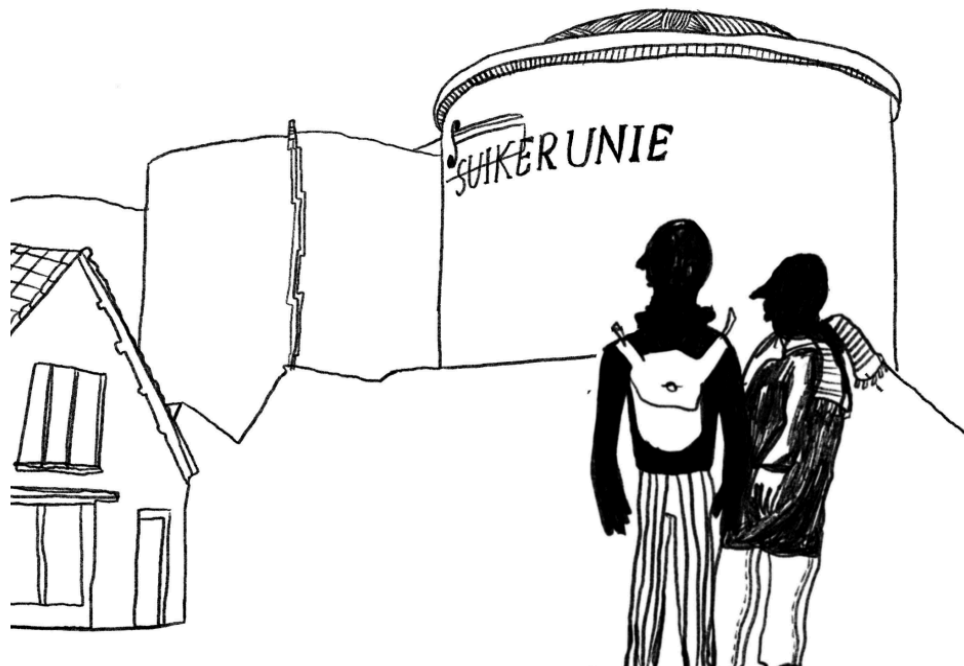# Lived neighbourhood experiences in Hoogkerk

Young adults talking about *their* neighbourhood

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Abstract

Young people's relationships with their deprived neighbourhoods are understudied. Little research focuses on how young adults perceive neighbourhood strengths and limitations, and how this often varies from the hegemonic discourse.

Therefore, this study adds to the neighbourhood perceptions and experiences of young adults aged 18-24, who have lived or still live in Noord and Zuid-Hoogkerk. Through participant-led walking semi-structured in-depth interviews and photo elicitation in Groningen, The Netherlands, thematic analysis was conducted, aimed to uncover patterns, commonalities, and differences between participants' perceptions and experiences. Young adults perceived little problems in their neighbourhood and often pointed to neighbourhood resources, thus attaching affective meaning to their neighbourhood. Both the social and physical neighbourhood characteristics played a part in their development of positive and negative possible future selves. Little social inequalities were found between Noord and Zuid-Hoogkerk, where the place identity was perceived as homogeneous between the different neighbourhoods. Policymakers should include young people in government policies, more often by discussing perceived neighbourhood problems and resources *with* them, not just *for* them

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26th of January, 2024
Final Version
Word count: 6593
Photo credits title page: Illustration by Bodil Bouwer, @colourmyhand on Instagram

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Young people's relationships with their deprived neighbourhoods are complex. Research on neighbourhood effects primarily focuses on the impact of physical characteristics, largely neglecting complex social processes and young people's neighbourhood perceptions and experiences. Places where one grows up cognitively represent parts of the past, present, and future selves, as Prince (2014) describes. Place-based experiences can lead to attachment or aversion and may be integrated into future possible selves. How young people conceptualise and represent themselves, - full of potential or negative possibilities - influences the development of their social, health, and educational outcomes (Prince, 2014). Moreover, the places they grow up in, create and imagine are not neutral, but are "always reflective of and constituted within and by relations of power" (Prince, 2014 p709). The social representations of place are prime examples of how power relations shape future possible selves. For example, living in a neighbourhood with high poverty levels harms young people's well-being (Visser et al., 2021). Furthermore, a negative neighbourhood social environment (e.g. little trust and sense of community) is associated with lower levels of well-being in young people (Aminzadeh et al., 2013; Elgar et al., 2010; Eriksson et al., 2012; Oberle et al., 2011).

In Hoogkerk, a village next to the city of Groningen, the quality of life is considered to be somewhat disadvantageous for youth growing up (Basismonitor Groningen, 2022). Hoogkerk periodically makes it to the headlines, when youth have been arrested after "assaulting and threatening" people or when "youth trashed an abandoned restaurant" (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2015; Omroep Organisatie Groningen, 2023). According to Visser et al. (2015), who researched the experiences of youth and their perception of their deprived neighbourhood in Feijenoord, a neighbourhood in Rotterdam, young people also perceive problems, such as crime and violence. They were, however, also aware of positive aspects of their neighbourhood. They pointed toward several resources, such as a sense of community, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Visser et al., 2015).

1.2 Research Problem

Research on socio-spatial inequalities primarily focuses on the structural characteristics of neighbourhoods, and the perceptions and experiences of adults in a macro context. Moreover, many

studies rely on income data to identify spatial inequalities, even though inequality is a multifaceted phenomenon across various fields, and cannot be understood by researching only income data.

The main purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind possible socio-spatial inequalities in Hoogkerk and how these shape the neighbourhood experiences and perceptions of young adults aged 18-24 in the neighbourhoods Hoogkerk-Noord and Hoogkerk-Zuid. These insights can be interesting for policymakers and youth workers several government layers, to understand young adults' perspectives and provide insight into neighbourhood problems, but also potential resources. This research is beneficial for existing literature on the neighbourhood perceptions and experiences of young adults in a Dutch context. Furthermore, this study will help contribute to and create an understanding of the relationship between possible socio-spatial inequalities and the experiences of young adults on a micro-level. Therefore, the following research question has been adopted:

"*To what extent do young adults in Hoogkerk experience socio-spatial inequalities in their neighbourhood?*"

The following sub-questions are proposed to further investigate the central research question, by researching both the social and physical environment and the perceptions of young adults on these topics:

1. How do young adults in Hoogkerk define neighbourhood problems & resources?
2. How does the socio-spatial context of the neighbourhood shape their (im)possible selves?

1.3 A Brief History of Hoogkerk

Hoogkerk, a village West of Groningen, has a rich and extensive industrial history. The location of Hoogkerk, at a junction of land and waterways, and the presence of a railroad formed important factors for industrial development near the end of the 19th century (Hacquebord & Overbeek, n.d). In 1969, after a political tug-of-war, the municipality of Hoogkerk was added to the municipality. Legally, it is now considered to be a neighbourhood of Groningen.

At the beginning of the 20th century, public housing was built in Oud-Hoogkerk (in this research referred to as Noord-Hoogkerk), for the sugar- and strawboard industry labourers. South of the train tracks, Zuid-Hoogkerk was later on built, a mix of mostly owner-occupied housing and rental housing (Hacquebord & Overbeek, n.d.). Hoogkerk has many facilities, such as its shopping centre, several primary schools, a community centre, and multiple sports fields (Basismonitor Groningen, 2022). Inhabitants have a relatively low educational attainment on average and less money to spend per month.

Additionally, both youth and old age dependency ratios are higher on average. Moreover, relatively few people with different ethnic backgrounds live in Hoogkerk (Basismonitor Groningen, 2022)

2. Theoretical Framework

Places are constructed through social practices and can be made meaningful by individuals. They have several layers and are interconnected to other places, such as neighbourhoods. Places can be viewed as a series of spots of social interactions, such as everyday social settings (e.g. homes, street corners, schools). These structure social interactions between individuals and thus shape and influence norms, values, and future possible selves (Visser et al., 2015; Prince, 2014). In the theoretical framework, the aim is to gain insight into the socio-spatial context meaningful for young people growing up in deprived neighbourhoods. Insights by several authors were gathered to investigate how socio-spatial inequalities, place identity, and possible selves are interrelated.

2.1 Socio-spatial Inequalities

Over the last decades, many advanced cities have seen a rise in socio-spatial inequalities, and the academic research on them is significant (Shi & Dorling, 2020; Sassen, 1990). Han (2022, p2) refers to it as "a state in which significant disparities are created because they are not evenly distributed across different spaces, which means that social inequalities are manifested in spatial patterns". For example, more advantaged neighbourhoods are associated with higher educational outcomes for adolescents (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2013). Furthermore, hanging out at a mall or fast-food restaurant was perceived as the preferred social arena for adolescents, because of a lack of involvement in physical leisure activities or youth clubs as a safe option, Havdal et al. (2021) found. Additionally, some explanations for neighbourhood effects put forward are: young people's development trajectories in deprived neighbourhoods get influenced by higher levels of crime, negative role models, influences of peers, and the presence of negative norms and values (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson, 2008). However, these studies fail to consider complex social processes, as Visser et al. (2015) point out. The socio-spatial behaviour and experiences of young people are thus different than those of adults.

2.2 Theory of Possible Selves

During adolescence, individuals develop a sense of self, constructed through cultural and socio-historical contexts, reflecting their experiences, personal interests, values, and knowledge

(Wainwright et al., 2018). They conceptualise and envision their futures, influencing their developmental trajectories, with both positive and negative possibilities, constraints, and potential. This self is constructed and influenced by place-based experiences, such as the place where one grows up (Prince, 2014). Young people may, for example, on the one hand, develop higher environmental competence in specific areas or streets of their deprived neighbourhood, because they perceive them as dangerous. On the other hand, they may also attach positive meaning to their neighbourhood, where they have developed extensive social networks of family and friends, who can be support sources (Visser et al., 2015).

Furthermore, norms, values, and expectations shape the content that will be incorporated into the possible self. The social and physical contexts of young adults, like schools, neighbourhoods, and families, shape the experiences of youth in who they might or might not eventually become. Aspired-to (who do I want to become?) or hoped-for (who do I hope to become?) possible selves may be supported or encouraged through interactions with people, or, belittled and ridiculed (Prince, 2014). These positively and negatively valued cognitions can, for example, support young adults in constructing a sense of pride and self-efficacy, or, can create place aversion. The identity development process can leave young people confused and, on the one hand, susceptible to negative influences, such as delinquency. On the other hand, having positive future possible selves has been linked to improved educational attainment (Destin & Oyserman, 2009) and more gainful employment, for example (Lee & Oyserman, 2009).

2.3 Place Identity

Prince (2014) describes the concept of place identity as all sorts of "positively and negatively valued cognitions (e.g. beliefs and symbolic meanings) about one's physical environment, accruing by someone's past environmental experiences, or memories that arise from experiences within physical places over time" (Prince, 2014, p700). Dixon and Durrheim (2004, p458) developed four key components of place identity. First, place identity involves a deep sense of familiarity, or 'insideness' that arises from habituation in physical environments. Secondly, it involves a sense of emotional belonging in the environment. Third, it contains how symbolic meanings contribute to the meaning of physical environments to the self. Lastly, place identity contains 'the role of the physical environment in enabling the achievement of identity-relevant projects'. By absorbing the physical environment, individuals can create environments where, for example, self-worth and self-expression can be pursued (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004).

Furthermore, the relationships people have with places are actively reconstructed as part of the ongoing process of identity development. Themes of change, such as rupture, discontinuities, and

transitions are important aspects of place identity (Prince, 2014). Moreover, it is an active contributor to envisioning and developing the present and future possible selves. Place identity has the power to conflict young people about personal worth and ability. Negative place stereotypes and stigmatisation of 'outsiders', can become part of the future selves of young people, as their lived experiences are wildly different than the views of the outsider. Spatial representations, such as 'the wrong side of the tracks' and trailer parks, influence how young people think about themselves, who they are now, and might become in the future (Prince, 2014).
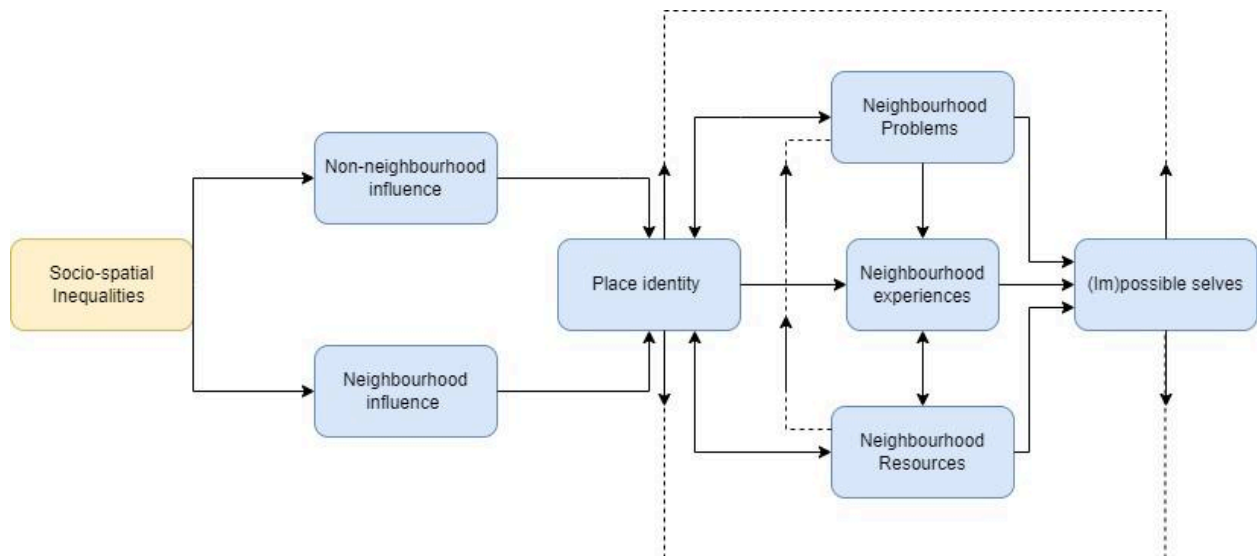
2.4 Conceptual Model

Figure 1 - Conceptual model of the relationships between socio-spatial inequalities, place identity, experiences, and (im)possible selves of young adults

The relationships between socio-spatial inequalities, place identity, the experiences of young adults, and their future (impossible) selves, are shown in Figure 1. In the model, the yellow box relates more to the central research question, and the blue boxes to the research sub-questions. The researcher divided non-neighbourhood influences and neighbourhood influences into separate blue boxes. Neighbourhood influences take place in the neighbourhood of residence, whereas non-neighbourhood influences do not. Neighbourhood influences can influence the positively and negatively accrued cognitions of neighbourhoods. Non-neighbourhood influences, such as social networks at school, can, in turn, influence how they perceive and experience their neighbourhood.

There is a causal relationship between the place identity of the neighbourhoods and the shaping of (im)possible selves. Place identity shapes the selves of young adults, and vice versa. Moreover, it is

interrelated to the experiences of young adults, as their experiences shape place identity. Their experiences, however, also get shaped by their neighbourhood. Furthermore, there is a two-directional relationship between place identity and the problems and resources of a neighbourhood. As Burton, Garrett-Peters, and Eason (2011) describe, social representations of place are examples of how characterisations of places (e.g. the wrong side of the tracks) are the product of place-based ideologies, working to "affix 'truths' and negative characteristics" both to the physical environment and the people who grow up there. Additionally, neighbourhood resources and experiences can influence the problems young adults perceive.

The future (im)possible selves are shaped by neighbourhood resources and problems, as perceived by the young inhabitants. Furthermore, the experiences of young adults shape who they are now and might become in the future, which, in turn, is influenced by possible problems and resources in the neighbourhood.

2.5 Expectations

Literature has established effects that are important to neighbourhood deprivation experiences of young people themselves (Visser et al., 2015; Visser et al., 2021). Additionally, research has been done on the problems and resources youth experience in their neighbourhoods (Visser et al., 2015). Little research, however, has been done in a Dutch context. Based on the literature, this study expects that the social and physical environment both play an important role in neighbourhood perception. Social-interactive mechanisms (e.g. lack of social cohesion, lack of positive social networks) and environmental mechanisms (e.g. physical surroundings, exposure to violence) may play a role. Young adults aged between 18 and 24, however, have seen themselves grow, make mistakes, and may have seen possible threats and fears in the neighbourhood they grew up in. Their place-based experiences, for example, the neighbourhood, are expected to play a smaller, as well as a different role for them, compared to young adults aged 13 to 18 years old, as researched by Visser et al. (2015). Moreover, it is expected that the conceptualisation of their futures, with place as a critical ingredient of the future self-concept, will still play an important role in their lives. Participants may have moved away from Hoogkerk, but it is expected that the participants' place identity has left positively and negatively valenced cognitions about their neighbourhoods and that it has shaped their present selves (Proshansky, 1978).

3. Methodology

This research has utilised the qualitative research methods of semi-structured in-depth walking interviews and photo-elicitation to investigate young adults' experiences in their neighbourhood while linking them to the socio-spatial context (see Appendix D). Participants were all aged between 18 and 24 years old at the time of the interview and live or have lived a large part of their lives in Hoogkerk.

During the walking interviews, the researcher walked along with the participant, asking interview questions and probing questions. This qualitative interview method is a way to deepen the understanding of lived experiences in particular places (King and Woodroffe, 2017). Photo-elicitation interviews are a method in which either the researcher or the participant introduces photos in the interview (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). Photographs on themselves do not necessarily convey empirical truths or "reality". This is, however, not necessary in research. Photographs can act as a means of communication between the researcher and the participant. The researcher can use photographs as a tool to expand on questions, and, simultaneously, the participant can use photographs to communicate the dimensions of their lives. Two people looking at the same picture will see different things. By giving young adults control of the camera, they can show what they find important in their neighbourhood, rather than what the researcher thinks. Moreover, photos may help them to exercise their agency, as the environment can play both a supporting and hindering role in this (Lewis and Lindsay 2000; Tunstall, et al., 2004; Gabhainn and Sixsmith, 2006).

3.1 Recruitment of Participants

To recruit participants, different organisations, initiatives in Hoogkerk, and the local social network of the researcher have been used to find participants. Participants have been recruited through convenience sampling and snowball sampling. In consultation with the participant, a meaningful place and time in Hoogkerk was chosen. The participant attaches certain memories or experiences they have had in the past in that location. The participant was asked to sign a consent form either right before or during the interview (Appendix C). The interview questions were divided into three parts:

1. Physical neighbourhood environment
2. Social neighbourhood environment
3. Possible selves and place identity

3.2 Data Analysis

After data had been collected, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Then, the transcripts were added to the software of Atlas.ti to categorise and code data. The following step was to go through all interviews and label all quotes. The labelled quotes were then used to create one or two-word codes that describe the theme of the quote. The last step was to categorise the thematic quotes and relate them to each other.

The thematic analysis has been done through deductive and inductive coding, to identify common themes and patterns (Clifford et al., 2016). Participants mentioned a variety of themes regarding neighbourhood experiences and how this shaped their (im)possible selves. Predetermined deductive codes based on literature and inductive codes have been added during data analysis and are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Deductively predetermined codes and inductively determined codes

Physical neighbourhood environment	Social neighbourhood environment
Neighbourhood resources	Neighbourhood problems
Preferred social arena	Neighbourhood locations
Neighbourhood familiarity/insideness	Possible selves
(Neighbourhood) relationships	Safety
Place identity	School
Non-neighbourhood social environment	Non-neighbourhood physical environment
Affective meaning neighbourhood	Street corners/streets
Social activities	Self-defining memories
The home	Place attachment

3.3 Ethical Considerations and Positionality

The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2018) has been adhered to. The five leading principles of conduct are: honesty, scrupulousness, transparency, independence, and responsibility. All participants and relevant names, locations such as homes, and phenomena named by the participants were pseudonymised. Consent to use the collected data was asked at the start of the interview, using a consent form in Dutch (Appendix C). It describes the research, how exactly the participants' data have been processed, and how participants can withdraw their consent from the

research. Data have been stored in the private researchers' database for the duration of the research and pseudonymised data have been shared with the supervisor and student peers.

Rowe (2014) describes how positionality can influence "research is conducted, its outcomes, and results". The researcher grew up near Hoogkerk, the study of interest. Therefore, the researcher can be described as both an insider, because a part of his social network resides there, but also an outsider, because he did not grow up *in* the village of Hoogkerk. On the one hand, it was easier to collect a large enough sample. On the other hand, it may have influenced the opinion the researcher developed on Hoogkerk, during the interviews. Most places were perceived as lively and safe by the researcher although some places made him feel out of place. Moreover, as the researcher is a male, this may have affected research access and outcomes, especially because Desiree was the only female in the research. The perception of males may differ from that of females, especially regarding perceived safety.

The power dynamic between participant and researcher was noticeable, as half of the participants were younger than the researcher. The researcher tried to read participants' ability to answer challenging questions, by looking at body language and previous answers. This may have given participants either less or more agency, depending on how they perceived the interview. Yet, since the walking interviews were participant-led, this may have given more agency to the participants.

3.4 Descriptive Participant Information

Table 2 shows demographic information about the participants. All but Daniel were still studying at the time of the interview, in different instances, ranging from secondary vocational education to the University of Groningen. The ages range from 18 to 24 years old. Desiree was the only female participating in the research. All participants have either grown up or have lived in Hoogkerk for a long time, ranging between 7 years and their entire lifetime. All participants have lived or still live in Zuid-Hoogkerk, although Sam and Frank have moved from Noord to Zuid-Hoogkerk.

Table 2 - Main participant demographics

Participant pseudonym	Gender	Age	Educational attainment	Moved out	Neighbourhood
Collin	Male	24	University of Applied Sciences	No	Zuid-Hoogkerk
Desiree	Female	20	University of Applied Sciences	No	Zuid-Hoogkerk
Ewout	Male	21	Secondary vocational education	No	Zuid-Hoogkerk
Sam	Male	18	Secondary vocational education	No	Zuid/Noord-Hoogkerk
Daniel	Male	24	University of Applied Sciences	Yes, 2 years ago	Noord-Hoogkerk
Frank	Male	23	University	Yes, 2 years ago	Zuid/Noord-Hoogkerk

4. Results

The participants showed that they have a critical understanding of their neighbourhood. Their world and their lives expanded when they left high school and their place identities with it. Moreover, they all were aware of both positive and negative aspects of the neighbourhood environment. The following sections elaborate upon this as follows.

4.1 'Problems In My Neighbourhood?'

The interviews showed that most participants were aware of the problems in their neighbourhood. First, the interviews showed that some of the young adults were indirectly involved in verbal and physical violence, where they pointed toward events they heard about from their social network or on the news.

They specifically referred to violent neighbours. These neighbours would not verbally or physically attack the participants but would argue with someone else, as illustrated by Desiree:

"When I was twelve I was an eye-witness of a stabbing (…), they were pretty aggressive people, I guess. In the sense that they were harassing their neighbours. I believe that they peed on the window once"

Youth interviewed by Visser et al. (2015) pointed toward violent behaviour as well, which participants heard about or experienced themselves. Most youths, however, had high levels of environmental competence. They had the ability to use the neighbourhood to their advantage and knew where to go, and where not to. Young people can feel uncomfortable walking past certain places, for example, because of a lack of supervision.

The experiences of the young adults in this paper influenced their spatial behaviour in Hoogkerk as well. Ewout and Desiree, for example, expressed concern about certain places, and the people attached to them outside their neighbourhood. Ewout, for example, is more on his guard when he is in certain parts of Noord-Hoogkerk. He and his girlfriend would rather evade, choose another route, or bike past youths hanging on the street quickly. This is best illustrated by:

"I don't feel very safe if I, well maybe I do, but my girlfriend wouldn't if we'd have to go through there, so we'd find another route, because I know how girls have been treated there in the past."

Furthermore, Frank was attacked by a group, when he was very young, which made him more aware of places to avoid in Noord-Hoogkerk. Moreover, Desiree, the only female participant, said that when people on the street yelled something at her, she would never indulge in yelling back. She

elaborated further: "Safety measures like that are always in the back of my head". According to Cui et al. (2023), perceived safety scores are highly consistent. However, in their research one-fifth of men and almost two-thirds of women perceived city scenes as unsafe. Where both women and men perceived safety, there were almost no differences between genders. Too few female participants participated in this study to record any relationship like this between men and women. Nevertheless, in this research, both genders found some places unsettling, and developed, to some extent, environmental competence.

Figure 2 - Frank: "In the streets further ahead, there's minimal street lighting, which usually leads to if urchins want to mess around or break things, they go behind the houses. It usually helps them to not get caught."

Furthermore, a majority of participants pointed towards the other side of the tracks. According to them, most problems occurred there and not necessarily in their part of town. Ewout, for example, does not see real problems in *his* neighourhood. He hears, however, girls are getting chased and on New Year's Eve, the *other* part of Hoogkerk gets closed off with large bonfires. Nobody enters, nobody leaves.

Yet, most of them do not avoid places in Hoogkerk, as Ewout would with his girlfriend. Sam sees young groups of men standing before the local supermarket. He walks past them without having second

thoughts, because nothing has ever happened to him. Frank also points out a mutual sort of respect, illustrated by the following:

"As long as you leave them alone, they will leave you alone. As long as you're not going to annoy them…it's some sort of mutual respect"

From the research from Visser et al. (2015) and Ormston & Anderson (2010, 11), similar findings emerge, as 'exposure to some kinds of antisocial behaviour may partially desensitize people to its effects'. For this research problems 'happen to people with problems', who grow up in 'problematic households', and problems, at least the largest part, do not happen in their neighbourhood, but elsewhere.

4.2 '*My* Neighbourhood' - A Source of Affective Meaning

Although all of them were well aware of negative aspects of Hoogkerk, they were generally positive about the physical and social neighbourhood environment. Sam said that he finds no problems, besides people hanging around, and occasionally breaking things in the neighbourhood, in both Noord- and Zuid-Hoogkerk, although he thought it was worse in Zuid-Hoogkerk. He said the following:

"I guess, when I tell people I live in Hoogkerk, I don't know… people have such a bad image of Hoogkerk"

He thinks it is unfair that Hoogkerk is treated as a place where everything is bad, while it is such a small part of Hoogkerk that causes problems. To explain their perceptions, they point towards support sources, like Collin who shares:

"It's, very, very accessible. The friends whom I hung out with, this was close…(...) it was sort of cozy here (..) you have everything and even though it's a neighbourhood, it's not very busy"

Collin brought, like other participants, friends to Hoogkerk to relax. They were at the pond or relaxing at home in the summer. Most participants reminisce about the pond as a place they (used to) go to in the summer (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 - Desiree: "Places like the pond make me nostalgic. So many fun memories attached to places like these"

Support sources like these made them value their local environment more. Some participants have made use of sports clubs in the past, like Daniel and Ewout. Notwithstanding, most participants made little use of the recreational facilities in or outside their neighbourhood. Possible explanations could be that they do not see the necessity of using them, most likely because their activity spaces have expanded over the years, extending over the borders of their neighbourhood and Hoogkerk. Daniel, a former Hoogkerker soccer coach, came to view his trainer programme as a space for personal growth. He wants to start kickboxing again because it is a place for self-expression and personal growth. Ewout used to do judo near his primary school but stopped a couple of years ago (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Ewout: "Lots of memories here. It's the first time I'm here again so it's really nice to see. Nothing has changed, really."

He saw places he had not seen in years. Yet, he seemed to perceive them as still important. He felt nostalgic seeing it again and especially named positively valenced cognitions about socialising environments, a derivative of place identity (Prince, 2014). In this research, neighbourhood familiarity is the foundation on which the participants' lives are based. The social networks of the participants expanded beyond the borders, as Sam illustrates:

"Interviewer: Do you still have friends here?

Sam: I don't think so. I have friends outside of Hoogkerk (..) I still know some people here, but I wouldn't say they're friends (..) I know all of them from school and work, outside Hoogkerk."

This results from the expansive self, a process that started when they went to secondary schools outside of Hoogkerk and the expansion of their social worlds. Interestingly, because most of these

participants are older than those in Visser et al. (2015) (aged 13-18), it is mostly the social networks in the neighbourhood that affirm positive future possible selves, instead of place-based neighbourhood experiences. Moreover, Visser et al. (2015) also noticed that neighbourhood inhabitants can reflect a sense of pride and worth. Yet, in this paper, participants who moved out of Hoogkerk still show a sense of pride and commitment in Hoogkerk.

Within their neighbourhood, the home is their preferred social arena. Some have longstanding friendships in their neighbourhoods. Collin describes the difference in friendships between a group of friends when he was young, with one of his best friends:

"I never felt like I was really part of that group of friends. (..) After a while I didn't hear anything from them anymore, so at a certain point, I stopped going to them. (..) Then I met Dave and we hung around, which was nice because Dave stopped by me, and I went to him. (...) and though we have different friends and we don't talk for a week, we text each other and everything is as usual"

This example illustrates a sense of familiarity, where the participants' perceptions of what it entails to be part of a group, is important and relates to the neighbourhood as a source of affective meaning. Nevertheless, this was not reflected in the plans for the future of any young adult. Visser et al. (2015) found that some of the youth desired to remain in the neighbourhood after they had left their parental home. Noteworthy is that Hoogkerk does not contain the same recreational facilities for students (e.g. close to work and school). Participants did name the accessibility and the relative affordability of Hoogkerk relative to Groningen. However, most think it is not a place they want their children to grow up in. Particularly other villages were perceived to be better for children to grow up in.

4.3 'Who Am I Now and Who Will I Be?'

The neighbourhood may play a smaller role in their self-development trajectory now, their past place-based experiences and perceptions about the neighbourhood, however, have shaped their sense of self. The socio-spatial context of both the neighbourhood and wider Hoogkerk has played and plays a pivotal role in the shaping of their (im)possible selves. Memories and experiences of participants are shared to shed light on who they are *now,* characterised by who they want to *be*, and how these memories and experiences play an important part in their developing-self.

Most participants shared memories about their homes and streets, where they invited friends, and where their family lives. They attach affective meaning to the streets and homes they live or have lived in. Sam reflects on the social street cohesion where he lived, in Noord-Hoogkerk:

Sam: This is where I grew up. The whole street was involved with each other.

Interviewer: Did you feel at home?

Sam: Yes, it's where I had a lot of friends too. We always celebrated King's Day together, decorating the whole street. So, I felt at home for sure."

As the above quote illustrates, most interviewed young adults show that to them, the neighbourhood forms an important part of their place identity. Sam came to view the street as a safe place for self-expression and personal growth, and the local physical environment, attached to its inhabitants. Places like these have become laden with affective and symbolic meanings, and for him, have been internalised and encoded in his possible selves, producing emplaced future self-concept (Prince, 2014).

Even though this street is the basis of affective meaning for Sam's place identity, it could also be a part of memories characterised by dislike or discomfort for other young adults. While social networks can create opportunities for certain groups, they exclude others (Visser et al., 2015). Some social groups are a larger part of the local social environment than others. Most young adults felt attached, although Collin shared that he was bullied pretty badly.

This changed his present self, as well as his neighbourhood perception. He perceives the neighbourhood as a place of dislike, even though "hanging around with Dave" is fun. Moreover, he never felt part of a group. Unlike the other participants, He thus felt somewhat excluded from the social environment. His self-image negatively changed, damaging his place identity because of the bullying. From high school and his studies onward, however, he found himself outside Hoogkerk, one where social interactions created meaningful places (e.g. school). His neighbourhood familiarity became less important, and his social world, like with all other participants, expanded. The above examples of Sam and Collin thus illustrate two different perceptions of how the self developed throughout their childhood, and how it shaped their neighbourhood familiarity.

Although several participants were bullied at their primary schools in Hoogkerk, none of the participants described the schools as places of discomfort. On the contrary, as Ewout illustrated with the following:

"This place holds so many memories. It's just that, I always had a great time here, always had friends, no complaints. This is one of the more beautiful places here."

For Ewout, his school contributed to place-based experiences of belonging, whereas the social environment for Collin, contributed to his experiences of place aversion.

Additionally, their future possible selves possess motivational and self-regulatory functions, to some extent (Prince, 2014). For example, Desiree shared her future possible career path and said her parents gave her opportunities to explore what she wanted to do, and indirectly, who she wanted to be. Most, if not all participants, had the opportunity to develop competing positive possibilities, enforced by embracing systems (e.g. friends and family). Therefore, the ability to develop positive future selves was not limited, where the ability to form positive motivational functions may have helped the participants to actualise their goals, academic, career-wise, or other (Prince, 2014). The social worlds of the participants play a larger role in their future possible selves than the physical environments. Nevertheless, certain places, such as their schools, work, and home, seem to play an important role in the shaping of their future possible selves as well.

5. Discussion

5.1 Limitations

This paper underlines the importance of further more in-depth qualitative research with young people. How young people perceive the local environment has long been interpreted by adults: parents, caretakers, and teachers, to measure the experiences of young adults. Almost all participants identified as male, making it difficult to compare power dynamics during the interviews. This has impacted data quality and reliability. Moreover, this study contains a small sample size, only highlighting a small part of young adults, a certain age group, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and is not representative of the whole of Hoogkerk. Additionally, only two participants lived in Noord-Hoogkerk, making it difficult to analyse differences between neighbourhoods. Data collection time was restricted, impacting the quality and quantity of the analysed data.

Furthermore, photo elicitation was adopted and participants were encouraged to take photos beforehand. Instructions to the participants about making photos beforehand, instead of during, could have been clearer. Consequently, participants' photos convey mainly positive cognitions of place, instead of possible negative ones as well.

Moreover, the participants' agency may have been restricted because the participant and researcher did not have the chance to build a connection before the interview. If this were the case, it would have been likely that the participants would have shared more experiences laden with symbolic meanings and beliefs.

5.2 Strengths

The strengths of this study lie in the perceptions and experiences of an understudied group: young adults aged 18-24, who live or have lived, most of their lives in the same neighbourhood. This paper therefore contributes to the understanding of the worlds of young people and how it shapes who they are now, and who they aspire, or hope to become. Moreover, this study illuminates the idea that participant-led walking interviews add to studying young people's neighbourhood experiences. Most participants felt comfortable enough sharing both positive and negative experiences. In part taking photos during the interview gave the participants more agency and may have shifted the power balance more toward the participant.

Contrary to what Visser et al. (2015) found, these young adults had much knowledge about the outside world. Even though they have few lived experiences outside the neighbourhood, as most of them had lived in Hoogkerk for the largest part of their lives, it is likely that their perceptions and experiences influenced their (im)possible selves. Their experiences are more heterogeneous, compared to Visser et al. (2015), and in line with Visser et al. (2023) as all of their lives *have* expanded over the borders of their neighbourhood.

6. Conclusions

This study explored young adults' perception and experiences of Hoogkerk, neighbourhood problems, and support resources, and how the socio-spatial context shaped them to envision their future (im)possible selves.

To a large extent, participants were well aware of problems in their neighbourhood, such as violence. "People with problems" coming from problematic households are the root of problems, such as physical violence, they pointed out. Most of them, however, were positive about their neighbourhood environment, a finding supported by Visser et al. (2015). As expected, they pointed toward several support resources outside Hoogkerk, such as school and work. After primary school, their social worlds expanded past the borders of Hoogkerk, and for most of them, their relationships were not Hoogkerk-based anymore. This could stem from the normalcy of social exclusion: even though their social networks were not (solely) Hoogkerk-based anymore, they had lived in their neighbourhood for large parts of their lives (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001). Furthermore, the young adults pointed toward the other side of the tracks, where problems resided. Some did mention problems in their neighbourhood but also pointed out that they got up to similar, although 'lesser' mischief when they were young.

It became clear, that the local social environment formed an integrated part of their mainly positive future possible selves. They were encouraged to form hoped-for and aspired-to possible selves by social interactions, and to a lesser extent, place. Their connection to the self was strengthened by external appraisals, where personal growth and self-esteem were central. However negative place-based experiences, such as (in)direct violence shaped environmental competence for some, as well as their possible selves.

When answering the main question, it becomes clear that neighbourhood problems and resources on the one hand, and future (im)possible selves on the other, are for all participants connected. Few social inequalities were found and both Noord- and Zuid Hoogkerk were perceived by most as positive and 'relaxing'.

Most recreational facilities are in Zuid-Hoogkerk and even though easily accessible, little to no participants made use of the recreational facilities, without differences between those aged 18 and 24. Additionally, the place identity of those who had lived in Noord-Hoogkerk was rather heterogeneous. On the one hand, negative place-based experiences had partially shaped negative future possible selves. On the other hand, they unexpectedly pointed toward a close-knit social network in the streets where they lived, positively shaping their experiences. In Zuid-Hoogkerk, most participants' place identity contained mainly positively valenced cognitions, about their social network, and aspects of the physical environment. For most, their positive future possible selves were encouraged and supported through these positive interactions. Some participants experienced the other side of the tracks as the wrong side of the tracks, as more problematic, and referred to it with dislike. Furthermore, since most participants' everyday places are mostly outside Hoogkerk, they may perceive places as more problematic, because they spend the majority of their time outside their neighbourhood.

Future research is recommended to focus on participant-led walking interviews through young people's neighbourhood, illuminating important everyday places, with a larger sample size. Photo elicitation could also be adopted, to shift the power balance more toward the participant. Policymakers should not simply research young people but also include them in policymaking. Moreover, as young people perceive their low-income neighbourhoods differently than the hegemonic discourse, policymakers should not assume they have fewer aspirations and opportunities.

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Appendix A: Glossary

1. Affective meaning in the neighbourhood: youths' pride and place attachment to their neighbourhood (Visser et al., 2015, p46)

2. Aspired-to selves: who someone wants to become in the future (Prince, 2014)

3. Environmental competence: Having the ability to use the neighbourhood skillfully based on their understanding of different places in the neighbourhood (Visser et al., 2015, p43)

4. Future (im)possible selves: who one can become in the future, based on place-based experiences in the social and physical environment

5. Hoped-for selves: who someone hopes to become in the future (Prince, 2014)

6. Neighbourhood familiarity: Knowing the places and people in the neighbourhood, where it can be seen as a referent to past experiences and actions. It can have both positive and negative consequences

7. Place attachment: Feelings attached to certain geographical places, emotionally binding a person to it

8. Sense of self: the perception someone has of themselves, based on experiences, norms, and values that can support or threaten the collection of characteristics an individual has

Appendix B: Deductive Code Tree
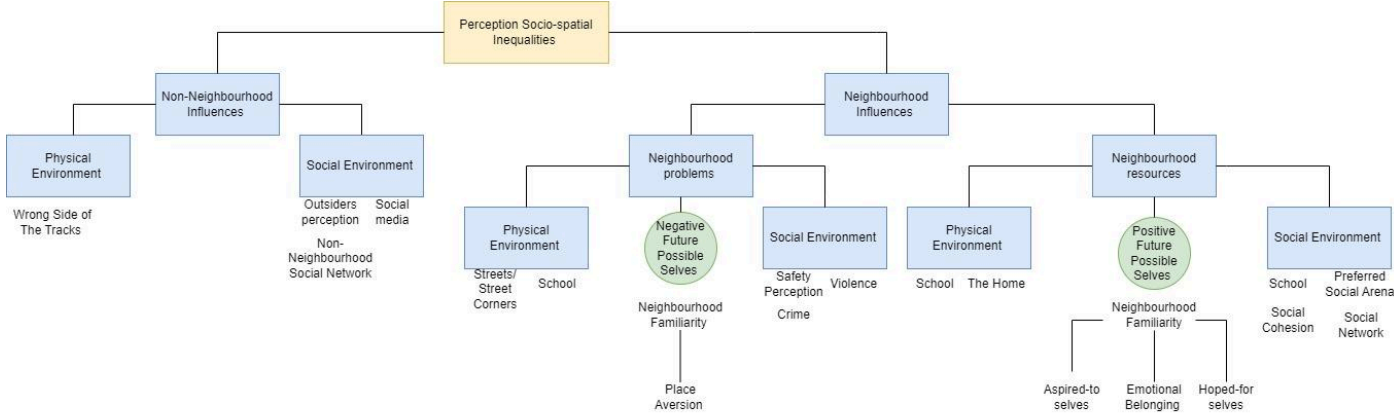
Appendix C: Empty Consent Form

Toestemmingsverklaring

Toestemmingsverklaring voor onderzoek: 'Young adults' neighbourhood experiences and (im)possible selves in Hoogkerk'.
Ik begrijp het onderzoek volledig. Ik heb genoeg tijd gehad om te beslissen of ik mee wil doen aan het onderzoek. Ik heb de kans gekregen om vragen te stellen en mijn vragen zijn duidelijk beantwoord. Ik begrijp welke gegevens worden verzameld in dit onderzoek.
Ik begrijp dat alle persoonlijke gegevens niet te herleiden zijn tot mij als deelnemer. Verder begrijp ik dat de data geanonimiseerd wordt.
Ik weet dat mijn deelname vrijwillig is. Ik begrijp dat ik mij terug kan trekken uit het onderzoek op elk moment, zonder een reden te hoeven geven.
Ik geef toestemming om de interviewgegevens te verwerken en gebruiken voor educatieve doeleinden.
Ik verklaar hierbij dat ik mee wil doen aan dit onderzoek.

Naam en Handtekening van deelnemer: Datum:

Verklaring Onderzoeker
Ik verklaar dat ik de deelnemer volledig geïnformeerd heb
Als er meer informatie naar voren komt tijdens het onderzoek die invloed heeft op de toestemmingsverklaring van de deelnemer, breng ik die tijdig op de hoogte.

Naam en Handtekening van onderzoeker: Datum:

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Hoi! Ik ben Aize Bouwer! Ik ben een Sociale Geografie en Planologie student aan de Universiteit van Groningen. Ik zit momenteel in mijn derde jaar en schrijf mijn scriptie. Het doel van mijn onderzoek is om te achterhalen hoe jongvolwassenen hun woonwijk zien en ervaren. Ik ben geïnteresseerd in welke plekken belangrijk zijn (en waren) in het dagelijks leven van jongeren. Ik vind dit onderwerp interessant, omdat ik het belangrijk vind dat alle jongvolwassenen op een fijne manier kunnen opgroeien in hun wijk. Verder vind ik het belangrijk dat ze positieve ervaringen en herinneringen aan hun wijk overhouden. Voordat we beginnen met het interview, zijn er een paar belangrijke dingen die ik nog even deel.

Tijdens het interview lopen we door Hoogkerk, naar plekken die voor jou waarde hebben. Deze kunnen zowel binnen als buiten jouw (voormalige) woonwijk liggen. Dit kan zowel positief als negatief zijn. Ook vraag ik je om voor of tijdens het interview om foto's te maken. Deze worden alleen voor dit onderzoek gebruikt.

De onderwerpen waar we het over gaan hebben zijn persoonlijk en kunnen gevoelig liggen bij je. Hierom benadruk ik dat het interview volledig vrijwillig is. Op ieder moment kun je stoppen en/of aangeven wanneer je een vraag niet wil beantwoorden. De antwoorden die je geeft tijdens het interview worden gebruikt om mijn scriptie te schrijven. Deelname is anoniem, wat betekent dat ik jouw naam en de mensen en plaatsen die je noemt, zal veranderen, zodat dit niet terug te leiden is naar jou.

Is het goed dat ik dit interview opneem, zodat ik later dit interview kan terugluisteren en kan bewerken zodat ik het kan gebruiken voor het onderzoek?
Het interview zal ongeveer een uur duren, al hangt dit af van hoe ons gesprek zal zijn, en wat je wil delen. Heb je nog vragen voordat we beginnen?

En, wil je nog meedoen aan het interview?

1. Inleidende vragen

0. Ik begin het interview met wat inleidende vragen:

   a. Hoe gaat het? Hoe is je dag tot nu toe?
   b. Hoe identificeer je je, en wat is je leeftijd?
   c. Studeer je (nog), heb je een baan, of doe je wat anders?
   d. Waar precies in Hoogkerk ben je opgegroeid?
   e. We hebben hier afgesproken, omdat ik jou gevraagd heb om naar een plek te gaan die van waarde is voor jou. Hoe lang geleden ben je hier voor het laatst geweest?
   f. En, waarom heb je deze plek gekozen?

2. Kernvragen

In dit gedeelte van de vragen vraag ik je om foto's te maken van plekken die voor jou belangrijk zijn/ kijken we naar de foto's die je gemaakt hebt van tevoren

De wijkervaringen van jongvolwassenen (Problemen en hulpbronnen in de woonwijk)
2.1 Fysieke leefomgeving wijkervaring

a. Hoe vind je het om hier weer te zijn? Roept het emoties en gevoelens op, en zo ja, wat voor emoties en gevoelens zijn dit?
b. Hoe vind je je woonwijk?

Wat vind je leuk/ fijn aan je wijk? En wat vind je minder fijn/ leuk, aan je wijk?

c. In hoeverre zie je hier problemen in de wijk? (bijv. criminaliteit, (verbaal) geweld, graffiti)
d. In hoeverre zie je hier hulpmiddelen in de wijk? (bijv. gebouwen waar je kunt sporten, de kerk, activiteiten in de buurt)
e. Hoe ervaar je dit deel van je woonwijk? Hoe vind je het om hier te zijn?
f. Wat voor andere plekken zijn voor jou belangrijk? Is het oké om naar deze plekken toe te gaan?
g.   Wat voor gevoelens/gevoelens/herinneringen, roepen deze plekken op bij jou?
h. Wat vind je fijn, leuk en/of goed aan de wijk?
i. Wat vind je niet fijn, leuk en/of goed aan de wijk?
j. In hoeverre zijn hier sportgebouwen waar je gebruik van maakte/ maakt?
k. Waar ging je naar school? Hoe vond je het om daar naar school te gaan

2.2 Sociale leefomgeving wijkervaring

a. Met wie woon/woonde je hier in Hoogkerk samen?
b. Hoe was het om samen te wonen met deze persoon/personen? (positief/negatief)
c. Hoe zou je je ouders omschrijven? Hoe is het contact met hen (en met broers en zussen)?

Wat herken je van je ouders in jezelf? (wat voor karaktereigenschappen) Hoe vaak zie je je ouders?

Heb je denk je ideeën overgenomen van hen over de wijk? Zo ja, wat voor ideeën zijn dit?

d. Heb je hier (veel) vrienden gemaakt? Wat voor vriendschappen zijn dit? Wat doen/deden jullie samen als jullie buiten zijn/waren hier in Hoogkerk?
e. Waar ging je naar school? Was dat in Hoogkerk? Wat vond je van je basisschool? Weet je wat je ouders van je school vonden? En je vrienden toen?
f. Hoe is/ was het contact met je (naaste) buren? In welke mate waren jullie hecht?
g. Woont hier veel familie in de buurt? (Hoogkerk) Zo ja, wie zijn dit/ Hoevaak zie je hen? Hoe is het contact met hen?

h. Hoe voel je je op het gebied van veiligheid in de wijk? Voel je je veilig, of ook wel eens onveilig? Wat zijn dit voor momenten? Wanneer is dit vooral? Zijn er specifieke tijden op de dag? En/of, wat maakt dat het veilig aanvoelt voor jou?

i. In hoeverre zie je hier politie in de wijk? Wat voor gevoel geeft dit voor jou?

2.3 Mogelijke zelven en plaatsidentiteit

a. Als je dit wil delen, wat is je fijnste herinnering aan de wijk? Waarom is deze zo fijn?

b. En, als je dit wil delen, wat is de minst fijne herinnering aan de wijk?

c. Weet je nog wat je later wilde worden, toen je jonger (13-18 jaar) was? Zo ja, wat was dit, en waarom wilde je dit worden?

d. Als dit nu wat anders is dan wat het toen was, waardoor komt dit denk je?

e. Wil je of wilde je ergens anders naartoe verhuizen? Waarom, waarom niet? En waarheen?

f. Pas je je aan aan je omgeving als je in Hoogkerk bent? Waarom wel/ niet?

g. Als je bent verhuisd uit Hoogkerk, wat was de voornaamste reden/redenen?

3. Concluderende vragen

We zijn bij het eind van het interview gekomen. We hebben het gehad over jouw ervaringen in de wijk en over wie jij bent geworden en hoe dit samenhangt met wie je was, nu bent en wie je wil en kan worden.

Belangrijk: hier benoemen wat voor specifieke problemen, hulpbronnen particpanten benoemd hebben.

a. Je zei dit over … (bijv. Hangjongeren) … kun je dit verder toelichten?

b. Deze dingen … (opnoemen wat eerder genoemd is) vind je dus fijn in je woonwijk, en deze dingen … (opnoemen wat eerder genoemd is) wat minder fijn/ niet fijn

c. Denk je dat ik een goed beeld heb gekregen hebt van … (bijv. De onderlinge sociale contacten)

d. Hoe was het voor jou om het hier met mij over te hebben?

e. Zijn er nog punten die ik gemist heb?

f. Heb jij nog vragen over het onderzoek?

Bedankt voor het meedoen aan onderzoek!

Een kleinigheidje: chocola

Appendix E: Flyer
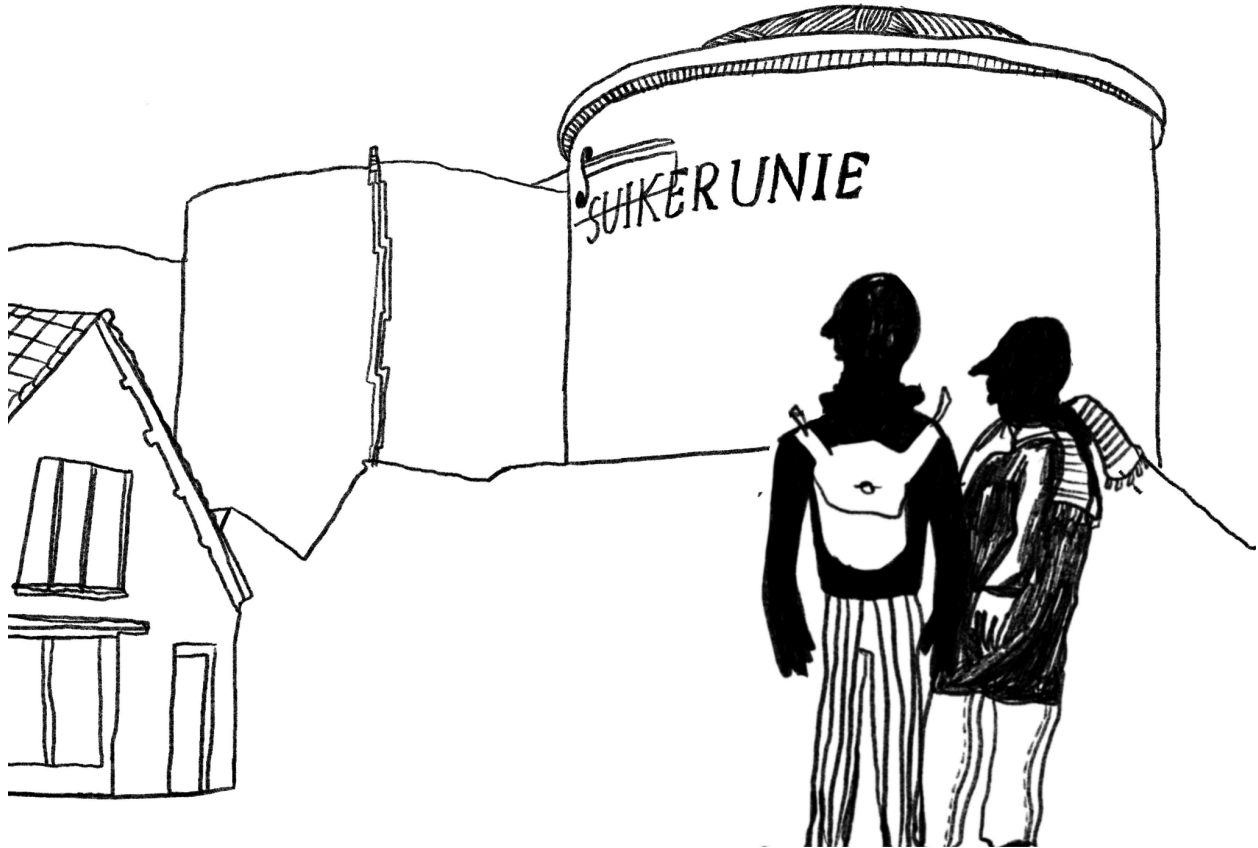
Doe jij mee?

Wie ben ik? - Aize Bouwer (23), student aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Wat onderzoek ik? - Welke plekken in jouw wijk waarde hebben voor jou, voor m'n scriptie

Waar? - Hoogkerk, waar we een uurtje rondlopen, in en rond jouw wijk

Wanneer? - Tot en met half december

Wie zoek ik? - Mensen tussen de 18-24 jaar, die wonen in Hoogkerk/lange tijd in Hoogkerk gewoond

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