

Bachelor's Project

Motivations and Drivers for Dutch Rural Youth: Staying or Leaving?

A quantitative study in Dutch rural villages



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Abstract

Young people living in Dutch rural areas in 2024 face multiple challenges. Many young people are unable to find affordable housing, leading to a longer stay at the parental home, a decrease in the mental wellbeing of those affected. This research explores the motivations and drivers for Dutch rural youth to either stay in their respective hometowns, or migrate away from those areas. Previous research mainly focused on the people actually migrating, but not a lot has been studied about the people staying and why those people choose to stay. Through a quantitative study of 321 respondents across 106 Dutch villages, findings reveal a large percentage of those respondents wanting to stay in the rural areas they live in. Factors such as established social networks, family ties and a convivial feeling in those villages also contribute to these views. Thirdly, environmental factors like the amount of available space and nature play an important role. Challenges are there for policy makers, because a lot of young people want to stay in the rural areas they live in, but this research shows that available affordable housing is lacking. However, with 85% of the respondents having the desire to stay in their rural areas, there lay many opportunities for rural areas to keep their youth on board and with it the liveability of those areas.

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2. Introduction

2.1 Background

Young people in Dutch society are facing difficulties in finding affordable housing in the current housing crisis (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, 2022) they tend to leave the parental home at a later age in life than they did in the past and more students choose to keep living at home while studying in a different city due to rising costs of living (CBS, 2022). These are just some challenges the Dutch youth are facing in the year 2024. On the other hand, with the current housing crisis, many news articles can be found about younger people currently living in villages, who are not able to find affordable housing in or close to their hometowns. A lot of groups of young people even take the matter into their own hands by forming a CPO, this is a collective of people who try develop a housing program on their own with help of the local government and other parties (Binnenlands Bestuur, 2018). Challenges like these also take a toll on the mental wellbeing of this generation (Eenvandaag, 2022). Next to this, some life choices are postponed because people are not able to find housing in the places they want to live in (ING, 2021).

Developments and challenges like the ones mentioned in the section above show that apparently a large part of the Dutch rural youth intends to keep living in their own hometowns. But why do these young people want to stay in their hometowns? What are the reasons for this? A lot of previous research has been done of the movement of (younger) people to cities (PBL, 2019). The main reasoning behind this movement is that young people want to live where the most (economic) activity is, where future chances are brighter and where they can develop a 'new life' outside of their original hometown (Weiss et al. 2021). A lot of government policies were also focused on this general move to the city, for a long time, a lot of housing programs and in municipalities were mainly focused on the development of bigger places in a municipality (Rli, ROB & RVS, 2023). Also the development of other amenities were mainly focused on the more urban areas. The reasoning behind this was that the amenities in those areas had to be strengthened because those areas would be the areas where most people wanted to live in the future. But in 2024, apparently, many young people living in those smaller rural areas are not planning on leaving (RTV Drenthe, 2024). Of course, a part of those people still wants to leave, but a lot of them are intending to stay. The question rises; why do some young people want to stay in their hometown, even if there are less activities and opportunities for this group in those villages? And why do some people still want to leave for other areas?

2.2 Research Aim and Research Problem

As mentioned before, quite a lot of research has been done about why people tend to move away from rural areas towards more urban areas. However, there is quite an extensive literature gap on why people living in rural areas want to stay in rural areas. This research aims to find out the main motivations and drivers for Dutch people living in rural areas for either staying in their hometowns, or leaving them. Thus creating a better insight in not only the motivations and drivers of migration, the area most often researched, but also creating an insight in the motivations and drivers of the people staying in those rural areas. This research also serves a societal relevance, when making clear what the reasons for young people to stay are, policy makers can also adjust their policies to this group. For society in general it is important to keep young people aboard, often the first thing that closes down in a village is the local school because there are not enough children anymore. After this, amenities like a place to sport, a village hall, bus lines and shops follow suit. Meaning, when you lose the young people in a town, it slowly dies down. At least the activities and amenities do. Therefore it is of the utmost importance to make clear what the main reasons for young people are to stay in those small

communities, because if this is known, policy makers and other organizations can act accordingly.

The aim of this research is to make the reasons clear why Dutch rural youth choose to either stay in their hometowns or migrating to other places. Understanding these motivations and drivers is important to be able to handle the future demographic and socio-economic challenges faced by many rural areas in the Netherlands. The central question for this research is:

What are the main reasons or motives for Dutch rural youth to stay in their hometowns or migrate away from them?

The following secondary questions logically arise from this main research question:

- Do economic factors have influence on the decision to stay in or leave their hometowns?
- What are the social reasons or motives for Dutch youth to either stay in or leave their hometowns?
- Which spatial or environmental components influence the decision-making process of young people living in Dutch rural areas?

The answers to these questions could provide new insights on which future research could be built as well as provide an useful instrument for policy makers, especially those working in the rural areas.

2.3 Hypothesis

The choices of young people living in Dutch rural areas to either stay in their respective hometowns or leave those towns are mainly influenced by a combination of economic, social and environmental factors. The relative importance of above-mentioned factors may vary from individual to individual, but together they encompass the main motivations for migration decisions.

3. Theoretical Framework

To create an insight into the main motivations and drivers for migratory decisions of Dutch rural youth it is important to first determine the main factors playing a role in migration from a rural to an urban area. This research will mainly focus on three main factors which are subsequently divided into different sub factors. In the three sections below those main factors are explained after which the conceptual model derived from these theories is explained.

3.1 Economic Factors

Migration from rural to urban areas is often driven by economic reasons. Urban areas are often more appealing because of the better economic opportunities in those areas.

Labour Market

A big factor in rural to urban migration are the often better employment opportunities in the urban areas (Seyfrit et al. 2010). In urban areas there are generally more higher paying jobs and cities provide greater chances if you want to make career advancements (Rauhut and Littke, 2016). Also there is easier access to educational institutions (Boone & Van Houtte, 2016). A lot of people in the Netherlands are studying in urban areas whereafter they 'stick around' in their later life (Thissen et al., 2010).

Housing Market

Another essential factor influencing the decision to either stay in or leave a rural area is the local housing market. Housing affordability can be a significant motivator for young people to stay in an area. Rural areas in general offer lower average housing prices compared to urban areas. This also means that for young people it is often more easy to buy a house in a rural area (Bijker & Haartsen, 2012). This affordability of housing may encourage young people to stay in their hometowns, home-ownership offers a stable foundation for the future life of people. Not only economically, but also it offers a mentally stable situation and a chance to build up a life somewhere (Clapham et al. 2018).

However, with the current housing crisis in 2024, the explanation as mentioned in the paragraph above has been complicated. The scarcity of affordable housing is not only playing a role in the urban areas of the Netherlands, also in the more rural areas there are plenty of places where there are not enough houses available for younger people to buy or rent. Many young Dutch people want to keep living in their own hometowns but this scarcity of housing means they might be pushed to start looking for housing opportunities elsewhere.

This means that the factor housing market can serve as both a push- and pull-factor in the migratory decisions of young Dutch people. On the one hand lower housing prices in rural areas can be an incentive for people to stay, while the scarcity of available and affordable housing for young people might force those individuals to go and look for housing elsewhere (McKee et al. 2017). The housing market in short plays a key role in the decision making process of people to either migrate or not.

3.2 Social Factors

Social networks

Social factors play a main role in the decision making process of individuals when it comes to the decision to stay in or leave an area. A first important concept are the social networks of people. In a more rural area people tend to know each other more often, 'ons kent ons'. Therefore, people living in rural areas often have an extensive established social network which might influence their decision to stay (Haartsen et al 2018). These networks can help people with not only social support but also with improved opportunities on for example the labour market (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006). Knowing a lot of people can be beneficial for a lot of things in life. Overall, those social networks increase the quality of life of people.

When people move away from their rural area to another (urban) area, they might lose this network or parts of it. Rebuilding a social network can be a challenge in a new environment, also it can be very time consuming to reestablish a similar network, if people are even able to create a similar network in an new urban environment. These reasons might be preventing people of making the decision to migrate away.

Contrary to the two paragraphs above, some people might to want to live in an area where they do not know a large percentage of the population. For those people those smaller communities can feel like too small, making it a push-factor for migration.

Family ties

This is possibly one of the stronger reasons for people to stay in the rural areas they grew up in. Many people have deeply rooted family ties in a certain village or area and because of this they do not want to live somewhere else (Morse and Mudgett, 2018). Those people often feel a sense

of belonging in the area in which they grew up. People often tie their identity to those places and it can be difficult for them to make the decision to leave those places (Fischer & Malmberg, 2001). Therefore family ties can be a strong driver for people to stay. However, it should also be noted that some people want to break this cycle and simply want to start over somewhere else. This differs from person to person and this is an interesting part of the research, opinions may vary.

Community feeling

Rural areas in the Netherlands often have a high level of social cohesion, people living in those areas feel like they belong to the community living there (Haartsen et al. 2018). This also leads to increased place attachment (van der Star & Hochstenbach, 2022). People living in a village often feel they share an identity and they are often proud of their hometown. Next to that, people often take part in activities in a village and they might contribute to different associations or clubs located in the town. Another part of this community feeling is the contribution to traditions or customs a village or area might have (Haartsen et al. 2022). This can range from festivities taking place every year, to century old traditions which are being honoured. People living in a community where a lot of these activities and traditions take place are often seeing these things as part of their identity, strengthening their reasons to stay (Demi et al. 2009).

3.3 Environmental Factors

The third main factor in this theoretical framework are the environmental factors for migration. This main factor is divided into activities and amenities on the one hand side and nature and environmental factors on the other side.

Activities and amenities

The availability but also the quality of different activities and amenities might play an important role in the decision making process of Dutch rural youth to move or stay (Elshof et al., 2017). For activities there are probably mainly push-factors towards the more urban areas because those areas often have more possibilities for younger people (Seyfrit et al. 2010). However, as mentioned in the section community feeling, some people might actually prefer the available activities in the rural areas they live in. But in general urban areas house more activities for young people. Next to activities, the availability of amenities also plays a major role in the migratory choices of people. For example, the availability of (public) transportation plays a big role in whether people want to live somewhere, when easy access to urban areas, or areas with more activities and amenities, can be easily reached by means of transportation, people are more likely to stay in the area they live in (Berg & Ihlström, 2019). The opposite is also true, when an area is far away from different amenities, people might choose to migrate away.

Nature and environment

The proximity to nature is a big advantage of living in a rural area for groups of people (Elshof et al., 2017). Access to nature areas, forests, or large open areas in general are often viewed as a positive addition to a place of residence (Morse & Mudgett, 2018)(Haartsen et al. 2022). Not only the aesthetic viewpoint is important when it comes to nature, it might also boost a healthier lifestyle because more outdoor activities are available. Lower pollution levels might also be a healthy advantage of living in a rural area, but this is debatable because different toxins used in agriculture might be harmful to humans too. But in general, the beauty of the nature in the more rural Dutch areas and the peace and quiet related to it are an important factor for a lot of people for wanting to live in a rural area instead of an urban one. For a lot of people this is a contribution

to their general wellbeing. On the other side, other people who are currently living in rural areas in the Netherlands are not enjoying this peace and quiet, it is for them experienced as boring or an area where there is not a lot to do. So the environment of a rural area can also work as a push-factor for a lot of people. This is also something on which this research tries to find some insights, are people in general more keen of the natural environment in the rural Dutch areas? Or do people enjoy the urban areas of the Netherlands more?

3.4 Conceptual Model

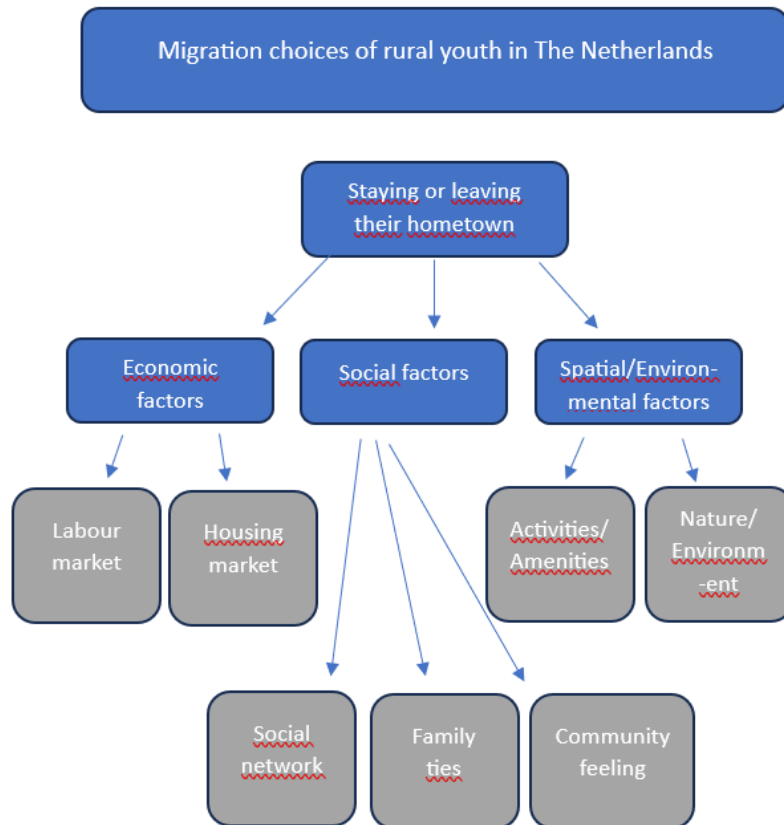


Figure 1 Conceptual Model: Author Dion Meester

The conceptual model as presented in figure 1 aims to provide the reader with a framework for understanding the factors playing a role in the migratory decisions made by Dutch rural youth. This conceptual model integrates the different factors playing a role in the decision-making process of the Dutch rural youth as they are mentioned in the above-mentioned theoretical framework. The conceptual model illustrates that the decision to stay or leave the hometown is based on three main factors: Economic factors, social factors and spatial or environmental factors. For each respective main factor a number of concepts is illustrated in the model. For economic factors these are the labour market in an area and the local housing market. The social concepts consist of the social networks of people, the existing or non-existing of family ties in the area and the community feeling people might have. And to conclude the spatial or environmental factors; here available activities and amenities play a role, but also the physical environment of a place. The physical environment is captured in the availability of nature, peace and quiet or the amount of available space. On the basis of this model, the data collection instrument was created.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

To answer the research questions in this study a quantitative approach was chosen. This research makes use of a survey as data collection instrument. With a survey, a large number of respondents can be obtained in a relatively shorter amount of time. By doing this, there was the possibility to collect data from a larger number of unique villages across the Netherlands.

4.2 Respondent Recruitment

For the data collection, the goal was to obtain data from a population aged 16 up until 27 years old. Next to this age criterium, the respondents had to live in a village. To verify whether respondents complied with these criteria, a question was asked about their age as well as their current place of residence. Later the answers to these questions were analysed to determine whether the response was admissible for this research.

4.3 Data Collection Instrument

The concepts as they are presented in the conceptual model have been operationalized into the survey used for this research (see Appendix 1). The sequence of concepts mentioned was also followed in the survey.

Firstly some general questions were asked about age, current place of residence, gender and educational level. The purpose of these questions was to verify whether the respondents were eligible for this research and to ensure that a random sample of the population aged 16-27 living in villages was taken.

After the general questions, the economic factors were asked about. Whether respondents currently work in the region and how they estimate the chances of them working in the region in the future. Questions about their current housing situation, future housing preferences and questions about the housing market were also being asked. *Here the question was also asked whether they wanted to stay in the region or leave the region.* With this, the most important question was asked in this part of the survey.

In the third section of the survey, social factors were asked about. Respondents rated the importance of different social aspects of living in a village. These questions were followed up by the fourth and last section of the survey, in this section respondents rated the importance of different environmental aspects of living in a village.

Before the third and fourth sections of the survey, respondents were asked to describe their place of living in maximum three words. By placing this question in front of sections three and four, the answers were not influenced by the aspects mentioned in those two sections.

4.4 Data Collection Method

The recruitment of respondents was done through an online survey on the website 'Qualtrics'. The recruitment process was firstly done by making use of the social network of the researcher, a large number of respondents was collected this way. Next to that, a link to the survey was shared on social media. This was shared over a hundred times, making the collection of respondents more diverse and thus also the collection of unique villages which strengthens the credibility of this research. Thirdly, a QR code of the survey was shared with students on two different schools. By making use of these above-mentioned data collection methods, a total of

382 responses were collected, of which 321 were ultimately used. Respondents out of 106 unique villages across the Netherlands participated.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Before starting the survey, the respondents were informed of the purpose of this research and how the researcher would handle the collected data. By progressing with the survey they gave the researcher consent to use their answers for this research. The participants were able to withdraw from the survey at any given moment. Next to this, the dataset was anonymous. Also was the data collected stored on a secure device to which only the researcher had access. Once the final version of this research is submitted, all data will be deleted permanently. In case of questions or issues with this research, the contact information of the researcher was made available.

4.6 Data Analysis

First step in the data analysis process was to clean up the dataset. First of all, empty responses were deleted. Qualtrics logs every respondent who progresses past the initial introduction message as a respondent, even if no questions were answered. Therefore these empty files were deleted. Then the two criteria to which the respondents had to comply were applied: age and place of residence. All respondents aged 28 and over were not taken into account by the data analysis. This was the case for 17 respondents. Next to that there was 1 respondent younger than the minimum age of 16. After this the respondents living in cities were also deleted. This was a larger group of respondents, a total of 43 responses were not taken into account because the respondents were not living in a village. Most of these respondents were studying in a city, thus providing a city as place of residence, while originally living in a village. To be sure of a clean dataset these respondents were removed.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive statistics

The analysis has been performed on 321 valid responses. As illustrated in Table 1, the sample population was divided into 42% men and 58% women. Figure 2 shows how the age of respondents was divided, a higher number of respondents aged 22-27 took part in this survey, the share of respondents aged 16-21 was lower. Table 2 displays the highest level of education enjoyed by respondents, providing a breakdown of the educational level of respondents within the sample. These three descriptive statistics offer a representative overview of the demographics of the sample.

How do you identify?	Percentage	Count
Man	42%	135
Woman	58%	186
Other	0%	0

Table 1 Gender

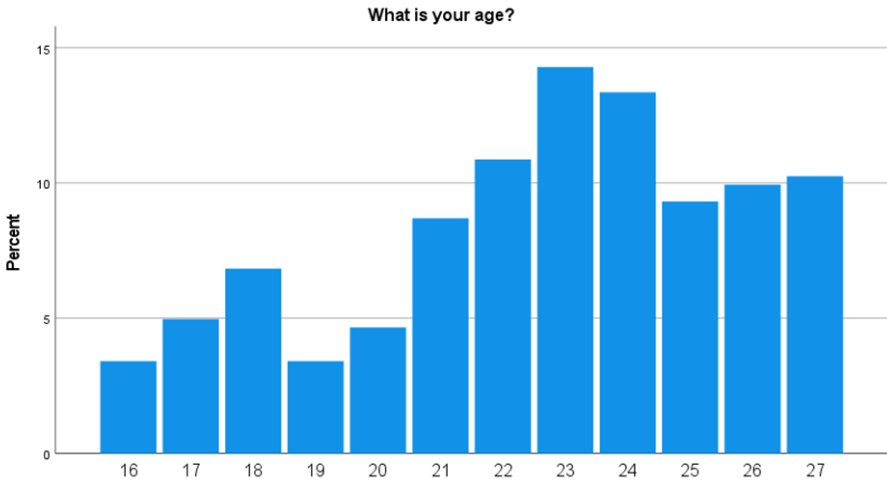


Figure 2 Division of age among respondents

What is your highest enjoyed level of education?	Percentage	Count
Primary School	0%	1
Highschool	12%	39
MBO	44%	140
HBO	35%	112
WO	8%	27
Something else, namely:	1%	2

Table 2 Highest enjoyed education

5.2 Economic Factors

When looking at the results to the questions focused on the economic factors for migration, Table 4 shows, 84% of the respondents indicated that they are currently working in the region at the moment. For this question ‘within the region’ was defined as within 50 kilometres of the current place of residence. 11% indicated that they work outside of this defined region and 5% is not currently working.

When looking at the question whether respondents see themselves working in the region in the future or not (Table 5), a combined total of 59% of the respondents estimate this chance as either high or very high. 24% of the respondents have a neutral view, and a combined total of 18% estimates the chance of themselves working in the same region in the future as low or very low.

Do you work in the region at this moment?	Percentage	Count
Yes I do work within this region	84%	269
No I work outside of this region	11%	34
I do not have work at this moment in time	5%	17

Table 4 Current work

How high do you estimate the chance that in the future you will (also) be working in the region where you’re currently living in?	Percentage	Count
Very Low	5%	15
Low	13%	40
Neutral	24%	77
High	32%	101
Very high	27%	86

Table 5 Future work

Looking at the current housing situation of respondents in Table 6; 62% of the respondents are still living at their parental home and only 34 percent are already owning or renting a house or apartment of their own. When looking at Table 7, it shows that respondents estimate the chance of them finding housing in or within the vicinity of their current place of residence as relatively small. Half of the respondents with 50% estimate this chance to be either small or very small, while 11% of the respondents estimate this chance to be large or very large. The rest of the respondents have a neutral view on this statement.

Taking into account the influence of housing prices within villages, as shown in Table 8, 67% indicated that the housing prices have either much or very much influence on the choice to live in a village or not. On the other hand only 11% indicated that housing prices do not have much influence or not much influence at all.

Describe your current housing situation:	Percentage	Count
Living with parents	62%	197
Owning/Renting a house or apartment	34%	107
'Op kamers' (Renting a room)	2%	7
Different, namely:	2%	6

Table 6 Current housing

How high do you estimate the chance that you will be able to find a house in, or within the vicinity of your current place of residence?	Percentage	Count
Very Small	16%	42
Small	34%	89
Neutral	39%	103
Large	8%	22
Very Large	3%	9

Table 7 Future housing

How much influence do the housing prices in your village have on the choice to live there or not?	Percentage	Count
Not much at all	3%	7
Not much	8%	20
Neutral	22%	59
Much	47%	125
Very Much	20%	54

Table 8 Influence housing prices

5.3 Social Factors

To analyse the social factors influencing the respondents migratory choices, the respondents were asked to rate the importance of the statements as mentioned in Tables 9 and 10 from not important at all (1) to very important (5). The averages out of these responses are shown for the group who indicated that they see themselves living in the same area in the future, as well as for the group who indicated that they want to leave the region. When comparing those numbers, it sticks out that the group of people wanting to stay rate all of the statement as more important than the group of people wanting to leave. For most concepts the difference ranges between 0,74 and 0,85 difference between the two groups, with the stayers scoring higher. For the statement it's pleasant ('gemoedelijk') here, the difference is only 0,31. This is also by far the highest rating statement by the people wanting to leave. So apparently this is an important statement for both groups of respondents. Another statement showing a different difference between the two groups is the statement about the activities, the difference between the two groups is only 0,55 here.

Importance of social concepts; respondents wanting to stay	N	Average Importance (1 not important at all, 5 very important)
Having a community feeling	237	4,04
Most of my friends live here	237	3,95
I know most people here	236	3,68
My family members also live here	235	3,66
It's pleasant ('gemoedelijk') here	236	4,10
The association life	235	3,52
The activities	235	3,65

Table 9 Social concepts people staying

Importance of social concepts; respondents wanting to leave	N	Average Importance (1 not important at all, 5 very important)
Having a community feeling	39	3,23
Most of my friends live here	39	3,15
I know most people here	39	2,90
My family members also live here	39	2,92
It's pleasant ('gemoedelijk') here	39	3,79
The association life	39	2,67
The activities	39	3,10

Table 10 Social concepts people leaving

5.4 Environmental Factors

The third group of factors are the environmental factors. The respondents were asked to rate the importance of the statements as mentioned in Tables 11 and 12 from not important at all (1) to very important (5). The averages out of these responses are again shown for the group who indicated that they see themselves living in the same area in the future, as well as for the group who indicated that they want to leave the region. Here it sticks out that respondents in both groups are showing a much more similar score compared to the other group than the scores as they were observed by statements about the social factors. Especially having a lot of space is rated as really important in both groups of respondents, 3,99 for the stayers and 3,95 for the leavers. Another remarkable observation is that the people intending to leave rate the nature in the area as more important than the people intending to stay. Another observation is that characteristic houses are rated as the least important by both groups of respondents. For the rest the differences between groups are relatively small, except for the rural feeling, here the people intending to stay show a 0,34 higher score than the respondents intending to leave. But still this difference is relatively small compared to differences observed by the social statements.

Importance of environmental concepts; respondents wanting to stay	N	Average Importance (1 not important at all, 5 very important)
The nature in the area	232	3,88
The peace and quiet	231	3,69
Having a lot of space	231	3,99
Rural feeling	232	3,81
Characteristic houses	231	3,12

Table 11 Environmental concepts people staying

Importance of environmental concepts; respondents wanting to leave	N	Average Importance (1 not important at all, 5 very important)
The nature in the area	38	3,97
The peace and quiet	38	3,61
Having a lot of space	38	3,95
Rural feeling	38	3,47
Characteristic houses	38	3,00

Table 12 Environmental concepts people leaving

6. Discussion

6.1 Reflection on Results

The structured survey was operationalized based upon the theoretical framework and conceptual model derived from this theoretical framework, all of the questions except the control questions were based on the concepts and theories, leading to a credible research.

Next to this, the large sample size and large number of unique villages also adds a lot of credibility to this research. Because of this relatively large sample size, the results as mentioned in the result section also really tell a story about how Dutch rural youth in this area of the Netherlands think about different aspects of their lives. The sample size might not be large enough to tell something about the Dutch rural youth population in general, but for the areas where the respondents were asked about, it paints a good picture. The transferability of the research is good in that regard. Also for dependability, if this research would be conducted in the exact same way, similar results would probably be obtained, the only outlier in this regard is the relatively large population from the village of Giethoorn.

6.2 Reflection on Methods

This research made use of a quantitative approach using a structured survey distributed via social networks and social media, resulting in 321 useable responses from 106 unique Dutch villages. Next to this, the sample size had a good reflection of the Dutch population in the age group 16-27. All ages were represented, all educational levels and also the division of gender was almost 50/50. By using this method, a relatively broad analysis could be made about the views of Dutch rural youth. Data analysis was straightforward, focused mainly on the descriptive statistics and comparison of Likert scale questions between the groups of people staying and leaving. This method was effective to show some general trends, but a larger group of respondents intending to leave could have strengthened these comparisons even more. Now the division was approximately 7 respondents wanting to stay versus 1 respondent wanting to leave. So this could be a challenge for future research.

6.3 Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of this research is the large number of respondents with 321, also the large number of unique villages is a strong point. Because of this relatively large dataset, the results derived from it are also more credible. Having a lot of unique villages makes sure that not only the view of a specific village is researched. All in all, having a large number of respondents and a large number of unique villages paints a broad picture of Dutch rural youth and their views on living in those areas. It should be noted that a relatively large number of respondents come from the town of Giethoorn with 75 of the 321. A risk in this can be that some of the results might be slightly different when this amount of respondents of Giethoorn would be lower. Giethoorn is quite a aesthetically beautiful village in the Netherlands and it is also a bit atypical with a lot of tourism. On the one hand people might want to stay there more often because of the beauty, but on the other side the busy tourism can also be a push-factor. So it is only a smaller limitation. Another stronger point is the order of the questions in the survey, by also dividing the questions in the same categories as they are discussed in this research, the respondents could clearly think about those factors separately from the others. This was also the case for the open question about the description in three words, by putting this question in front of the other statements, respondents were not influenced. A limitation in the survey is the division between wanting to live in the same village and wanting to live within a 15 kilometre radius of the village. For some people it could mean that there is a larger place in this radius, thus meaning that they

might not want to keep living in a rural area. However, when looking at the results of those respondents, they rate many aspects of village life quite high compared to the people wanting to leave so they probably prefer village life but opted for this 15 kilometre radius because of worries about availability of housing or work. Lastly, a limitation might be the relative smaller amount of respondents wanting to leave the region they currently live in with 39. However, this actually illustrates that many people like their rural living environment with most respondents opting for staying. This is also the main motivation for this research, the researcher observed a growing appreciation of the rural life for different reasons and apparently a lot of respondents also thought this way, making this a relevant research for local policy makers and other parties.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Conclusions

This study aimed to give an insight in the primary reasons and motivations for Dutch rural youth to either stay in their hometowns or migrate elsewhere. The analysis of 321 respondents from 106 unique villages revealed that 85% of the respondents wants to keep living in their current region, with different economic, social and environmental factors playing a role in the decision-making process.

Focusing on economic factors, this research found that 59% of the respondents sees themselves working in the area in the future. However, housing affordability emerged as a crucial factor determining whether people are staying or leaving. Only 11% of the respondents estimates the chance to find a house as larger than neutral, this, together with 67% of respondents indicating that housing prices do have a large influence on their decision to stay in an area or not, shows that housing prices and the availability of housing plays a crucial role in the decision-making process.

Social connections and community feeling are also critical motivators for staying in a village. Respondents intending to stay in an area rated different social aspects on average 0,8 higher on a scale of 1 to 5, when compared to people intending to leave. Next to this, the term 'gezellig' surfaced as the most mentioned word in a word cloud used to describe a village in three words. This highlighted the importance of social cohesion and community feeling for the decision to stay in a rural village.

To conclude, both groups of respondents rated environmental aspects such as having a lot of space and the nature in an area as really important. There were only minor differences between the two groups of respondents here. Interestingly respondents intending to leave the area rated the importance of nature higher than the people intending to stay. This suggests that while environmental factors may be crucial for the appreciation of an area, those factors on their own are not a reason or motivation for people to stay in an area.

All in all, these findings show the complex interplay of economic, social and environmental factors when it comes to the decision of young Dutch people to either stay in a rural area, or migrate away.

7.2 Recommendations for future Research

This research provided an insight into the motivations and drivers for Dutch rural youth to either stay or migrate away from the places they currently live in. In the future it could be especially useful to conduct a similar research but then in the form of a case study in a particular region or even in a particular town in the Netherlands or elsewhere. Another recommendation for future research is one where the group of people intending to leave an area is just as big as the group of respondents intending to stay. Also, for local policy makers, further more in depth research could be really useful to gain a better understanding of the reasons why youthful people living in their territory would like to stay in or leave the area. Reasons for staying could be better safeguarded and retained, while motivations for leaving could be tackled better. Because for rural areas the youth remains the lifeblood of the community.

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Appendix:

A1: English Survey

Dear respondent,

First of all I would like to thank you for your participation in this survey! This survey will take roughly 4-5 minutes of your time. This survey will focus on the exploration of the housing preferences of young people living in Dutch rural areas. The results of this survey will be used for my Bachelor Thesis for the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

- The survey is anonymous and the collected data will be handled with care.
- The collected data will not be shared with other parties than the two persons grading this thesis.
- The collected data will be deleted when my research is concluded.
- You can decide to withdraw from this survey at any moment.

If you have any further questions or if you are curious about the eventual research, please contact me at:

Dion Meester

d.meester@student.rug.nl

When you continue with filling out this survey, you give me permission to use this data for my Bachelor Thesis on the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

Q1: What is your age?

Q2: What is your current place of residence?

Q3: Is this also the place of residence where you grew up?

- Yes
- No

Q4: In which place of residence did you grow up in? (only when 'no' was selected at Q3)

Q5: How do you identify?

- Man
- Woman
- Other

Q6: What is your highest enjoyed level of education?

- Primary school
- Highschool
- MBO
- HBO
- WO

Q7: Do you work in the region at this moment? (max 50 kilometres distance of your current place of residence)

- Yes I do work within this region
- No I work outside of this region

- I do not have work at this moment in time

Q8: How high do you estimate the chance that in the future you will (also) be working in the region where you're currently living in?

- Very low
- Low
- Neutral
- High
- Very high

Q9: Describe your current housing situation:

- Living with parents
- Owning/Renting a house or apartment
- 'Op kamers' (Renting a room)
- Different, namely:

Q10: Would you like to live in, or closely to, your current place of residence in the future?

- Yes, prefer to live within my current place of residence
- Yes, as long as it is within 15 kilometres of my current place of residence
- No (skip to question Q13 when 'no' is selected)

Q11: How big do you estimate the chance that you will be able to find a house in or within the vicinity of your current place of residence?

- Very small
- Small
- Average
- Large
- Very Large

Q12: How much influence do the housing prices in your village have on the choice to live there or not?

- Not much at all
- Not much
- Neutral
- Much
- Very much

Q13: Describe your place of residence in maximum three words:

Q14: To what extent do you rate the following things as important when it comes to the social life in your current place of residence? (from not important at all to very important scale 1 to 5)

- Having a community feeling
- Most of my friends live here
- I know most people here
- My family members also live here
- It's pleasant ('gemoedelijk') here
- The association life
- The activities

Q15: Do you find any other things important on the level of social life in your current place of residence?

Q16: To what extent do you rate the following things as important when it comes to the living environment of your current place of residence? (from not important at all to very important scale 1 to 5)

- The nature in the area
- The peace and quiet
- Having a lot of space
- Rural feeling
- Characteristic houses

Q17: Do you find any other things important on the level of the living environment of your current place of residence?

This is the end of the survey. Thank you very much for your contribution!

A2: Dutch Survey

Beste deelnemer,

Allereerst hartelijk dank voor je deelname aan deze enquête! Deze enquête zal ongeveer 4-5 minuten van je tijd in beslag nemen. Deze enquête richt zich op het verkennen van de woonwensen van jongeren en jong volwassenen woonachtig in Nederlandse plattelandsgebieden. De resultaten van deze enquête zullen worden gebruikt voor mijn Bachelor Thesis aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

- De enquête is anoniem en de verzamelde data wordt met zorg behandeld.
- De verzamelde data zal niet met andere partijen dan mijn beoordelaars worden gedeeld.
- De verzamelde data wordt verwijderd zodra mijn onderzoek is afgerond.
- Je kunt op elk moment besluiten te stoppen met deze enquête.

Mocht je verdere vragen hebben of geïnteresseerd zijn in het uiteindelijke onderzoek neem dan contact met mij op:

Dion Meester

d.meester@student.rug.nl

Wanneer je verder gaat met het invullen van deze enquête dan geef je toestemming dat deze data wordt gebruikt voor mijn Bachelor Thesis aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Q1: Wat is je leeftijd?

Q2: Wat is je huidige woonplaats?

Q3: Is dit ook de woonplaats waar je opgegroeid bent?

- Ja
- Nee

Q4: In welke woonplaats ben je opgegroeid? (alleen wanneer 'nee' is ingevuld bij Q3)

Q5: Hoe identificeer jij jezelf?

- Man
- Vrouw
- Anders

Q6: Wat is je hoogste genoten opleiding?

Q7: Werk je op dit moment in de regio? (maximaal 50 kilometer afstand van je woonplaats)

- Ja ik werk binnen deze regio
- Nee ik werk buiten deze regio
- Op dit moment niet werkzaam

Q8: Hoe hoog schat jij de kans dat je (ook) in de toekomst werkzaam zal zijn in de regio waar je nu woont?

- Zeer laag
- Laag
- Neutraal
- Hoog

- Zeer hoog

Q9: Beschrijf je woonsituatie op dit moment:

- Woonachtig bij ouders
- Eigen (huur)woning
- Op kamers
- Anders, namelijk:

Q10: Zou je in de toekomst in, of in de buurt van, je huidige woonplaats willen wonen?

- Ja, graag binnen mijn huidige woonplaats
- Ja, als het maar binnen 15 kilometer van mijn huidige woonplaats is
- Nee

Q11: Hoe groot schat jij de kans dat je een woning zult vinden binnen of in de buurt van je huidige woonplaats?

- Zeer klein
- Klein
- Gemiddeld
- Groot
- Zeer groot

Q12: Hoeveel invloed hebben de huizenprijzen in je dorp op de keuze om daar te gaan wonen?

- Zeer weinig
- Weinig
- Neutraal
- Veel
- Zeer veel

Q11 & Q12 worden overgeslagen bij antwoord 'nee' op Q10

Q13: Omschrijf je woonplaats in maximaal 3 woorden:

Q14: Welke dingen vind jij belangrijk aan het sociale leven in je huidige woonplaats? (van helemaal niet belangrijk tot heel belangrijk, schaal 1 tot 5)

- Het hebben van een dorpsgevoel
- Mijn vrienden wonen hier
- Ik ken de meeste mensen hier
- Mijn familieleden wonen hier ook
- Het is hier gemoedelijk
- Het verenigingsleven
- De activiteiten

Q15: Iets anders, namelijk:

Q16: Welke dingen vind jij belangrijk aan de leefomgeving van je huidige woonplaats? (van helemaal niet belangrijk tot heel belangrijk, schaal 1 tot 5)

- De natuur
- De rust/stilte
- Er is veel ruimte

- Plattelandsgevoel
- Karakteristieke huizen

Q17: Iets anders, namelijk:

Dit is het einde van de vragenlijst. Heel erg bedankt voor je bijdrage!