

# International students & Dutch urban heritage

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*A study on university marketing and the effect it has on student image*

Master thesis Cultural Geography  
Faculty of Spatial Sciences  
University of Groningen

Bart Booij

Supervisor:  
dr. P.D. Groote

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**university of  
 groningen**

## **Abstract**

Heritage can be used by different people, companies or organisations in different ways. The message created by using heritage can also be interpreted in multiple ways. The University of Groningen uses heritage to create a visual image of itself to promote the University amongst international students. This image emphasizes the long history of the University in helping students successfully achieving their degrees.

The research for this thesis shows that international students value the aesthetic aspects of heritage a lot, although heritage is not a big part of daily activities. Most students feel at home in a historic environment. This thesis suggests that the way international students chose their foreign University is similar to the destination choice tourists make. The image they have of their destination is therefore very important in the decision making process. It also appears that the aspects students attribute to Groningen and its University are comparable to the image the University tries to create.

## Preface

Heritage and the way we use it has fascinated me throughout my studies at the University of Groningen. For a long time I have been certain that heritage should be the subject of my thesis, the final product of my academic career. Different people look at heritage in different, individual ways. Different cultures must therefore also look at heritage in different ways. These two aspects, heritage and different cultures put together have given me reason to do this thesis.

I would like to thank all staff of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences and especially my supervisor, dr. P.D. Groote for his patience and advice during the process of creating this thesis. Thanks for all 102 respondents for filling out the questionnaire.

I would also like to thank Jordan and Grant for reviewing the thesis, Yvonne for giving me the final push to complete this thesis. And last but certainly not least, Anneke for supporting me through the long process of doing this thesis.

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## 1. Introduction

Every year over three and a half thousand international students attend classes at the University of Groningen<sup>1</sup> in the Netherlands. Although a lot of students arrive from the neighbouring country of Germany there is a very diverse mix of young people that make the journey to this Dutch city. The broad offer of subjects to study at the University even enlarges that diversity as students can study subjects ranging from 'Applied Physics' to 'Religion and Culture'.

The city of Groningen has a rich history and many of the historic buildings are in good condition in its city centre. A lot of buildings were built in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century when Groningen experienced its heyday as it was considered a major power in the northern Netherlands. The Martinitower was constructed in this period and is a major feature in the city and in leaflets, flyers and other promotional material. Groningen urban heritage can be (and is) used to create certain images of the city. Different images are created by different people, companies, government agencies, institutions and many other participants in the Groningen 'arena' to serve different purposes.

As one of the participants of this arena, the University of Groningen finds it very important to emphasize its almost 400-year history and connection with the city in promotional material and on its website. All master degree leaflets feature pictures containing urban heritage and short stories on university and city history. On the web-portal for international students one can find a range of pictures and a slide show on the city of Groningen. Both the pictures and the slideshow prominently feature heritage of the city. Therefore University appears to think of heritage as an important asset to the institution.

International students are influenced by the image the University creates in their decision making process to determine what university to attend. As heritage plays such an important role in the promotion of Groningen as a place to study this research will focus on the heritage aspect of its marketing. However, the intended image of the city/university might not be received by different international students in the same way.

Heritage is used to create an image of a place, and as such it is used by the University of Groningen to create an image of Groningen, which is then transferred to the University itself. The story this heritage tells (or is meant to tell) may be interpreted differently by various groups. Gender, culture or study related differences may be a good explanation for this range of view. If such differences occur, the University of Groningen might be better advised to diversify its international promotional material.

Furthermore, there might be interesting similarities and differences between international students and native Dutch residents of Groningen. International students can be viewed as a special group of city residents, the temporary nature of their stay in the city and the diverse cultural background they possess could lead to differences in the way they view heritage and attach meaning to it. This can be a reason to further differentiate the material for Dutch students and international students.

Based on this, this thesis tries to answer a number of questions:

- Why does the University use heritage to promote itself?
- What image does the University of Groningen create using heritage to promote itself internationally?
- What role does heritage play in the decision making process of international students?
- What differences can be found between the international students regarding their views on heritage? (Considering: gender, age, area of study, country/culture of origin)
- What differences can be found between the international students and Dutch city residents?

This thesis explores and tries to explain these questions based on literature research and statistical analysis of a survey held amongst international students in May and June 2011.

The second chapter will explore the theoretical framework for using heritage as a marketing instrument in general and as a way of creating an image of reliability and trustworthiness, due to the age and track record of the company in question. The third chapter explains the research methodology for this thesis' research. In the fourth chapter the research results are explored and an analysis of those results is given. The fifth and final chapter concludes with a discussion on the results.

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<sup>1</sup> Whenever the capitalized 'University' appears in the text, this means the University of Groningen, when not capitalized 'university' can mean any university.



## 2. Heritage used in visual images

As mentioned in the introduction, heritage is used to create an image of the University of Groningen. Prospective students use this image to determine whether or not to attend that University. The power of the visual image in making decisions is investigated by Stern et al. (2001). They assert that people need to simplify decisions by making symbols onto which people attach values and meanings. These valued symbols create an image that ultimately helps making decisions. Through etymological reasoning Stern et al. (2001) give the following definition of 'image':

*"...an image transforms physical stimuli (real world and/or media representations) into mental pictures."*  
(Stern, et al., 2001, p. 204)

The image is formed by all sources of information of a certain place, product, company or organisation. These sources include advertisements by the company/organisation itself, family advice, movies, books, personal experience, newscasts and many other sources. Although this thesis focuses on the image that an organisation, such as the University of Groningen, promotes of itself, primary and other secondary sources will sometimes be considered in this chapter (see Figure 2.1).

If a company or organisation recognizes the importance of its history and heritage to the success of the provided product or service, heritage can be used as a representation of certain (perceived as beneficial) aspects.

In this chapter answers are sought for the following questions as mentioned in chapter 1:

- Why does the University use heritage to promote itself?
- What image does the University of Groningen create using heritage to promote itself internationally?

A lot of literature exists on 'images' and the first paragraph will discuss that literature. The second paragraph will discuss the concept of 'heritage' and the way it is used in images and representations of the past. The third paragraph uses the concept of heritage brands to explain why certain companies use their heritage and history to promote their products and what they perceive as being beneficial aspects of corporate heritage and history to their company. In the last paragraph the theoretical framework presented in the first three paragraphs is applied to the University of Groningen. It will explain the situation of the University regarding its corporate brand, corporate image and the implied benefits of heritage in that brand and image of the University.

### 2.1 Destination image

As with most big decisions, a lot of factors contribute to the decision making process of prospective students. Based on information that is available through word of mouth, reputation and *perception*, students decide which university to enrol in (Briggs & Wilson, 2007). People do not act on an objective

reality but on a perceived *image* of reality (Boulding, 1956). That image is influenced by information sources. Palacio et al. (2002) and Palacio & Martín (2004) studied the importance of cognitive and affective images on the image of universities and image of tourist destinations (see Figure 2.1).

Cognitive images are influenced by various information sources either actively or not actively induced by the 'destination' itself or by secondary parties including friends and families, companies not directly linked to promoting the destination and news broadcasts. Both Palacio et al. (2002) and Palacio & Martín (2004) conducted empirical studies to prove the importance of '*cognitive images*' as a significant influence on '*affective image*'. They also stated that cognitive images have a significant influence on the affective image itself, thereby making it clear that the cognitive image is extremely important in the decision making process.

As pointed out, the cognitive image in turn is constructed by (amongst others) induced secondary sources, advertising being an important means in those sources. It is therefore relevant for organisations to promote an image that they perceive will attract the right consumer. Moreover Jenkins (1991) states that certain organisations have a need to promote a visual identity to represent their self-image, which includes logo's, properly designed websites and flyers but also buildings and interior designs that offer the image the organisation wants to confer to potential customers.

In this way heritage is actively used to promote certain aspects of companies and organisations to attract customers. Ample research has been done regarding the use of heritage in branding products, companies, organisations and cities (amongst other categories) as will be described in the next paragraphs.

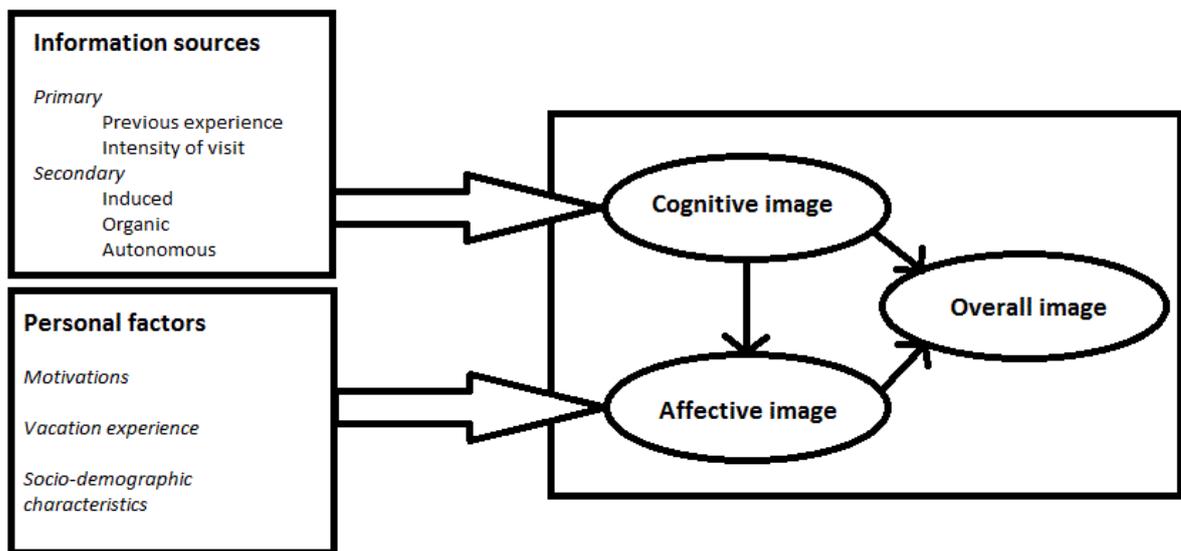


Figure 2.1: Model of the formation of destination image (Palacio & Martín, 2004)

## 2.2 Heritage

This paragraph outlines key issues of difficulties in defining heritage in general, as it is a broad concept with many interpretations. According to Ashworth et al. (2007) heritage is not a given, it does not consist of any fixed number of buildings, objects, traditions and customs. Heritage is marked in the present and is therefore created in the present. Ashworth claims heritage creation is fulfilling a present need and not an expected need in the future (although often one justification for preservation of historic buildings is saving it so that future generations can enjoy it). This research uses the following explanation of what heritage entails:

The concept of heritage is *"...the use of the past as a cultural, political and economic resource for the present, our concern being with the very selective ways in which material artefacts, mythologies, memories and traditions have become resources for the present."* (Ashworth, et al., 2007, p. 3).

The selectivity Ashworth speaks of is interesting. It is very important to consider who makes the selection and with what purpose it is made. The created heritage, and the meaning that is given to it can and will be used to different ends. Ashworth et al. (2007) say the following about giving meaning to heritage

*"It is meaning that gives value, either cultural or financial, to heritage and explains why certain artefacts, traditions and memories have been selected from the near infinity of the past."* (Ashworth, et al., 2007, p. 3).

This implies that heritage does not have an intrinsic value and that value is awarded to certain objects of heritage with different meanings. Heritage and its meaning are used to tell a story, a narrative. That narrative is presented with a certain goal in mind (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008) . In city marketing it is used to present a selective narrative of a city or town. Selected buildings and histories are represented in tourist flyers, whilst others might be used to attract companies. Karavatzis & Ashworth (2008) state that there are four types of place-product relationships. One of these is called 'Place-product co-marketing'. This form of marketing tries to transfer certain 'generally known' properties of a place onto a product. In the well-known example used by Karavatzis & Ashworth (2008) the 'reliability, fastidiousness and meticulousness' with which the Swiss people or Switzerland are supposed to be associated with are transferred to Swiss watches as these characteristics are assumed to be attractive for watches. In the case of using heritage to attract consumers and companies to a city (or students to a university for that matter), certain aspects of heritage are used in a place-product co-marketing setting.

This boils down to the following key question: 'What value is given to properties of heritage that is beneficial for the attraction of customers?' One way to understand part of this problem is to look at the use of heritage in the branding of certain products, companies and destinations.

## 2.3 Brand heritage

In recent years branding of corporations and institutions has increased and with that comes an increase in research on the subject.

*"A brand is a distinguished name and/or symbol ... intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those competitors."* (Aaker, 1991, p. 7)

There are many factors that are important in the branding of products, companies and destinations (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2009). This thesis only focuses on one of those aspects: the visual/aesthetic aspect. One reason for this is that in the services industry, the 'product' of which is intangible and requires visualization, has great importance for a good corporate image (Strandvik & Rindell, 2010).

Urde et al. (2007) give five dimensions of a brand's heritage: track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols, importance of history to image. The main characteristics ascribed to heritage in a lot of the literature on heritage brands and branding heritage are that they represent longevity and track record (Urde, et al., 2007; Aaker, 1991; Brown, et al., 2003). A history of organisations, products and services can be used to imply a certain feeling of trust and well-being with its customers and consumers. Aspects of the organisation's track record are high-lighted in the corporate image to promote this feeling.

*“Brand heritage is an emerging concept within the marketing discipline which suggests that the historical status of older companies is often explicitly linked to their brand identity and consumer appeal.” (Hudson, 2011)*

It seems clear that the University of Groningen has used heritage in the redefinition of its brand in the last few years. This is illustrated in the next paragraph, in which the theoretical framework set out in the first paragraphs of this chapter will be applied to the situation of the University of Groningen.

## 2.4 University of Groningen

In their introduction Ali-Choudhury et al. (2009) explain the shift from educating a small elite to a more ‘mass’ education at universities. They explain that this development contributes to more and more universities using marketing and particularly branding to attract more students. The need for universities to create awareness of their existence, gain market share and differentiate themselves from other universities forces them to create stronger brands. This appears to be the case for the University of Groningen as well.

Although they do not give extensive reasons for the University’s rebranding in 2007, Den Hollander and Piersma (2008) explain that the unclear identity of the University in internal and external communications of the various faculties, departments and other services was a major driving force in implementing one corporate house style for the entire University. Prior to 2007 there were no clear guidelines on University communication, in- or external, many departments and faculties were developing their own logo and stationary, only marginally mentioning their link to the University of Groningen (Den Hollander & Piersma, 2008). Since September 2007 the University reinvented its corporate image with a new design of its logo, website, stationary and advertisements. This complete overhaul in the University’s symbolic representations coincided with large renovation projects and a new interior design style. These changes reflect the research of Jenkins (1991) as described in paragraph 2.1 and according to him, this change of visual style influences the cognitive image of prospective students.

*“The University of Groningen is a European top university with a rich tradition that offers high-quality teaching and research in a wide variety of academic disciplines. To sustain its global reputation, it is vital that the University presents itself in a uniform and recognizable fashion.” (University of Groningen, 2010)*

A major component of the reinvention of the corporate image of the University was to provide a stronger emphasis on its heritage (Den Hollander & Piersma, 2008). The old University coat of arms got a more prominent place and so did heritage of the city of Groningen. As the University of Groningen was established almost 400 years ago (1614) it is safe to say it has a long track record. In the various flyers and webpages dedicated to attracting prospective students this is highlighted. The connection with the history of the city itself is also highlighted. The University forms an important part of the city and its history, as explained in various publications on university image and marketing (Waeraas & Solbakk, 2009).

The University uses the heritage resources of the city of Groningen to attribute aspects to itself. These aspects are perceived to be beneficial in attracting international students. The city of Groningen has characteristics that make it an attractive place to study in. Old cosy streets and nice terraces with lots of students are pictured in the flyers and other promotional material of the University to imply a good atmosphere, cosy and not as distant un-personal as a modern campus might be perceived. In the English flyers references are made to a successful economic past of the city and University of Groningen.

*“The Groningen canals, ports and warehouses take you back to 14th century Hanseatic times...”*  
(University of Groningen, 2011a)

Apparently the University of Groningen assumes that prospective students will value this 14<sup>th</sup> century feeling and that it will attract more students.

On the University website area for prospective students the following is said:

*“The university has a visible presence: the historic buildings in the inner city tell the tale of a rich academic tradition...”* (University of Groningen, 2011b)

This statement clearly underlines the connectedness between city and University. The University presents the city as a perfect study environment. Groningen has cosy streets, with a lot of students and other young people and those aspects should be attractive to prospective students.

At least, that is how the University (re)presents the city. Empirical research is needed to determine how the presented image is received by international students. In the next chapter the methodology for this research is explained, the following chapter will then give the results of the conducted research.



### 3. Methodology

In this chapter and the next empirical research and its results will be described. Answers to the following research questions of chapter 1 are sought:

- What role does heritage play in the decision making process of international students?
- What differences can be found between the international students regarding their views on heritage? (Considering: gender, age, area of study, country/culture of origin)
- What differences can be found between the international students and Dutch city residents?

#### 3.1 Comparison with other residents

For practical and financial reasons it was not possible to conduct research of both Groningen inhabitants and international students. Therefore the PhD study done by E. Ennen in 1999 was used as a basis for the research in this thesis. Following an extensive literature study Ennen found three typologies of inner city residents: connoisseurs, take-it-or-leavers and rejecters (Ennen, 1999, pp. 53-59).

Ennen performed a large scale survey amongst inner city residents of three European cities (Alkmaar and Leeuwarden in the Netherlands and Szeged in Hungary). In her survey she asked respondents questions about housing and living in the city centre, their opinion on twenty five statements regarding inner city urban heritage and some personal questions. The first part of the questionnaire ('Housing and living in the city centre') included questions about how long a person lived on this address and in the city centre, if the residence is a registered monument, if the resident conducts his or her daily activities in the city centre and if the resident owns a car. The second part of the survey consisted of twenty five statements on inner city heritage. Each respondent was asked to fill out his or her measure of agreement on a Likert-scale. The list is also included in the questionnaire done for this research which is included in the Appendices. The third part of the survey consisted of personal questions regarding income, education and membership of a national or regional heritage preservation programme.

From the socio-economic data of the survey Ennen was able to roughly cluster the respondents in the three types she predefined in her theoretical work. Even though the data showed more clusters than defined, Ennen was able to place them as sub-groups of connoisseurs, take-it-or-leavers or rejecters, thereby coming to workable groups. After this clustering of respondents per city Ennen could investigate the different responses to the statements in part two of the survey (see the Appendix for this research's questionnaire which is modelled after Ennen's).

It is not the purpose of this paragraph to discuss shortcomings of Ennen's research, nor to propose better ways of doing the research needed for the purposes she had. On the contrary Ennen's research provides a solid basis for the research in this thesis. The University of Groningen uses a lot of urban heritage in promoting the university to international students. One way to measure the impact of the

urban heritage of Groningen on international students is to 'measure' the attitude foreign students have towards inner city urban heritage in the same way Ennen did with inner city residents.

For this thesis another group of city inhabitants were defined: 'international students'. By doing the same research (asking them to fill out the same questionnaire Ennen requested inner-city residents fill out) it will be possible to determine what group the international students are most similar to. Also, it will be interesting to see if people from different cultures value Dutch heritage in a different way.

Ennen predefined the three types of residents she expected to find in the inner-city. This research views a different type of city resident. Namely the international student. This group is at least homogenous regarding level of education. The respondents are non-Dutch and they are only living in the Netherlands temporarily. These characteristics makes international students an interesting group to study.

The survey that was done for this research differed from Ennen's in part 1 and part 3. The questions regarding car and home ownership seemed irrelevant to the study group. Even if there was some ownership of cars and houses, there would be but a few respondents and at least too few to make good analyses possible. Interesting questions for international students were length of stay and country of birth (see the Appendix for a full version of the questionnaire).

Although this research is not performed on such a large scale as the PhD research of Ennen. Out of the approximately 2,500 international students attending the University of Groningen 102 were reached through active surveying. Next to the fact that the group is large enough to make proper statistical analyses there are still too few respondents for proper comparisons between countries of birth, faculty attended and other parameters. This will be discussed in the next chapter, which focuses on the results of the research.

## 3.2 Components

To compare the data in my research, the answers to the questions on attitudes were classified into five components. These are the same components as Ennen statistically defined for Leeuwarden. These were chosen mainly to compare the data more easily between the studies. The reason I have chosen Leeuwarden, and not Alkmaar or Szeged, is that in that city the three different groups of inner city residents were most clearly found in the data. Therefore I will be able to make a better attempt at identifying the type of resident category the international students belong to. The way the component values were calculated differs from Ennen. In her PhD research Ennen calculated the effect each statement had on the component it belonged to by doing a principal component analysis. Doing such an analysis within this research would mean totally different components in the first place. To make this research comparable to Ennen's the same components were used. Because her components were copied, a statistical analysis of the variables and computation of the components was not possible. Instead, the components were aggregated using the means of the variables they consist of. Table 3.1 shows the different components and their variables. Differences between groups of students are found by using the one-way ANOVA statistical test.

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### The components in Groningen

#### *Heritage and aesthetic value*

The historic city centre of Groningen must be preserved

Historic buildings improve the atmosphere in Groningen

A historic city is beautiful

#### *Heritage and willingness to pay*

The conservation of monuments inhibits the development of the city

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Rules and legislation concerning the urban heritage are detrimental to the freedom of the owner  
A historic city centre is too traditional to live in  
Living in a monument imposes restrictions to the residential enjoyment  
The ability to survey a modern city centre is much more pleasant than the lack of ability to survey the historic city centre

*Heritage, sense of place and cultural identity*

It is pleasant to live in the vicinity of all kinds of city centre facilities and activities  
If many characteristic historical buildings in the city centre were demolished I would not feel at home there  
A historic city centre attracts a more diverse public than a modern city centre

*Indirect costs and benefits of heritage*

Tourism makes the city centre less liveable and congenial<sup>1</sup>  
Tourists influence the city centre negatively  
Tourists in the city centre endanger the privacy of city centre residents

*The city centre and car traffic*

Cars poison the atmosphere in the city centre  
Parking places in the city centre must not have priority over the preservation of historic buildings<sup>2</sup>

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**Table 3.1 Components used for this research**

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<sup>1</sup> This statement was posed in the positive form in the questionnaire. To make up the component I have recoded the data to get a clearer idea of what respondents thought about tourism in the city centre. People who state that tourists make the city centre less liveable are also likely to say that tourists do not influence the city centre negatively and endanger the privacy of city centre residents.

<sup>2</sup> This statement was posed in the positive form in the questionnaire. To make up the component I have recoded the data to get a more clear idea of what respondents thought about the city centre and cars. People who agree on the first statement would likely disagree on the second statement when filling out the questionnaire.



## 4. Results & analysis

Chapter 2 largely focused on the marketing and branding aspect from the point of view of the user of heritage images, namely the University. This chapter focuses on the effect it has on the receiver of those images, the students. The following paragraphs discuss the differences between international students and (more) permanent residents of inner city areas, differences between students as well as the role heritage plays in the decision making process of international students.

The first paragraph will give some descriptive characteristics of the respondents. The second paragraph gives a comparison with inner city residents from Ennen's study in Leeuwarden. That paragraph will also typify the students as one of three types of heritage residents Ennen described in 'Fragments of Heritage' and as is explained in the previous chapter. The rest of this chapter analyses differences within the group of international students and the role heritage played on their decision to study in Groningen.

### 4.1 The respondents

As mentioned throughout this thesis, International students are a very diverse group and this is illustrated by the results of the survey. In total 102 respondents filled out the survey of which there were 53 men and 49 women. Students came from 33 different countries, in Table 4.1 the range of countries is shown. The respondents were 18 up to 31 years of age. The international students lived scattered throughout the city, with international housing in Selwerd and Winschoterdiep having a large share (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 also shows the location where they most often had classes. This corresponds with the faculties they studied at. All nine faculties were represented in the data, although the Faculty of Theology only had one respondent. The time most students were already in Holland varied a lot too, with the largest share of students having lived in Groningen for 6 - 12 months. Considering the research was conducted at the end of the academic year, this was not surprising. Most students stay for either a year or a semester at the university. As the data show, a third of the respondents were leaving within a month, and half of all respondents will have left within two months after filling out the questionnaire.

Country	N
China	13
Germany	13
United States	12
Sweden	6
England	5
Mexico	4
Northern Ireland	4
Spain	4
Greece	3
Hungary	3
Italy	3
Australia	2
Austria	2
Bulgaria	2
Canada	2
India	2
Indonesia	2
Republic of Ireland	2
Poland	2
Scotland	2
South Africa	2
Belgium	1
Brazil	1
Colombia	1
Czech Republic	1
Denmark	1
France	1
Iran	1
Latvia	1
Portugal	1
Romania	1
Turkey	1
Vietnam	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>

Table 4.1 Country of origin

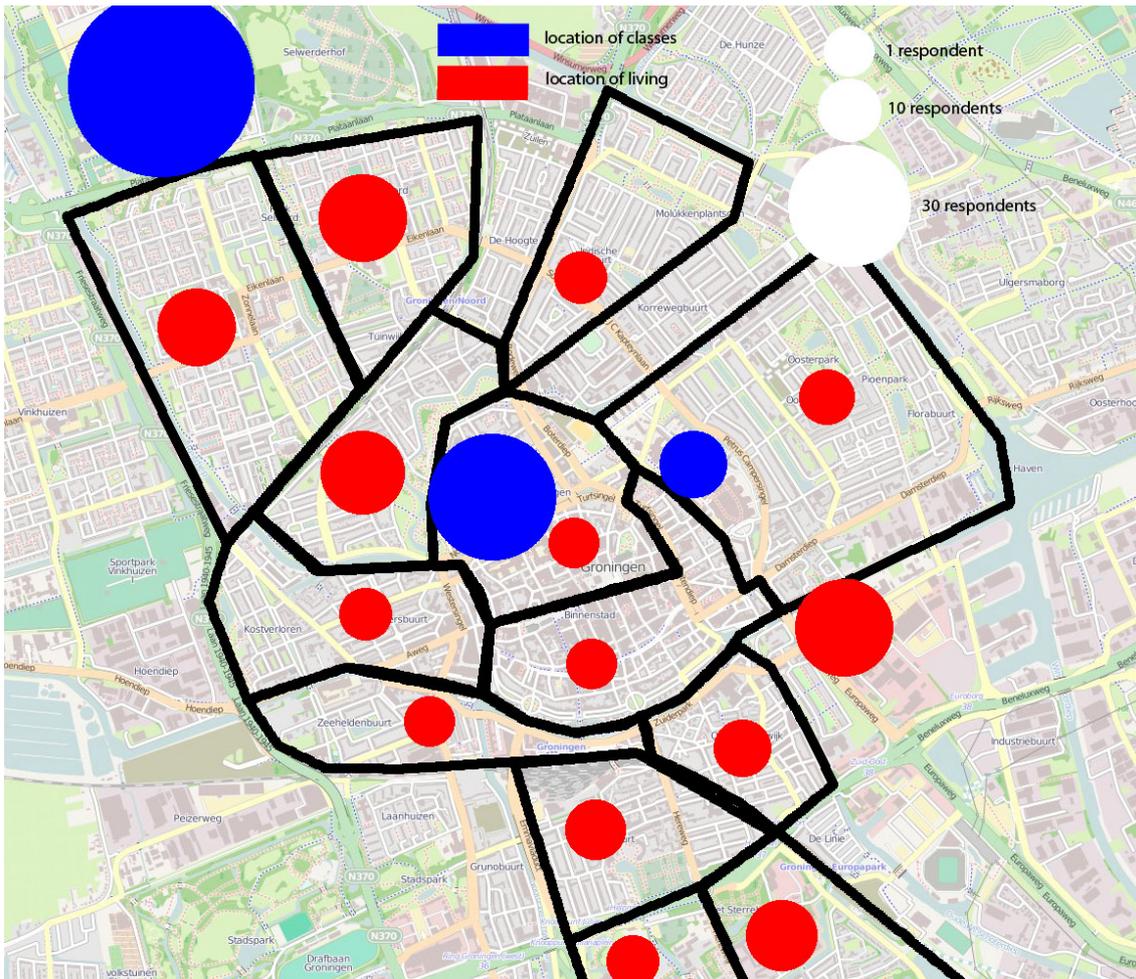


Figure 4.1 Location of classes and location of residence

## 4.2 Connoisseurs, Take-it-or-leavers or rejecters?

As discussed in the previous chapter, the five different components are derived from Ennen's study in 1999. In Figure 4.2 the mean values per component are given on a scale from 0 to 1, with 0 being neutral and 1 being a positive view toward heritage. As seen in Figure 4.2 all components are viewed positively by the respondents. In the next few paragraphs the five components are discussed and compared to the study Ennen did in Leeuwarden in 1999.

### 4.2.1 Heritage and aesthetic values

As shown in Figure 4.2, 'Heritage and aesthetic values' was valued the most positive of the attitude part of the survey. This is the same as in Ennen's research. Questions relating to this component were answered 'agree' or 'totally agree' by an overall majority. In Leeuwarden no significant differences were

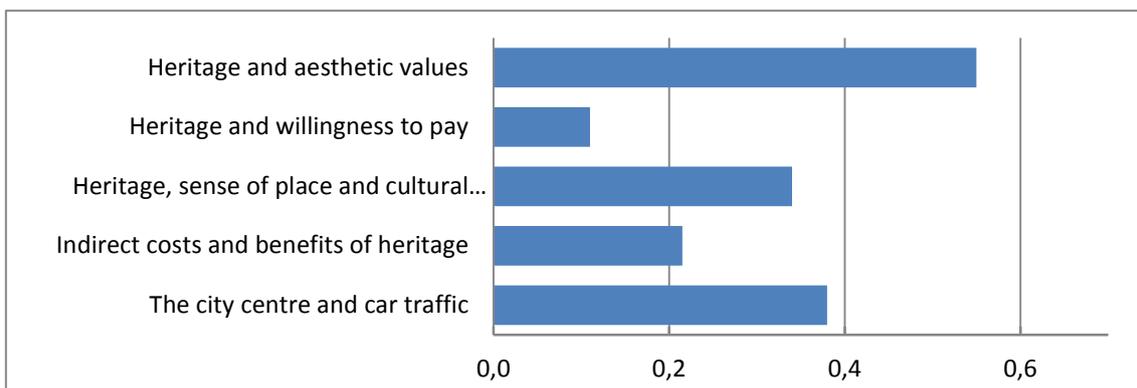


Figure 4.2 Average scores on the components by all respondents

found between the three types of inner city residents. The majority of respondents in Groningen also answered most questions with 'agree' or 'totally agree'. On the statements 'The historic city centre of Groningen must be preserved', 'Historic buildings improve the atmosphere in Groningen' and 'A historic city is beautiful' over three quarters agreed (respectively 83%, 79% and 79% filled out agree or totally agree).

#### **4.2.2 Heritage and willingness to pay**

While the aesthetic aspect of heritage is valued greatly in all cities of Ennen's research and amongst the responding international students of Groningen, 'Willingness to pay' gives different results. Respondents rated this component rather neutral. In particular, they are mostly neutral about the statements on rules and legislation restricting the owners freedom (47.1% did not agree or disagree) and living in a monument being more limiting (52.9% did not agree or disagree). This is not so strange as most, if not all, students have not experienced first-hand what it means to live in a monument in the Netherlands. They will have rented their room or apartment and therefore do not handle with restrictions or legislation directly and are more likely to not have an opinion on these statements. The majority of respondents did not agree or disagree that a modern city is better surveyable than a historic city (61,8% did not agree or disagree). On the other two statements attributed to this component respondents had a clearer opinion: 48,1% disagreed that the conservation of monuments inhibits the development of the city and 67,6% of the respondents disagreed that living in the historic city centre is too traditional. Although the results are the most neutral of all the components, the respondents that do have an opinion on the component have reacted positively towards the statements. In Ennen's research it were the take-it-or-leavers and rejecters who correspond the most with the international students.

#### **4.2.3 Heritage, sense of place and cultural identity**

'Heritage, sense of place and cultural identity' contains statements related to heritage being a part of a respondents life and whether they feel at home with heritage in their living environment. The third component attracted a positive response. Most respondents find it pleasant to live in a historic environment (78%) and would not feel at home if many characteristic historic buildings were destroyed (55%). Although a great share (48%) still agreed with the statement that a historic city centre attracts a more diverse public than a modern city centre, 35% were neutral about this. The international students seem to be most similar with the take-it-or-leavers and historic connoisseurs on this component.

#### **4.2.4 Indirect costs and benefits of heritage**

Although Ennen named this component 'Indirect costs and benefits of heritage' all related questions are about tourism. A more adequate label for this component would be 'Heritage tourism in the city centre'. The respondents reacted rather negatively on the three statements that comprise this component, but because the statements were formulated in a negative way, this actually means that the respondents view tourists in the city centre positively. Almost half (49%) of the respondents disagree with the statement that tourists influence the city centre negatively. Also 49% disagrees with tourists endanger the privacy of city centre residents. On the third statement 'Tourism makes the city centre more liveable and congenial' 55% agreed. On this component the Groningen research is most similar with the historic connoisseurs and take-it-or-leavers in Leeuwarden.

#### **4.2.5 The city centre and car traffic**

The fifth and last component I discerned from the attitude statements is 'The city centre and car traffic'. This component is one of three with a largely positive view. Most people agree that cars poison the city centre (59.8%) and that parking places should not have priority over preservation of historic buildings (64.7%). This means a positive view toward heritage for the international students. It also means that since most international students do not have cars and seem to use the inner city a lot they do not care about cars in the inner city and it could have nothing to do with the heritage in the inner city. With this

component as with the last two components, international students are most similar with historic connoisseurs and take-it-or-leavers in Leeuwarden.

#### 4.2.6 Take-it-or-leavers

Following this analysis of the response to the twenty-five attitude statements and a comparison with the results of Ennen’s research in Leeuwarden, the international students seem to fit best in the take-it-or-leavers type Ennen defined. This was to be expected, as Ennen herself mentioned that students belong to this type. Take-it-or-leavers live only temporarily in the city centre, they rely on cheap inner city services (restaurants, copy shops cafes as well as the university facilities) and therefore look at the inner city and its heritage in a functional way. Ennen mentions that ‘the meaning given to urban heritage is inherent in the role it plays as part of the public space, but mostly as background’ (Ennen, 1999, pp. 58-59).

A number of external factors were pointed out paragraphs 4.2.1 through 4.2.5; not living in a monument might have resulted in a neutral view on heritage and willingness to pay and not having a car might have led to a strong rejection of cars in the city centre. The effect of these factors on the results is not examined in this research, but Ennen comes to the same conclusion in her research.

Although Ennen mentions the often temporary character of living in the inner city by take-it-or-leavers, a difference with the research of Ennen is that the international students live in Groningen for only a few months to a year (a few exceptions were present in this research, but on average international students only stay for a semester or an academic year). This gives rise to questions on how international students view inner city urban heritage. Perhaps they view heritage as tourists do, with a tourist gaze and an appreciation primarily of the aesthetics of the heritage concerned. This research points in that direction, as the ‘Heritage and aesthetics’ component is valued very positively overall and the other components are viewed more or less neutral. This means that students do not have a clear idea of what they themselves would want with Groningen heritage. Perhaps they see it as not their place to say something about that heritage.

### 4.3 Duration of stay

	has stayed for:	plans to leave within:
<b>less than a month</b>	21	33
<b>less than 2 months</b>	10	17
<b>2 - 4 months</b>	14	16
<b>4 - 6 months</b>	18	13
<b>6 - 12 months</b>	26	14
<b>more than a year</b>	13	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>102</b>

A characteristic of international students that distinguishes them from other residents of the city of Groningen is the temporary nature of their stay in the city. Table 4.2 shows all respondents grouped by their duration of stay. It shows how long the respondents

**Table 4.2 Duration of stay for all respondents**

have stayed and how long they plan to stay in Groningen. This paragraph discusses this characteristic the influence length of stay has on the meaning students attach to the heritage they experience in their day to day life.

#### 4.3.1 Time since arrival

In general the results were in line with the theoretical framework Ennen presented in her PhD research. She poses that the solidarity with the city centre and its heritage increases over time. In the case of this research the longer a respondent lived in Groningen the more positive he or she was about the heritage

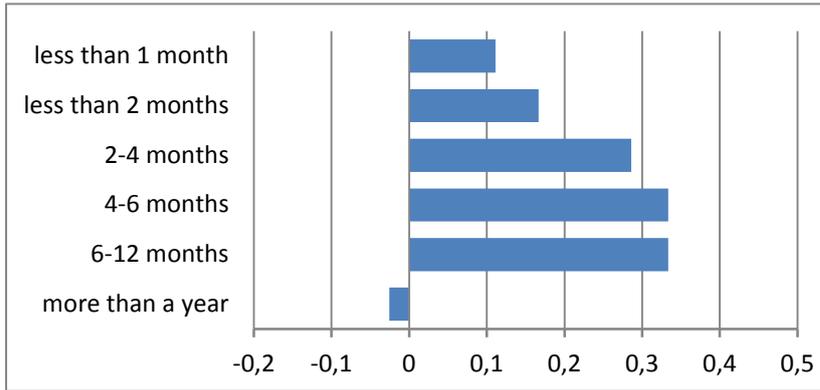


Figure 4.4 The average score on the component 'Indirect costs of Heritage' per length of stay

on the component. This means that although appreciation of tourists in the city centre increases over time there is a sudden change in results after one year of stay. Figure 4.3 shows the results for a single statement belonging to the component 'Indirect costs of Heritage'. The increasingly positive view as time progresses is clearly illustrated as well as the difference with the group that has stayed for more than a year in Groningen.

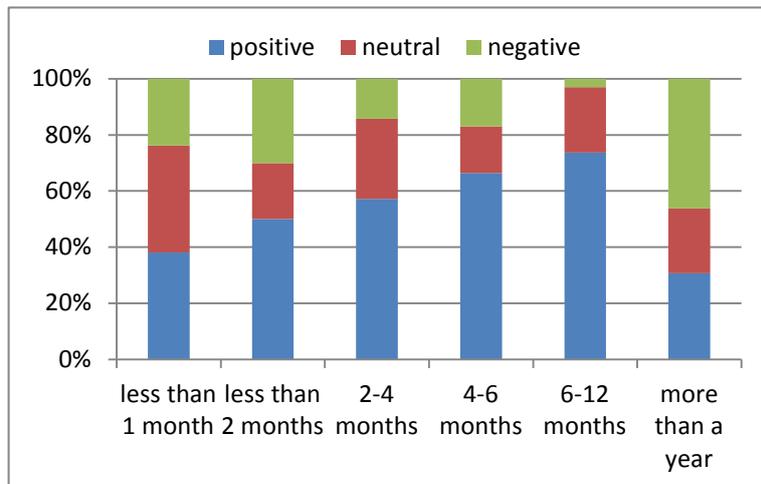


Figure 4.3 Response to the statement 'Tourism makes the city centre more liveable and congenial'

Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.3 both generally represent all components and questions. As time progresses, students are more positive about heritage. In all results the group of students that has stayed for more than a year in Groningen had the least highest scores on the components. Further analysis of this 'long-term' group of students was inconclusive about the reasons why the results were so different for this group. The group consists of equal shares of men and women and the faculties they study at are diverse as are their countries of origin.

### 4.3.2 Time before departure

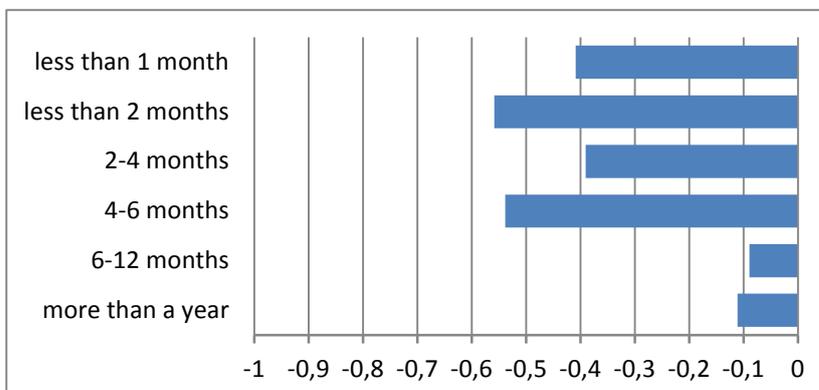


Figure 4.5 The average score on the component 'The city centre and car traffic' per expected departure time

in the city and that it should be preserved. This is true for all components, although only the component 'Indirect costs of Heritage' (see Figure 4.4) gave significant differences in the results.

As shown in Figure 4.4 the students who had lived in Groningen for more than a year gave a negative result

The results for this variable were different from the time students already had stayed in Groningen. Appreciation for the city's heritage declined the longer students planned to stay in Groningen. The only significant differences were found with the fifth component: 'City centre

and car traffic'. It seems that the groups of respondents that are still planning to stay in Groningen for more than 6 months have a more neutral opinion of cars in the city centre (see Figure 4.5). Further analysis showed that most of the respondents who were planning to stay for more than 6 months also already have stayed in Groningen for a longer time. This longer duration of stay in the Netherlands could mean that they have a car at their disposal, although this was not asked in the questionnaire and remains just a possibility. Compared with Ennen's research a longer duration and possible car ownership should explain the difference in view on this component.

The other components showed a similar result. The longer a respondent planned to stay in Groningen, the more neutral their take on heritage seemed to be, with a sharper decline in appreciation with the last two categories of people planning to stay for more than six months.

#### 4.4 Type of study/location in Groningen

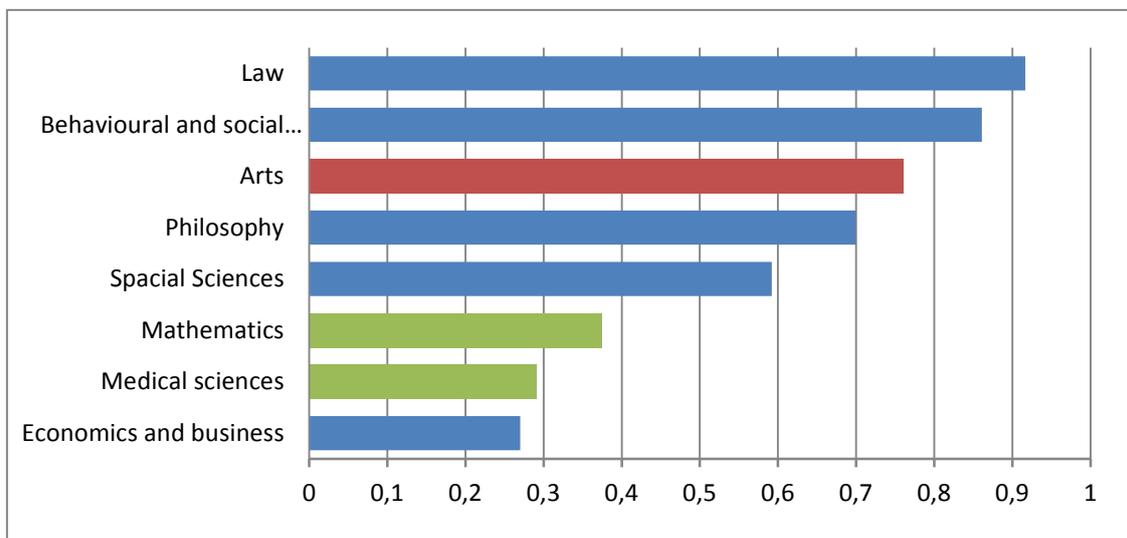


Figure 4.6 The average score on the component 'Heritage and aesthetics' per faculty (the red bar represents Alpha faculties, the green bars represent Beta faculties and the blue bars represent Gamma faculties)

The role that type of study plays on the way students look at and give meaning to heritage could be a major factor where different groups of students have a significantly different opinion about heritage. Figure 4.6 shows the average score on the component 'Heritage and aesthetics' per faculty<sup>1</sup>. Although the scores are different for each component a pattern can be found in grouping the faculties according to their academic field of study (Alpha for products of human behaviour, Beta for the natural world and Gamma for human behaviour in itself). With all components the arts faculty has a higher average score than both beta faculties. Due to the diverse nature of the Gamma faculties no clear picture rises from the data.

Another way of differentiating faculties is by their location in Groningen. The Alpha faculties and some of the Gamma faculties are located in the centre whereas the Beta faculties and the rest of the Gamma faculties are located outside the city centre. The component 'Heritage and aesthetics' was valued differently for students following classes at the Zernike campus outside the city and students studying in the city centre (see Figure 4.7). It appears that studying close to (or even inside) historic buildings makes students more appreciative about the heritage they experience each day. For students taking classes outside the city centre, in the modernist Zernike area, this is different. They do not experience heritage on a regular basis and clearly differ in view. Although students studying at the University Medical Centre (UMCG) are close to the city centre they show even less appreciation for the aesthetic values of Dutch heritage than the Zernike students do. The last comment suggests that there is more at play than the

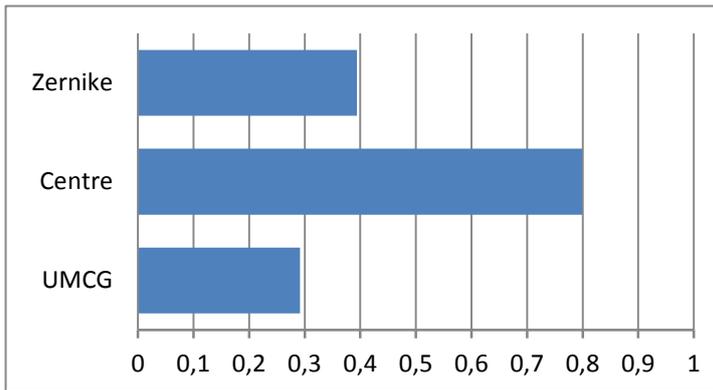


Figure 4.7 The average score on the component 'Heritage and aesthetics' per location of classes

relative location to the city centre. As the first part of this paragraph suggested, study area might be a major part of it. As the faculties are largely concentrated in three locations, generally along the line of what the field of study is, it is hard to separate these factors.

Analysis on the effect on the location of living, was inconclusive. The respondents were spread out over the city too much to make

adequate conclusions about the influence of where they live on the way the students view heritage.

### 4.5 The role of heritage

	yes	no
<b>Groningen Heritage</b>	23%	77%
<b>Dutch Heritage</b>	41%	59%

Table 4.3 Percentage of people choosing the University of Groningen for Groningen heritage and Dutch heritage

For the University of Groningen it is important to know what the role of heritage is for international students in their decision-making process. The questionnaire featured a number of questions on whether heritage was a reason for students to make a choice for Groningen or the Netherlands as a place or country to study in.

Most students do not come to Groningen for Groningen heritage, as seen in Table 4.3. The reason for this might be that the city of Groningen does not have particular urban heritage that is different from Dutch urban heritage in general. More students chose Groningen for its Dutch heritage, which is to be expected following the previous statement.

Two open questions in the questionnaire asked for positive and negative aspects of the city of Groningen. Only one respondent mentioned heritage as a positive aspect of the city and no respondents mentioned heritage or a related aspect as a negative aspect of Groningen. This is in line with the results discussed in the previous paragraphs. It appears that heritage does not play a big role in the lives of international students, it also did not play a big role in choosing the city of Groningen and by extension the University as a place of study.

A factor that many students did mention as positive for the city of Groningen, is its good supply of restaurants, terraces and bars. As well as the youthful atmosphere caused by overrepresentation of students in Groningen's population. This seems to be an important factor for international students, as well as the University. This at least seems as one aspect of University branding that returns in this empirical study.

<sup>1</sup> The faculty of Theology is omitted because it was represented by only one case.



## 5. Conclusions and discussion

This fifth and final chapter will combine all the aspects described in the literary study of chapter 2 and the empirical data described and analysed in chapter 4. The first two paragraphs will conclude this thesis and the third paragraph will reflect on the way this research was conducted and gives directions for further research.

### 5.1 Regarding international students' meaning toward heritage

Although international students view heritage in a variety of ways individually, the data found in this research does not show clear distinctions between groups of students. Heritage does not play a large role in the day to day life of students, they fit in to Ennen's model as 'take-it-or-leavers'. It means that they do not mind living in a heritage environment, but that heritage is not a big part of daily activities. Although this might seem like international students have a 'do not care' attitude towards Groningen heritage, they are in fact generally positive towards it. The aesthetic side of the urban heritage in the inner city is valued greatly and most students feel at home in a historic environment.

The role of heritage in the decision making process of international students, regarding choice of University, is not large. Some students claim that Groningen heritage and Dutch heritage were reasons to study at the University of Groningen, but they are a minority. This thesis suggests that the way international students chose their foreign University is similar to the destination choice tourists make. The image they have of their destination is therefore very important in the decision making process. That students view Groningen as a lively city, with a lot of students, nice little streets and bars and restaurants reflects the image the University promotes with, this is explained in the next paragraph.

### 5.2 Regarding the University of Groningen brand

The University of Groningen uses heritage to create an image which has a mostly visual character. As pointed out in chapter 2 Stern, et al. (2001) explain the great importance of visual images. The power of those images is used to influence the decision making process of prospective students. Palacio & Martín (2004) describe that process. Furthermore, since the services the University provides are of an intangible nature, visualization of a good corporate image is necessary (Strandvik & Rindell, 2010). That the University of Groningen uses heritage and a close link to the city of Groningen as a visualization of its corporate identity, implies that the University attributes beneficial aspects to heritage. Those beneficial aspects are mostly that the longevity and the accomplished history of the University imply a feeling of trust and well-being. This is emphasized in the images the University uses by using cosy and student and terrace laden streets.

What should the University of Groningen do with the results of this thesis? Most of the students do not have a clear idea of the components discussed in Chapter 4. Moreover they do not come to Groningen

for the heritage that the University uses in its promotion and branding. Consequently, it seems that using heritage in branding the University is not working and the University should try and find another way of attracting international students. However, this is not necessarily the case. Although heritage clearly does not play an important explicit role in students' life, it may still transfer an image of an institution that has stood the test of time and is therefore a good institution to entrust one's education to.

As the image that prospective students have of the University of Groningen and the city of Groningen is influencing the decision to study in Groningen it is important to create an appealing image. The image of a good study climate combined with the social necessities of the age group has been presented to the students. Using heritage and images of cosy streets seems to be a good way to achieve that, as most students seem to enjoy the aesthetic values of heritage and they enjoy the prospect of a good student life. In that sense, it is in the University's best interest to visualize qualities of student life in Groningen and make sure as many prospective students are reached as possible to induce that image.

### **5.3 Reflection and discussion**

Although Ennen's 1999 research was used as a basis it became clear over the course of doing this research that it was not adequate enough to properly answer all research questions. The questionnaire lacked questions about whether or not students saw promotional material of the University and if the image presented in that material was a reason to choose the University of Groningen. For practical reasons it was not possible to redo the enquiries.

It is clear that there are some differences amongst international students regarding their view on heritage. It is however necessary to conduct a more extensive survey of the target group. Although 102 enquiries seemed well enough at the beginning of this research, it proved too few to make adequate generalizations possible. When grouping students by nationality, study and place of living the groups were too small to do statistical analysis, As these variables were so diverse it proved impossible to aggregate them into meaningful groups of countries or disciplines.

These points are worth considering when doing further research into this subject. There is not much research on the way international students regard heritage or choose the destination of their foreign study activities. In this thesis the suggestion is made that international students choose the way tourists choose their destination. It needs further research to test this.

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# Appendix

## Questionnaire for international students

This questionnaire starts with a few questions related to housing and living in the city centre of Groningen.

### Housing and living in the city of Groningen

1. How long have you been living in Groningen?

- less than a month
- less than 2 months
- 2 – 4 months
- 4 – 6 months
- 6 – 12 months
- if more than one year, please specify: .....

2. How much longer are you planning to live in Groningen?

- less than a month
- less than 2 months
- 2 – 4 months
- 4 – 6 months
- 6 – 12 months
- if more than one year, please specify: .....

3. In which neighbourhood of Groningen do you live?

.....

4. In which neighbourhood of Groningen do you most often have classes?

.....

5. What do you think are the most positive aspects of the Groningen city centre?

.....  
.....

6. What do you think are the most negative aspects of the Groningen city centre?

.....  
.....

### Your opinion on a number of statements:

Please state your opinion on the next statements. You can choose on a scale of 1 through 5, please encircle the right number. The numbers represent:

1 = totally agree

4 = disagree

2 = agree

5 = totally disagree

3 = do not agree/ do not disagree

1.	The historic city centre of Groningen must be preserved	1 2 3 4 5
2.	The conservation of monuments inhibits the development of Groningen	1 2 3 4 5
3.	Historic buildings improve the atmosphere in Groningen	1 2 3 4 5
4.	Parking facilities in the city centre of Groningen must have priority over preserving historic buildings	1 2 3 4 5
5.	Monuments belong to my environment	1 2 3 4 5
6.	Modern buildings improve the image of the city centre more than historic buildings	1 2 3 4 5
7.	A historic city centre is beautiful	1 2 3 4 5
8.	Rules and laws concerning the urban heritage are inhibiting property owners' freedom	1 2 3 4 5
9.	It is pleasant to live in a historic environment	1 2 3 4 5
10.	A historic city centre is too traditional to live in	1 2 3 4 5
11.	Tourism makes the city centre more liveable and congenial	1 2 3 4 5
12.	Cars poison the atmosphere in the city centre	1 2 3 4 5
13.	Living in the city centre is too noisy	1 2 3 4 5
14.	If many characteristic historic buildings in the city centre were demolished I would not feel at home anymore	1 2 3 4 5
15.	Lack of parking space makes it too difficult to visit the city centre	1 2 3 4 5
16.	The preservation of historic buildings is government business	1 2 3 4 5
17.	Monuments give identity to the city centre	1 2 3 4 5
18.	Tourists influence the city centre negatively	1 2 3 4 5
19.	A historic city centre attracts a more diverse public than a modern city centre	1 2 3 4 5

20.	Tourists in the city centre endanger the privacy of the city centre residents	1 2 3 4 5
21.	I feel at home in the city centre	1 2 3 4 5
22.	Living in a monument imposes restrictions on residential enjoyment	1 2 3 4 5
23.	It is pleasant to live in the vicinity of all kinds of city centre facilities and activities	1 2 3 4 5
24.	The surveyability of a modern city centre is much more pleasant than the lack of surveyability of a historic city centre	1 2 3 4 5
25.	In the evenings and at night the catering industry generates a nuisance	1 2 3 4 5

### Personal questions

This questionnaire ends with a few personal questions. These are important to enable representative conclusions to be drawn. For instance, it is important to know how many men and how many women have answered this questionnaire.

**The given information will be treated with the strictest confidentiality!**

1. What country are you from?

.....

2. What is your (Dutch) postcode?

.....

3. What is your gender?

m/f

4. What is your age?

.....

5. Did you grow up in a historic city?

.....

6. What are you studying in Groningen?

.....

7. Did the Groningen heritage play an important part in choosing to study in Groningen?

.....

8. Did the Dutch heritage play an important part in choosing to study in Groningen?

.....

9. Did the geographical position of Groningen in the Netherlands/ Europe play an important part in choosing to study in Groningen?

.....

Thank you very much for filling out this questionnaire. Please state any further comments you might have below.

.....