

Where and How Expatriates Integrate: A Case Study from the City of Groningen, The Netherlands

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Master Thesis

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Abstract

With the continuing rise in globalisation and international migration, many societies are facing increased diversity, and more communities around the world are being required to address the issue of unifying more heterogeneous populations. Integration has become a widely recognized factor in the success of communities socially, economically and in levels of happiness and liveability. Accordingly, the challenge for urban planners is to promote factors that foster successful integration of new residents as the demographic and cultural composition of cities continues to evolve. One group of such residents is expatriates, who constitute a significant and increasing population in the Netherlands. This case study presents research into the integrative success of foreign national expatriates into the Dutch city of Groningen. It specifically examines where and how these expatriates build important communal relationships and how this affects the perception of these individuals' success at integrating into both their neighbourhoods and into their communities at large. It further explores their experiences as they assimilate into a culture that is often foreign to them and explores factors which might be seen to foster more successful integration into a new society, as well as how better policies could be introduced that help to facilitate this integration. Ultimately, it is critical about the role space plays in how expatriates integrate and build social networks, determining that while people still meet in physical spaces, in the City Centre or their local bars, important communal connections are more likely to have initially been facilitated online.

Keywords: Integration, Participation, Connection, Community, Expatriates

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1. Introduction

With the growth of globalisation and the continuing rise in international migration, more communities must work to successfully integrate a larger number of new people into their societies. Every year, there are millions of people who migrate to new countries, and to be successful, they must each adjust to and work to integrate into a new society (Farh, Bartol, Shapiro, & Shin, 2010). Each community endeavours to integrate new arrivals in its own way, and with varying degrees of success. The immigrants themselves must also integrate into their new physical and social 'space.' There are many ideas about what successful integration is, with typical indicators including success in employment, education, and broader 'assimilation into mainstream society' (Blokland, 2000; Misztal, 1996). Other important indicators of integration are found in individuals' perceptions of their integration into their new culture, particularly their experiences of social connections, which have been found to have more positive effects for migrants and refugees than for native-born individuals (Puyat, 2012; Samek, Laporte, Nauenberg, Shen & Coyte, 2012). In this study, the focus is on gaining insight into the physical places, or 'spaces', that provide opportunities for social connections that facilitate the integrative success of foreign nationals, also referred to as expatriates, living in the Netherlands, and in Groningen specifically. This is one of the few studies that looks at how expatriate integrate spatially.

1.1 Problem Definition

This research study will identify important spatial and social factors that facilitate successful integration of expatriates into well-established communities in Groningen. Particularly, the study will explore what role physical 'space' plays in how new arrivals make important social connections and in what ways this is relevant to how well 'integrated' they feel. Identifying these components will help to increase our understanding of factors that successfully facilitate the integration of newcomers into established communities. Results from this study will add to our understanding of ways to facilitate integration and will have implications for identifying effective ways of fostering a stronger sense of connectedness and integration for new arrivals.

1.2 Relevance of Migration and Expatriates

In recent years, immigration has become an increasingly important political and social issue. The refugee crisis and ‘tightening’ of Western countries’ physical borders in attempts to stop immigration (most conspicuously in the United States, Hungary and Italy) has brought immigration to the forefront of the news and public opinion. With the refugee crisis in Syria and the Middle East forcing millions of people from their homes as well as the rise of nationalistic policies in the United States and Europe among leaders wanting to “get tough” on immigration, the UNHCR (United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees) is claiming that we are now experiencing the highest levels of human displacement on record (UNCHR 2018). Recently, the President of United States has been forced to change his policies which separated migrant children from their parents, likely due to public pressure (Shear, Goodnough and Haberman, June 20, 2018). Further, newly elected far-right Italian interior minister Matteo Salvini has faced scrutiny for his plans to expel Roma people living in Italy as well as refusing permission for a ship carrying rescued refugees to land in Italy and claiming plans to seize the “illegal” rescue ships (Kirchgaessner, June 19, 2018). Although it seems that immigration has become a ‘flash-point’ recently, immigration has been taking place throughout human history. However, globally levels of migration have been on the rise for the last half century, especially into Europe and other Western countries (Boschmann, 2011; Froy and Giguere, 2006; Phillimore and Goodson 2008; White, 2015). With levels of immigration on the rise internationally, it is increasingly relevant to consider successful integration within their new homes for all migrants.

Pew Research Center analysis of United Nations data shows that the total number of migrants globally has increased from just over 50 million in 1960, to over 200 million in 2015 (PEW, 2016). This is represented in ‘Figure 1’. The United Nations International Organization for Migration 2018 World Migration Report estimates that the current total figure of all global immigrants stands at 244 million international migrants (PEW, 2016). Based on geography, socio-economic status, cultural and religious heritage, as well as other factors, this 3.3% of the world’s population who are considered to be ‘migrants’ represents a broad array of humanity; from the émigré who crosses treacherous terrain fleeing political

repression to the international executive who easily jets between world capitals. Within these massive numbers of people is a subset of international residents, the expatriates. There is no solid consensus on the definition of 'expatriate'. In its 2015 research on expatriates in The Netherlands, Statistics Netherlands (CBS) worked from extremely narrow parameters: "an expat [is] someone who was born outside the Netherlands and does not have Dutch nationality, who is aged 18 to 75 and earns a salary at the upper end of the norm in their sector" (Central Bureau for Statistics, Netherlands (2016). Others note that within the business community, the traditional image of the "expat" would be that of an older white, European male, often accompanied by a wife and children (McNulty and Vance, 2017). However, with cultural changes, globalism and the accessibility and acceptability of international travel, the nature of the expatriated individual has changed. Even within international organizations and the business community, the old stereotype of the expat has fallen by the wayside. (McNulty and Brewster, 2017; McNulty and Vance, 2017). McNulty and Vance (2017) noted that more female executives have settled into international offices, and there are married couples with no children; women professionals with 'house-husband' spouses; expatriate single men and women; males or females in same-sex partnerships; single-parents with children; blended families; and younger millennials all within the expatriate community. The expatriate can no longer be perceived just as a Westerner, since there are increasing numbers of non-Western (often Asian) expatriates (McNulty and Brewster, 2017; McNulty and Vance, 2017). Even this more-encompassing corporate-directed definition has its limitations, however. Young people seeking an education or following romance or seeking life experiences can become expatriates, as do an increasing number of older retired people. For the purpose of this study, a simple and more inclusive definition of expatriate is used, one based on the word's Latin origins, *ex patria*, "out of country." 'Expatriate' denotes a person who has citizenship in at least one country but is living in another country.

With the rising number of migrants internationally, including those who are making permanent moves as well as those who will be living in their new home for a more limited time, there is an increasing need for research and effort on the part of planners, policy advisors and others involved in shaping policy around 'integration' of these individuals. The

aim of this study is to explore those factors that enhance the process of integration in a middle-sized international city with a rising international population (in this case, Groningen), in order to gain new insight into 'where' and 'how' integration occurs, and what role 'space' plays in this integration. This study will provide insight into where and how non-Dutch nationals make social connections in Groningen and how they perceive their progress of 'integration' into this new place. It will expand our understanding of what spatial and social factors affect integration and it will specifically examine which factors are most important in increasing individuals' perceptions that they have successfully integrated.

Much of the literature on integration experiences has focused on refugees who have left their home countries due to reasons beyond their control, with considerably less attention directed toward foreign nationals, or expatriates, who have typically moved to a new country of their own accord for work, study, or relationship reasons. Although there are undoubtedly key differences between immigrant types in terms of their adaptation and integration into a new culture, there are probably important similarities in their experiences, especially in their development of social connections. Much more is known about expatriates in terms of their work roles, with less attention paid to social connections. Findings from this study will add to the understanding of aspects of social relationships and the places where these social connections occur that are important for successful integration of expatriates in their new communities.

Although this study focuses particularly on expatriates, the results will contribute to our understanding of the importance of aspects of social interactions and social connections that are predictive of successful integration into new communities and countries for other types of immigrants. The implications of this study will have relevance for 'migration' and 'integration' factors at large.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of Research Study

In this study, the focus is on gaining insight into the places, or 'spaces,' and processes that provides opportunities for social connections that facilitate the integrative success of foreign nationals, also referred to as expatriates, living in the Netherlands, and in Groningen specifically. As a middle-sized international city with a rising international population, Groningen provides an ideal location for the study. This study will explore what role 'space' plays in how new arrivals make important social connections and in what ways space is relevant to how well 'integrated' they feel. Aspects of social connections that are viewed as important will be explored. Results from the study will help to increase our understanding of factors that successfully facilitate the integration of newcomers into established communities. This is one of the few studies that looks at how expatriates integrate into their new environment and distinctive in that it examines the importance of digital facilitation in generating spatial connection. Results from this study will have implications for identifying effective ways of fostering a stronger sense of connectedness and integration into their communities for new arrivals. This study will provide insight into where and how non-Dutch nationals make social connections in Groningen and how they perceive their progress of 'integration' into this new place. It will expand our understanding of what spatial and social factors affect integration and specifically which factors are most important in increasing individual's perceptions that they have successfully integrated. Additionally, this study should contribute to policy frameworks in The Netherlands, in Groningen, and in other places around the world with rising international populations, which could lead to better integration strategies in the future, especially as these places work to attract foreign workers and 'entrepreneurs' to work and live in these places.

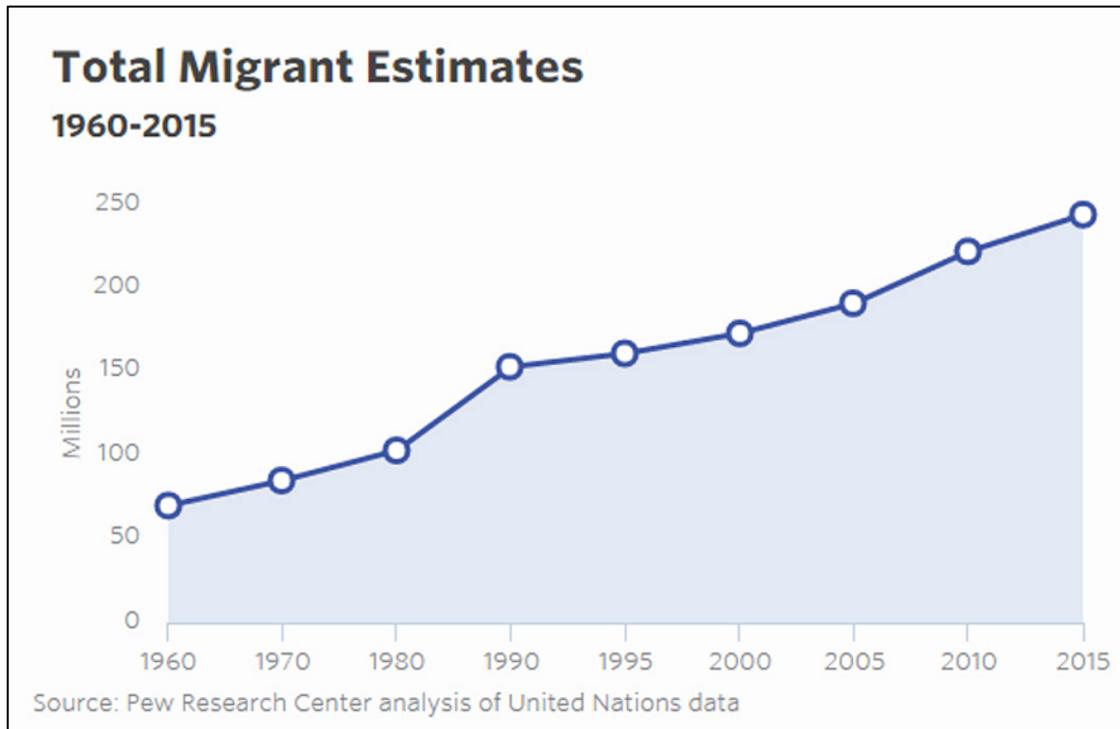


Figure 1: Total Global Migrant Estimates 1960-2015. Pew Research Center

1.4 Research Questions

The main research question is:

How important is 'space' and what role does it play in affecting how successfully expatriates make social connections and integrate into Groningen communities?

The research question is divided into the following sub-questions:

- 1) Where, how, and with whom do expatriates make social connections in Groningen?
- 2) What aspects of social connections are viewed as most important for integration and well-being of expatriates in Groningen?
- 3) What role does "space" play in the successful integration experience of expatriates into Groningen?

1.5 Spatial Boundaries

The spatial boundary of this study is the metropolitan region of Groningen, in the northern part of the Netherlands. The choice for this location was deliberate, as Groningen is the largest metropolis in the north of Netherlands, and it serves as the population hub for the Northern Netherlands. The population of the province has grown from 558,113 in 1997 to 583,581 in 2017, with the native-born population growing by 5,219, slightly less than 1% over the twenty years, from 526,789 to 532,008. However, the number of foreign born individuals increased by 20,249, from 31,324 people to 51,573 in this same 20-year period, a 64.8% increase. So, this means that the number of foreign-born individuals increased 1.65 times in size over this period, from being 5.6% of the population in 1997 to being 8.8% of the population in 2017 (Central Bureau for Statistics Netherlands (2018). Further, the population of this area has been consistently growing as a whole, averaging 4% total population growth per annum from 2006 to 2016 (Rijksoverheid 2016). With both a growing general population as well as a steadily increasing rise in percentage of the population born abroad, this growing international municipality is a good choice to examine factors that affect integration experiences of expatriates.

2. Theoretical Framework and Empirical Literature

This chapter provides a discussion of Ager and Strang's integration framework that provides the theoretical basis for this study. It also includes a summary of the relevant empirical literature for this thesis, with a focus on integration and the social aspects important for successful integration, expatriate adjustment, residential, neighbourhood and spatial factors related to social connections, and technology's role in modern social connections.

2.1 Ager and Strang Integration Framework

In order to understand integration, we must first understand place, as it is the spatially bound aspect of integration. A modern characterization of place represents more than just the physical and includes the distinctive lived experiences of people and feelings of belonging (Hubbard, Kitchin and Valentine, 2005). We also know there are distinct cultural and symbolic aspects of place and the associated economic, social and political elements. Therefore, place is an important consideration as a contributing factor to individual's sense of social identity and belonging.

Numerous studies report that the nature of integration varies widely in different places as the factors affecting 'successful' integration vary in different cities and different cultures (Ager & Strang, 2004; Valtonen, 2004; Lewis, 2010; Smyth & Kum, 2010). Spencer (2011) notes that large aspects of the integration process are contingent upon the distinct factors (such as employment opportunity and housing) accessible to migrants specifically based on the 'places' in which they live. (Spencer, 2011). Platts-Fowler and Robinson's (2015) study of the integrative experience of refugees in the two English cities of Hull and Sheffield considers space extensively. They consider the multi-dimensional aspects of place when they note that, "place is a geographic location with material form, which constitutes and contains physical resources and social relations and is invested with meaning and value... different places provide different opportunities in terms of access to resources, services and facilities. The cultures and identities that dominate in a place can serve as a source of safety,

security, and belonging to some, whilst defining others as distinct and different or as outsiders... thus, place is not merely a setting in which social life unfolds, but also a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced” (Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2015; 478).

‘Place’ is more than just a geographic marker then, but also includes the distinctive resources and social and cultural aspects of places. This is especially important to consider for newly arrived individuals as these factors will affect how these individuals integrate. Platts-Fowler and Robinson ultimately determined that ‘place’ played an important role in integration of refugees in the two cities in which they did case studies, finding that greater “acceptance of diversity” and greater access to “culturally sensitive amenities” occurred in Sheffield and that this was likely spurred by a higher percentage of diversity and longer history of immigration distinctive to Sheffield. (Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2015; 488). So, ‘place’ and ‘space’ undoubtedly play a role in integrative success. However, they further note that, “there has been little systematic analysis of the precise ways and extent to which integration is playing out in different ways in different neighbourhoods, towns, or cities” (Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2015; 477). The ‘places’ where integration occurs most successfully is one of the key factors we aim to explore in this study.

In their seminal piece, “*Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework*”, Ager and Strang (2008), who have thoroughly examined processes of integration throughout their research, provide a conceptual lens through which to understand integration. In their framework, they define ten aspects of integration, which are divided into four pillars; *1. Markers and Means*, *2. Social Connection*, *3. Facilitators*, and *4. Foundation*. It is through this theoretical lens that we can examine integration.

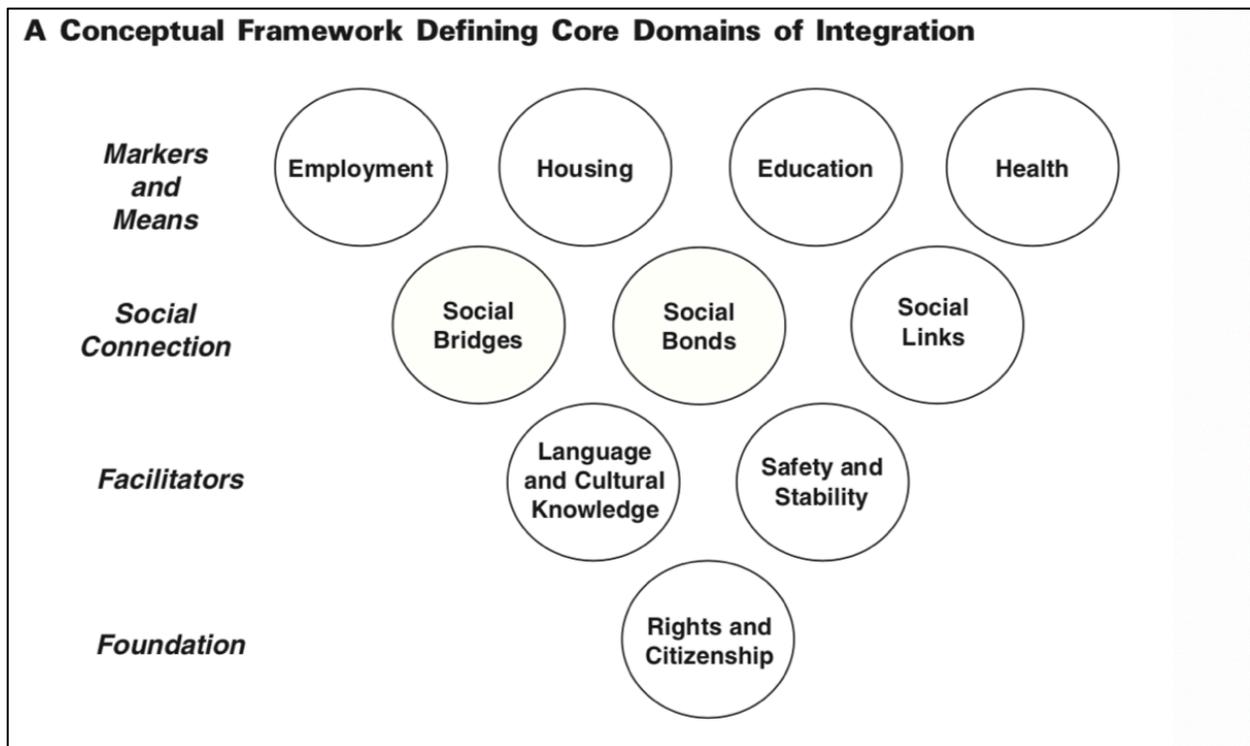


Figure 2: Ager and Strang 2008 conceptual integration framework.

The meanings of each of these four pillars can be summarized as follows;

1. *Markers and Means:* The areas of ‘*Employment*’, ‘*Housing*’, ‘*Education*’ and ‘*Health*’ are seen by Ager and Strang (2004) as being four of the chief markers of integration and are of particular significance. Successfully completing aspects of these domains has been documented to have a positive impact on integrative success.

2. *Social Connection:* Social Connection includes the three areas of ‘*Social Bridges*’, ‘*Social Bonds*’ and ‘*Social Links*’, and this pillar is viewed as the “connective tissue between foundational principles of citizenship and rights on one hand, and public outcomes in sectors such as employment, housing, education and health on the other” (Ager and Strang 2008, 177). These social connections are seen as providing links to the four fundamental ‘*Markers and Means*’, and provide ways of connecting new arrivals to existing structures, as well as facilitating the building of social capital which will further increase their success in integrating.

3. *Facilitators*: These two areas of '*Language and Cultural Knowledge*' and '*Safety and Stability*' are regarded as mechanisms through which new arrivals become attached to and established within their local community.

4. *Foundation*: The foundational area of '*Rights and Citizenship*' is seen as the underlying base through which new arrivals engage within their community and are officially recognized as citizens.

The Ager and Strang framework has been positively received and used effectively within other research as a framework through which to examine integration experiences, although usually for refugees (Phillimore and Goodson, 2008; Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2015; Smyth and Kum, 2010). This framework was used by Phillimore and Goodson (2008) to study the experience of integration of refugees in the UK, and they found that the most successfully integrated had attained high scores across all of the factors listed by Ager and Strang and that limitations of achieving success in even one of the factors listed by Ager and Strang, (housing for example) limited overall integrative success more than expected. Smyth and Kum (2010) examined how refugees in Scotland who were previously employed as teachers often had difficulty finding re-employment in Scotland within their field. As this study aims to specifically examine the role of 'space' in facilitating social connections for expatriates, we will focus primarily on the ways that 'housing' (in the form of residential location of expatriates) and 'social connections' are interlinked. Although the other aspects of integration noted by Ager and Strang (2008) are certainly important components of 'integration', this study is explicitly concerned with how social connections are facilitated spatially.

2.2 Rationale and Relevance of Studying Expatriates

As noted in the introductory chapter, the term *expatriate* is used to denote a person who has citizenship in at least one country but is living in another country. Expatriates differ from immigrants in various ways, particularly in the expected length of stay in the foreign country and their reasons for moving to the foreign country. There may be socio-economic differences between expatriates and immigrants, and there is a general perception that

expatriates are more highly educated, and their reasons for living outside of their places of origin include business, university studies, partner relationships, and perhaps the novelty or personal growth that comes with an extended international experience. Most expatriates may stay in the foreign country for a period of several years, with plans to eventually return to their home country, though there are those who choose to permanently reside outside their country of birth.

The number of expatriates in the Netherlands has been increasing, and it is important to understand the factors that influence their integration experiences. Much of the literature on integration experiences has focused on refugees who have left their home countries because of such motivators as war and political or economic instability, generally factors beyond their control. Other literature has examined the adjustment of expatriates, or foreign nationals, who have moved to a foreign country as a matter of personal choice, often for professional, educational, or relationship reasons. The majority of this body of research has looked at the experiences of expatriates who have moved for work, and the focus of the research is on their experiences in their work-related settings, assessing their adjustment or adaptation in their business and professional roles, including relationships with work colleagues. Much less attention has been paid to their social connections and interpersonal relationships outside the realm of work. Although there are undoubtedly key differences in terms of their adaptation and integration into a new culture for immigrants and expatriates, there are likely to be some similarities in aspects of their social relationships, particularly in the role of social connections in successful adaptation. Findings from this study will add to the literature on the understanding of important aspects of social relationships, and the places where social connections occur that are important for successful integration of expatriates in their new communities. Also, results from this study should inform the development of policies and programs within government or institutions such as universities that will benefit from helping foreigners feel more welcome, to integrate successfully into their new culture, and contribute to the economic and social fabric of their communities.

2.3 Literature on Expatriates

Research on expatriates has been occurring for decades, and although interest in expatriate experiences has continued to increase, particularly due to the growth in multinational corporations and the globalization of business (Morley, Heraty, and Collings, 2006), the body of research literature remains limited in scope. As noted above, the vast majority of studies focus on factors such as job satisfaction that are related to business and organizational management and human resources, with few studies examining the intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of individuals who move to a new culture (Harzing, Pudelko, and Reiche, 2016; Kim, 2001; Selmer, 2000; Vaiman, Haslberger, and Vance, 2015). In a review of conclusions from meta-analytic studies of expatriate adjustment studies, it was found that research on socio-cultural adjustment in a new country typically examined three facets of adjustment: general, work, and interaction (Takeuchi, 2010); with *general adjustment* referring to psychological comfort related to such factors as weather, food, and living conditions; *work adjustment* referring to psychological comfort with aspects of different work environments; and *interactional adjustment* (typically in work-related settings) referring to comfort with communication styles in the host country and interactions with nationals in the host country. All three aspects of adjustment focus on the impact for expatriate success in work adjustment and performance.

Researchers have noted the need to examine the intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of individuals who are living in a new culture when examining their adaptation experiences (Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dansen 2002; Berry, 2001; Kim, 2001). This is one of the key aims of this study. The social domain of the expatriate experience remains relatively unexplored, in comparison to the literature on work-related adjustment, but the limited research available clearly points to social connections as a central factor for success in adapting to life in a new country. For instance, research has found that ties with other expatriates and with host country residents were important for expatriate adjustment; however, social ties with other expatriates typically provided greater social support than ties with host country residents (Johnson, Kristol-Brown, Van Viamen and DePater 2003). Other research also noted the importance of having relationships within the host community as

well as the expatriate community for more positive adjustment (Johnson et al., 2003; Shoffer & Harrison, 2001; Wang & Kanungo, 2004). Also, the positive role that social connections play for migrants and refugees as they adapt to their new home has been documented, and these fundamental human connections would logically be as important for expatriates (Puyat, 2012; Samek, Laporte, Nauenberg, Shen & Coyle, 2012). Even for those expatriates who are in a foreign country for a relatively short time period, feeling integrated into their new community and developing social connections is important for their well-being and adaptation. This study will add to our understanding of how expatriates form social connections in their new communities and identify the dimensions of social connections that facilitate integration, making an important contribution to an aspect of expatriates' experiences that have received limited attention by researchers.

2.4 Expatriates in the Netherlands

Considering the massive scope of global immigration, why is the subset of expatriates important? Even looking within the restricted definition of the CBS report, expatriates make up a significant population in The Netherlands. Following the CBS parameters and depending on the salary level used, the number of expatriates in The Netherlands in 2015 numbered as many as 75,000, equivalent to the populations of Spijkenisse or Schiedam. The expatriates noted by the CBS typically reside in the Randstad region, where most internationally oriented companies are located (Central Bureau for Statistics Netherlands, 2016). There is a visible expatriate presence in university cities, such as Groningen, Utrecht and Maastricht, which are growing middle-sized municipalities which attract international academics and their families, cities that are striving to become "international" cities and "hubs of entrepreneurship" (Internations 2018.) Simply from a point of finance, those 75,000 residents who earn "a salary at the upper end of the norm in their sector" are an economic powerhouse, without even considering the thousands of university students, retirees, and spouses or partners of business professionals who would meet the broader expatriate label. As defined by the CBS, these "upper end" professionals are also highly skilled workers and professionals who contribute significantly to the knowledge base and international connectivity of the country and their communities.

Expatriates differ from immigrants in various ways, particularly in the expected length of their stay in the foreign country, as well as their reasons for moving to the foreign country. The popular assumptions of the past have been that the expatriates were using their international experience as a short-term step on their career ladder or a long-term vacation, however the perception of the expatriate is no longer the professor-on-sabbatical or the artist-gone-to-Provence. Many expatriates, within or outside international business, move beyond old stereotypes of expatriates as short-timers, uncommitted to their communities and neighbourhoods. The need to move beyond this limited view of expatriates is noted on the research aggregate web site, Expat Research (2018): "What is especially important, particularly within the context of globalization today and in the future, is to debunk the myth of one type of assignee: the "there-and-back" expatriate. Awareness is needed that the term "expatriate" covers an ever-widening and ever-diversifying set of individuals, including those that repatriate multiple times as part of a continuing and evolving "dynamic" global career. And these individuals make important contributions to the social and economic components of their new homes."

Although the municipality of Groningen does not record data specifically about where expatriates live (which is understandable, especially considering the difficulty and wide variations of the definition of 'expatriates'), they do record the general demographic composition of the city; which includes data about where immigrants live around the city. They define immigrants as those with a, "*Migration background - Persons have a migration background if at least one of their parents is born abroad. A distinction is made between people who are abroad themselves born (the first generation) and persons born in the Netherlands (the second generation).*" (Bergsma, 2018). They have further made a distinction between 'Western' and 'Non-Western' origin groups, noting that Non-Western groups are, "*Individuals with one of the countries as origin group Africa, Latin America and Asia (excluding Indonesia and Japan) or Turkey*" (Bergsma, 2018). This information can be seen in 'Figure 3. Western Immigrants per Neighbourhood. Groningen, (Bergsma, 2018).

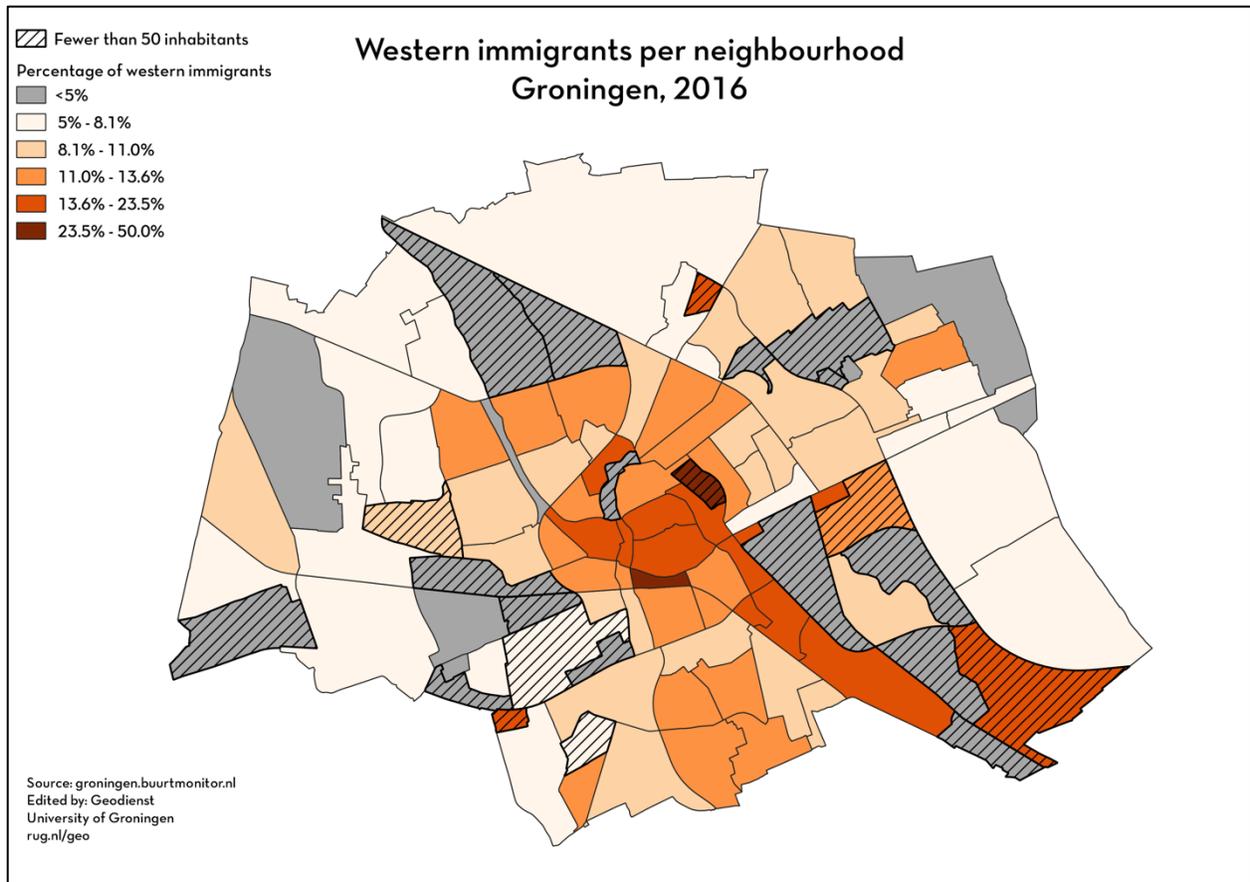


Figure 3. *Western Immigrants per Neighbourhood Groningen, 2016: Geodienst. Bergsma, J. (2018).*

As can be seen from this map, the largest concentrations of ‘Western Immigrants’ can be found in ‘Centrum’ in the centre of the city; in ‘Selwerd’ and ‘Paddelpoel’ to the north-west of the city, in ‘Helpman’ and down towards ‘Haren’ in the south of the city and they are especially concentrated around ‘Stationgebied’ directly south of the city and around the University Medical College (UMCG) directly east of the city. However, as the municipality does not clearly define who is included in these figures, or the length of stay for individuals in these areas, it is not possible to distinguish which type of ‘migrant’ lives where. Further, it is assumed that large student housing complexes, which house a high number of international students, in ‘Paddelpoel’ and especially in ‘Stationgebied’ (which is largely a non-residential zone) have a large impact on the high percentage of ‘migrants’ in these areas, and that the large research hospital (UMCG) attracts foreign medical professionals to live

nearby. For clarity, 'Figure 4. Residential Location of Respondents' in 'section 4.4' shows the geographic location of ex-patriates interviewed for this study.

2.5 Residential Factors – Neighbourhood and Urban Environment

Where one lives impacts how, where, and with whom social contacts occur. Immigrants, especially refugees, are often limited in where they can live by economic, social, and policy positions (Cernea and McDowell, 2000; Hinze, 2013; Somerville and Steele, 2001). The neighbourhood where individuals live determines the people with whom regular contact is likely to occur, and with whom loose social connections are likely to be formed, and perhaps close and supportive relationships. Even though these loose connections may not be a source of emotional and social support, they are still an important part of daily life and may contribute to the newcomer's sense of being welcomed (or not) to the new country. (Granovetter, 1973). Neighbours may also provide important informational support to newcomers, which is an important contribution for adjustment (Taylor, 2011).

The ethnic and social diversity of the neighbourhood can also contribute to the experiences of established residents and newcomers. For example, Butler's (2003) research on middle-class residents living in a gentrified part of London found that while these residents often express a "narrative of belonging" and have positive views of living in communities which are diverse, these views do not necessarily convert into actual involvement with the other residents and with community establishments. Although these individuals claim to "celebrate diversity" and appreciate the cultural representation within shops, restaurants, and festivals, they also choose to send their children to school elsewhere, segregating their children during the fundamental social formation processes, and show lacklustre commitment to fostering intra-communal ties as a whole (Butler, 2003; Putnam, 2000). Butler and Robson (2001), who study social capital, gentrification and neighbourhood change in London, examined the role socio-economic status and ethnicity play in building social connections. They concluded that, "the 'social mixing' that residents say they like is the coming together 'through commonly shared social networks of like-minded individuals which, in reality, is largely exclusive of non-middle-class people, and not a mixing across

racial, ethnic, and class boundaries (Butler and Robson, 2001;2150). Also, other research has shown that even when individuals choose which space and neighbourhood to live in, cross-cultural spatially-based connections don't necessarily occur (Van Beckhoven and Van Kempen, 2003; Blokland and Van Eijk, 2010; Kleinhans et al. 2000).

Existing patterns of residential segregation can also impact the experiences of new residents. Research has focused specifically on the negative and positive attributes of residential segregation, examining where new migrants live in relation to established neighbours and in proximity to members of their own or other migrant communities. These studies have generally shown that increasing the inter-residential diversity, or neighbourhood diversity, of a place, whether with newer or more established immigrants of a different national and ethnic background, has little effect on increasing social network diversity and social bonding (Blokland and Van Eijk, 2010). Thus, expatriates may or may not have opportunities to become involved with other neighbourhood residents, who may be of a different ethnicity as well as a different nationality. Although establishing relationships with host country members has been found to be an important factor in successful integration, developing such relationships may be challenging if there are not established means for doing so, such as in a work or educational setting.

Policies, such as the urban restructuring policies in the Netherlands, which have been in place since 1997, can also have implications for the integration experiences of newcomers to a country. In the Netherlands, this urban restructuring is principally aimed at improving the quality of the living environment by destroying or refurbishing low-rent social housing to build more expensive rental or owner-occupied units. The paramount goal of this policy is to dismantle the social and physical monotony of urban areas in order to build more diverse neighbourhoods. The aim of these restructuring projects is to create an environment that will promote positive interactions between groups within the restructured facilities. Such a goal would certainly seem to hold potential for facilitating expatriate integration into their new residential area. In their examination of the impact of such projects, Van Beckhoven and Van Kempen (2003) and Kleinhans et al. (2000) found that there were overall positive communal and individual effects of this restructuring, with some new

connections being forged. However, they conclude that “it appears that in general the neighbourhood plays a limited part in the life of the residents; a majority of all residents, both the old and the new, undertake most of their activities outside their own neighbourhood” (Blackhoven and van Kempen, 2003:871).

These studies and others (See Blokland, 2003; Mustard and Ostendork, 1998) seem to suggest that where individuals live-- and specifically efforts in structuring neighbourhoods to be diverse--has a limited effect on actually building more diverse social networks and is a less influential factor for building social capital of new arrivals than previously thought. Van Beckhoven and Van Kempen further note that “A positive influence in terms of increasing and intensive social contacts between the old and new inhabitants of the neighbourhood also did not happen; people in neighbourhoods seem to live alongside each other, not together (Van Beckhoven and Van Kempen, 2003:871). However, these policies as a whole have had many beneficial effects, with studies also showing less stigmatization and ghettoization in more diverse neighbourhoods (Blokland and Van Eijk, 2010), which could result in a more welcoming environment for newcomers. Furthermore, it is hoped that these policies will have increasingly beneficial aspects, especially for future generations, who are hoped to be more open to and thus more likely to experience future social network diversity.

Thus, the introduction of new individuals into an established neighbourhood has not significantly increased new social contacts for either the new arrivals or established individuals. Essentially, research has consistently shown that re-formatting housing situations does not directly result in social mixing and that people “prefer” to mix with others who are “like them,” even in socially diverse neighbourhoods (Arbaci, 2007; Atkinson, 2006; Butler, 2003). Other research has shown that simply living within proximity of people who are of different social classes or ethnic groups, or of people in other income groups is not sufficient for overcoming divides within social networks (Atkinson, 2006; Butler, 2003). Further research has shown that mixing of incomes in a community does not create mixed income networks either (Putnam, 2000).

Boschmann (2011) theorizes, through her work on communal contact in the Netherlands, that since Dutch neighbourhoods are relatively small in size, it is easy for people to connect outside of their neighbourhoods and that as such, the ethnic composition of their neighbourhoods is not as important. This explains why, at least for the “mobile age-group of 15–65, no effect is found of ethnic composition of the neighbourhood on interethnic leisure contact.” (Boschman, 2011: 366). It is likely that this research is applicable for other communities around the world as well, as it becomes easier to make connections beyond the local level and on a larger scale, and these connections are increasingly facilitated by the rise, use, and availability of modern digital technology.

It is difficult, then, to draw firm conclusions about neighbourhood characteristics that might facilitate integration for expatriates. Although neighbours could be a useful source of information that could facilitate aspects of daily life, or provide assistance with minor tasks, such information and assistance can also be easily obtained from other sources. Residential factors may not be as important in integration as other factors, such as establishing social support networks with other expatriates, in contributing to a sense of place, or finding other spaces where meaningful social relationships are formed. With the ever-increasing use of social media and digital technology to identify potential contacts, and to establish and maintain contact with others, some aspects of integration may become easier.

2.6 Views of Integration

Integration is a complex issue, with the definition of the term itself being highly debated within the academic community. Da Lomba summarizes some of the research on how academics define integration and he finds that there is no cohesive agreement of how to define the word and its connotations and purposes (Da Lomba, 2010). There are essentially two groups of thought as to how integration is viewed. The first is a view which holds that integration is more of a ‘one-way’ process, which focused on how well migrants are able to acclimatize and adjust to the conditions and culture of the new societies in which they are living. This view has been criticized as being biased, especially as the underlying assumption is that migrants should desert their own values and beliefs and culture in order to be

'successful' in their new society (Da Lomba, 2010). Ager and Strang (2010) argue that this perspective also generates the problem of migrants who are not able to 'successfully' assimilate and thus become a burden for their host societies. The second view sees integration as a 'two-way' process and considers the importance of how open societies are to integrate newcomers or outsiders, and how willing they are to work to do so, and to assist the foreigners in integrating. This view is characterized by the involvement of refugees and migrants as well as host societies in the adaptation of newcomers (Ager & Strang, 2004). This perspective of integration claims that both migrants and host society members play a crucial role in making sure that migrants have access to jobs, education, housing, health, culture and language and that they feel part of the new environment, instead of being problematized. In his influential theory of acculturation, Berry (2001) also claims that the process of integration involves both minority and dominant groups in order to allow them to negotiate their cultural differences and avoid conflict. Blokland and van Eijk summarize this fragmentation of the two views when they note that "Generally, public debate shows a rough divide between integration as an individual characteristic where a migrant can be more or less 'integrated', measured by labour market participation, educational attainment and, at times, adherence to dominant values or societal integration, defined by... notions of cohesion or by communitarian notions of what defines 'us' in multicultural societies. The connection of integration with residential segregation brings these two together." (Blokland and van Eijk, 2010: 314) Another important factor to consider for integration is that it is unique for each individual person, with each person bringing different comprehensions and understanding of how the processes work, and how well they work (UNCHR, 2018). Considering the complexity of 'integration', the two-sided view is undoubtedly more appropriate for truly 'successful' integration, especially when considering that individuals already established into a community play a fundamental role in both how they perceive and work to integrate outsiders.

This study will focus specifically on respondent's perception of their own integration and what spatial and social factors influenced their interpersonal interactions as they moved to their new neighbourhood and community. Specifically, we operationalize integration for this study as the perception of how well expatriates feel that they are able to make important

social relationships and build attachment and a sense of belonging to their new place. Using Ager and Strang's (2008) framework specifically designed to measure integration, we hope to gain a better understanding of what promotes more 'successful' integration for new arrivals into cities, and what role 'space' plays in this integration. It has been shown that diverse social networks have positive social, economic and political implications, as individuals from all across society are able to build larger and more impactful social networks with better social capital (Putnam, 2000). Further, there is strong evidence that communities with these more diverse social networks are less likely to experience fragmentation and conflict related to this diversity (Portes 1998; Putnam 2000; Ooka and Wellman 2006). So, understanding the factors behind successful integration and working to promote them spatially, politically and socially are important aspects in building strong communities with less division. As migration inevitably increases numerically and in importance, especially considering the effects for the children of migrants, many of whom will be born in countries foreign to their parents, communities must work to successfully integrate these individuals in order to build and maintain robust societies.

2.7 Social Networks

A large body of research has documented the importance of social networks for individual wellbeing. Networks that are characterized by a high variety of diverse ties, both 'strong' and 'weak' have more favorable outcomes for individuals (Grannovetter, 1973). Thus, another important aspect of consideration for this study is the social networks that individuals form. Previously covered literature has shown that individuals tend to prefer those 'like them' and build social networks with others with similar socio-economic and ethnic characteristics. (Butler, 2003; Berry 2001; Blokland and Van Eijk 2010). One of these groups is 'expatriates', who have been shown to have a distinct set of social connections.

Research on expatriates has shown that expatriates are likely to have three 'main' social networks, those of their own nationality, the host nationals and other foreigners (Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Kloss's (2010) thesis about "Expatriates in Denmark" is one of the few studies that has examined the social connections of expatriates. Kloss concludes that it is difficult to merge expatriates into local cultures and that there is typically limited important

social contact between expatriates and their host culture (Kloss, 2010). Kloss further found that even through many of the expatriates wanted to build local connections, few were able to successfully do so. She concluded that these results reflect the literature suggesting that Danes have a relatively closed social society, preferring their own inner circle of friends and family, adding to the difficulty of foreigners trying to assimilate into this new society. Kloss notes that, "The expatriates base this on the already established, strong childhood and high school friendships Danes have and that they, therefore, not seem to be interested in making new friends. On the other hand, making friends with other expatriates is perceived as easier because their network is not so closed yet and especially in the beginning of the stay it is easier to get in touch with them" (Kloss, 2010:48). These findings about the experiences faced by expatriates in making social connections with Danish residents reflect the challenges of integrating into a new culture. It is likely that the results of this study will show some similarities in how expatriates build social networks with other expatriates; however, it will be interesting to see if expatriates in Groningen have any greater success in crossing cultural barriers than the expatriates in Kloss' study experienced.

2.8 Technology's Role in Modern Social Connection

Some of the more recent studies of how people make social connections has focused on the 'digital' component of the modern world. Graham reported that as early as 2001, the 'communication grids' of cities had begun to change in response to advances in technology, and as more people gained access to the internet and were able to build social connections online. More recent research, such as Alam and Imran's (2015) study of refugee communities within Australia, has shown that it is increasingly in 'digital' form that communal connections are being made, especially for outsiders and new arrivals to urban areas. Their study concluded that digital inclusion and social inclusion were vitally interlinked as factors necessary to build social networks. They noted that, "Refugee migrants viewed digital technology as a vital tool for learning, assimilating with the wider community, accessing education and job opportunities, and contact with family and friends" (Alam and Imran, 2015:358). This sentiment is echoed in other academic work, with Lloyd, Kennan, Thompson, and Qayum (2013) arguing that in modern society, social inclusion is chiefly

facilitated through the use of digital technology and that “those without access to information [technology] run the risk of becoming increasingly excluded from mainstream information sources and may fail to develop the capacity to fully settle, to recognise and take up opportunities, and to participate in society as full citizens (Lloyd et al., 2013: 123-124).

There is a growing body of research on how internet technologies are changing the way individuals develop and communicate with social contacts, providing new venues for generating and accessing social support (Chu, Kwan, & Warning, 2012; Mikal, Rice, Abeyta, and DeVilbiss, 2013; Rains & Keating, 2011; Rains & Young, 2009). However, research on Internet technology use by migrants and expatriates is limited and studies have usually focused on the utility of such technologies for facilitating the maintenance of ties with the home country and organization (Cox, 2004; Kim & McKay-Semmler, 2013; Ogan & Ozakca, 2010). However, Chien’s (2005) study of new arrivals into Canada noted the importance of how social networking sites offer the ability for newcomers to communicate in their native language and that they used these outlets to help other compatriots settle and also to build social networks within their own ethnicity to help them settle.

Taylor’s (2011) study of ‘social media as a tool for inclusion’ for various demographics, including ‘recent’ immigrants in Canada, notes that most of the recent skilled migrants are likely to be active and communicating to others through social media, and especially Facebook and LinkedIn. (Taylor, 2011). She also notes that recent studies report that recent migrants have higher online communication and internet surfing rates than those born in Canada, where the study was conducted. Further, Taylor (2011) notes that migrants are also more likely to participate in social networking online.

Alam and Irman (2015), Lloyd (2013) and (Graham 2001), as well as others, have all stressed the importance of this ‘digital inclusion’ as a foundational component of ‘social inclusion’, and undoubtedly this form of social connection will become increasingly relevant as digital technology becomes increasingly influential in all aspects, and especially social dimensions, of our daily lives. Fundamentally, it is apparent that globalization and digital technology have changed the way that people interact and how they connect, and that the role of the

neighbourhood in building social connections, particularly for new arrivals, has been changing.

Consequently, many researchers have shown that neighbourhood-level spatial aspects of social connection are changing as the as society 'globalizes' and 'digitalizes and that for many people, important connections are no longer being made at solely the neighbourhood level, especially between 'different groups'. Within the literature that has been covered, we have seen that 'proximity' is not necessarily a strong factor in building neighbourhood level social connections, especially when considering that people like to live with others "like them" and that mixing of incomes, racial and ethnic is not necessarily likely to occur at the neighbourhood level (Atkinson, 2006; Butler, 2003; Putnam, 2000). However, there are certainly still fundamental spatial aspects in how people meet and become socially connected and integrated into new communities, and this study aims to examine just how these connections occur and where spatial connections *are* being made.

3. Methodology

The aim of this study is to consider how expatriates experience and define integration and to examine the role of space in their experiences of integrating into their new settings. In this section, the procedures used to complete the research will be described. As the research literature on expatriates and their social connections and integration into their new place of residence is fairly limited, the present study is largely exploratory, and the decision was made to utilize a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches in data collection. The qualitative approach allowed for the emergence of themes that might not be apparent from a solely quantitative approach, and the inclusion of a quantitative measure provided a means to more fully explore the perceptions of respondents' experiences as they adapted to their new culture. Finally, the procedures used in data collection and the data analysis approach are described. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns, or themes, found in the data.

3.1 Methods of Data Collection

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study to better understand how expatriates integrate into new communities and how they perceive the importance of space as it relates to their integration process. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were used to gain insight into respondents' experiences and perceptions, and the information from these interviews provided the majority of the data used in the study. The semi-structured interview approach also allowed for the discovery of nuances in individual respondents' experiences and exploration of how they assigned meaning to cultural experiences. The quantitative component for data collection was a short questionnaire that participants were asked to complete following the interviews, which assessed respondents' sense of connection with and integration into their residential community and the larger community and provided a means of further exploring and understanding the themes that were identified from the qualitative data.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were designed to qualitatively explore the experiences of foreign nationals attempting to integrate into Dutch society. This methodology was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain insight into each participant's individual experiences and to pursue details about participants' experiences, addressing more thoroughly the aspects that were identified as being important to their integration, and why these aspects were important. An interview guide that was developed for the interviews can be found in appendix I. The interview guide was crafted to operationalize the concepts that were identified as the focus of the study, based on the literature review and theoretical framework. The aim of this study is to ascertain the importance and role of 'space' as expatriates make social connections and integrate into their new communities, and the interview questions were developed according to this goal. The following questions provide examples of how the desired information was obtained:

1. To examine the role of 'space' in respondents' experiences of integrating into society in Groningen, participants were asked where they met people who were important for their integration.
2. To determine where and how participants made social connections, respondents were asked about the people they perceived to be important to their integration into the society in Groningen and about how they met these individuals and what kinds of interactions they engaged in.
3. To determine what factors participants thought were most influential in their integration into Groningen, respondents were asked questions about what they liked best about their neighbourhoods and their social interactions, and about what factors contributed to their feelings of inclusion and acceptance.

The interview guide was used by the interviewer to ensure that all respondents were asked the same questions about the main aspects of the study and is included in the Appendices under section 7.1. The semi-structured approach allowed for the interviewer to probe for additional information and to more thoroughly address topics that the respondents brought up during the course of the interview, and to adapt the order of the questions if necessary.

As Silverman (2000) notes, exploratory studies like this thesis can follow a less structured format, which allows the interviewer to pursue topics that the respondent may bring up, and to ask the interview questions in a different order.

There were fourteen interviews completed for this study. The interviews were conducted either in the participants' homes or in public spaces such as local cafes, depending on the preference of the respondent. Interviews lasted from 32 to 54 minutes, and all of the interviews were conducted in English. Participant recruitment and demographic information about the respondents can be found in the Participant Overview paragraph in Section 3.5.

3.3 Questionnaire

In addition to the in-depth interview, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire which provided information about the respondents' sense of connection and integration into their new place of residence. Questions were asked to determine how well participants thought they had integrated into their specific neighbourhood as well as the community at large in Groningen. A Likert-type 1-10-point rating scale was used with 1 indicating the lowest level of rating about the topic asked about in the question (e.g., from not very much, or not very well, or very low) and 10 indicating the highest level (very much, or very well, or very high). Detailed verbal instructions were provided to the respondents about the rating system in the questionnaire.

Five questions that focused on integration into their local neighbourhoods (Residential Integration) were used; such as: "How well integrated into your neighbourhood do you feel?" and "How happy are you living in your neighbourhood?" Three questions were used to indicate how well respondents felt that they had integrated into the community of Groningen at large (Community Integration), including questions such as "How well integrated do you feel into the community of Groningen?" and, "How do you rate your connection to the community of Groningen?".

Additional questions were included in order to further explore aspects that might be relevant to respondents' experiences in their new communities. These questions addressed social network diversity, community diversity, participation in public events, Dutch language skills, and levels of contact with other international people and with Dutch citizens. Information from these additional questions helped in describing the broader context of the experiences of the respondents in their new communities. The questionnaire can be found in appendix II.

3.4 Participant Recruitment

The participants of this study were recruited in the city of Groningen through organizations that work to connect foreign nationals and through the personal network of the researcher. To participate in this study, participants had to have lived in the Netherlands for at least one year and not to have immediate plans to move away from the Netherlands. Potential participants were initially contacted through email or Facebook and asked if they would be willing to participate in this study. There were sixteen individuals who initially responded, and fourteen of these ultimately became participants in this study; the other two individuals did not respond to requests to set up a time and date for the interview. Nine females and five males were interviewed. When asked about their ethnicity, thirteen of the fourteen responded that they were 'Caucasian', and the respondent from Curacao responded that she was of 'Mixed Ethnicity'. All of the respondents spoke English, and all interviews were conducted in English.

The participants ranged in age from 24 to 42, with an average age of 30.4. The participants were mostly European, with eight coming from European countries, two coming from South Africa and one each coming from Australia, Canada, Curacao and the United States. The characteristics of the participants can be seen in Table 1. The limitations of the size and sample characteristics of this survey are discussed in the "discussion and conclusion" section. To guarantee the anonymity of the participants, they are referred to with fictitious names.

3.5 Table: Participants Overview

Name	Age	Nationality	Gender	Length of Stay (years)	Residence	Integrative Success	
						Residence	Larger Community
LAURA	24	South African	Female	2	South	7.60	7.92
ANNA	38	Curacaoan	Female	11.5	South	8.80	8.25
LEAH	26	Australian	Female	2	City	2.00	3.96
JAMES	42	German	Male	6	City	7.00	6.60
LEO	31	German	Male	5	South	6.80	6.93
SARAH	33	British	Female	4	City	5.20	5.61
TONY	27	Italian	Male	3.5	North	6.80	6.60
TAMMY	32	French	Female	2	City	7.20	7.26
GEORGE	30	Romanian	Male	5	North	4.20	2.97
EMILY	28	South African	Female	4	South	7.40	7.59
KELLY	29	Canadian	Female	3	North	3.80	4.62
AMELIA	26	Italian	Female	2.5	North	4.00	3.63
JOSE	36	Spanish	Male	6	South	7.20	7.59
SUSY	24	American	Female	2	South	6.80	5.94

3.6 Ethical considerations

In qualitative research, as in all research, informing participants by providing thorough information about the research project is important in order to minimize any risks for the participants (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Therefore, information about the goal of the research and what their participation entailed was provided to the participants before the interviews. The participants were assured that their statements would remain anonymous and confidential, and told that they had the right to stop their participation at any moment. Informed consent was explained, and interviewees were asked to verbally provide

permission before the interviews were recorded. The participants were also informed about the procedures for guaranteeing that their responses would be anonymous. All of the participants completed the interviews and questionnaire and appeared to be comfortable with the interviewer. For this study, individual's actual names are not used, and it is unlikely that the information contained in this report could be used to identify the interviewees. For instance, when using direct quotes from participants about their residential communities, or interactions with other individuals, no identifying information such as street name or individual names are used.

3.7 Position of the Researcher

By its nature, the interviews that are used in qualitative research result in direct contact between the researcher and respondents. As noted above, it is important for the researcher to establish rapport with the respondents, and to clearly and completely inform them about the procedures and measures that will be taken to protect the subjects' confidentiality. Hennink et al. (2011) further note that it is important to be aware of the role the researcher may play in the study. As an expatriate myself, I shared some similarities with the respondents, which likely contributed to the comfort level that they experienced with me. I am also similar in age to most of the respondents (young adult), which could have resulted in respondents feeling that I would understand their experiences. These similarities may have contributed to their level of comfort in participating in the interview and responding to the interview questions openly and truthfully.

3.8 Qualitative Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) note that thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative method that is a useful and flexible method for qualitative research in psychology and other disciplines. Thematic analysis is also appropriate for a range of research questions and allows for the emergence of themes that might not be apparent from a solely quantitative approach; thus, this approach was used to guide the data analysis. Their guidelines "provide a vocabulary and 'recipe' for people to undertake thematic analysis in a way that is both theoretically and methodologically sound." (2006: 78). The qualitative data collected during these interviews

was transcribed and analyzed using a code tree that was based on relevant concepts from Ager and Strang's (2008) theoretical model of integration. This code tree can be found in section 7.3 of the appendix. This code tree allowed labels to be given to the interviewee's responses based on the theoretical concepts previously discussed and identify important social and spatial aspects of integration to them. Coding is defined as giving labels to the text grounded on what is applicable theoretically (Haynes, 1997). Coding allowed for a thematic analysis of the interviews. For example, it was anticipated that the respondents would talk about where they made social connections, so therefore the various types of social connections and the possible locations they could have met are parts of the framework of the code tree. All of the respondent's answers were coded from the components of the code tree and it was therefore possible to identify themes from the data and explore the relationships between categories, and especially to determine the relationship between social connections and spatial locations.

3.9 Quantitative Data Analysis

Residential (Neighbourhood) Integrative Success

In order to determine respondent's perceptions of their success in integrating into their neighbourhoods, 5 questions from the quantitative part of the study were used. Using a 10-point scale, with lower scores reflecting lower levels of integration, participants indicated their perceptions of their connection to their neighbors, their connection to their neighbourhood, how much they felt their neighbors would provide support and help to them if needed, how happy they were in their neighbourhood, and how well they felt they had integrated into their neighbourhood. A mean score was computed for each respondent based on their responses to the five questions.

Community at Large (City of Groningen) Integrative Success

Each respondent's perceptions of their success in integrating into the larger community was assessed through their responses to three questions from the quantitative part of the study.

Again, as in the approach for neighbourhood integration described above, participants used a 10-point scale to indicate their perceptions of how they perceived their connection to the community of Groningen, how well integrated they felt into the community of Groningen, and how happy they were living in Groningen. Mean scores were computed for each respondent based on responses to these three questions.

In order to operationalize spatial boundaries for this study, the metropolitan area of Groningen was divided into three geographic areas ('North', 'South' and 'Centre') based on where survey respondents reported living. The figure showing these locations and a description accompanying them can be seen in 'Figure 4. Residential Locations of Respondents' for this study.

4. Results

This chapter describes the results from the analysis of the interviews and the questionnaires and identifies the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. In the first section, **Section 4.1**, an overview of the results will be described, and themes from the data are identified. The next section, **Section 4.2**, provides perspectives from these respondents on what integration means to them, as integration is a central concept for this study. Then, the following four sections provide detailed descriptions of each theme identified from the data. **Section 4.3** describes an important finding of this study; ‘digital facilitation of spatial connections’. Next, **Section 4.4** looks at ‘neighbourhood and social conditions of the local community’. **Section 4.5** shows the table of ‘mean integrative success scores for centre, south and north’ In **Section 4.6**, ‘connections to individuals already integrated into the society’ is examined. Finally, **Section 4.7** looks at the importance of the ‘knowledge of Dutch language’.

4.1 Overview

The results provide important insight into the various experiences of these expatriate respondents as they worked toward integrating into Dutch society. Findings indicated that where you live does matter and has an effect on where and how you make social connections and become integrated in the city of Groningen. Further, having public spaces and resources available to make social connections contributed to the building of social networks and perceived integration. Although some residents responded that their neighbourhoods were an important component of their perceived integration, most people responded that they made their most important social contacts through community or city initiatives, and most often initial contact with these individuals was made digitally. Thus, ‘space’ does matter, especially in providing a physical location to meet individuals, but for this sample, spatial contact was facilitated primarily through digital means. Additionally, two key social components that were consistently mentioned as important to ‘integration’ during the interviews were having pre-established connections to the city and Dutch language

proficiency. Overall, although respondents reported that they thought that 'space' was important, the facilitation by these groups was more important than the actual space itself. The internet clearly played a crucial role in providing initial digital contacts that often led to meetings in public spaces. These results reiterate the key role of social connections in integration for this sample, a finding that has been documented in research on other migrant groups and their experiences as they face the challenges that are part of integrating into new cultures and communities. These social effects are more important than spatial effects in facilitating perceived 'integration'. Spatial characteristics are still important, especially as locations to facilitate social contact. Further, most expatriates reported having closer foreign social connections than Dutch social connections, although those respondents who perceived their communities to be more 'open' were more likely to have close social connections in their residential neighbourhoods. Although work was perceived to be important to daily life and especially economic vitality, most respondents said they did not feel they had made many important social connections through their work.

4.2 Participants' Definition of Integration

As integration is one of the fundamental aspects of this study, it is important to consider its definition. As noted earlier, the academic literature is characterized by an ongoing debate about how to define integration. For the purposes of this study, the goal is to understand integration from the perspective of the respondents, based on their definitions of what integration means to them. The following quotes are some of the interviewee's responses to how *they* define integration:

Feeling like you are a part of things going on around you

[Laura, 24, South Africa]

Knowing what the culture is like and participating in it

[Sarah, 33, British]

Having connections with people around you and knowing that you have people to count on

<i>Feeling that you belong</i>	[Leah, 26, Australia]
<i>Being able to get a job, work and contribute to society</i>	[Emily, 28, South Africa]
<i>Being a part of your community and being involved in it</i>	[James, 42, Germany]
	[Anna, 38, Curacao]

As expected, individuals have differing perspectives on what ‘integration’ means. Although most individuals interviewed shared similar views about what the most important aspects of ‘integration’ are, including “being able to connect to others around you” and “participate in society”, respondents often had different approaches towards achieving integration and ideas about what it meant for them. Their responses reflect the view that integration is an individual responsibility, and that individuals play an active role in integrating into their new communities, and that ‘successful’ integration is largely in the perception of the individual.

4.3 Digital Facilitation of Spatial Connections

Determining ‘how’ and ‘where’ ex-patriates meet and build social networks was the key question for this research study. Results from the interviews provided insightful data about these components, and this ‘digital facilitation of spatial connections’ proved to be one of the most frequently used means of connecting with others. A majority of the respondents reported that they thought their most important social connections had been initially been made digitally through social media, including Facebook groups like “Ex-Pats in Groningen” and organizations like “Connection International”. These groups coordinate physical meetings at bars and cafes almost exclusively in the centre of Groningen. These events provided an opportunity to build fundamental communal connections and were integral to successful integration for those whose primary social network was built through this avenue. When respondents were asked how they met other important social connections, the following responses reflect the most common experiences:

There is an international coffee morning that is held at “LaPlace” by the Grotemarkt. It’s held by Connect International a few times a month I think, so I try to go to that because I know that I will see my friends there, but also, it’s a good opportunity to meet new people and help them feel comfortable

[Sarah, 33, British]

When I came here I did not know anybody, so I used the website “Meetup” and saw there is a group for expats and they have an event at “Bar Pacific”, so I go to that to meet people

[George, 30, Romanian]

I joined the ‘Facebook’ page “Expats in Groningen” when I first moved here. They often just post questions or try to sell things, but I got added to a ‘Whatsapp’ group from the page and started to go to yoga with some of the other members who meet on Saturdays in the Noorderplantsoen

[Susy, 24, American]

Well, I first came here to go to school [university] and since I came alone, I decided to join groups like ESN [Erasmus Student Network] and KEI Week [University Sponsored Welcome Week] and I made a lot of close friends there. A lot of the people I met there I maintained close contact with, but since a lot of those people are international students who are only here for a semester or a year, many of them move away, so you’re constantly working to maintain a social network. But, I’ve stayed active in ESN and even done it for a second year now, since it’s pretty easy to makes friends there, even though they are often not here for long

[Amelia, 26, Italian]

Answers like this were typical of respondents, with social contacts occurring ‘online’ initially through social media or through organizations aimed at connecting ex-patriates. Twelve out of the fourteen respondents perceived that the social connections they deemed to be ‘most valuable’ were initially facilitated online. Although this initial facilitation was online, it ultimately led to physical meetings around the community, and by far most meetings were

held in the Centre of the city. This finding is similar to results from previous research reporting that actual physical meetings are often expatriates' chief method of building social networks and interacting and engaging within their social networks, but that these first connections are often initiated electronically (Grudin, 2006; McAfee, 2006; Steinhuser, Smolnik, & Hoppe, 2011). When asked why they thought these online connections were so important, many mentioned that it was 'easy':

Well, it's always hard to meet people when you move to a new place, and I've used websites like this [meetup] before to meet people with similar interests, so it's easy to do and you already know you have something in common, so that's a good place to start

[Kelly, 29, Canadian]

I'm a very social person, so for me to be social is very important. I saw they have a page for the ex-pats here [in Groningen] and I made a message to say I was new and wanted to meet people, and I got a good response, so these were some of the first people I met here... it was easy to do

[Amelia, 26, Italian]

Another advantage of digital social connections is the facilitation of connecting with other expatriates. With the expectation of those who came to be with Dutch partners, the majority of respondents reported that a majority of their close social connections were with other foreigners. This makes sense as these respondents also indicated that the digital groups they joined were usually run by expatriates for other expatriates:

Well, the group [Expats in Groningen] is run mostly by a British guy, and it's usually other expats that come to the events, I mean that's what they're designed for [laughs], so yeah that's mostly who shows up. There are some Dutch people who come occasionally, with other members coming, or if they're interested I guess, but it's almost exclusively other expats

[Leo, 31, German]

I have some friends from work and that I've met in other ways, but the people I think I feel most connected to are those I've met through those [online] groups. I mean I guess a part of it is that we already have the shared position of being foreigners here, so that's a kind of bonding tool...

[Tammy, 32, French]

Further, many respondents reported difficulty making Dutch friends if they didn't already have established Dutch connections (see section 4.5) and noted this challenge as being one of the important factors that influenced the composition of their social networks:

I think it's difficult to make friends with Dutch people honestly. I have some, but it really takes a lot of time and effort to get to know them. I also think that they're a bit 'closed up' to meeting new people and want to stick to the friend groups that they already have. But I also think that's just a part of Groningen, since a lot of people living here are from here and have been here for a long time already and established themselves. Perhaps it would be different in a bigger city like Amsterdam, I don't know.

[Tony, 27, Italian]

Tony's comments about perceiving that his experience might have been different if he was in a bigger city, even if within the Netherlands, draw attention to another dimension of the spatial aspects of social connection. These experiences are reported by other respondents, who also note that they expect that they would have different experiences integrating and connecting in a bigger city:

I think one of the things about Groningen it that's it's kind of a small close-knit community. Like a lot of the people I meet here, even the Dutch ones, tend to be from here and have lived here for a while, so that they a relatively 'set' group of friends. So, most of the friends that I've made here have been other foreigners since it seems like the 'Groningers' seem to be a little bit closed off. I don't feel like it's that international here, especially since I've lived in other big cities before and it feels like my friend groups there were a lot more international... So, I wonder what

it would be like if I had moved to a bigger city in the Netherlands, like Amsterdam or Rotterdam, and if it would be the same there

[Leah, 26, Australian]

Comments like this showed up throughout the interviewees responses, with other interviewees wondering if they would have a different experience in a different place. Many noted that they felt Groningen to be less 'international' than they had first perceived or expected and this has likely had an effect on their experiences of 'integration'.

Some noted that they felt like they would feel more 'integrated' in bigger cities like Amsterdam, and this would undoubtedly be an interesting topic to explore in future research and future case studies might explore the comparison of perceived integration of expatriates in a smaller city like Groningen with a bigger city like Amsterdam. As is covered in the next section, "Neighbourhood and Social Conditions of the Local Community", many respondents reported difficulty befriending their neighbours and this is undoubtedly a factor that contributed to their reliance on the digital realm in search of social connections, and to the reasons that this group largely facilitated their initial social and spatial connections digitally.

4.4 Neighbourhood and Social Conditions of the Local Community

This aspect of integrative success is specifically spatially-oriented and shows that for this sample group, the neighbourhood where one lives matters. Although the sample size is small, and the sample group of expatriates is a specific type, their residential locations provided an opportunity to explore how 'space,' as reflected in different neighbourhood locations and features, might influence the integration experiences of these respondents. The sample was fairly equally divided into three spatial categories based on their residential area; *1. In the Centre of the City, 2. To the North of the City, 3. To the South of the City*. Living in each of these specific areas had spatial consequences and influenced where and how these individuals made social connections that were tied to where they lived. Although it is impossible to draw statistical conclusions due to the small sample size, the findings described in this section are suggestive about the role of residential location on perceived integrative success. However,

all respondents did mention how aspects of where they lived affected how they made social connections, thus it is possible to draw some preliminary conclusions about the influence of one's place of residence. The geographic distribution of residence of respondents can be seen in 'Figure 4. Map of Residential Locations of Respondents'.

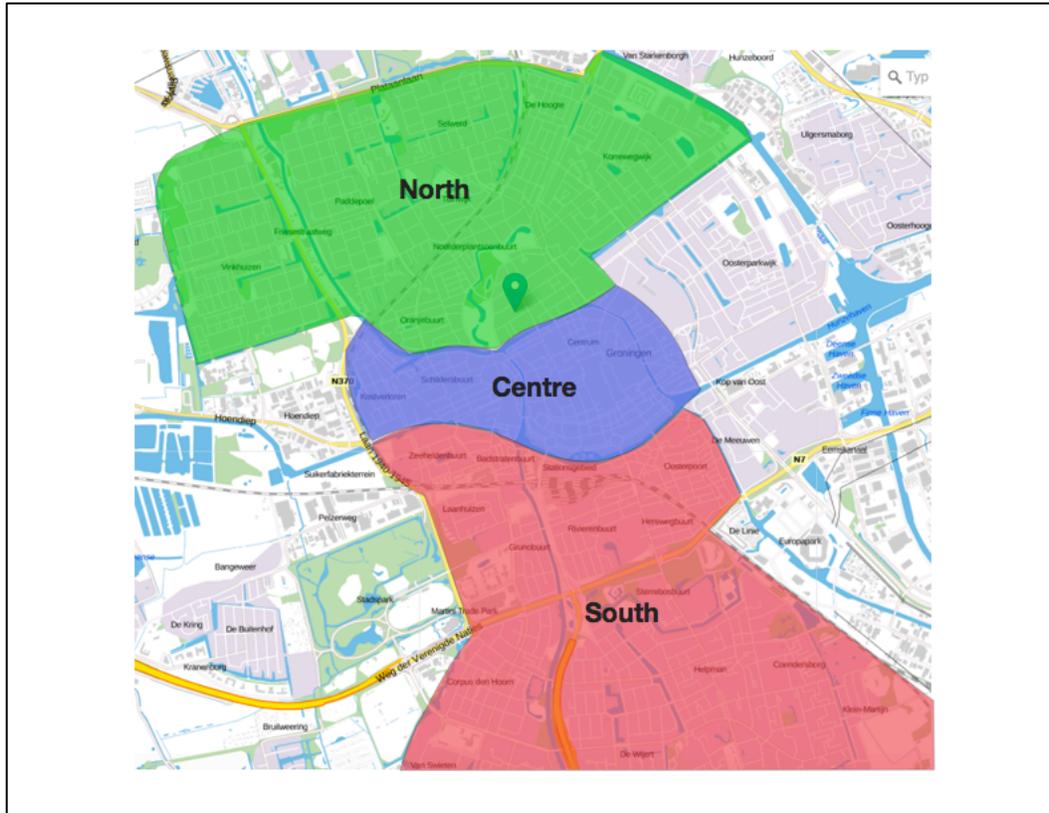


Figure 4. Map of Residential Locations of Respondents. Geodienst (2018).

As described in section 3, this study included a questionnaire that asked respondents to rate their perceptions of their integration into their residential neighbourhood and the community at large. There were two spatial categories, then, that were assessed through the questionnaire: *Perception of Neighbourhood Integrative Success* and *Perception of Community at Large Integrative success*. The mean scores were computed for each respondent based on their responses to these questions for both 'neighbourhood' and 'community' level perceived integration. The table is included below.

4.5 Table of Mean Integrative Success scores for Centre, South and North

	Centre (n=4)	South (n=6)	North (n=4)	Total (n=14)
Mean (Residence)	5.35	7.43	4.70	6.06
Mean (Community)	5.86	7.37	4.46	6.11

Overall, respondents indicated that they felt moderately integrated (slightly above the mid-point value) into their residential area (M=6.06) and into the larger community (M=6.11). Further, the quantitative results provided additional support for the role that neighbourhood location plays in integration success.

From the above table it is interesting to note that people who were interviewed from the “South” of the city had a mean integrative success score for “community” and “residence” above the total mean whilst people interviewed from the “North” and “Centre” had averages below the total mean. This suggests that integrative success is highest in the “South” from the people surveyed.

Respondents living in the South scored the highest of the three categories on both ‘residential’ and ‘communal’ integrative success. Individuals in this part of the city reported that their neighbors were more open to meeting new people, and this group, whose ratings indicated they felt most integrated, were more likely to report that they had neighbors who were close friends and that they had met these people in the neighbourhood. Jose, a 36-year-old Spanish teacher exemplified this well, when explaining how where and how he meet the people he thought had been most important to his integration into Groningen:

I think actually I would have to say that it's my neighbors that have helped me feel the most at home here. We've had good friendship since I moved here pretty much. They actually came out

to talk to me when we were first moving in, to greet me, to welcome me to the neighbourhood I guess, and they actually invited me to come to a party at their house and I went and had such a good time, and so we've been friends since then.

[Jose, 36, Spanish]

Jose further explained how exactly his neighbours helped in his integration by noting that his neighbours whom he initially made contact with also helped him to build his social network and that he met new people through them, including other neighbours he had not initially met. He also noted a spatial aspect of connection, as he mentioned that his neighbours often met at the local pub, and he made many social connections there, including with other neighbours. He further noted the importance of how this made him feel a sense of belonging as he knew he would find familiar faces at the pub and that he felt welcome there. Others in the South also reported that they had met neighbours in pubs and cafes in their community, and that this was the primary avenue through which they made these 'local' connections. Leo, a 31-year old German engineer reported a similar story to that of Jose when asked where he had made important 'local' connections:

We meet at the pub down the street, the Merleyn. There is no set time to meet, but sometimes they [my neighbours] ask me to join them and we go, and sometimes I just go if I'm wanting a drink and I will see them [my neighbours] there

[Leo, 31, German]

Emily, a 28-year old South African consultant, also reported a similar experience:

I like to go to the local café for coffee in the mornings, especially during weekends, when I can relax a bit more, and sometimes I will recognize my neighbours and talk to them for a bit. I wouldn't say any of them are close friends or anything, but it's nice to know who's living around you.

[Emily, 28, South African]

Her experiences further indicate the importance of loose social connections for feeling as though you are accepted and recognized in your neighbourhood.

When looking at the data from 'Figure 3. Western Immigrants per Neighbourhood Groningen, 2016: Geodienst' it can be seen that 'western immigrants' are clustered in the 'City Centre' and 'South' and it would be worth investigating more thoroughly as to why this is the case in future research. Further, it could be expected that such patterns could lead to spatially-dependent networks of expatriates living closely together. However, none of the respondents within this sample set reported that they were socially close to other expatriates in their neighbourhood and mostly reported that besides occasionally meeting their friends at private events and get-togethers at other's houses, they mostly met at pubs or at events located in the city centre. When asked why they choose to live where they did, individuals in the 'South' mostly noted the physical attributes of the place and preferring the housing options available there:

I choose to live here because of the house actually. I really liked the design of it

[Jose, 36, Spanish]

It was the best option for me from what the makelaar [real-estate agent] showed me. It looked like a nice area to live in, with the park nearby, and [it seemed] quiet, but not too far away to get to work or go to the city

[Leo, 31, German]

My husband was already there actually (laughs). So, I came to move in with him. But I very much like the neighbourhood, it is very cosy and I feel comfortable here

[Anna, 38, Curacaoan]

In contrast to respondents living in the 'South', individuals living in the North scored the lowest of the three categories in how they rated their level of integration into their neighbourhood, the extent to which they thought their neighbors would be supportive and helpful to them, and how happy they were living in their neighbourhoods. Some of their

responses indicate why these residents scored comparatively low in ‘residential’ integrative success:

Well I don't feel like I know any of my neighbours. I mean I recognize them and maybe we say "hello", but I don't really know any of them very well. I only even know the names of one or two!
[laughs]

[Tony, 27, Italian]

No, I'm not really friends with any of my neighbours. It's not like it's that bad, but I don't think it's a very friendly place to live, especially compared to how it was back home [in Canada], where you would at least be cordial with your neighbours. Here we don't really communicate at all.

[Kelly, 29, Canadian]

The other respondents living in the ‘North’ had similar sentiments, and none claimed to be very close to their neighbours. This lack of closeness is undoubtedly a negative aspect of living in their neighbourhood that contributes to their lower scores on perceived neighbourhood integration.

The final group considered in terms of residential integrative success is those living in the centre of the city. These individuals were in-between those living in the north and the south in terms of how they rated their level of integration and happiness living in their neighbourhood. They all reported overall being less close to their neighbors than to those in the south, but closer than those who lived in the north part of the city reported. A recurrent theme in their interview responses concerned living arrangements, as these respondents typically reported living in small apartments or studios above businesses and often didn't really know their neighbors, except perhaps some of those living in the same building in them (if there were other people living in the same building). Leah, a 26-year-old Australian provided her perspective:

Well I live in a building that used to be all offices I reckon, that they just started converting to apartments. I think I was actually one of the first people to move in. So, there wasn't really an established community here anyway. I mean I have neighbors now, but there isn't really a place to meet, and we only pass each other in the hallways sometimes and greet each other. I have talked to my next-door neighbor before when I was doing the washing and we briefly chat sometimes, but we haven't become close. Also, most of the buildings around me are stores, and I reckon most have apartments above them, but it would be hard to know who lives there, even if you met them on the street, I wouldn't know that they were my neighbour.

[Leah, 26, Australian]

James, a 42-year-old German, said that living in the Centre meant that it was easy for him to go to events in the city to bars around him:

I don't have to go far [to meet people] so I am more likely to go to events or to the pub... I have been going to the pub 'De Pintelier' almost since I first moved here 6 years ago, so I will probably know someone there to drink with

[James, 42, German]

Space to Meet: The Centre

James's sentiment about his proximity to local pubs and events appeared in the interviews of most respondents and leads to one of the most important conclusions of this study: that the newly arrived ex-patriates mostly meet in the 'Centre' and that *this—having a physical space that is conducive to meeting new people and that provides friendly gathering spots—is the important spatial aspect of social connection for this group*. When asked where they met their most important social contacts, twelve out of the fourteen mentioned locations in the 'Centre'. Here are some of their responses:

We meet at the 'Bar Pacific' at least once a month for the welcome drinks and then they do games nights and other things there as well

[George, 30, Romanian]

Well my friends live around Groningen in different places, so often we start out at somebody's house for some drinks, and then we go to the city to the bars there, like on Peperstraat, because there's always a lot going on there and it's fun

[Tony, 27, Italian]

Kelly: There's all kinds of events they coordinate through the Whatsapp group [for expatriates] and I try to go to as many as I can... If it's a daytime event, which are usually during the weekend since everyone is busy at work, and the weather's okay [laughs] we might meet at the park... If it's a nighttime event its usually at a bar somewhere in the city. We like to meet at 'O'caellaighs' since it's a true Irish pub, with an Irish owner, and so we feel more welcome speaking English there, but we also go to hear music or do trivia night all around the city

[Kelly, 29, Canadian]

Kelly's comment on feeling comfortable speaking English was also echoed by other respondents, with many noting that they appreciated having a 'safe' space in which to speak their language and not feel judged for it, and the accompanying comfort level and sense of ease is likely one of the major reasons that centrally located 'internationally-themed' pubs and events drew this group of ex-patriates into the 'Centre' to meet.

4.6 Connections to Individuals Already Integrated into the Society

Another strong indicator of perceived integrative success was connected to both degree of language knowledge and also the desire to learn Dutch and making efforts toward developing proficiency in speaking the Dutch language. Of the fourteen people interviewed, six indicated they had established associations with an individual or individuals already established within Dutch society in Groningen (five had moved to be with their Dutch romantic partners and one had moved as associated with their business). These social connections were deemed to be especially important and helpful to integrate into Groningen. Unsurprisingly, those who ranked most highly on their perceived success of integration were those who moved because of a romantic partner. Having the connection to this previously established individual meant being more likely to have access to local resources and people.

Laura, a 24-year-old South African student who has been living in Groningen for the last two years and came to be with her local Dutch partner exemplifies this well, explaining how her boyfriend was her main outlet through which to make social connections:

I mean, he already had his friends and family here, so he was pretty well established, and I mean we even still live with his family, but I guess I've just kind of taken that on, and we get along super well, even though it's a bit cramped sometimes. But yeah, I've become friends with a lot of his friends and met people at like events and stuff, so being with him really helped me to meet people here a lot.

[Laura, 24, South African]

Laura further explained how having this previously established social connection helped her to feel more integrated into society in Groningen:

Well, it's obviously helped so so much, because he already his group of friends that I made friends with too, but also, I guess living with his family has meant that we've kind of had to be a part of our neighbourhood, so I guess you would consider that integration as well?

[Laura, 24, South African]

Further, Laura notes that being connected to her boyfriend's parent's family has led to her having connections to individuals in her south Groningen neighbourhood as well (Laura lives with her boyfriend and her parents):

Yeah, pretty well actually I reckon. John's [her boyfriend's] family are quite good friends with a couple families on the block, and so we sometimes have like dinner together or do a barbeque. Since we still live with John's parents, we see those neighbors around sometimes and almost always greet each other at least.

[Laura, 24, South African]

However, Laura explains that she perceives this relationship to be more ‘formal’ and while she appreciates having them and feels that they help increase her ‘integration’, she does not feel particularly ‘close’ to them:

Well actually I guess that maybe our [her and her boyfriend's] relationship with our neighbors is more formal, because they're really his parent's friends. I mean, it's nice to know who's living around you and all and it feels a bit more comfortable being able to talk with them, but it's not like we're that close to them or anything. But it is still definitely pretty nice to know who's living around you. For sure though, it's been through John's friends that I've met the most people.

[Laura, 24, South African]

Nonetheless, having her boyfriends established social circles, with whom she interacts frequently and feels are among her most important social connections has been vital to her overall feelings of ‘integration’ into the community:

Yes, definitely. We do stuff with them all the time, so it's with them that I feel like I'm a part of the community.

[Laura, 24, South African]

Anna, the 38-year-old female, who was the respondent who reported the highest perceptions of being integrated into Dutch culture, echoes the same sentiment about the role of her Dutch husband in helping her integrate into society, as well as language proficiency. When asked about why she felt so integrated as she did, here was her response:

I came to be here with my husband almost twelve years ago now, so I think that's probably why I feel so connected. I still have family and friends in Curacao, but most of my friends now are from here.... I met some [of my friends] through my husband, and some through my neighbourhood, and I think both are important... Of course, speaking Dutch has helped, I think it's the only way you can truly get to know the Dutch people

[Anna, 38, Curacao]

Anna's long residence in Groningen (11.5 years), Dutch husband, and Dutch language skills certainly make her an outlier within the sample, and these factors undoubtedly contributed to her relatively high perceptions of both 'residential' and 'communal' integrative success. In some ways, she could be perceived to be a 'outlier' among this sample group, as she has been in the Netherlands for a longer length of time compared to other 'expatriates', although she still self-identifies as an 'expatriate' due to her strong connection to her home country of Curacao. However, she is not 'newly arrived', and therefore is somewhat of an outlier in the sample group. Her position shows that time spent in a place matters, as does having language skills and pre-established connections.

Emily, the 28-year old South African female who has been dating a local Dutch man for the last two years also reports that this has helped her to become integrated and comfortable in her neighbourhood:

Well, when I first got here I mostly made international friends through ESN and other international groups and through the university... but since I've been dating my boyfriend, who's Dutch, for two years now I've gotten to know his family and the people in that community much better.

[Emily, 28, South African]

Emily explains that dating a local Dutch man has largely increased her number of Dutch friends, largely through his social connections:

Once we started to become more serious, he started to introduce me more and more to his friends, who are mostly Dutch, so since it's been a couple of years now, I've become close to some of them... I'd consider some of his friends to be among my more important social connections now, yes.

[Emily, 28, South African]

Beyond providing important social connections, Emily notes that her relationship with her Dutch boyfriend has greatly improved her skills in Dutch:

Yes, well like a number of people from South Africa, I did speak some Afrikaans growing up, so I had a base, but since I've been dating my boyfriend I've learned to speak better Dutch and have lots more opportunity to practice.

[Emily, 28, South African]

Emily's sentiments about how speaking Dutch and wanting to improve proficiency in the language have shown up consistently in the interviews as factors affecting 'integration', and as such they form another fundamental finding of this study, the following, **Section 4.6** 'Knowledge of the Dutch language'.

4.7 Knowledge of the Dutch Language

Another strong indicator of perceived integrative success was connected to both degree of language knowledge but also the desire to learn Dutch and making efforts towards establishing proficiency. Of the five individuals who have Dutch romantic partners, all claimed to have higher language proficiency than any of the other nine people surveyed. The three highest scoring participants in language proficiency claimed knowledge of the language before moving to the Netherlands, especially as these three all grew up with some proficiency in either Dutch or Afrikaans. Anna, a 38-year-old consultant, who grew up in Curacao but has lived here for five years with her Dutch partner, explains how this language proficiency helps:

I grew up in Curacao, so Dutch was one of my native languages. I also speak Papiamentu, which is a kind of a local language, and some Spanish and yes of course, some English as well (laughs)

[Anna, 38, Curacao]

She further explains how this has helped her integrate and feel at home:

Oh, yes! So, for me, although I live here, it's not quite as foreign, in some senses (but I still haven't quite gotten used to the weather! (laughs)). But no, since I can speak to almost everyone I meet,

but it is also convenient for shopping and other daily activities, and just getting around in general. So, I would say it has been very convenient

[Anna, 38, Curacao]

Finally, Anna explains how beneficial speaking the language has been to her and how important she thinks it is to be able to successfully integrate:

Yes, it has been very helpful, I think so, especially with other Dutch people. It's easier to make conversations with people from here, and I would say I have some pretty good friends here. I have my husband as well, who's Dutch, so initially I met a lot of people through him. Some of them are really my very good friends today still, too.

[Anna, 38, Curacao]

Jose, the 36-year-old Spanish teacher explains that although he is working to learn Dutch, his primary communication with his neighbours is in English:

Well I try to speak some Dutch with them when I can, because they are good to teach me I think, but still their English is better than my Dutch, and they don't speak much Spanish, although since I'm working to teach Spanish here, I have taught them some, but still it's better we don't have a conversation in Spanish, or in Dutch (laughs). So yes, we mostly are speaking English.

[Jose, 36, Spanish]

Jose explains that although he is not fluent in Dutch, having a basic knowledge of the language has been hugely beneficial to him for 'every-day' life, although perhaps not as much for his 'integration':

Yes, I think it helps to go around and to do everyday things like shopping and going out to eat or to the bar, but it is basic, my Dutch, just to do things like this. So, it helps me to get around, but I think maybe not so much for my integration

[Jose, 36, Spanish]

Laura, the 26-year-old South African student who has been living in the ‘south’ of Groningen for the last two years and came to be with her local Dutch partner, also echoes these sentiments. She notes that although her Dutch was not perfect when she first got here, she was still able to make connections with her neighbors and gotten to know them better:

I mean, I also speak Dutch pretty well, since I spoke Afrikaans growing up, so it's pretty easy to transition to Dutch, although there are some words that are different, I can still generally understand what people are saying and they can also understand me, so that has for sure helped in becoming a part of this community as well

[Laura, 26, South African]

Emily, also from South Africa, and with previous knowledge of Afrikaans, mentions how being able to speak Dutch has positively influenced her feelings of integration by improving her social networks:

Well, I think it's so important to be able to speak Dutch here, because although I was able to make lots of friends only speaking English, they were mostly with other foreigners. However, being with my boyfriend for two years now, my Dutch has gotten much better and I've made much closer friends with my boyfriend's friends especially... I think you have to be able to speak Dutch to be able to really get to know the Dutch people, especially in Groningen.

[Emily, 28, South African]

Emily's experiences of the advantages of being able to speak Dutch as aiding to integration were confirmed by other respondents as being an important aspect of increasing ‘integrative success’. Conversely, those who had difficulty with the language repeatedly responded that they thought having stronger Dutch language skills would help them in integrating:

I think being able to speak Dutch would be really beneficial to my whole experience here, integration, work, everything. I work for an international company and was hired to work in their marketing department specifically to market to the United States, so I was hired for my English skills, and at a company that is supposed to be ‘multi-cultural’ and ‘international’ but

my colleagues rarely speak to me in English, even though I know they are all fluent. So, I feel pretty left out and haven't made any close friends at work. If I spoke Dutch, I think this would be very different.

[Leah, 26, Australian]

George, a 30-year-old Romanian lab assistant noted a similar experience:

I would have to be able to speak Dutch to have better relationships with my neighbours, I know that. But I think to really become close to the Dutch people you have to speak Dutch. I mean I completely understand, it is difficult to make a good friendship when you are not speaking your language. So I guess that is why most of my friends are other Romanians and people who speak English since I speak those well... If I spoke Dutch I think it would be easier to make Dutch friends, but I still think that it is difficult to get to know Dutch people, I think it is also a cultural thing.

[George, 30, Romanian]

In total, respondents who reported speaking some Dutch reported feeling more integrated and that they were more likely to have more Dutch social connections (especially for those with pre-established connections). Respondents who reported little Dutch proficiency overall reported feeling less integrated as well as reporting having more non-Dutch connections.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter examines how the results described in the prior chapter answer the fundamental research questions of this study. Using the Agar and Strang (2008) framework, factors that reflect social connections that are critical for integration were identified and the role of these factors in the integration experiences of expatriates was explored. This is unique as it is the first time this framework has been used to examine the experiences of integration for expatriates specifically. The results from this study have elucidated our understanding of the ways that expatriates form the social network relationships that provide an important sense of connection to their new community. These results are similar to other studies in that support for the Agar and Strang (2008) theoretical framework was found.

The primary research question was, “How important is ‘space’ and what role does it play in affecting how successfully expatriates make social connections and integrate into Groningen communities?”. Further, there were three sub-questions, which were:

- 1) Where, how, and with whom do expatriates make social connections in Groningen?
- 2) What aspects of social connections are viewed as most important for integration and well-being of expatriates in Groningen?
- 3) What role does “space” play in the successful integration experience of expatriates into Groningen?

5.1 Findings

There were a number of important findings in this study. The most significant finding was the importance of digital facilitation in generating social connection among expatriates, and that this ‘facilitation’ was largely seen as being more important than the physical meeting spaces themselves. Additionally, it was found that having connections to individuals already integrated into society considerably increased perception of ‘integration’. It was found that ‘Dutch language ability’ was an important factor in increasing perceived integration and consequently in increasing Dutch social connections. Finally, it was found that the

expatriates surveyed for this study considered their most important social connections to overwhelmingly be with other expatriates, with the exception of respondents who had moved to be with their Dutch romantic partners.

5.2 Digital Facilitation of Social Connections

The fundamental aim of this study was to examine social and spatial aspects of ‘integration’ for expatriates. In querying study respondents as to ‘where’ they had made important social connections, they repeatedly responded that they had made these connections at the meetings of groups working to connect expatriates in the city of Groningen. Although these meetings were generally held at various locations in the ‘Centre’ of the city, it was not the physical location of the meetings that was identified as being important to respondents, but rather having digital connection and communication to facilitate these meetings. This finding makes sense and is in-line with other research, which has shown the increasing importance of digital technology in generating social connections. Lloyd et al. (2013) even argue that in the modern, globalized world, “social inclusion is chiefly facilitated through the use of digital technology... those without access to information [technology] run the risk of becoming increasingly excluded from mainstream information sources and may fail to develop the capacity to fully settle, to recognize and take up opportunities, and to participate in society as full citizens” (Lloyd et al., 2013: 123-124). Further, these results echo other academic research on other migrant communities, such as Alam and Imran’s (2015) study of refugee communities within Australia which asserted that it is increasingly in ‘digital’ form that communal connections are being made, especially for outsiders and new arrivals to urban areas. This study corroborates these findings, as the respondents reported they mainly built their social networks initially through digital methods.

5.3 Ties to Established Connections and Dutch Language Ability

We also found that having connections (in the case of this study, generally romantic partners) who were already established within the community made it much more likely for respondents to have further social connections who were locally based. Five respondents reported having Dutch romantic partners and reported these as being the centre of their own

social circles. These respondents said they had more local connections, a social circle which included more Dutch people than foreigners, and all had higher scores of 'perceived integration'. Further, this group self-reported being the most proficient in Dutch, which they saw as one of the most integral components to achieving 'successful' integration. Conversely, the other nine respondents self-reported lower Dutch proficiency. The nine respondents who did not have these pre-established connections all mentioned that they thought having higher proficiency in Dutch would help them to integrate more successfully, and most thought that language proficiency was one of the hallmarks of integration.

5.4 Social Connections to other Expatriates

Although all respondents reported having at least some social connection to local Dutch people, the majority of respondents (ten out of fourteen) reported that their social connections were overwhelmingly with other expatriates. The respondents said that it was 'easier' to initially make contact with other expatriates as well as being 'easier' to build 'important' relationships. This is in line with other research on how expatriates build their social networks, with Kloss (2010) noting that "making friends with other expatriates is perceived as easier because their network is not so closed yet and especially in the beginning of the stay it is easier to get in touch with them" (Kloss, 2010:48). Beyond the shared common language among this group of expatriates (English) and position of being foreigners, many reported feeling other commonalities, including educational background and personal interests. Although there has not been much research on the topic of how expatriates build their social support relationships, this finding is similar to the results from previous academic work. For example, Johnson et al. (2003) found that for expatriates, social ties with other expatriates typically provided greater social support than ties with host country residents (Johnson et al., 2003). Further, Kloss' (2010) thesis on 'Expatriates in Denmark', which is one of the only studies done specifically done on expatriates' integrative experiences, concluded that that it is difficult to merge expatriates into local cultures and that there is typically limited important social contact between expatriates and their host culture (Kloss, 2010).

However, further research should be done on ways to increase expatriates' connections to their host communities, as it been shown that local social connections play a positive role for other migrants as they adapt to their new home, and these fundamental human connections would logically be as important for expatriates (Puyat, 2012; Samek, Laporte, Nauenberg, Shen & Coyle, 2012).

5.5 The Role of 'Space'

The final significant finding of this study has to do particularly with the role of 'space' in the integration of expatriates into their new location. Specifically, this study found that for expatriates, having a 'safe' physical space in the centre to meet, where they felt comfortable speaking English, and which was convenient to access, was important. The 'centre' in Groningen proved to be the most important physical space for most expatriates as it was where they met others, particularly other expatriates. Although the five respondents with pre-established Dutch romantic partners reported overall higher 'integration' into their neighbourhood, only one respondent reported feeling 'highly integrated' into her neighbourhood (Anna, the 38-year-old from Curacao with a Dutch romantic partner, fluency in Dutch and who has lived in Groningen for 11.5 years; with a self-perceived score of 8.8/10 for residential integrative success). The next highest score was Laura, the 24-year old South African national with a Dutch romantic partner, who was fluent in Dutch, had lived in Groningen for 2 years, and who had a self-perceived residential integrative success score of 7.6/10. The other twelve respondents scored a mean of 5.7/10 of self-perceived residential integrative success, indicating a relatively low overall perception of residential integration among this sample. This is not surprising, as research has shown that neighbourhoods are not the typical sources for social support relationships within one's social network, and that even when individuals choose which space and neighbourhood to live in, cross-cultural spatially-based connections don't necessarily occur (Van Beckhoven and Van Kempen, 2003; Blokland and Van Eijk, 2010; Kleinhans et al. 2000). These studies have generally shown that increasing the inter-residential diversity, or neighbourhood diversity, of a place, whether with newer or more established immigrants of a different national and ethnic background, has little effect on increasing social network diversity and social bonding (Blokland and Van Eijk, 2010). Further, it has been found that individuals tend to prefer those 'like them' and build social networks with others with similar socio-economic and ethnic characteristics and not based on spatial characteristics. (Butler, 2003; Berry 2001; Blokland and Van Eijk 2010).

However, this pattern of findings does not discount the neighbourhood as an important component of social life and it is still possible that loose social connections are likely to be formed in neighbourhoods of residence, and perhaps close and supportive relationships. Even though these loose connections may not be a source of emotional and social support, they are still an important part of daily life and may contribute to the newcomer's sense of being welcomed (or not) to the new country (Granovetter, 1973).

5.6 Limitations

There were a number of limitations to this study primarily related to this specific sample group. The first and most obvious limitation is the size of the sample, as fourteen respondents is a relatively small number. However, this group of expatriates is likely very similar to other expatriates in important ways. As noted in the literature review, expatriates are a unique group with distinct attributes such as high educational attainment and in this sample, all proficient in English. Further, this group may have been more socially active even among expatriates living in Groningen as they were contacted through active social groups and willing to participate in this research. This group was relatively young and had, on average, only been in Groningen for 4.18 years. It is expected that individuals who have been in a foreign society for a longer period of time will have different experiences of integration. However, because the research aim was to discover 'where' and 'how' *new* arrivals made social connections, the results from this study do make a contribution to the understanding of factors that both inhibited and facilitated the establishment of social connections. Further studies might look at the different experiences of how newly arrived expatriates build social and spatial connections in other cities, such as Amsterdam, and how cities with differing characteristics (e.g. city size, diversity, location) might face different challenges.

5.7 Recommendations

The findings from this study provide an important insight into how newly arrived expatriates have integrated into Groningen. The most important finding was the role of digital technology in creating social connections. The city of Groningen already has a

platform through which to help facilitate these interactions through their “Welcome Centre North” building, which aims to help the newly arrived establish themselves. Their website provides a list of recommendations of how to meet people and includes links to groups like ‘Connect International’ and the ‘Expats in Groningen’ Facebook page (Welcome Center North). However, some respondents reported limited knowledge of the Welcome Center North, so perhaps they could work to increase their presence and link to other online resources. Another recommendation for the municipality would be to increase the scope and reduce the cost of Dutch language classes, as respondents reported that being able to speak and understand Dutch would be likely to help them integrate, however they felt that the courses in Dutch offered were too expensive for non-students, and that perceived that these courses were ‘designed’ more specifically for students of the city’s universities. Finally, respondents reported that they often encountered difficulty assimilating into their work environments and felt that the city could work to better prepare workplaces, especially those seeking international workers, to acculturate these foreign workers.

5.8 Conclusions

Globalization is becoming an increasingly relevant issue for more places, as rates of immigration continue to rise, leading to more people living in an increasingly diverse society. Immigration brings both challenges and opportunities for growth. Identifying the most effective ways to encourage integration into new cultures has implications for all citizens. This study has found that the way in which society is forming social connections is becoming increasingly ‘digital’, and less ‘spatially-based’ especially for ‘new arrivals’ and ‘expatriates’. Further, it has been found that, at least for the medium sized city of Groningen, in The Netherlands, expatriates’ social networks are mostly based around connections with other expatriates that were initially made through digital contacts. These digital connections often resulted in plans for face-to-face meetings, typically in the City Centre. For the most part, then, these expatriates are not forming social connections that they describe as important to them in their neighbourhoods and with their neighbours. It is likely that this pattern holds true for expatriates in other communities and countries as well, although little research has focused on the topic of where or how expatriates form important social connections.

However, it is probable that expatriates will form more important neighbourhood and communal bonds the longer they spend in a community and the more ingrained they become within the culture. The processes of making social connections and developing social networks that the expatriates in this study engaged in reflects the importance of creating the “connective tissue” (Agar and Strang, 2008:177) that is most likely to result in positive integration. And, as Platts-Fowler and Robinson emphasize, “place is not merely a setting in which social life unfolds, but also a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced” (Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2015; 478). Place then is central to forming important social connections, and when we properly consider ‘space’ and ‘place’ and the people in them, we gain important insight into effective ways of fostering more cohesive communities for all.

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7. Appendices

7.1. Interview Guide

Hello, my name is Ethan Hill and I am a master's student of Socio-Spatial Planning (concerning the development of the community in planning practices) at the University of Groningen. I am doing a survey about how well immigrants feel connected to and integrated into their communities. Your answers will help me to build a better understanding of how to successfully integrate different groups of people in the hope to build strong, more connected communities. Thank you for volunteering to answer my survey; I very much appreciate your help. This survey is completely voluntary, and you may quit at any time and may skip any questions if you are uncomfortable in answering them. All of your answers will remain anonymous and cannot be tied back to you personally. I can be contacted at e.s.hill@student.rug.nl or at 0638220638.

Basic Questions

Do I have permission to conduct this interview? (*Respondents verbally agreed*)

Demographics

1. Can you tell me about yourself?

Probe: age/gender/ethnicity/nationality/

2. How long have you lived in the Netherlands for?

Reason they're Here and Where they Live

3. Why did you move here?

Probe: work/study/relationships

4. Did you come to the Netherlands with anyone else, and if so, who?

5. Where do you live in the city and how did you end up there?

Probe: neighbourhood/region

6. What is the best thing to you about living where you do?

Probe: potential social implications

Income

6. If you don't mind me asking; about how much do you earn?

Probe: income level/social benefits

Language Skills and Benefits

7. Do you speak Dutch, or are you trying to learn?

8. How much do you think being able to speak Dutch has helped you to become part of the community, or if you don't speak Dutch, how much do you think this has hindered you becoming part of the community?

Community Involvement and Friends

9. Where and how did you meet the people you feel have been most important for your integration into Groningen?

10. What about your neighbourhood/community makes it easy or hard to meet people?

11. How well do you feel like you know your neighbours?

12. Do you feel like you are "part of"/included in your local neighbourhood/community? If so, why, and if not, why not?

13. Who are the people who you spend the most amount of time with, where are they from and how did you meet them?

14. How has the municipality of Groningen helped you to integrate (through organizations such as "Welcome Centre North")?

Probe: if this has helped or not/what the municipality could do to better facilitate integration

7.2 Questionnaire

The following section is designed to explore your feelings about the strength of your connection to your neighbourhood and community at large. These questions ask you to indicate the strength of your feelings about the importance of each factor for your 'integration', or the degree to which you feel the statements reflect your feelings, and are indicated on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 indicating the lowest level of rating (e.g, from not very much, or not very well, not very strong, or very low) and 10 indicating the highest level (very much, or very well, or very strong, or very high). Please circle your choice.

How do you rate your connection to your neighbors?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How much do you feel your neighbors support you/would help you in a time of need?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How connected do you feel to your neighbourhood?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How well integrated into your neighbourhood do you feel?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How happy are you living in your neighbourhood?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How diverse do you feel your neighbourhood is (racially/ethnically)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How diverse do you feel your neighbourhood is (by age)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How do you rate your connection to the community of Groningen?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How involved are you in the community of Groningen?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How happy are you living in the community of Groningen?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How well integrated do you feel into the community of Groningen?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How important do you think having pre-established connections to people already established in Groningen has been (or would be) to integrating into the Community of Groningen?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How well integrated do you feel into Dutch society?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How diverse do you feel Groningen is (racially/ethnically)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How diverse do you feel Groningen is (by age)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How diverse do you feel your community is (by social group/income)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How socially diverse do you feel is the group of people who you have contact with regularly?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How ethnically diverse do you feel is the group of people who you have contact with regularly?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How international do you feel is the group of people who you have contact with regularly?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How much has the municipality of Groningen facilitated your integration into the city?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How important have public events (such as those held by ex-pat groups, or through organizations such as "Welcome Center North") helped you to integrate?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Is your whole social network based more on other international people or on Dutch people (1 meaning your social network is based completely or almost completely on other international people and 10 meaning your social network is based completely or almost completely on Dutch people)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How would you rate your skills in understanding and speaking Dutch?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How important do you think speaking Dutch is to become integrated into society in Groningen?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Thank you very much for participating! Your feedback has been valuable! Please hand this questionnaire back to me once you are completed.

7.3 Code Tree

Experience of Integration

Social Connections

Dutch
Other Ex-Patriates
Romantic Partners
Neighbours
Friends
Family
Colleagues
Connect International
Welcome Center North
Other International Associations

Where and how people connect

Neighbourhood
Local Cafes or Bars
Work
In the City
School
Online
Mutual Friends
International Associations
Other Social Activities

Perceived Positive

Integrative Aspects

Feelings of being settled
Feelings of belonging
Feelings of being involved

Feelings of being connected
Wanting to build connections
Wanting to participate socially

Perceived Negative
Integrative Aspects

Difficulty meeting people
Difficulty with Dutch Language
Cultural Differences
Difficulty bonding with community