



How can the municipality and university attract Chinese students to Groningen by creating conditions to strengthen place attachment?

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Summary

The University of Groningen has stated that it wants to attract more Chinese students to enlarge its status as a global university. China is nowadays the leading source of international students for universities worldwide. Chinese students, however, face difficulties in adjusting after a cross-cultural transition. Students are argued to adjust more easily by creating attachment to the new environment, in which institutes can have a substantial effect. When attachment is created, it is likely that the place will be recommended to other potential students, which has been labelled the 'network mediated migration' theory. The municipality and university both benefit from the arrival of international students. By adjusting policy the institutions are able to create a better bond to the students. As a consequence, the institutions will need to understand how conditions can be created to strengthen attachment to their place. The research addresses the following research question:

How can the municipality and university attract Chinese students to Groningen by creating conditions to strengthen place attachment?

Semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted with nine Chinese PhD students, of whom seven have resided in Groningen for more than a year. From the interviews it becomes apparent that Chinese students do indeed create place attachment to Groningen. Several participants even refer to the city as their second home. The students praise the city as a pleasant place to study, although getting familiar with the new culture can take up to a year. The presence of compatriots is perceived as essential to place attachment. The Chinese students feel that it helps to relieve stress and adjust more easily.

The municipality and university try to create conditions to help international students in creating place attachment. Students are welcomed in the city by guidance in finding housing and activities to stimulate social interaction. From the interviews it appears that the municipality and university could improve by creating more awareness for cultural sights and the possibilities to meet fellow students. The university could make students more aware of sports or study association, to promote social interaction, or to offer courses to newly arrived students. Moreover, international students should be able to find fairly priced rooms.

Several students have been introduced to Groningen by an acquaintance who has studied in Groningen. All participants would recommend the university and city to other potential students, a few participants are already promoting the city to friends or through social media. Network mediated migration appears to be successful in Groningen.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The University of Groningen is a popular destination for international students, approximately 20% of the students is international (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2017). By attracting more internationals the university wants to enlarge its status as a global university and become part of the world's top 50 universities (Rijksuniversiteit, 2018). One of the countries that the university focuses on is China. China is nowadays the leading source of international students for universities worldwide, about 25 percent is Chinese (CCG, 2016). It is expected that this share will rise and universities will become dependent on Chinese students (ICEF, 2015). The arrival of Chinese students in Groningen has been increasing also. China is already in the top 3 countries that deliver most students to the university, with an increase of 28 percent in 2017 to the year before (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2017).

The university has explicitly stated that it wants to attract more Chinese students (Rijksuniversiteit, 2018). As a consequence, the University of Groningen had the intention to expand to Yantai, a Chinese city, to attract 'talented students'. The plans to open a campus itself were declined, but the university is still looking for other types of collaboration within Yantai, which will increase the status of the university in China. In consequence, the inflow of more Chinese students will rise.

The adjustment of international students is critical, challenges should be reduced to a minimum (Janjua et al. 2011). Students are argued to adjust more easily by creating attachment to the new environment (Terrazas-Carillo et al., 2014). Especially international students that experience a large cross-cultural transition are more likely to experience forms of dislocation. Research indicates that institutes have a substantial effect on the attachment of students (Zhou et al. 2008). It is likely that the place will be recommended to other potential students, when students experience some sort of attachment (Lee, 2010). Social networks are important pull-factors for potential students.

This chain migration has been labelled the 'network mediated migration' theory by Wilson (1994).

Besides the university, the municipality benefits also, since international students benefit the local economy (Bleaney et al., 2006). The municipality of Groningen assessed the economic impact of international students to be approximately €74 million (Municipality of Groningen, 2017b). According to Venhorst et al. (2013), the municipality of Groningen can create a better bond to students, by adjusting policies. As a consequence, municipalities and universities need to understand how conditions can be created to strengthen place attachment (Florek, 2011). The gathered experiences by students can be used by the municipality and university to manage the inflow of Chinese students.

1.2 Research problem

The aim of the research is to examine how Chinese students can be attracted to Groningen by creating conditions to strengthen the place attachment. The municipality and university will gain better insight into Chinese students, and may be able to adjust their policy, so network mediated migration can occur. In order to examine this, the following research question is proposed:

How can the municipality and university attract Chinese students to Groningen by creating conditions to strengthen place attachment?

The sub-questions are defined as follows:

- How do Chinese students create place attachment to Groningen?
- How can the municipality and university of Groningen improve attracting international students?
- How does network mediated migration occur in Groningen?



1.3 Structure

The research paper is structured as follows: The theoretical framework is presented in the second part, which contains the concepts and theories that are relevant to this research, including a conceptual framework. The methodology is displayed in the third part and consists of explanation about the research methods and how the research is conducted and analysed. Subsequently, the results are discussed in the context of the theoretical framework. Finally, the conclusion summarizes and reflects on the main results. Recommendations for future research are presented.



2. Theoretical framework

This part presents the theories and concepts, gathered by reviewing literature about place attachment and network mediated migration. The conceptual framework gives an overview of the relevant concepts.

2.1 Place attachment

Place attachment can be defined as the emotional bonds with a place (Florek, 2011). In order to develop bonds and remain in a place, a person has to feel comfortable and safe (Hernandez et al., 2007). By interaction with multiple places, attachment is successful when individuals describe themselves as belonging to a specific place (Stedman, 2002). Terrazas-Carrillo et al. (2014) interviewed students about place attachment and concluded that most students feel more closely related to the university than the city itself.

Scannell and Gifford (2010) have developed a model that connects three dimensions of place attachment: personal, place and psychological process. The first dimension is the personal process, which separates the individual and group level. The bonds an individual holds to a place are often created by experiences that person has had in that specific place. The group level is composed of a shared meaning to the place (Low, 1992). It often involves a shared culture. The second dimension is the psychological process, which refers to the extent that people connect themselves to that place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Affect, cognition and behaviour are important factors of this process. Affect refers to the emotional bond that an individual develops to the new environment. Cognition entails the memories, knowledge and meaning related to the place. Behaviour is about attachment that finds its way in actions, such as length of residence and potential plans to stay. The third dimension, the place dimension, looks at the characteristics of the place, it separates the social and physical aspects. The social aspects involves the new networks the individual creates. The physical aspects are places within the city that strengthen place attachment.

2.1.1 Personal dimension

Individual level

Students, that make a large cross-cultural transition are more likely to experience problems like emotional distress that affects their happiness and well-being (Arthur, 2004; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). The challenges, such as cultural differences and language problems, that an individual experiences in the host country are crucial for its attachment (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2014). Adjusting to the new environment works different for everyone.

Cultural/group level

The cultural adjustment to the host country is critical and a cause for stress (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013; Bradley, 2000). Stress factors include missing home and the new academic environment, since the educational organisation and the behaviours of the university are different than what the student is familiar with (Zepke & Leach).

For international students, place attachment can be created by places or people within a city that awaken memories of the place of origin (Guiffrida, 2006; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). These memories can be created because of social interaction with people who share the same culture or by maintaining shared customs. Public places, such as restaurants or bars can create the perception of experiencing home also.

Chinese students need time to adjust to the Dutch culture since it is entirely different than the Chinese (Hu et al., 2016). A Chinese person strongly believes in inequalities between individuals, for example (Hofstede et al., 2010). This entails avoiding disagreements with people who are considered higher on the social ladder, in contrast to someone from the Netherlands. For example, communication between professors and students is often informal in the Netherlands, which results in misunderstandings for Chinese students (Hu et al., 2016).



2.1.2 Psychological process

Place attachment as affect

This individual is emotionally bonded to a place when a sense of belonging has occurred, the desire to remain close to the place is an indicator for this phenomenon. Homesickness or displacement is a component that is related to this issue. For international students, the process of loosening bonds to the place of origin is found to be faster than that of domestic students, according to Chow and Healy (2008). The ones that are absent for a longer time, often experience homesickness and wish to return.

Place attachment as cognition

An emotional bond to a place is created, by becoming familiar with the behaviour, values and ethics of the new environment (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2014). Knowledge in relation to place attachment is about knowing the new environment. By getting to know the details of the place, attachment is strengthened. Places that have unique aspects, such as history or culture, are more likely to create attachment to. Furthermore, students link meaning to the new environment, which is an aspect of adjusting.

Place attachment as behaviour

The length of residing in the same place is an important factor for attachment (Hay, 1998; Droseltis & Vignoles, 2010). Furthermore, students that have resided in a place for a longer time are argued to experience fading of memories, concerning home (Low & Altman, 2012). It allows the students to create bonds with the new place and subsequently create a new home.

Potential plans to stay are part of the subdivision also, which is often accompanied by becoming dislocated to home (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2014). Dislocation becomes apparent in losing contact with friends and family. For international students, the process of loosening bonds to their place of origin is found to be faster than that of domestic students. Keeping in contact with home, when studying abroad, is found to be a positive

influence to make people stay in the place after graduating (Chow & Healy, 2008). Besides dislocation, plans to stay depend on opportunities in the place also (Fried, 2000). When job opportunities are lacking for example, a student might be more eager about returning to the place of origin.

2.1.3 Place dimension

Social level

International students that are confronted by transitional barriers are argued to mainly communicate with students that hold the same nationality (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Rienties et al., 2013). Research indicates that students from China score relatively low on social adjustment, which causes such transitional barriers when moving to a Western country (Eringa & Huei-Ling, 2009). Interacting with compatriots is found to reduce stress that accompanies adjustment. Zhou et al. (2008) found adjustment of students is largely influenced by social networks.

Social interaction with domestic people is also argued to be an important factor in strengthening the place attachment (Easthope, 2004; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). By gaining knowledge about the culture of the population in a new environment, the individual develops an emotional bond to that place (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2014).

Physical level

The physical level of place attachment is argued to be less strong than the social level (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). The sub dimension is often related to places that encourage social interaction, such as the building one lives in or the work environment. The perception of individuals towards the physical environment has been examined. The physical sites that individuals cherish are often greenery, such as parks and forests, and built environments, such as buildings and streets. Climate is also part of the physical level, particularly when it is different than what the individual is accustomed to.

2.2 Network mediated migration

Social networks, such as friends or family, of a student who has been abroad are more likely to follow, according to the social capital theory (Massey et al., 2002). These previous migrations have a long-run effect on decisions of potential migrants (Wegge, 1998). Wilson (1994) has labelled this kind of migration 'network mediated'. The individual that has resided in the country functions as a resource that can assist in adjusting (Massey et al., 2002). New connections in the host country become part of the social network also. Students who still study abroad will become a pull-factor for potential other students. The migrants are linked by the country of origin, according to Wegge (1998). Previous students inform the potential students about the opportunities and difficulties in the host country. As a result of the inflow of migrants that hold the same nationality, institutions and organizations are often founded to satisfy demand and provide services, such as information and housing advice (Prothero, 1990).

2.3 Conceptual model

A conceptual model has been developed, in accordance with the theories and concepts. The first concept is place attachment, based on the model by Scannell and Gifford (2010), which consists of the personal dimension, the psychological process and the place dimension. Place attachment leads to network mediated migration, since students that create attachment will affect others. The conceptual model is displayed in figure 2.1.

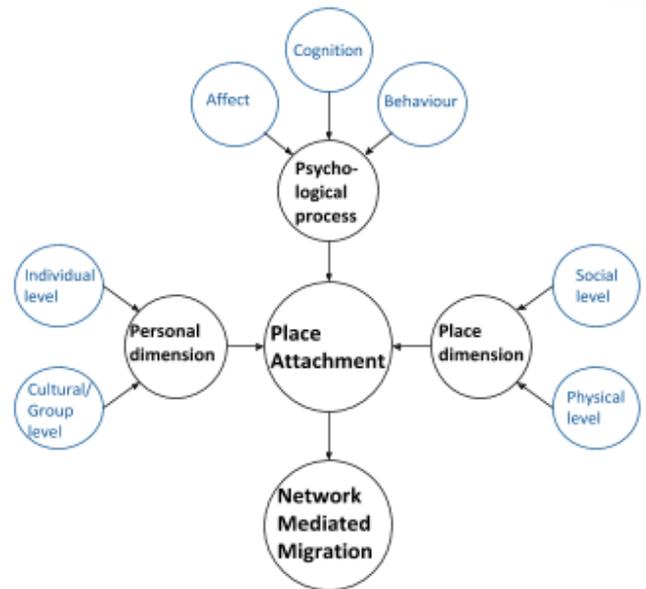


Figure 2.1 Conceptual model



3. Methodology

The research method and the details about the research are presented. The ethical considerations, analysis and reflection are also addressed.

3.1 Research method

To answer the research questions, both primary and secondary data have been collected. Qualitative research is appropriate here, since this kind of research focuses on subjective meanings, values and emotions (Clifford et al., 2010). Since this research is focussed on offering every individual to explore and explain what their opinion about Groningen is, in-depth interviews have been conducted. The form of interviewing is to conduct semi-structured interviews (Dunn, 2005). This form is predetermined, but offers flexibility. Participants are able to raise issues, that the researcher has not thought of. Secondary sources will be reviewed to gather information about what the municipality and university are doing to support international students by creating conditions to strengthen place attachment.

3.2 Data collection

The interviewees are nine Chinese PhD students, who are enrolled at the University of Groningen, and an employee of the international office of the university. Since a PhD program lasts four years, students are ought to adjust in both a different social and academic environment. Furthermore, since PhD students have gained experience with higher education, one might expect a different attitude towards learning styles than a student who has no experience (Harvey et al., 2006). The aim in gathering participants was to discern students who have resided in Groningen for less than a year, and students who have resided in the place for more than a year already. The students who have been in Groningen for a longer period of time are likely able to reflect on difficulties in the beginning, while newcomers still need to adjust. The time of residence was an important factor in selecting participants. A range has been made between students that have resided in Groningen for a short period of time, ones that

have resided in the place a little over a year and ones that have resided in Groningen for a few years. The students that were interviewed are displayed in table 3.1.

Participant	Sex	Workplace	Length of residence
1	Female	City centre	5 years
2	Female	City centre	5 years
3	Female	City centre	3,5 years
4	Female	City centre	7 months
5	Male	UMCG	7 months
6	Female	UMCG	1,5 years
7	Male	UMCG	1,5 years
8	Female	UMCG	1,5 years
9	Female	UMCG	1,5 years

Table 3.1: Participants

The questions in appendix A functioned as basis for the interviews. The first Chinese students were contacted through the supervisor of this project, Dr. Zhou. Subsequently, through the social network of the first two interviewees, other participants have been contacted via mail. To create an informal atmosphere between the interviewee and the researcher, an informal place has been chosen by the interviewees. All participants, except one, chose their workplace as the place to meet. One participant chose the University Library. The interviewee from the international office was approached via mail. An appointment for a visit was made to ask questions about the activities of the international office and study associations.

3.3 Ethical considerations

The interviews have been conducted anonymously, to guarantee the confidentiality and privacy of the participants. By creating trust, no letter of consent was needed. Before the interviews, permission was asked to record the conversation. As can be expected, the researcher has treated the participants, the Chinese community, the University of Groningen and the municipality of Groningen



with respect. There was no unequal power relation as regards to the Chinese students, since both the interviewee and the interviewer are students.

3.4 Data analysis

After transcribing the conversations, the transcripts have been analysed. The interviews have been coded, according to the codes in appendix B. Coding helped to identify patterns. By doing this, the gathered data has been connected to the sub-questions and research question. Coding was accomplished by using the software Atlas.TI, which makes the gathered data easier to interpret and compare the transcripts (Friese, 2015).



4. Results & Discussion

In this part, the interviews are presented and discussed in the context of the theoretical framework.

4.1 Place attachment

In accordance with the theoretical framework, place attachment has been divided into the personal dimension, psychological process and place dimension.

4.1.1 Personal dimension

Individual level

Several participants have experienced individual experiences, mainly kindness from Dutch people, that has created contentment. Participant 9 illustrates it as follows:

“A week ago I felt confused about my project. (...) It made me very sad (...) Then my colleague said I have to say it to my boss. After I communicated with him, I felt very relaxed. But in China it is very difficult to do so.”

The quote above appears to confirm the literature, since experiences such as these are argued to reduce cultural differences and create attachment (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2014). It is difficult for the municipality and university to influence experiences such as these. However, the municipality and university may be able to support the social interaction between domestic and foreign students, for example by organizing events or supporting associations.

According to Terrazas-Carrillo et al. (2014), language problems are part of the individual level also. Many participants struggle with the proficiency of the English language. Participant 9 mentions that she is obliged to take a language course by the chairman of the department, an employee of the university. This form of intervening is a measure for the university to strengthen place attachment of newly arrived students also.

Cultural/group level

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, people who experience a large cross-cultural transition are looking for places that are similar to the place of origin (Guiffrida, 2006). Participant 9 confirms:

“You always want to find something that is similar to your hometown”

Participants 7 and 9 mention to celebrate Chinese holidays with new connections, who are considered friends. Furthermore, for participants 4 and 7 the Chinese food is the most important reason to miss China. Participant 9 is satisfied because she can cook Chinese food for herself now. The municipality might be able to stimulate aspects such as these, for example by adding the number of Chinese restaurants or other Chinese elements to Groningen.

The participants did experience stress, because of the differences in culture. The attitude towards someone who is perceived higher in the hierarchy, in this case the supervisor, is seen as a struggle, appointed by participant 3:

“In China they will tell you specifically what you should do (...) they will force you to change your mind and follow their ideas.”

The quote above corresponds with research by Hu et al. (2016), who argue that the culture is indeed the main struggle for Chinese people in a Western country. The university is able to help the students in adjusting to the new culture, for example by offering introduction courses. Associations related to the university can relieve stress also, by connecting students.

Several study and sports organisations organise activities for international students. The International Office of the university arranges an introduction convention and extracurricular activities. The study association for international students Nexus tries to connect students with both each other and domestic students. The Association of Chinese Students and Scholars in Groningen (ACSSG)



helps Chinese students to get in contact with compatriots, by organising Chinese related activities. However, most participants were not aware of the activities or were not interested, because they rather wanted to rest or hang out with colleagues when not working. Participant 4 suggests the university to send mails about associations, because she is not aware. Only participants 1 and 2 stated to take part in activities occasionally. Sports in general, however, does reduce stress, according to participant 3.

Offering a course might also benefit the students with another struggle, namely the directness of Dutch people, which is mentioned by all participants and corresponds with the argument of Hofstede et al. (2010). At first, the directness deters the Chinese students. After adjusting, the directness is often being preferred, as illustrated by participant 3:

"It saves a lot of time, you don't have to guess. (...) In China you always have to guess, and I'm not very good at that. I really like this direct communication"

The municipality has composed a welcome policy, in which the institution admits that social and cultural integration into Groningen has been ignored (Municipality of Groningen, 2017a). This corresponds with opinions of participants 3 and 4, who state that they would like to meet more Dutch people and know more about the culture, but did not know how. A solution is the International Welcome Center North (IWCN), an organisation that has been founded to welcome and help internationals, and is supported by the municipality and university.

4.1.2 Psychological process

Place attachment as affect

Although all participants refer to a place in China as their home, the students feel comfortable in Groningen and are very pleased about the university. The students perceive the city as relaxing and remote, which is identified to be of importance for studying. Participant 3 describes the effect of Groningen on her:

"I think it's my second home. I lived in Beijing for almost four years also (...) but you feel you're a really small fish in a very big bowl. But here you feel better (...) It's more small and you feel like: If I live in this city, I can really make a home here"

The participant has lived in multiple places, the quote illustrates that she feels a sense of belonging. The statement corresponds with the argument of Stedman (2002), who mentions that attachment is successful when individuals describe themselves as belonging to a place. Since the perception towards Groningen is positive, policies related to affect appear to be effective.

Place attachment as cognition

Participants 2, 3 and 5 first heard about Groningen at a PhD affair in Shanghai or Beijing. The university is present at international affairs, which appears to be successful for attracting new students. Participants 1 and 4 heard about Groningen because a professor in China introduced the students to the university, which indicates that the university has a good reputation in China.

The municipality cooperates with municipal partners around the world, including two in China. Especially the UMCG benefits from the relationship with Tianjin, which is one of the main sources of new students. Surprisingly, none of the participants had heard about Groningen and did not know anything about the city, which implies that the municipality and university could improve the branding of the place.

Most participants are aware of the possibilities and shortcomings of Groningen after residing in the city for more than a year. The participants declare to feel comfortable in Groningen. There are, however, issues they would like to see improved, which indicates that the Chinese students are aware of the environment. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, knowing the place is argued to be a form of place attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010) Participant 8 thinks that more places of interest should be added to Groningen to



make the city more interesting. Apparently the municipality should highlight the sights better, or there are too few places of interest. She describes her feelings as follows:

“Martinitower and the museum. Is there anything else? I also did the Groningen trail. (...) Most people said: I really like the swimming pool! So I was thinking: this is weird”

Moreover, participants 3, 4 and 8 mention that most letters they receive are in Dutch, including letters from the UMCG. The students perceive it as a strange issue, because of the presence of many international students. This issue is resolvable by the university. Furthermore, the signage is considered an issue, which the municipality has identified as a problem (Municipality of Groningen, 2017b). It wants to make Groningen accessible and understandable to everyone. In the current situation, signs are mainly in Dutch, participant 4 has expressed her thoughts:

“Maybe they can put two languages on things. Because I was in the UK for one year. And Wales has its own language. Each sign they have, the first line is in English, the second one is Welsh”

Place attachment as behaviour

According to the literature, the length of residence is one of the main factors of place attachment (Hay, 1998). From the interviews it became clear that this statement is true for the participants. For almost all participants it took several months, up to a year, to fully adjust. This is especially noticeable for students who have resided in Groningen for more than a year. As mentioned, the municipality and university are able to offer courses to facilitate the adjustment and create attachment in an earlier stage.

A majority of the participants is certain about returning to China. For most students the job opportunities are most important, which corresponds with the Chinese culture (Hu et al, 2016). The municipality is crucial in creating job opportunities in Groningen. Since

there are few jobs available for the students, they are inclined to move back. Every PhD student has to return to China for at least two years after their stay in the Netherlands. Participant 4 only resides in Groningen for one year and describes it as follows:

“We’re supported by this system scholarship. We have a certain period of time that we have to serve China. (...) Otherwise I’ll have to pay back all my money”

Participants 8 and 9 miss China because of family, which is their main reason to return. Literature by Terrazas-Carrillo et al. (2014) suggests that international students lose contact with friends and family in their home country. Surprisingly, this issue is found to be untrue for the participants. All participants have contact with family and friends in China, the frequency did not become less. The matter does indicate that Chinese students are still longing to home. According to Chow & Healy (2008), this is a positive influence to make people stay. The municipality and university do not have to stimulate this issue. Even though, participant 7 states that he feels comfortable, but still has the desire to return because of family:

“I would rather stay in the Netherlands, after my PhD. (...) Because I’m the only child in my family, I need to go back”

4.1.2 Place dimension

Social level

Social networks have been essential in creating attachment, as displayed in the quote by participant 3:

“I think friends are really important. When I travel to other cities in Europe, I miss my friends. I think that’s an important reason that I’ll miss Groningen”

All participants prefer social interaction with other Chinese students, as argued by Rienties et al. (2013). Participant 9 mentioned that other Chinese students made it easier to adjust, as illustrated in the quote below. Participant 5 and 9 also mention the importance of the supervisor.

“At first, when I came here, I couldn’t adapt to something here. I missed home. But now I feel okay. I have some friends, I feel better now.”

Communicating with fellow Chinese students appears to be the main factor to reduce the stress of adjusting. In the interviews it becomes apparent that most of the social life of the participants occurs inside the work environment. The clustering of Chinese students is strengthened by the university, that often puts the Chinese students together. Participant 3 states:

“The secretary of the faculty sent me an email that you can register on this website (...) All my neighbours are Chinese. I feel like there is a Chinese community in my building. So I always speak Chinese”

For housing, the university refers to Short Stay Housing (SSH). The organisation rents out over 2000 rooms and studios annually to international students in Groningen (SSH, 2018). However, a room is more expensive than an average room in Groningen. Other students are obliged to rent a room via the private housing market. The municipality has recognised that information about the housing market is often lacking and has promised improvement (Municipality of Groningen, 2017b).

According to Terrazas-Carrillo et al. (2014), an emotional bond to a place is developed by interacting with domestic people. Only participants 3 and 5 have social interactions with Dutch people outside the work environment. The participants reside in Groningen to write their essay and the majority do not have the urge to meet others. However, participants 3 and 4 declare to do

have the desire to meet more Dutch people. Participant 4 does not think there are a lot of opportunities for her, which can be considered a surprising result, since there are many study associations that offer possibilities. Participant 3 learned about the culture and met more people by exploring the nightlife:

“I didn’t have a Dutch friend at all. But then, after two years, (...) I started going out with my PhD-colleagues, (...). I felt like: this is the thing I should experience”

Physical level

The workplace, often the UMCG or in the city centre, is an important place to create place attachment for the participants, because of the social interaction. Additionally, the apartment, often close to the Zernike Campus, is seen as an important place in Groningen to the students. The parks in Groningen are mentioned by participants 7 and 9, especially the Noorderplantsoen is valued. Many participants mentioned to enjoy the quietness and especially the fresh air compared to large cities in China. Furthermore, participant 5 names the Vismarkt as an important place, since he buys his groceries at the market. The light blue selection in figure 4.1 displays the important places in a map. The university and municipality have a better insight in where to offer activities.

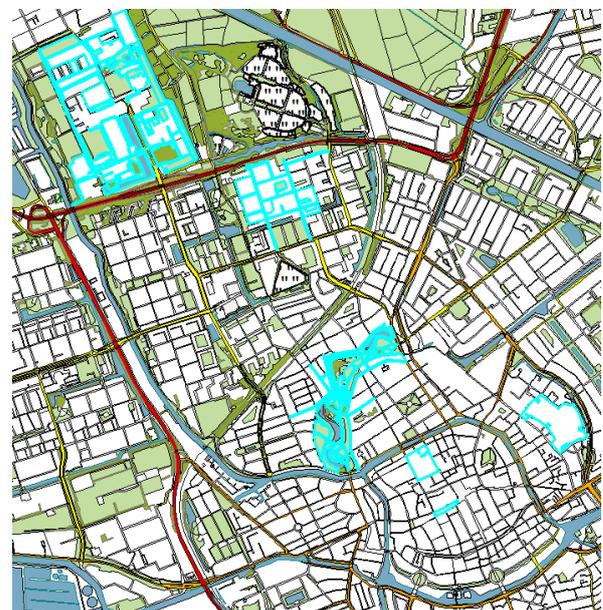


Figure 4.1: Important places to participants



4.2 Network mediated migration

All participants would recommend Groningen to other students, mostly because of the university. Some have already recommended it. Participant 3 reposts items of the University of Groningen on social media. However, she also mentions the importance of the supervisor, which is perceived as more important than a university city. Participants 4 and 8 refer to Groningen as a good place to study, not for travelling. Participant 5 shares his experiences with mediating:

“I already recommended the university to fresh students in China. A girl wants to apply, she says”

Participants 7 and 9 have moved to Groningen after being introduced to the city by a former student. The individual that introduced participant 7 unfortunately left Groningen shortly after the arrival of the participants. Participant 9 has been introduced to the city by participant 7 and states that it helped her in adjusting. The quote by participant 7 shows that the network mediated migration is indeed effective:

“I heard it from my classmate (...) Before, I never heard about Groningen. Actually I was thinking about another university, in Nijmegen”



5. Conclusions

The aim of the thesis was to examine how Chinese students can be attracted to Groningen by creating conditions to strengthen place attachment. The results are summarized and reflected to answer research question. Furthermore, recommendations for future research are given.

By interviewing nine Chinese PhD students, it appears that students do indeed create place attachment to Groningen. Social networks are most important for creating attachment. The Chinese students mainly interact with compatriots and feel that presence of fellow Chinese students helps to relieve stress and adjust more easily. Most of the social life occurs inside the work environment. Getting familiar with the new culture can take up to a year, which can be reduced by the municipality and university.

Possibilities are introduction activities or courses that help in adjusting to the new culture and create awareness for the possibilities to meet fellow students, through the IWCN for example. Sports or study associations may also be given a more important role. Furthermore, international students should be able to find fairly priced rooms. Ultimately, all participants had never heard about the city of Groningen before being introduced, which means the municipality or university could invest in place branding.

Because the students create place attachment after a period of time, the network mediated migration theory is applicable. The fact that there are more compatriots, the remoteness of the city and the kindness of the Dutch people are the main reasons. However, this is only applicable for students who have resided in Groningen for a longer time. Chinese students that only reside in Groningen for a year will likely not recommend the city to others.

Earlier research indicated that most students feel more closely related to the university campus than the city itself (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2014). This research paper, however, presents that place attachment to the city can be strengthened also. The results provide municipalities and universities with a better understanding in how conditions can be

created for attachment to the place. Given the substantial inflow of Chinese students worldwide, the gathered experiences by students can be used to manage this inflow.

Reflection

It was clear to detect the differences between the ones that have had time to adjust and participants that are still getting familiar to new environment. It offered a valuable understanding of the place attachment that is created over time. The interview questions have been slightly adjusted after the first two interviews, mostly because the students were not able to understand the English terminology. In a few interviews the language resulted in some misunderstandings. Some interviews did not provide new information. Ultimately, Chinese students appeared to be quite resistant in talking with someone unfamiliar. Since some participants know each other, a biased opinion may have occurred. One of the students may have introduced the newly arrived student to the city and influenced the opinion.

Unfortunately, an interview with an employee of the municipality of Groningen or the IWCN did not occur. The municipality has been contacted by phone, mail and several visits. The employees kept referring me to a contact form or an email address. An employee mailed me back that she was busy but would look who could help me best. Saying that it would only have to be a couple of questions or minutes did not have effect also. Also the IWCN did not respond to my mails and referred to their email address when visiting.

Recommendations for future research

A larger sample size than nine students will make generalising more accessible. Examining the activities of other municipalities and universities could provide the municipality and University of Groningen another insight in the creation of place attachment. Larger cities may satisfy Chinese students better, since more social and cultural opportunities are offered. Interviewing a civil servant of the municipality would be interesting also. The servant would be able to explain the policy in more detail than documents. This will possibly



display the progress that is generated also. The added value of domestic students could be examined more closely also, to examine the effect on adjustment to the culture.



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Appendix A - Interview guide

General information about participant: age, education, length of residence in Groningen, housing situation.

Before moving to Groningen:

- What made you choose Groningen as a place to study?
- How long have you been in Groningen already?
- What did you know already about Groningen before moving there?
- Did you already know someone who moved to Groningen before you?

Groningen in general:

- What do you think of Groningen?
- Would you say you feel at home in Groningen, and why (not)?

Adjustment/culture:

- Where are you from in China, rural or urban?
- What were the main cultural differences compared to China?
- Was it hard to adjust and why?
- How did you adapt?
- Did you get help to get used to the culture here?
- Would you say you've adapted well, and why?
- What do you think of the people here?

Social:

- Were you able to meet many people during your stay?
- Did you get help with that, like from the university or study associations?
- How often do you go there?
- Are you able to connect well with domestic people also, and why (not)?

Groningen after a while:

- Can you name something that you like most about Groningen?
- And something you like least?
- What changed in your perception of Groningen, compared to before your move?
- Would you recommend Groningen to others?

Contact with home:

- Is your contact with family and friends from home as close/much as in the beginning?
- What would be the main reason to return to China?
- And what would be the main reason not to return to China?

After studies:

- Do you want to go back to China?
- Because you want to or have to?
- What do you think the municipality or university could do better to make you feel more at home in Groningen?
- What is important for you when seeking a place to live?
- Do you think that could be Groningen?
- Friends not a reason to stay or go back to Groningen?



Appendix B - Coding

Code	Interpretation
China	It is interesting to get insight in how students perceive China and if they are willing to return.
Cultural place attachment	Many students experience homesickness because of the differences in culture, which could affect place attachment.
Housing situation	To gain knowledge of their housing situation creates insight in if the student was able to find a room independently or received help from the SSH. Furthermore, it becomes clear if the student lives alone or with fellow students, and with whom.
Individual place attachment	Individual experiences that helped to create place attachment to Groningen
Improvements	What can be improved to the city to attract even more Chinese students to Groningen, according to the participants?
Physical place attachment	Literature suggests that attachment is created over time. The duration of their stay compared to how they perceive Groningen gives an overview of place attachment. Missing family and friends is part of this code also.
Recommendation Groningen	To test the network mediated migration theory. How did students get to know about Groningen and would they recommended Groningen to others?
Social place attachment	How the students have adjusted socially and with who they mainly interact with.