housing agencies
- Word-of-mouth (e.g. friends, family, acquaintances)
- Social media (e.g. Facebook)
- The Student Hotel
- Through an association (e.g. study, student, sport)
- Through the university website
- Other(s): _____

Q.17 How many viewings (if any) did you attend before finding your accommodation?
_____ viewing(s)

Q.18 How much money did you invest in finding accommodation? (e.g. for housing websites, housing agencies)
_____ €

Q.19 Were you subjected to fake offers and websites concerning rooms/houses?

- Yes
- No

Q.20 Did you choose your first accommodation as a temporary option until you found one that met your standards and requirements?

- Yes
- No

Cultural differences related questions

Q.21 Was the language barrier an issue for finding accommodation in Groningen?

- Yes
- No

*Display Question 22 only:
If Q21 = Yes*

Q.22 What issue(s) did you encounter?

Q.23 If applicable, please select the reason(s) you have been turned away for during the process of searching accommodation:

- Being a student
- Linguistic reasons
- Gender discrimination
- Age
- Cultural background
- Money
- Other: _____
- Not applicable to me.

Reflection

Q.24 How would you rate your first experience of finding accommodation in Groningen?
0 = the lowest; 10 = the highest.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Q.25 Do you believe university provides enough useful information about student accommodation?

- Yes
- No

Display Question 26 only:

If Q25 = No

Q.26 Please explain why not:

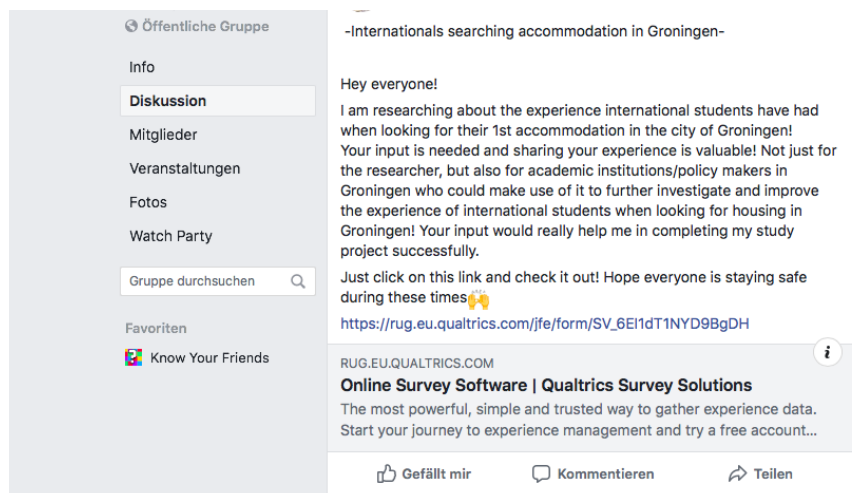
Q.27 Do you think university should provide housing for exchange- and first-year students?

- Yes
- No

Q.28 Are there any further points of interest you would like to address in relation to student housing for international students?

End of the survey.

B.1 Example of the distribution



Screenshot of an example showing: 1) explanation and motivation of filling out the survey. 2) how it was distributed in a public group on a social media platform such as Facebook.

B.2 SPSS – Tables and Figures

Table 2: List of countries by participants in the survey

		List of Countries			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Albania	1	,5	,5	,5
	Australia	1	,5	,5	1,1
	Austria	5	2,6	2,6	3,7
	Belgium	2	1,1	1,1	4,7
	Botswana	1	,5	,5	5,3
	Brazil	1	,5	,5	5,8
	Bulgaria	4	2,1	2,1	7,9
	Colombia	4	2,1	2,1	10,0
	Costa Rica	1	,5	,5	10,5
	Croatia	1	,5	,5	11,1
	Denmark	3	1,6	1,6	12,6
	Ecuador	1	,5	,5	13,2
	Egypt	1	,5	,5	13,7
	Estonia	1	,5	,5	14,2
	Finland	5	2,6	2,6	16,8
	France	2	1,1	1,1	17,9
	Georgia	1	,5	,5	18,4
	Germany	49	25,8	25,8	44,2
	Ghana	1	,5	,5	44,7
	Honduras	2	1,1	1,1	45,8
	Hungary	1	,5	,5	46,3
	India	4	2,1	2,1	48,4
	Indonesia	8	4,2	4,2	52,6
	Ireland	8	4,2	4,2	56,8
	Italy	3	1,6	1,6	58,4
	Japan	1	,5	,5	58,9
	Lebanon	1	,5	,5	59,5
	Lithuania	3	1,6	1,6	61,1
	Luxembourg	11	5,8	5,8	66,8
	Morocco	1	,5	,5	67,4
	Mozambique	1	,5	,5	67,9
	New Zealand	2	1,1	1,1	68,9
Norway	2	1,1	1,1	70,0	
Peru	1	,5	,5	70,5	
Poland	1	,5	,5	71,1	
Portugal	4	2,1	2,1	73,2	

Romania	10	5,3	5,3	78,4
Russian Federation	2	1,1	1,1	79,5
Saint Kitts and Nevis	1	,5	,5	80,0
Saint Lucia	2	1,1	1,1	81,1
Saudi Arabia	4	2,1	2,1	83,2
Slovenia	1	,5	,5	83,7
South Africa	2	1,1	1,1	84,7
South Korea	2	1,1	1,1	85,8
Spain	6	3,2	3,2	88,9
Sweden	1	,5	,5	89,5
Switzerland	2	1,1	1,1	90,5
Thailand	1	,5	,5	91,1
Turkey	1	,5	,5	91,6
Ukraine	2	1,1	1,1	92,6
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	12	6,3	6,3	98,9
Viet Nam	1	,5	,5	99,5
Zimbabwe	1	,5	,5	100,0
Total	190	100,0	100,0	

Table 3: Budget for rent expected/spent.

Descriptives of Question 8 and Question 10

		Statistic	Std. Error
What was the budget you expected to pay for you rent in Groningen? - €	Mean	430,0526	8,24599
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	413,7866
		Upper Bound	446,3186
	5% Trimmed Mean	423,4503	
	Median	400,0000	
	Variance	12919,309	
	Std. Deviation	113,66314	
	Minimum	,00	
	Maximum	1000,00	
	Range	1000,00	
	Interquartile Range	127,50	
	Skewness	1,036	,176
	Kurtosis	6,532	,351
	What was the actual price for your rent? - €	Mean	485,5295
95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Lower Bound	463,6594
		Upper Bound	507,3997
5% Trimmed Mean		473,0153	
Median		455,0000	
Variance		23355,066	
Std. Deviation		152,82364	
Minimum		250,00	
Maximum		1400,00	
Range		1150,00	
Interquartile Range		138,75	
Skewness		1,911	,176
Kurtosis		6,545	,351

Appendix C - Interviews

In Appendix C, the interviews for this research will be presented. Firstly, the general layout of the interview will be displayed which the researcher used as a guideline when conducting them. It will then be preceded by Interview No.1, Interview No.2 and Interview No.3.

General layout of the Interview

Introduction

There are a number of important issues to cover in the introduction such as:

- Introduce myself as a student from the RUG,
- Explain the topic and the purpose of the interview (being for my Bachelor's project),
- Explain the structure of the interview,
- Participation guidelines:
 - 1) Anonymous and confidential. They will be used for the purpose of this research within the University of Groningen community and may be shared with other academic researchers/policy makers in Groningen.
 - 2) Free participation also means that participants are "allowed" to change their minds and withdraw.
 - 3) Participants have to be given the right to view the results of the research.

- 4) Ask the participants for consent on whether they allow me to record the interview for further analysis of the results.

Main Body

Contextual question:

- 1) How do you perceive the situation of student housing for international students in Groningen?

Cultural differences:

- 2) To what extent is the Groningen housing market able to serve the diversity of housing requests by international students?
- 3) Have you experienced international students being in any advantage or disadvantage when it comes to searching student housing as they are from abroad? (please provide arguments for your answer).

Improvement/Solutions to student housing shortage:

- 4) As seen in the news, the university and the Gemeente of Groningen are working on solutions to increase the availability of student housing:
 - a) Do you know of any projects built so far that have been successful/unsuccessful for international students on the housing market in Groningen?
 - b) Which ones?
 - c) Why are/were they successful or unsuccessful?
- 5) How can educational institutions, such as the RUG or the Hanze, assist international students when looking for housing?
- 6) What measures can the Gemeente of Groningen use in the housing market to approach the shortage of student housing?

Aspects to address at the end of the survey

This is where the interview is drawn to a close. Certain things need to be addressed:

- 1) Anything else the participant would like to mention? Feels they should say before we end the interview?
- 2) Ask if they have relevant documents that could contribute to the research.
- 3) Ascertain how to keep in touch if the interviewee is interested in receiving the research results.
- 4) Thank them for participating.

Interview No. 1

In this interview, the interviewer is referred to as 'A:', and the interviewee shall be noted as 'B:'. This interview took place on June 8th, 2020.

B: Hello, good afternoon.

A: Hello, nice to meet you. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I will start off by running through the formalities.

B: Sure, no problem.

A: This interview is for research purposes. It's for my thesis at the RUG which is about the experience of finding housing in Groningen for international students. The interview will be anonymous and the information will also be confidential. The data collected will be seen only by my supervisor and perhaps by academic researchers and policy makers from the RUG. It's also free participation which means that you are free to terminate the interview whenever you want. Do you have any questions so far?

B: No, it's clear.

A: Also, do you mind if I record the phone call so I can write the interview down when analyzing it later on?

B: No, that's not a problem.

A: Okay so, the interview is divided in 3 sections, the first one is a general question, so that would be: how do you perceive/See the situation of international students in Groningen when looking for housing?".

B: It used to be pretty hard to find housing, especially for internationals. But since last year, maybe one and a half years ago, lots of new accommodations came on the market. So the market is definitely easier to find something. Also, there are not as many international students as there were in 2018, which was really the top of the numbers of international students. So, it's become a bit easier, but still it's quite difficult for them to find something.

A: Okay, as you mentioned as well in 2018 there was a peak. That's when I believe some students had to live in tents on campus if I'm not wrong. That was one of the solutions provided by the city.

B: Yes, that sounds worse than what it was. (laugh).

A: Okay, so you still think nowadays is rather better than back then but the situation still needs to be improved in that way?

B: Yes. We're working on improvement, so every year there are more new accommodations available on the market. So that helps to get a better market and we also are getting better at communication towards international students. Expectations are, I think, more real. We're also providing peak accommodation. So, if you haven't found anything, there's always a place to stay for the first couple of days or weeks. So, you can find something in Groningen.

A: So, in that sense, if a student comes up to you or to the university and says "I wasn't able to find anything", the university/the RUG will provide housing for a certain period until they (students) find something?

B: Yes, we did that in combination with the Hanze Hogeschool and the municipality.

A: Is that already in place or is it going to start from the next academic year?

B: No, there's been peak accommodation the last couple of years. The last year we had three locations where students could stay. From August 9th until October 9th. For two months.

A: That leads to my next question, in that regards, do you believe that there's certain projects that have been built so far in the city which have been successful or unsuccessful for international students depending on how you perceive it?

B: Well there's been a lot of accommodation, not everything is especially for international students. I think most of the accommodation is for young people in general. So also for students, but not specifically international students. But anyway that helps in the total market because if someone moves to this new accommodation then his/her room becomes available for other students. So, there's an effect, a kind of a flow, and one room leads to another and leads to another. So in the end, all the accommodation that is built is good for students and therefore for international students.

A: Okay great. In that regard, you said you've been providing this one solution in cooperation with the Gemeente and the Hanze/Rug for peak accommodation: are there other measures that educational institutions could take for international students if they are in such situations of not being able to find housing?

B: No, because where we differ in the Netherlands from other countries, is that universities is not allowed by law to invest in housing. So, we don't have any housing ourselves. We are depending on market, on private parties to provide something like that or housing corporations. They provide cheaper housing for people who need/who don't have an income as high as needed for their own property.

A: So, in that sense, if the university is not allowed to step into the market, are there any specific measures that the Gemeente could take to facilitate the market for international students?

B: The role of the university first is to communicate with students about the housing situations in Groningen. That's an important role because what we're trying to do is to send all students from the moment they start, they're interested in studying in Groningen, we start communicating about the housing situations in Groningen saying it's difficult to find something, start early, come early. So, you find something easier. That's what we're trying to do. That's the message we're communicating. The Gemeente is also not allowed to have their own accommodation, they have much more influence on market parties, on private parties. Because they have the Bestemmingsplan. They have much more influence. And also, they're making agreements with social housing corporations. About how many housing they should provide for which parties. So, they have the instruments to influence the market, more than the university does.

A: I see. I'm asking you because you work in that department. Do you know if the Gemeente is actively trying to solve it for students overall? Because obviously they (the Gemeente) are in power, they can put in policy and other regulations but is there anything concretely directed to students right now in this period?

B: Not specifically students. But youth in general. That's one of their main groups.

A: So, you would say, as in the Gemeente doesn't say it students, but just youth overall. So, they put them in categories.

B: There's this program called, you can look it up on the internet, "Bouwjung". If you look that up, there's quite a lot of initiatives for building, for young people in Groningen. And it's something the municipality started a couple of years ago. And it's part of their policy.

A: Okay great, I'll look it up then. So, these were the questions about my 3rd section, which is about solutions for student housing. Now, I just have one last section which is about 3 questions about the cultural difference. Because that is one my main aspects that I am treating in my research. So since international students when they come in, they perhaps have different expectations, different purposes compared to local, Dutch people here in Groningen. So, the question is: to what extent is the Groningen housing market able to serve the diversity of requests for international students?

B: Well, you said something about expectations. That's a main issue within our communication. Because like I said, we differ in the Netherlands from housing situations in most other countries where the universities provide housing themselves. And we don't do that. We are not allowed to. So that's something we experience international students; still expect should we tell them we don't have our own housing? A lot of people show up here saying "Here I am. Where is my room?" And we say: well we don't have any rooms. You need to look for one yourself. So that's a big difference in expectations. Although we do tell them and it's on the internet everywhere. They still expect us to have rooms for them available when they come here. That's the first thing we are trying to differ, just keep communicating: you have to look for your own room. So coming time, have a look. It's also a difference between countries. So Non-EU students they depend on housing provided by SSH. SSH is a corporation we have a contract with to provide housing especially for international students. The only thing is they don't have as much rooms as we need for all our international students.

A: Yes and that one, if I'm not wrong, SSH is only for incoming first-year students right?

N: Yes, that's right. That's right. Yeah.

B: So non-EU students are dependent on SSH. And they are usually quite early on application. So, they find something through SSH.

Most European countries are different. They try some, some start within SSH. Others find their own way. And most people who depend on peak accommodation, and then there's a third group that's German students. Although they are international students, they usually find their way on the housing market the way Dutch students do. So, they don't depend on international housing or peak accommodation as much as other European students.

A: Do you perhaps know why there is a link between Germans finding it quicker than other nationalities for instance?

B: Yeah most Germans who come here live relatively close. Just across the border, so they have time to come to Groningen and look for themselves. Come for a day or for a weekend. And have a look at different rooms and they start early. Also, there are quite a lot of German students so they have their own network. People already living in Groningen; providing them with accommodation. So, they have their own network.

A: Of course, and if we turn that around. Do you know about any international students perhaps, countries or like groups of people, who do not have it as easy as Germans? So, on the other side of the spectrum where it gets really tough for them.

B: Well EU students who don't find accommodation with SSH, they have it quite more difficult than other students.

A: Okay. Alright.

B: They are usually completely lost when it comes to finding accommodation. When they come here from China, then there's a huge language barrier. So, they are really dependent on SSH.

A: Well, we covered all the questions that I needed for my research. One last question would be: Do you perhaps have any documents that I could use to have a look at policies by the university or anything related to housing for students overall?

B: Yes, I do. I have a policy from UG. I can send you. That's in English. Also, but that's I think that's only in Dutch from the municipality. It's the Woonvisie.

A: That wouldn't be a problem, because I speak German so I can understand it when I read it. But speaking is another thing.

By whom is it you said?

B: The Gemeente, municipality. The Woonvisie. Well I don't think it's confirmed yet, no I don't think so, but they are working on it. It's quite recent.

Also, well I don't know if that's of any help, we had an evaluation of the peak accommodation last year. I don't know if that interests you, I don't know if it's in Dutch or in English. I think it's in Dutch.

A: Yes, that could be interesting indeed because then I could compare it with my survey which I already sent out.

B: Yeah. And did you contact GSB as well? It is the Groningen Studenten Bond, they did a survey as well last year.

A: I'll have a look at that as well then.

B: It's also a place where students can go if they have any questions or problems with rental agreement. That sort of stuff.

A: I see yes, yes. Well for my part that's it. Do you have any further questions, interests, perhaps wanting to have the results?

B: Yes, please. We're interested in everything that's researched about this. We're doing our best. Every little information helps.

A: Would you be interested in having the results from the survey, the raw data, or my interpretation of it as well?

B: No, your interoperation of it. That would be good.

A: So basically, just to make it clear, would you like me to send you my thesis in the end once it's done?

B: Yes. When do you plan it's done?

A: Probably in a month. By the end of the month I will be handing in my first draft, then I get feedback for it and then once that is done it will be around the 10th of July, which is the final deadline for it. I can send it to you then.

B: Yes, please. That will be interesting. Do you mind if I share it with a couple of people within the university? They're also working within student housing.

A: Well that should be fine yes. As long as it remains within the university community.

B: Okay cool.

A: Seriously thank you very much for your time and contribution. I appreciate it.

B: You're welcome. Not a problem. It's really good to do stuff like this.

A: Yes. Well I'm looking forward to the documents that you'll send me and I wish you a very nice day.

B: Okay you too and good luck with your thesis.

A: Thank you, bye.

B: Bye.

Interview No. 2

In this interview, the interviewer is referred to as 'A:', and the interviewee shall be noted as 'B:'. This interview took place on June 9th, 2020.

B: Hello, (name).

A: Ja, goedemiddag. Sorry, ik spreek niet zo goed Nederlands. Spreek je Engels?
Yes, good afternoon. I don't speak very well Dutch. Do you speak English?

B: Ja, tuurlijk. Of course.

A: Hello, I am currently a student from the RuG and I'm writing my thesis about the experience of finding accommodation for international students in Groningen and I was wondering if you perhaps have 15 minutes for six questions?

B: Yes, that's possible. Of course.

A: Okay, to begin with, some information: I'm a third-year student at the RUG University. My thesis is about the first experience of finding accommodation for international students in Groningen and that's why talking to a real estate agent is really important so I can get new information. The interview is anonymous and confidential so your name will not appear in any of the documents. The data will remain within the university community but will be seen by my supervisor for the thesis and maybe by other academic researchers and/or policy makers from the university. It's also free participation which means you can end the interview if you'd like. And one last thing would be: do you mind if I record the phone call so I can write it down afterwards when analyzing the interview?

B: Yes, that's no problem.

A: Ok great, thank you very much. Do you have any questions before we get started?

B: No, it's okay.

A: Okay so, the interview is divided in three sections which is first a general question, then cultural difference and the last one is about improvement/solution to student housing. The first question would be: How do you perceive the situation of student housing for international students in Groningen?

B: How do you mean? How do you perceive?

A: Yes, so how do you feel the situation is for international students when they look for housing.

B: Ok. Yes ok. My opinion.

I think there are properties enough available at the moment, most times, and last year, every year, August and September it was very difficult to find accommodation. I know that our company is renting a lot of rooms and studios to international students. They can find us in a good way. That's also important for us. Yes, we have good experiences with international students and yeah like I just said, I

think the most important is just every year there is a critical point end of August/beginning of September to find a suitable place. I don't know of course how it will be this year because of the corona situation. Yeah, the last two years it was very hard.

A: So overall you think it's ok except for when there's peak moments like August and September?

B: Yeah exactly, the summer period. For the rest we also have a lot of internationals going for the first year in an SSH house. After a year they have to go find another place. Most times in May or June they will start, we can help them most times to find a new place.

A: Yes ok, great.

The next two questions are about cultural differences. The first one is: How diverse do you think the housing market in Groningen is for international students? When they have special requests or overall compared to Dutch students?

B: Yeah, well we have students from all over the world (laugh), so yeah that is very nice and interesting to meet them. For us and also for our landlords there is no difference between a Dutch student and an international student. The most important for our landlords is that they have a good student environment and of course that they pay the rent on time. That's the most important issues for our times.

A: And in that regard, you say there is not difference. Have you maybe experienced international students who are in advantage or disadvantage when it comes to searching housing, since they are from abroad?

B: Yes, that's a good question. No, I don't think there is. For me there is no difference. Sometimes you hear some stories from students who were looking for a place and sometimes you hear some things that happened. But yeah, I don't have a very good overview of that. I can't say anything about that no.

A: Ok. So, we move on to the next question. That's about improvement or solutions to student housing shortage, so as you say there's peak moments when everyone is looking for housing and a few years ago it was a bit difficult at some point and ever since so the university was working with the Gemeente of Groningen to build new projects. Do you know of any projects that have been successful or unsuccessful so far for international students in Groningen?

B: Of course, they are very big projects. The Gemeente Groningen and the university they do it together also with bigger housing, social housing and companies. Search for housing companies. Those kinds of projects, we of course work with private investors, who also want to build properties for students. The main issue of course in this case is that the Gemeente Groningen doesn't give any licenses anymore to start student housing. So, that makes it very difficult for investors of course to arrange student houses and what we see is that a lot of student houses will be renovated then they will be built into studios or small apartments, that's what's happening a lot of times and that way there will be left student rooms available for the new upcoming students.

A: So, in that sense: how do you think educational institutions like the RUG or the Hanze could assist more in the housing market? Because you said for instance the Gemeente they don't do/offer private licenses anymore for private investors. Do you think university can act into that or is the power only in the Gemeente?

B: I think the Groningen Gemeente have got their own opinion about the student housing and they prefer, in my opinion, to rent mostly themselves together with social housing companies or with the university or the Hanze Hogeschool. So, sometimes they are not very positive about private investors, but I think they need the private investors here in town to arrange enough places for all the students and young workers and people who are coming here into town.

A: Well, great that was my last question. Are there any further points of interest you would like to address in relation to this interview?

B: No, I think I can do my story.

A: Ok. Well, just one thing, are you interested in seeing the results of this or is it fine by you?

B: Yeah it would be interesting to see, you can send me maybe by email.

A: What is your email address?

B: You can send it to the general email address of the company. That's easier. (email said)

A: Ok, will send it there. My name is Matthew just to remember. I will be done with my thesis in a month so once I have analyzed everything I will send it over to you so you can have a look at it. Thank you very much for your participation, I really appreciate your help and input.

B: Yeah, good luck with your thesis!

A: Thank you very much, have a nice day.

B: You're welcome, bye bye.

A: Bye.

Interview No. 3

In this interview, the interviewee requested to be sent the questions via email and filled them out by him-/herself. The answers shall be noted in blue and in *italic*. This interview was filled out on 20th June, 2020. It was sent in the following format:

Student conducting this research: Matthew Lavana Pérez
Faculty of Spatial Sciences
University of Groningen

Introduction

Dear (NAME), this interview includes 6 main questions which are divided in 3 different categories. You just need to type out the answers for each question. If there is a question that you cannot answer, you can leave it out and if possible indicate why you couldn't please (for example: doesn't apply to me).

These are important aspects I would like to mention before starting the interview:

- I am a 3rd-year student and I am doing my bachelor's thesis on the topic: *The experience of finding accommodation for international students in Groningen*.
- Participation guidelines:
 - Your answers are anonymous and confidential. They will be used for the purpose of this research within the University of Groningen community

and may be shared with other academic researchers/policy makers in Groningen.

- It's free participation which means that you are allowed to change your mind and withdraw.
- If you are interested in viewing the results from this research, let me know and I can forward it to you once it is done.

Main Body

Contextual question:

- 1) How do you perceive the situation of student housing for international students in Groningen?

Finding a suitable place can be very hard for an international student. Most of them search furnished and for 6-9 months. Most of the times they are not in the Netherlands (yet), so they can't join a viewing. Most of the internationals we help is with our searchrequest, then we assist a candidate in finding a suitable property.

Cultural difference:

- 2) To what extent is the Groningen housing market able to serve the diversity of housing requests by international students?

It all depends on the budget. The student hotel is good but expensive. If the budget is €250-400,- per month you will need some (local) help.

- 3) Have you experienced international students being in any advantage or disadvantage when it comes to searching student housing as they are from abroad? (please provide arguments for your answer).

Yes and no. Some landlord prefer Dutch people, but it's very rare. Off course if you (as a candidate/ or your "NAME OF THE COMPANY") can't visit a viewing you will miss out on the property. The hardest part is the term, if you are searching for 6 months, then a landlord has to (re)pay an agent again to have it rented out. If he selects a candidate that will stay a couple of years then it's way cheaper.

Improvement/Solutions to student housing shortage:

- 4) As seen in the news, the university and the Gemeente of Groningen are working on solutions to increase the availability of student housing:
 - a) Do you know of any projects built so far that have been successful/unsuccessful for international students on the housing market in Groningen?
 - b) Which ones?
 - c) Why are/were they successful or unsuccessful?

Sure, Suikeruni/ Student Hotel. They are successful, but not a good match for a (not wealthy) student.

- 5) How can educational institutions, such as the RUG or the Hanze, assist international students when looking for housing?

The Gemeente Groningen is very negative against real estate agents in general. Even though, the people we help are really happy about it. Of course, we are not for free (nor cheap) but we provide excellent service.

- 6) What measures can the Gemeente of Groningen use in the housing market to approach the shortage of student housing?

They have to find a way that landlords will prefer internationals of Dutch.

End of the interview

- Are there any further points of interest you would like to address in relation to student housing for international students?

Yes, we started with online viewing, see our YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCw6jKK7vN6fSRMMAfY0peZg> candidates can see the property and show interest via the website (free of charge). The selection is based on the timeline (so internationals have the same chance of getting the property). If you need more information let us know.

- Would you like to receive the results of my project for this topic?

Yes, I would like to.

Thank you very much for your participation and contribution. I really appreciate it!