# Strangeness in Maastricht

*Strangeness among German students of Maastricht University*

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# Foreword

Writing this bachelor thesis was an extensive undertaking. Having grown up in a border city myself, I have always been interested in border cities and the dynamics concerned with such a city. Maastricht, the city which serves as case study for my thesis, is the perfect example of a border city, since it is close to Flanders, Wallonia and Germany at the same time. Since time immemorial the city has been subject many different cultures and influences. One of the dynamics that characterizes many border cities is traffic of people crossing boundaries. Having visited Maastricht many times in my past and having considered applying to Maastricht University, I was, and am, very interested in the dynamics of the student population in Maastricht. The student population of Maastricht University is very international and consists largely of German students who have made Maastricht their home. Therefore I have dedicated my bachelor thesis to tracing the experiences of German students who study and live in Maastricht.

Doing the research was a large endeavor that I did not do without help. In fact, there are a number of people I would like to thank for helping in my research. Without their help I would not have been able to write the bachelor thesis.

First of all I would like to thank Bianca Szytniewski, who supervised my research from the beginning until the end. She helped me construct and carry out the research and write the bachelor thesis. Especially when making the interview guide her help was very valuable. Her help was very valuable in all phases of the research and helped me create my bachelor thesis.

I would like to thank Korrie Melis, who supervised my research at its early stages, as well. Her feedback helped to construct the research and research plan. In addition, I would like to thank my fellow students who gave feedback regarding my research plan. They too helped me to shape my research and research plan.

Of course, carrying out the research was possible only with the help of the German students in Maastricht who willing to give me an interview. Their help was invaluable to the research. Without the data they supplied during the interviews I would have been unable to do the research. Therefore I would like to thank the students that I interviewed as well.


Nijmegen, June 2013.
Bert Hegger

# Summary

Much has been written about the concept of strangeness and strangers. Practical research concerning strangeness, however, is scarce. Only few studies related to concepts of strangeness or otherness have been done. Therefore the amount of studies that investigate feelings of strangeness among a group of people is limited.

Strangeness may exist among many people, for example in the city of Maastricht. Maastricht is a very international city, with a large international student population. In fact, most international students who study at Maastricht University are German. The total amount of German students, who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht, is approximately 2500. With such a large amount of German students living in a 'strange' city, feelings of strangeness may exist.

The goal of this thesis is *to contribute empirically to the theories around strangeness and gain insights in the experience of strangeness of German students, who follow a complete bachelor or master program at the University of Maastricht and live in Maastricht, towards Dutch people in Maastricht by analyzing to what degree strangeness is experienced and how it influences social contact between these German students and the Dutch people in Maastricht.*

Since only little empirical studies on strangeness have been done so far it is relevant to contribute empirically to the theories around strangeness. The goal translates into the following research question:

*To what degree do German students, who follow a complete bachelor or master program at the University of Maastricht and live in Maastricht, experience a feeling of strangeness towards Dutch people in Maastricht and to what degree does this feeling of strangeness influence social contacts with Dutch people in Maastricht of these German students?*

Strangeness is a condition that everybody may experience from time to time, all can be strangers occasionally and strangeness can exist in every relationship (Simmel, 1950). Social contacts may be influenced by feelings of strangeness. Feelings of freedom might characterize a feeling of strangeness, meaning that the person experiencing strangeness feels free to meet people and to have a lot of social contacts. These social contacts are of a superficial nature (Bauman, 1995). On the other hand, feelings of strangeness could be characterized by feelings of remoteness or even fear towards another person (Gurevitch, 1988). Feelings of remoteness or fear could also be of influence on social contact in the sense that social contacts could be reduced. Both feelings of strangeness may exist and may differ daily.

In addition to feelings of freedom or threat, closeness and remoteness, typification may take place between social actors. When a social actor is perceived as a stranger he could be reduced to a set of characteristics that typify the other. The other is not seen as a human being anymore, but as a small set of traits, which reduce him/her to a certain type (Rundell, 2004).

In order to research feelings of strangeness among German students who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht, 14 respondents have been interviewed for their experiences in

Maastricht. These experiences concern their feelings in Maastricht and are analyzed in depth. The research is of a qualitative nature, where the data which the respondents supplied is analyzed in great detail. The research perspective is phenomenology, which means that the experiences of the respondents have been researched. From the data the respondents supplied common experiences have been found, which paint a picture concerning feelings of strangeness with German students who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht.

The interviews, which were semi structured, have revealed many experiences that German students have in Maastricht. Of those experiences, several can be called common as they were experienced by many of the respondents. These common experiences are related to studying in Maastricht, feelings in Maastricht, social contacts and more. One common experience, that proved to be important for the research, has to do with social contacts the German students have in Maastricht. It is interesting to see that the close friendships they have are all with other Germans. In fact, most social contacts in general are with other Germans in Maastricht. Contacts with Dutch people were of superficial nature and were limited, for example to small talk at the grocery store. Another experience was that they all very much liked the city of Maastricht and studying in Maastricht. Superlative after superlative was used in describing how positive they felt about Maastricht and studying at Maastricht University.

Contact with Dutch people is limited to casual contact. Even though the social contacts with Dutch people are limited, they are enjoyed very much. Furthermore, many respondents argued that the language provides a barrier in communication between nationalities. Even though this is partly solved by communicating in English, speaking in the mother tongue is easier and preferred by the respondents. Therefore group forming between nationalities takes place, as all nationalities find it easier and more comfortable to communicate in their mother language. Strangeness is present among the German students in a delicate, subtle way. Both positive feelings, such as enjoying contact with Dutch people, and more negative feelings, such as not overcoming the language barrier, are present. Communicating with other Germans is simply easier and more comfortable. In addition to the language barrier, the way that the students make friends also is important. Instead of overcoming the challenge the language barrier provides, the respondents resorted to familiarity by interacting mostly with other Germans. The students tend to meet people via the people they already and build a group of friends this way. Since they have more contact with Germans from the start, their entire friend group becomes mostly German.

To conclude and answer the main research question it is safe to say that feelings of strangeness towards Dutch people are felt in a very subtle way. Both positive feelings and negative feelings have an influence on the social contacts of the respondents. The respondents all indicate that social contacts with Dutch people in Maastricht are good, if not great. However, most of their social contacts are with Germans, due to the existence of a language barrier. The existing theories around strangeness often speak of a clearly noticeable separation between positive and negative feelings, which are the result of strangeness. In practice, however, this dichotomy is not as clear cut as described in the theories. Instead, strangeness works in subtle ways and may not be as clearly visible as the theories would argue.

# Contents

# 1 Introduction

## 1. 1 Project frame

Maastricht is, with 25.1% of its inhabitants not being ethnically Dutch, a diverse city. In 2011 17.0% of Maastricht's population was not ethnic Dutch, but of another Western ethnicity. Many people of many different ethnicities live in Maastricht, making it a very diverse city. These people may have different reasons for living in Maastricht, namely studying, working, consuming, trying to create a better life etc. Maastricht University (MU), for example, is the most international university of the Netherlands, since 43% of its students and 25% of its staff are not Dutch (Maastricht University, 2012). Furthermore, Maastricht is a border city, lying close to Flanders, Wallonia and Germany. Since time immemorial the city has experienced different cultures, namely Flemish, Wallonian and German culture. To this day, people from these lands go to Maastricht to consume, study and work.

The city of Maastricht wants to be a multicultural and safe city. Each individual should have equal chances of participating in society, despite sex, religion, age, health, colour, sexual preference, religious and political beliefs, marital status or education. Diversity here is not a burden, instead it is necessary to being able to participate in society (Gemeente Maastricht, 2012). The municipality of Maastricht has a clear cut definition of diversity, namely '*aiming at every individual, not allowing discrimination and combating prejudice, having awareness of individual choices of citizens, emphasize quality of policy and implementation and using different perspectives*' (2012).

Due to the amount of different ethnicities and backgrounds a feeling of strangeness or otherness could exist in Maastricht. Strangeness is an experience that can have two faces, it can be negative and positive at the same time (Bauman, 1995). This division is not clear-cut, but might be blurred or mixed. Both faces may exist simultaneously and work in subtle ways. Positive feelings might be associated with feeling comfortable at home and free. Negative feelings might be associated with a challenge, or even feelings of threat towards an other. Strangeness in a city can invoke feelings of opportunity and pleasure. It can cause superficial contacts with strangers, which can cause happiness (Bauman, 1995). It can also be an obstacle for mutual understanding, since communication in interpersonal relations depends upon the presumption of sameness of the self and the other (Gurevitch, 1988). Strangeness relates to separation and difference and does not constitute interpersonal communication (Gurevitch, 1988). All the different people from different backgrounds may have different goals, which could create a feeling of strangeness between those different people. A stranger is far and near at the same time. He is part of a group, but is detached from it at the same time. The stranger can be seen as familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, creating ambivalence or disorder. This disorder creates fear, as the stranger falls into a border area of ordering. He is part of us and part of them at the same time (Jacobsen & Poder, 2008). A feeling of strangeness and with that, lack of interpersonal communication could potentially lead to prejudice and discrimination and could undermine the diversity policy which is executed by the city of Maastricht. Then again, since strangeness can also amount to feelings of pleasure and may motivate to have superficial contacts in a city, it can also be a positive experience (Bauman, 1995). The experience thus has two faces, namely a positive one and a negative one. The city of Maastricht wishes to be a 'mosaic' of different

cultures, and wants to be a tolerant city (Weling, 2005). In order for this vision to become reality, one could argue that experiences of strangeness ought to be charted, as it has a positive and a negative dimension, which can exist at the same time. This could have consequences for the diversity policy the municipality has implemented.

As has been written, many different groups inhabit Maastricht. One group that inhabits Maastricht consists of the international students who study and live in Maastricht. 43% of all 15.000 registered students of Maastricht University is international, meaning nearly 7000 students at the University of Maastricht are international students. A significant amount of the international students also live in Maastricht, namely 2850 students. This number is expected to rise to 4850 by the year 2020 (Apollo, 2012). This figure consists only of international students who follow a complete bachelor or master program at the University of Maastricht. Exchange students who reside in Maastricht for less than 2 years are not part of this figure. 2850 students, which will increase to 4850 students, is a considerable part of the Maastricht population, and with that, a considerable part of the mosaic of different cultures the city longs to be. As these figures show, many international students also live outside of Maastricht. Most international students are German students, who to a great extent also live in Maastricht. In fact, international students living in Maastricht consist mainly of German students. Of the international students the German students are the absolute majority. Approximately 3500 students of Maastricht University are German, making German students the largest group of international students in Maastricht. Many of them also live in the city of Maastricht. Approximately 2000-2500 German students live in Maastricht, making it a considerable part of the (student) population (Maastricht Housing, personal communication, 6 March 2013). As the German students are a minority group in a Dutch host society, the German students may experience strangeness. As will be argued in chapter 2, strangeness is a complex and dynamic concept.

Furthermore, Maastricht University has the intention to grow to 25.000 students in the future. An exact term for achieving this target has not been set. In growing to 25.000 students the university should not be apprehensive to increasing the percentage of international students studying at Maastricht University. The university states that the growth in students is to be realized by increasing the numbers of international students at the university. The percentage of international students following a bachelor or master program may well increase to 75%. In addition, the university has the desire to become the economic motor of Maastricht and the surrounding region (Redactie, 2012). With the amount of international students already being high, and increasing, the number of German students studying in Maastricht will probably increase as well. Since the number of German students is so high, sensations of strangeness could exist in Maastricht among those students towards Dutch people in Maastricht. As has been written, this experience can have positive and negative sides. It can create both feelings of pleasure and threat, it can separate and unite.

As has been written, a negative side of strangeness is the failure to constitute interpersonal communication, which can lead to separation and difference (Gurevitch, 1988). This is in contrast to the 'mosaic' of cultures the city of Maastricht longs to be. In a mosaic all the different pieces of the mosaic form one coherent whole. If one piece of the mosaic, which consists of German students, does not connect with the rest of the mosaic (i.e. city of Maastricht), it could cause these students to feel

unconnected to Maastricht. The different pieces should communicate with one another to form a coherent whole. Then again, strangeness in the city can also unite people, by bringing them together. The sensation can create feelings of freedom and opportunity and may lead to contacts between people. With the high amount of German students, a feeling of strangeness towards Dutch people in Maastricht, which may have both positive and negative aspects, could exist. It must be noted that this division between negative and positive feelings does not have to be clear cut. It can be blurred and mixed, and may differ as time progresses. Since German students make up the largest part of the international students, it is logical to focus on these students. Dutch students and German students make up the large majority of students at Maastricht University.

## 1.2 Research Goal

My research will revolve around making an empirical contribution to the theories around strangeness by gaining new insights via a case study. One reason for this is the fact that little research on strangeness has been done by using a case study.

The goal of my research is as follows:

The goal of this thesis is *to contribute empirically to the theories around strangeness and gain insights in the experience of strangeness of German students, who follow a complete bachelor or master program at the University of Maastricht and live in Maastricht, towards Dutch people in Maastricht by analyzing to what degree strangeness is experienced and how it influences social contact between these German students and the Dutch people in Maastricht.*

From the goal it becomes clear that I intend to contribute empirically to the theories around strangeness. Although (international) students in general may experience strangeness, I will focus on German students alone. The main reason for this is that I do not have the time to research all international students and all nationalities. Since German form the largest group of international students I will focus my research on them. Furthermore, Maastricht lies in a border region with Germany and has had ties with Germany for centuries.

Only German students who follow a complete bachelor or master program, and live in Maastricht, will be investigated. Since they make the city their home for a long time they have a profound influence on the city and may go through different stages when experiencing strangeness. Researching their feelings will provide the most complete picture about strangeness. Even though exchange students may also experience strangeness, they reside in Maastricht for a short period of time and have a limited amount of influence on the city because of this.

## 1.3 Research model

In order to research strangeness among German students I have devised a research model, which summarizes the entire research process visually. The research model is shown in figure 1.

**Figure 1:** Research model

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┌─────────────┐      ↑
│ Literature on │      │
│ strangeness   │      │
│ and otherness │      │      ┌─────────────┐          ┌─────────────┐          ┌─────────────┐
└─────────────┘      │      │ German      │          │             │          │ New insights,│
                      │ ───→ │ students in │ ───→ │ Analyze data│ ──┐  ───→ │ empirical    │
┌─────────────┐      │      │ Maastricht  │          │             │    ↑     │ contribution to│
│ Literature on │      │      └─────────────┘          └─────────────┘          │ theory       │
│ Maastricht    │      │                                                        └─────────────┘
└─────────────┘      ↓
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*Phase a*                    *Phase b*                    *Phase c*                    *Phase d*
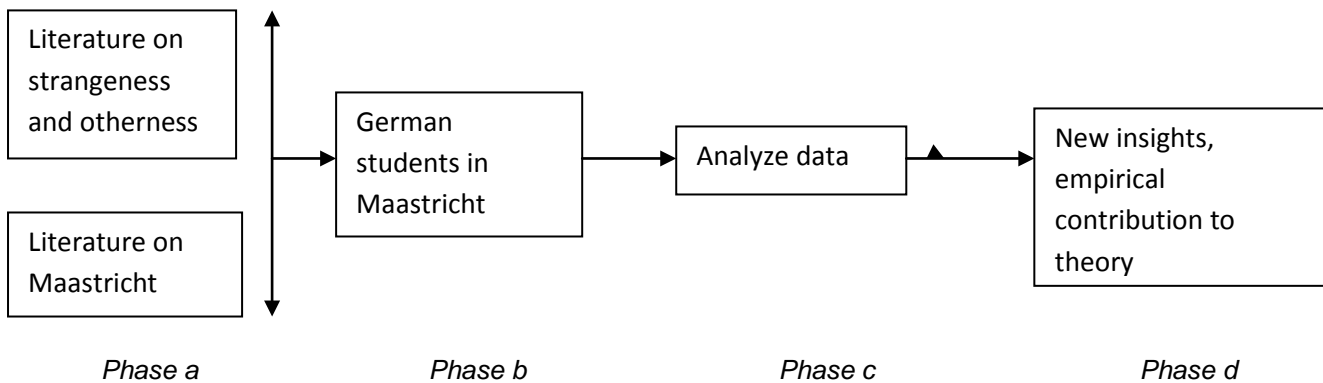
As the model shows, my research is roughly divided in four phases, namely phase a, b c and d. The first phase involved studying literature on strangeness and otherness, and later in that phase studying literature on Maastricht. With the literature on strangeness and otherness I could discover the important aspects that of strangeness and otherness. In addition, the literature helped me in making a theoretical framework with which I could analyze a particular case study. Literature on Maastricht was also studied, after which Maastricht was chosen as case study on which I would perform my research.

The next phase is phase b, where the empirical part of the research commenced. In this phase data has been gathered from German students who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht as well. The research has a qualitative nature and in total 14 students have been interviewed. More on methods will follow in the methodological section in chapter 3.

Phase c involved analyzing the acquired data and reporting the results. After having transcribed the interviews in phase b, it became imperative to analyze the data in detail. This was done digitally, which allowed me to analyze the interviews more effectively and efficiently. Again, more on methods will follow in chapter 3.

The last phase in the research is phase d, which revolved around drawing conclusions from the results. With these conclusions new insights have been acquired, which have added to the existing theories around strangeness.

## 1.4 Research question

The goal translates into the following research question:

*To what degree do German students, who follow a complete bachelor or master program at the University of Maastricht and live in Maastricht, experience a feeling of strangeness towards Dutch people in Maastricht and to what degree does this feeling of strangeness influence social contacts with Dutch people in Maastricht of these German students?*

In addition, a number of partial question have been established to research the different parts of the main question. The first partial question revolves around differences and similarities between German students, who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht, and Dutch people in Maastricht that these German students experience. Differences and similarities between German students and Dutch people in Maastricht may exist, which may cause feelings of strangeness among those German students. According to Marotta, strangers are culturally, socially, racially or in any other way different from a host society (2010). In the case of German students in Maastricht, the differences will most likely be of cultural and social nature. These differences, likely caused by difference in nationality, may lead to the German students feeling strange in Maastricht. They are essentially Germans in a Dutch host society, therefore it is worthwhile to find out if possible differences create feelings of strangeness among the German students. Similarities, as perceived by the German students, may also exist. These can also influence feelings of strangeness. The second part of this question goes in deeper into differences and similarities, as perceived by the German students. It is about how the German students handle possible differences and similarities and hints at how these differences/similarities manifest themselves in practice. Since the German students probably experience cultural and social differences, they will likely deal with those differences in a certain way. In addition, they will also deal with possible similarities in a certain way. These differences and similarities between the German students and the Dutch host society may cause strangeness to manifest itself in practice. German students might behave in a certain way, or do things a certain way influenced by similarities or differences.

Since strangeness may influence social contacts it is worthwhile to know the nature of the social contacts of the German students in Maastricht. Strangeness may lead to more social contacts and may lead to less social contacts (Bauman, 1995). Therefore it is important to find out what the nature of contacts of the German students is. This makes up the second partial question. The German students will have different kinds of social contacts with different people in Maastricht. In researching this question, an eye will be kept upon the place where the contact takes place. Contact at the university with other students may take place regularly. Social contact at the university may be semi-mandatory, since it is necessary to communicate with others in workgroups. These workgroups have an international character due to the 'international classroom development', in which 'students from different origins and cultural backgrounds come into contact with divergent views and various ways of solving problems, preparing them for successful careers on the international labour market' (Maastricht University, 2012). In larger lectures students are more anonymous and may cling together more with their own community. Secondly, social contact in social events is distinguished. Here, it is all up to the student to decide with whom he interacts. Finally, social contact in other events has been distinguished. Since the research is of a qualitative nature and focuses on the experiences of the respondents, the option of new input from the respondent is left open. This is done to make sure that the research becomes as complete as possible. After having charted the nature of the social contacts if becomes necessary to find out how these are influenced by feelings of pleasure/freedom and threat that come with strangeness. One way in which strangeness can manifest itself is via a sensation of freedom, due to little obligations towards each other (Simmel, 1950). This is freedom to have

superficial contacts with stranger, which last as long as the contacts are pleasurable (Bauman, 1995). To chart experiences of freedom to engage socially with Dutch people in Maastricht could reveal signs of strangeness, or mutual estrangement. Mutual estrangement is related to the pleasurable, superficial contacts (Bauman, 1995). This freedom is not only legal freedom, but more so it is social freedom. Other ways in which strangeness manifests itself may also be present. Strangeness may also harbor feelings of threat, which can diminish the amount of social contacts that the German students have. Here, the stranger is seen as someone to be kept at bay (Bauman, 1995). This experience could cause the German students to interact less with the Dutch host community and cling more to their own German community in Maastricht. As can be seen in the conceptual model, in figure 2, strangeness may lead to more social contacts and less social contacts, depending on what side of strangeness (pleasure or threat) is stronger.

The third and final partial question revolves around the typification that is part of experienced feelings of strangeness. An element of strangeness is the typification of the stranger to certain general characteristics, where the stranger is reduced to a certain type instead of being recognized as an equal individual (Rundell, 2004). The German students may feel that they are typified by Dutch people in Maastricht. This can create an experience of strangeness among the German students towards the Dutch students, since they are not recognized as equal individuals. At the same time, the German students may see the Dutch students as strangers as well and reduce them to certain general characteristics too. In the case that German students feel typified by Dutch people and typify Dutch people themselves, it could mean that they are both strangers to each other, thus being mutually estranged from one another. Bauman (1995) and Simmel (1950) both argue that mutual estrangement can lead to freedom and even more contact, because of little obligations towards each other. As can be seen in the conceptual model, typification is an important factor in the experience of strangeness.


**Partial questions:**

- Do possible differences and/or similarities between the German students and the Dutch people in Maastricht cause feelings of strangeness among the German students towards Dutch people in Maastricht and how are these handled?
- How are the social contacts influenced by the feelings of pleasure/freedom and threat/challenge that come with strangeness and what is the nature of those social contacts?
- To what degree do German students who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht feel typified by Dutch people in Maastricht and to what degree do they typify Dutch people in Maastricht themselves?

## 1.5 Relevance

### 1.5.1 Societal relevance

Gaining insights in the feeling of strangeness is relevant, since feelings of strangeness could undermine or strengthen goals and policies set by the municipality of Maastricht. Maastricht wants to be a mosaic of cultures, without discrimination or prejudice (Weling, 2005). For this vision to become reality the city must be aware of potential feelings of strangeness of its inhabitants. German students form a considerable part of the population of Maastricht, and with that, a large part of the 'mosaic of cultures'. Possibly being an obstacle to interpersonal communication, a feeling of strangeness could therefore hamper with the realization of the 'mosaic of cultures'. It could also strengthen this 'mosaic', as a feeling of strangeness can also unite people and create contacts between people. This has to do with the sensation of freedom, opportunity and pleasure that come with strangeness in a city (Bauman, 1995). Both sides interplay in the experience of strangeness, which could have its effects on social interaction between the German students and Dutch people in Maastricht. Therefore it is worthwhile to know the degree to which German students experience strangeness. German students make up the large majority of international students at Maastricht University. It is useful to know how this group experiences strangeness every day. Especially, since strangeness is a dynamic concept. The danger and opportunity that characterize strangeness are not fixed. They may exist at the same time and cause an ambiguity (Bauman, 1995). Here one side can be dominant one day, whereas the other side may be dominant the other day. To know how German students experience strangeness can also give an image of how they fit in the 'mosaic of cultures'. A feeling of strangeness may be pleasurable and inviting to stay, it might also be threatening and compelling to leave. Furthermore, these feelings can interplay and could differ day by day. In this research the focus will lie upon the German students, since they are the 'strangers' in the Dutch host society. To research feelings of strangeness in Maastricht would therefore aid the societal relevance.

### 1.5.2 Scientific relevance

New insights in feelings of strangeness of German students registered at the University of Maastricht would enrich the existing theories that focus on strangeness and otherness. In addition, little research has been done on feelings of strangeness of students. Although several studies on strangeness have been done so far, the extent to which strangeness has been investigated in practice seems limited. An example of a study is the investigation to the sense of belonging among high school students representing 4 ethnic groups by Faircloth & Hamm (2005). This was a quantitative study, analyzing a large amount of high school students on certain domains using statistical analysis. Since the sense of belonging was the topic of investigation, it could be related to the concept of strangeness, as strangeness could hamper with a sense of belonging. Another example of a study was the othering across time and place in the Suikoden video game series. In this qualitative study, fan websites of the Suikoden game were analysed by Schwartz (2008). A questionnaire was filled out by 11 users and a textual analysis to analyse the function of online discussion was carried out. Another example of a study related to strangeness is the study of discrimination of non-western migrants in the Netherlands at the labour market (Andriesen, Nievers & Dagevos, 2012). What I have not found so far were studies

concerning experiences of strangeness or otherness among groups of people in a certain society. Such a study could be used to measure strangeness and otherness, and with that see how well this group is integrated in a certain society. As has been written, strangeness has two sides, namely a positive and a negative side. The positive side, associated with freedom, encourages contact between people. The negative side, associated with the stranger an enemy, or someone to be kept at bay diminishes contact between people. I have not been able to find a research focusing on both aspects, to find out if a certain side of strangeness is dominant. This could explain the integration of a certain group in society.

Many studies concerning integration of different cultural, ethnic and social groups have been done. These studies may focus on for example the acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands or ethnic diversity and study performances in secondary school (SCP, 2013). These studies do not focus on feelings of strangeness. Feelings of strangeness seem to be researched little in practice in general. Therefore my research will focus on experiences of strangeness and will investigate the feelings of strangeness that German students in Maastricht have. Strangeness can exist in many forms and may be difficult to see at first glance. This research aims to reveal strangeness among German students in Maastricht and will take into account different, subtle facets of strangeness. These experiences, related to the perception of the self and the other, might result in feeling comfortable, at home and free at a place.

## 1.7 Overview

In this chapter the research subject, research goal and question have been introduced. Furthermore, the research question has been divided in 3 partial questions, which will help to answer the main research question. In addition, the relevance of researching experiences of German students who follow a complete bachelor or master program at Maastricht University, and live in Maastricht, has been stated. In the next chapter, the theoretical framework that will explain what strangeness is will be given. After this the conceptual model that has been derived using the theoretical framework will be illustrated. Finally, the conceptual model and partial research questions will be operationalised

# 2 Theoretical framework

This chapter revolves around the theoretical framework that has been constructed for this research. Firstly, paragraph 2.1 will introduce the topics of strangeness and strangers and discuss the meaning of these concepts. Secondly, paragraph 2.2 goes deeper into the concepts of strangeness and strangers and portrays the ambivalent positions that come with strangeness. Thirdly, in paragraph 2.3 the conceptual model that has been derived by using the theoretical framework will be shown. Fourthly, in paragraph 2.4 the operationalisation of the conceptual model and partial questions will be depicted.

## 2.1 Strangeness and strangers

Strangeness and strangers are topics that are becoming more and more visible in society, as society is becoming more diverse. Most Western European nations and even cities have very diverse populations (Iamsterdam, 2013). Whether it is about people migrating to a new place who are considered to be strange, and feel strange themselves, or about students coming from abroad to study in another country. The world is becoming ever more globalised and strangeness is felt more and more among more people. First of all, a distinction between strangeness and strangers must be made. A stranger is a person who is culturally, socially, racially, or in any other way different from a host group. Strangeness is a feeling, an experience, which may exist between social actors (Marotta, 2010). This feeling of strangeness can exist in every relationship (Simmel, 1950). Therefore experiencing strangeness does not necessarily mean that one is a stranger (Marotta, 2010). An interesting example is given by Gurevitch concerning the revelation of otherness in one's parent. A child usually is emotionally close with his parents and sees, for example his father, first and foremost as his father. When the child sees the father in a different setting, for example at work with coworkers the father has a different identity, namely that of a (co)worker. The father is disconnected with fatherhood, which can create a distance between the child and the father. This can lead to feelings of sadness and anger, since reality and identity no longer correspond with each other (1988).

Simmel describes the stranger as 'the person who comes and stays tomorrow' (1950). This person does not belong to a group, but is an element of a group. This is characterized by a sensation of closeness and remoteness in the relationship with the group (Simmel, 1950). According to Bauman, the stranger has no obligations to another person of group. The contacts the stranger has are superficial, due to mutual estrangement. This, thanks to the 'universal otherhood of city life' may lead to pleasure and freedom, as the stranger has no obligations and can make superficial contact (Bauman, 1995). Other feelings that can be related to feelings of pleasure are feelings of being comfortable, feeling at home. Another way the stranger may be perceived is as a threat. The stranger 'ante portas', meaning 'at the gate', is someone that needs to be kept at bay. This notion deals with an 'idealized conception of the secure home' (Bauman, 1995). The home receives its meaning from the opposition between risk and control, danger and security and can be viewed as a safe haven, or a comfort zone (Bauman, 1995). The stranger, or migrant standing at the gate, distorts this comfort zone and creates fear. The fear of being overwhelmed by others that delete the known world and identity (Van Houtum & Pijpers, 2007). This would cause a desire to keep the stranger at bay, which would

diminish interaction with that person. These negative feelings can also be seen as a challenge that needs to be overcome or as feelings of being uncomfortable or not being at home. A third way of viewing strangers, according to Bauman, is to view the stranger as 'Janus faced'. The city can bring the stranger both pleasure and danger, both opportunity and threat. The postmodern city may be inviting and pleasurable and sinister and menacing, which are contradictory cultural offers. Since the stranger may use both offers, he is described to have two faces. Both faces are blurred (Bauman, 1995). The division described above seems to be very clear in the sense that either positive or negative feelings might surface. This does not always have to be the case. In fact, negative and positive feelings can be blurred and mixed. One might have both positive and negative feelings at the same time. These feelings can develop as time progresses and are not static. One might feel comfortable in one situation, but feel uncomfortable, or even threatened in the next. Therefore it is necessary to see strangeness as a concept that can be present in many different, subtle ways. The dichotomy as described above is, therefore, mostly not visible in practice. Instead, strangeness manifests itself in small, subtle ways.

Having described strangeness from the viewpoint of the 'non'-stranger so far, it is necessary to note that strangeness is a very dynamic concept. The state of being a stranger is not fixed and may differ through time. The concept of the stranger, and other, is related to the perception of the self. The other only exist due to a certain perception of the self. By seeing oneself in a certain way, one might perceive an other to be different. Thus, strangeness at its core has to do with seeing an other as being different from the self. Every relationship may know feelings of strangeness and everyone can feel strange at some point. This was already illustrated in the example of Gurevitch about the revelation of otherness in one's parent (Gurevitch, 1988). This example clearly shows that strangeness is dynamic and not fixed in time. In addition, it shows that one does not always have to be a stranger. One may be a stranger at one moment, and be a 'friend' the next moment.

A process that strangers undergo when they face a dominant host group is a process of objectification. A person, perceived as a stranger, is abstracted to a certain type and is not treated as an individual (Rundell, 2004). This typification is constantly upheld (Gurevitch, 1988). The making of the stranger is done by people themselves, by refusing to recognize people as human beings (Jacobsen & Poder, 2008). By reducing a person to a few 'typical' characteristics one fails to recognize another as an equal, which can create an experience of strangeness with that person. By failing to recognize people as equals, i.e. typifying them, we create strangers. They are in many ways denied access to society and are a product of the ordering of the host group and are made strange. This kind of thinking leaves out a third possibility, apart from 'us' and 'them' (Jacobsen & Poder, 2008). Creating a certain type also hints at the perception of the self. In order to see someone as a type, he is seen as an other and as a person who is different from the self. Typification can happen in many different ways and can vary in intensity. It might mean that one sees another as less than an equal, because he reduces the other to certain characteristics deemed typical for that person. It might also mean that one feels that a certain act is typical for a certain other. An act might be considered as being typically Dutch, or typically German.

By making order, and making culture, we create a border. Creating a border is a 'process of

spatial differentiation' (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2001). Thus, it is an active process done by people. Furthermore, borders both reject and erect othering. By creating a cohesive order, differences inside the borders are meditated. However, new differences are created with those that live outside the borders. This is known as the paradox of borders (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2001).

Strangeness is a sensation, an experience that one may experience in every relationship to a certain degree (Simmel, 1950). This sensation of strangeness, or otherness, is characterized by feelings of nearness and farness at the same time. The feeling of otherness can be an obstacle for mutual understanding. Bauman argues that the stranger in a city is 'Janus faced', i.e. having two faces. One of these faces is positive and one is negative. Positive feelings, relating to feeling comfortable and feeling free as well, and negative feelings, relating to a challenge or to feelings of threat, can be mixed. They can exist at the same time and can vary in different situations. These feelings can also be very subtle and might not always be noticed by the self. The positive feeling is related to freedom and opportunity, whereas the negative one is related to menace and threat (1995). With the negative face one could assume that 'communication in interpersonal relations in dependent upon the supposition of sameness of the self and the other' (Gurevitch, 1988). One side of strangeness is that it does not constitute interpersonal communication. Strangeness can be seen as the realm that lies between host society and the other (Gurevitch, 1988). In order to communicate one must assume that the other and the self are the same. As has been described, this dichotomy between pleasure and threat is not clearly visible in practice and manifests itself in delicate ways. Typification of the other, which happens with strangers and others, thus obstructs mutual understanding and communication. An interesting point is shown by Rouchy, who states the differences between two individuals who meet and two groups who meet. When two individuals of a different nationality meet, they often look for similarities of experience. This is often not perceived as a threatening situation. When two groups of two different nationalities meet cultural differences are more easily spotted. This can invoke a feeling of strangeness towards the other group, as group identity, and the differences between the identities are more easily spotted (2002).

The positive side of strangeness is that it may lead to more contacts, due to mutual estrangement. People feel estranged from one another and do not feel obligations towards each other. This can lead to a momentary link, a superficial contact between people (Bauman, 1995). In addition, positive feelings can also include feeling at home, or feeling comfortable. Simmel acknowledges the freedom associated with being a stranger. He states that being a stranger in a place may result in freedom, due to the lack of commitments the stranger has to this place (1950). This is in concurrence with Bauman's philosophy, which states that the positive side of strangeness is freedom due to lack of obligations towards each other, which, as has been written, can create superficial contacts between people (1995). These two sides of strangeness, both positive and negative may exist simultaneously, as strangeness consists of closeness and remoteness at the same time. These feelings might exist in a subtle way that is not easily noticed. In addition, they might be mixed and exist at the same time during different situations.

## 2.2 Ambivalent position

As has been stated before the experience of strangeness is characterized by feelings of remoteness

and closeness at the same time (Morakhovski, 2000). In the time of global communication and globalization individuals may be physically close, but emotionally remote. The distinction between 'here' and 'there' becomes vague, due to the so called time-space compression. 'There' can be 'here' and 'here' can be far away. Thus, the division between spaces is becoming blurred and strangerhood and strangeness are no longer temporary conditions, but may be a way of life for some (Morakhovski, 2000). Since people may be emotionally remote, but physically close, feelings of familiarity and unfamiliarity can develop towards these people. A sensation of ambivalence can prevail, where a person might not be part of a group, but is an element of a group. The stranger is accepted into the group, but is detached from it at the same time (Simmel, 1950). The host group has certain general characteristics in common with the stranger, which causes the closeness in the relationship. The characteristics in common with people closer connected than the stranger are more specific, than the general characteristics in common with the stranger. This relates to the remoteness in the relationship with the stranger (Simmel, 1950). The commonness of general features works unifying, but it does not make individuals dependent upon each other, which results in a feeling of closeness and remoteness towards a stranger (Simmel, 1950). Due to this ambivalent position, being close and remote at the same time, fear might be produced in a society, since the stranger is part of the society and detached from it at the same time. The stranger violates a border, and is part of both the new society and the old society (Jacobsen & Poder, 2008). It is a space between categories, which undermines binarisms such as 'friend – enemy'. He occupies a space, which is characterized by indifference. The present day stranger, also referred to as cosmopolitan stranger, is neither friend nor enemy and has a normal attitude towards others (Stichweh, 1997).

As has been written this ambivalent position causes fear in the host society, since the stranger violates borders and occupies a space 'in between' worlds (Jacobsen & Poder). He stands on the threshold of two worlds, namely the new society and the society where he comes from. This fear could be reduced by taking on a cosmopolitan attitude. Cosmopolitanism is a humanistic ideal, which revolves around the willingness to tolerate others. Studies have shown that cosmopolitan people accommodate diversity and conceptualize otherness in such a way that it reduces or even eliminates a sense of threat (Calcutt & Skrbis, 2009). This orientation could be related to a sense of common humanity, where people are hospitable to others on the basis of their shared humanity. As Kant describes it one should 'treat others with peace, as long as he treats you with peace' (Rundell, 2004). A typification of strangers is out of the question, as this focuses on differences and does not focus on common humanity. Jacobsen & Poder argue that one should treat a stranger as a representation of himself and not as an unwanted peculiarity (2008). It must be noted that cosmopolitanism is not an historic inevitability, but a cultural and cognitive orientation. People must actively practice this orientation to make it a reality (Calcutt & Skrbis, 2009).

The ambivalence which has been written about is not fixed, but changes over time. Firstly the description of oneself changes over time and is fluid. In addition, the intersection of self-perception and perception of the self by others is subject to change (Young, 2005). It can change when one goes from one social environment to the other. In addition, the problem of otherness, as David & Rawls call

it, is different and differently constructed in modern differentiated societies (2006).

## 2.3 Conceptual model

Having described strangeness and strangers in general, it now becomes necessary to demarcate a definition of strangeness for this research. This is necessary to make sure that the research can be fulfilled within the specified time. Therefore I have demarcated a way in which I will use strangeness in my research. Giving an exact definition of strangeness is difficult, since it is a very broad, complex and dynamic concept. Therefore I have demarcated strangeness to a few important basic features that I will focus on in the investigation. <u>Strangeness at its core is related to seeing another person as an other, in the sense that he is different from the self.</u> This can have several results, which have already been outlined. In this research I consider *strangeness to be an experience directed at the host community that causes both feelings of pleasure and unease among people living in a community of which they are not natives, which can respectively lead to more contact and/or less contact between people and could cause typification of/by other communities.* This definition does not encompass all features of strangeness, since it would be unfeasible for me to research strangeness in all its complexity due to time limitations. It is a description of strangeness that I will use in my research.

From the theoretical framework a conceptual model has been derived. Figure 2 shows the conceptual model and visualizes these features of strangeness, which have been described throughout chapter 2.

**Figure 2:** Conceptual model
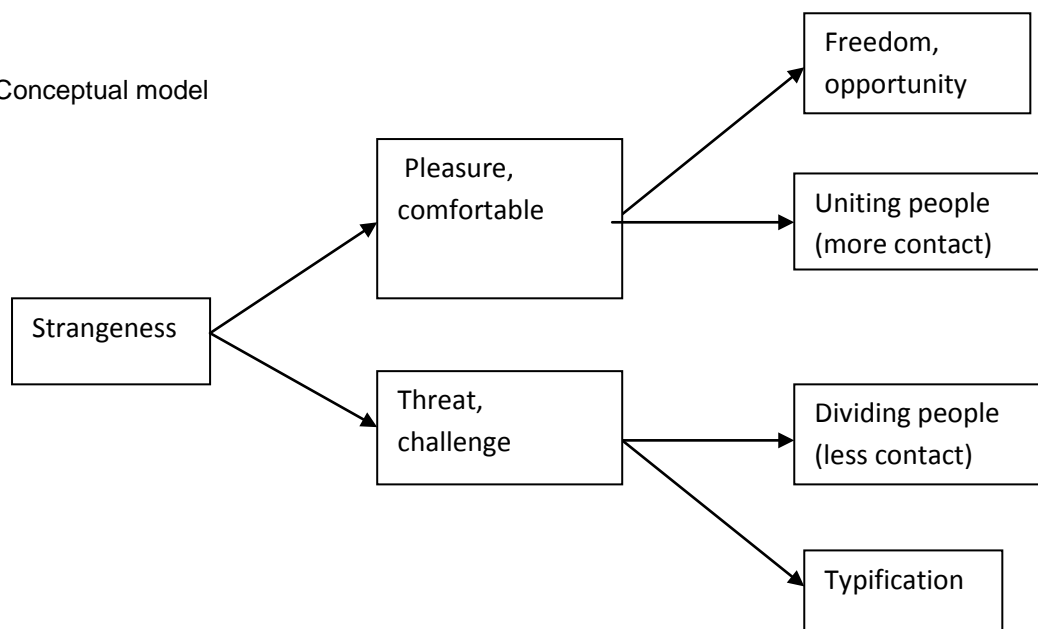
## 2.4 Operationalisation

In order to research strangeness, the concept has to be made measurable. Therefore the following indicatory 'definition' of strangeness for this research has been established. As has been described in the previous section strangeness is a sensation that revolves around seeing the other as being different from the self. This can result in different ways, which have already been described. It is a sensation that is not part of a person, but it is something that influences people. The way strangeness will be demarcated in this research is described as follows: *Strangeness is an experience that will be investigated among German students who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht. The topic of investigation will be experiences of strangeness of German students directed at the Dutch people in Maastricht, which can cause German students to have more contact with their own community and less contact with their own community and can cause more and less contact with the Dutch community. Furthermore, it can lead to the German students feeling that they are being typified by the Dutch community and typify the Dutch themselves.* In the research I will thus focus on the German student alone. I will investigate experiences of strangeness of German students, which are directed at the Dutch host community. Here, social contacts of German students will be looked at. Secondly, feelings of being typified of the German student will be investigated. If the German student feels that he is reduced to a few characteristics and not seen as a full person, as described in the conceptual framework, he might feel strange in Maastricht.

## 2.5 Overview

This chapter consisted of the theoretical framework, conceptual model and operationalisation of the conceptual model and the partial questions. A framework has been devised with which to research strangeness in Maastricht. Having done this, the next chapter will be about the methods that will be used to research strangeness in Maastricht. Here, the research strategy and choice of qualitative methods will be discussed.

# 3 Methods

This chapter will outline the methods used to research strangeness among German students in Maastricht. Firstly, in paragraph 3.1 the research strategy will be given. Among other things, it will be argued that the research will be of qualitative nature. Secondly, in paragraph 3.2 the choice of qualitative methods will be explained. This will be clarified further by using figures that visualize the research process. In paragraph 3.3 the way of analyzing will be described.

## 3.1 Research Strategy

Since the time to perform the research is limited I have collected data from a small amount of respondents and analyze it in depth. In addition, as has been stated in chapter 1, little research on strangeness has been done.

Since it was my aim to chart the experiences concerning strangeness among German students in Maastricht the research was of qualitative nature. From the goal and main question of the research it becomes clear that I have aimed to recover the experiences of German students who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht as well. Since experiences call for an in depth investigation, a qualitative research is the best option. With a case study, situated in Maastricht, I have displayed all finesses concerning experiences of strangeness among German students in Maastricht. Due to the limited amount of respondents the extent to which claims can be generalized is limited though. Since I will focus on one case study and investigate this case in depth, the accuracy and validity of my research will benefit.  The results were most detailed and showed many facets of the experiences of the German students in Maastricht. The case study is singular, meaning that I have focused only on Maastricht during my research. Furthermore, since time is limited I have chosen to investigate one case in depth, so that I can show all complexities of strangeness among German students in Maastricht. The case of Maastricht is unique in the Netherlands in terms of amount of German students studying there.
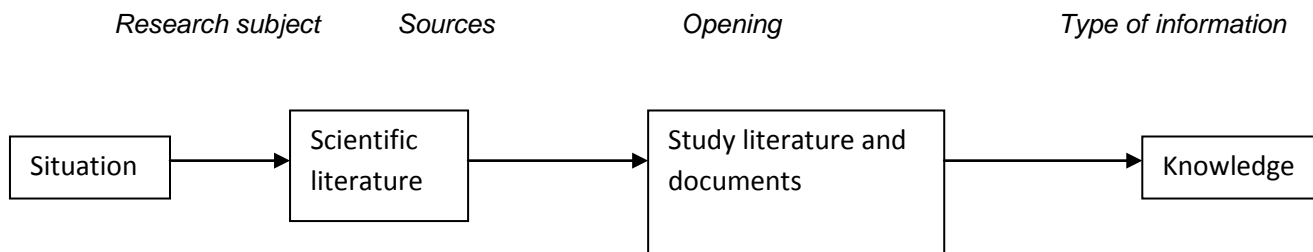
## 3.2 Choice for qualitative methods

To research experiences of strangeness of German students who live in Maastricht and are registered at the University of Maastricht I have used different qualitative methods. Different methods have been used to get an in depth image of the experience of strangeness. By using different methods to generate data, i.e. triangulation, the level of my research will rise (Vennix, 2010).

In the first phase (phase a) of the research a study of literature on the subject was the most important way of gathering information. By studying the literature I got a broader picture of experiences of strangeness of German students in Maastricht and created a project frame for the research. In addition, the literature supplied me with reasons for experienced strangeness. The literature first and foremost provided a theoretical framework to make sense of the data from the respondents. Furthermore, a study of literature on the subject has also helped to get insights in strangeness in general and among students. With these insights I have devised an interview guide, which has brought up memories from certain experiences from the respondents. These experiences will help me to chart strangeness among German students in Maastricht. Thus, literature was studied

<u>to get an image of the project frame around strangeness in general and of Maastricht.</u> Furthermore, the literature has helped me to devise a theoretical framework with which I have demarcated and analyzed strangeness. This process is visualized in figure 3.

**Figure 3:** Collecting research material in phase a

*Research subject*          *Sources*                    *Opening*                              *Type of information*

Situation → Scientific literature → Study literature and documents → Knowledge

The second phase of the research was phase b, where the most important qualitative method I have used for my research were interviews. I have interviewed 14 German students who follow a complete bachelor or master program at the Maastricht University and live in Maastricht by using semi-structured interviews. The German students that were interviewed studied different programs in order to have a decent variety of German students for the research. The interviewed students studied were between 18 and 25 years old and studied different programs at different faculties. Table 1 contains more detailed information about the respondents, including the exact programs they studied. This way, I have not focused on one type of German student alone, which would have made the research very narrow. By studying a great variety of students from different programs I have gotten the most valid image of experiences of German students in Maastricht. Since the students come from different programs they have different background and probably have different social relations. I have used an interview guide with predetermined topics to interview the respondent. Semi-structured interviews were the type of interview of choice, since it gave me the necessary structuring to address certain topics. At the same time it provided necessary freedom for the respondent to talk about his/her experiences freely (Vennix, 2010). This way the respondent might bring in new information that I might not have anticipated. Since the research revolves around experiences of strangeness of German students it is necessary to have an interview guide with freedom for input from the respondent. At the same time, structuring is necessary to provide limits for the input from the respondent. The structuring has provided the required direction to the interview so that I can get an answer to my research question.
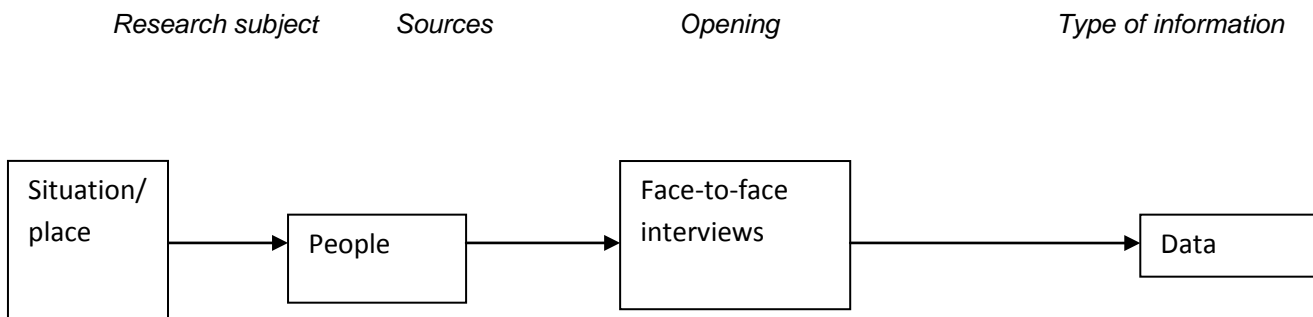
**Table 1:** Respondents

| Name | Age | Program | Place of origin in Germany |
|------|-----|---------|----------------------------|
| Annika | 25 | Strategic Marketing (master) | Heidelberg |
| Alexander | 20 | International Business (bachelor) | Kleve |
| Hannah | 23 | European Law (bachelor) | Cologne |
| Jacob | 22 | Economics (bachelor) | Cologne |
| Timo | 24 | Globalisation (master) | Berlin |
| Valentin | 23 | Economics (bachelor) | Frankfurt |
| Andreas | 20 | Economics (bachelor) | Bonn |
| Anna | 19 | International Business (bachelor) | Bonn |
| Filip | 22 | European Studies (bachelor) | Frankfurt |
| Zoe | 24 | International Business (bachelor) | Lübeck |
| Peter | 23 | Architecture (master) | Munich |
| Julian | 21 | International Business (bachelor) | Wiedenbrück |
| Tanja | 19 | European Studies (bachelor) | Hamburg |
| Ricardo | 21 | International Business (bachelor) | Düren |

All students mentioned in table 1 are German students who follow a complete bachelor or master program at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht. The research process in phase b is visualized in figure 4.

**Figure 4:** Collecting research material in phase b

*Research subject*      *Sources*      *Opening*      *Type of information*

```
┌──────────┐          ┌────────┐          ┌────────────┐          ┌────────┐
│ Situation/│─────────▶│ People │─────────▶│ Face-to-face│────────▶│  Data  │
│ place     │          │        │          │ interviews  │          │        │
└──────────┘          └────────┘          └────────────┘          └────────┘
```

The research perspective most suitable for researching the experiences in terms of strangeness of German students is phenomenology. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon, i.e. strangeness, to a description of the universal essence (Creswell, 2012). It describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon, i.e. strangeness (Creswell, 2012). To discover common features in the experiences with strangeness among German students, has painted a picture of strangeness of this group in Maastricht. To get to the essence of experiences of strangeness of German students studying and living in Maastricht, has provided a better image of strangeness and all that is related to this concept. Phenomenology has been used to analyze the interviews with the German students. From the data the respondents supplied several shared experienced have been found. The results of the analysis will be shown in chapter 4.

Since the research revolves around the experiences of strangeness of international students who live in Maastricht and are registered at the Maastricht University, I have asked questions that relate to experiences of strangeness. These questions will aim at the degree of strangeness that is experienced and reasons for that experience of strangeness. The interview guide that has been used for the interviews can be found in appendix 2.

### 3.3. Analysis

I went to the central library of Maastricht at the 26th and the 27th of March and on the 17th of April to do my interviews. By going to this central library I interviewed students from all sorts of studies. During these days I have interviewed 14 respondents for their experiences revolving around strangeness. In the interviews I asked the questions and the student responded with answers. When the respondent gave an answer to the question I often used probing questions to dig deeper into the experiences of the student. After having done the interviews it became necessary to analyze them. The first step was to convert the audio material into written text by transcribing the interviews literally. All the audio material was converted into written word in order to analyze the generated data. After having transcribed all the interviews, the next step was to analyze them. I read the texts carefully and, by using the concepts of phenomenology, filtered out the common experiences. With the coding I have

formulate common experiences of strangeness among the German students. The notions that were described in chapter 2 and were visualized in the conceptual model will be given the most attention. Analyzing has been done digitally by using the computer program 'Atlas.ti'. All the texts were loaded into 'Atlas.ti', after which I have coded them. All information which is useful in the research was coded, which means that useful bits of data were highlighted and given a certain label. From these codes several common themes emerged, which were labeled as 'code families'. All codes with a similar meaning or theme were ranged under the same code family. In total 11 code families were distinguished, namely: 'contact with Dutch', 'contact with Germans, 'contact with non-Germans', 'cultural differences', 'cultural similarities', 'culture in general', 'handling of culture', 'feelings in Maastricht', 'group forming', 'large number of Germans', 'studying in Maastricht'. The code families can roughly be characterized as common experiences, although codes ranged under one code family may vary. Several experiences, designated with codes, may have been ranged under the same code family as they describe the same experience. For example, feelings students have in Maastricht were put under the code family 'feelings in Maastricht' even though the nature of these experiences can differ greatly. Feelings in Maastricht may include liking the city of Maastricht, but also seeing Maastricht as a small city.

Having done a great deal of the fieldwork in March already I had ample time left to do more fieldwork in order to get a better picture of strangeness among German students in Maastricht. Therefore I went back to Maastricht at the 17th of April to do more interviews. I went to the central library and interviewed more respondents. Again, the audio material gathered that day was converted into written word by transcribing everything that was said literally. After having done this, it became necessary to analyze these interviews. Again, the transcripts of the interviews were loaded into Atlas.ti and were studied carefully. All bits of information were given a label, i.e. a code. These codes were ranged under the already existing family codes generated by the earlier interviews. No new family codes emerged from the later interviews. The family codes that were mentioned contain a variety of codes, that all have a similar meaning or theme. These family codes will be described in chapter 4.

## 3.4 Overview

The methods that will be used to research strangeness among German students in Maastricht have been portrayed in this chapter. After having given the research strategy, the choice of qualitative methods has been explained. Having illustrated the methods that will be used for this investigation, it becomes necessary to report the results that were generated from this investigation. Chapter 4 will portray all the results from the interviews, after which the partial questions will be answered in chapter 5.

# 4 Results

Having described the methods that were used to gather data for the research it becomes necessary to report the results that were discovered after having transcribed and analyzed all interviews that were done with the German respondents. Firstly, this chapter will portray the results that came from the interviews. It will feature the experiences of the German respondents that came up in the interviews. As described in chapter 3, the experiences were categorized in codes and code families. Code families consisted of similar codes, which means they consisted of common experiences. The code families and smaller regularly occurring codes will be outlined in paragraph 4.1. Every code family will have its own subsection. All common experiences regarding strangeness will be outlined in this paragraph. Even though some experiences might be more valuable to the research than others, all experiences that were felt by a large number of respondents will be described in this chapter in order to a the most complete picture of the students feelings. These results will be analyzed in chapter 5.

## 4.1 Shared experiences

In this paragraph the shared experiences of the students will be outlined. Experiences felt by only 1 or 2 people will not be illustrated.

### 4.1.1 Feelings in Maastricht

From the information the respondents supplied several common experienced were found. To start with the results I will outline the family code 'feelings in Maastricht', which describes all the feelings the respondents have in and about Maastricht in general. One experience shared by most students is that Dutch people in Maastricht are friendly. In describing her contacts with Dutch people, Annika explained that: 'It's always really nice. I think that they're super open minded, they're helpful, they're funny'. Julian stated that: 'Yeah, open minded, it's no problem, they're really friendly.' This experience was found again and again among respondents. Another feeling in Maastricht, which is sometimes used in the same sentence as the previous experience is that Dutch people are very open minded. Andreas, for example, said the following: 'Mostly I think they're very open minded and friendly as I said, in general'. Similar things can be heard from most other respondents.

One experience that was common for almost all respondents is that they enjoy studying in Maastricht and like Maastricht. After asking what studying in Maastricht is like, Hannah replied with 'Really nice', Filip said the following: 'I would just say that I really happy to study in Maastricht. I was really happy that they gave me the opportunity to study here. I think that for a lot of German people'. Similar opinions can be heard from most respondents. The general enjoyment of studying in Maastricht is an experience commonly shared among the interviewed respondents. On the whole the German students like Maastricht, not only its atmosphere, but also for the way it looks. Many respondents like the way Maastricht, for example with its old buildings: 'And the city centre is amazing, because it has old houses and all the stuff', which Andreas mentioned.

An experience related to enjoying studying in Maastricht is feeling at home in Maastricht. Hannah mentions the following: 'Yeah, I feel at home, after two and a half years.' and Filip mentioned that 'it's just being in a smaller city where you always feel at home and I always feel safe here.' Tanja

also stated she feels at home, 'after a while though'. This point, namely that it took time to feel at home in Maastricht, was common for many respondents. It took time to feel at home and make friends in Maastricht. Other experiences related to feeling at home were feeling safe and feeling welcome.

One experience common for many students is that Maastricht is a small city. 'Yeah, I really like it, because as he said it's really small, so you don't get distracted at all. And, ehm, yeah it just feels nice' was Filips' experience. This experience could be related to the experience of missing things in Maastricht. Timo, for example, misses the big city: 'I kind of miss a big city'. Jacob stated the following: 'There are still things that you can't really do here I'd say.  It's nice to go home for that'. Another experience, which could be related to perceived lack of big city life, is the experience of limited night life in Maastricht. Ricardo mentioned the following: 'It's, when you compare it [night life] to other cities in Germany or to bigger cities, there's not that much happening'.' Even though Maastricht is small and might have limited options compared to a larger city, many respondents feel that there are party opportunities for everyone. Jacob, for example, said 'I mean it always depends on where you go. You can still find parties that suit probably everyone, just go to the right place'. Andreas went even further and declared that 'when it comes to partying it's fine, I would say it's amazing. But I think there are places to go and I think there are a lot of opportunities for social events'.  Thus, there are conflicting experiences concerning night life. Some respondents miss big city life, whereas others say that there are party opportunities for everyone.

One other experience concerns the international scene or atmosphere that Maastricht is perceived to be. Many of the respondents see Maastricht as an international city. Timo, for example revealed the following: 'In a way that you understand a lot more of what Europe is about. You have the Germans, you have the Belgians, the Dutch people coming together'.  Many of German students like these international experiences, for example: 'I like the [international] experiences, and that's always great'. Although Maastricht is perceived as international, the expectation of Maastricht as being international differed from the reality of Maastricht being international for some. Alexander revealed the following: 'Well, I also, before I came here, I thought that it would be more international and not only Dutch and Germans'. Clearly, some see Maastricht not as being as international as expected and think there are many Germans in Maastricht. More on the large amount of Germans will be outlined in subsection 4.1.9. In addition, one of the reasons for studying in Maastricht was the international scene, which will be portrayed further in subsection 4.1.2.

**4.1.2 Studying in Maastricht**

One common trait of the respondents is that many of them have the desire to study in English. 'I wanted to study in English' sums up Hannah's' feelings about wanting to study in English. Time calls studying in English an opportunity: 'Maastricht gave me the opportunity to study in English'. These quotations sum up the experiences about the desire to study in English, but they are only the tip of the iceberg concerning what the respondents mentioned about studying in English. What can also be seen is that English education in Maastricht is one of the key reasons for choosing Maastricht University.

Another reason for studying in Maastricht found to be common with the German students was

that they liked the advantages of Problem Based Learning (PBL). 'That you're in small groups and it's a lot less anonymous', mentioned by Jacob, was considered as a large advantage of Maastricht. For Valentin, the small working groups were also a large plus: 'and these small working groups, they have good equipment here'. The small working groups provide another advantage, namely that it is easy to get into contact with other students: Zoe: 'Yeah, it's nice as well, due to the fact that you have these small groups. You always get to know people and the tutorials always change, so you know you will always get to know more people'. Not only was more contact with other students deemed an advantage of the PBL system, the contact with the professors was also deemed positive: 'You feel like it matters more whether you do something or whether you don't. And you feel like you get recognition from, I don't know, your tutor and the professors', as described by Filip.

Another experience that is common for many German students is the high work load at Maastricht University. Julian also mentions the 'high work load' and states that 'You're always walking in a triangle to the library, university and to home'. What comes out of many interviews with the German respondents is that the work load at Maastricht University is very high. Some students do not have the time for other things, such as learning Dutch or partying. Andreas states that in the first year time is limited to learn Dutch: 'In many cases you don't have the time actually to make a Dutch course in the first year'. A common experience is that many of the German students do not have much time to do things they would like to do due to the high work load. Some would like to learn Dutch or explore the Netherlands, but this is not possible because of the high work load.

### 4.1.3 Cultural similarities

Since the German students who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht are essentially abroad in another country they experience a different culture. The way they experience Dutch culture may have similarities and differences compared to how they experience German culture. This subsection outlines the cultural similarities between Dutch and German culture that the German students experience in Maastricht.

One common experience is that Dutch culture is not experienced that strongly and that Dutch and German culture is very similar. Peter experiences Dutch and German culture as 'pretty similar' and Anna describes her experience with Dutch and German culture as follows: 'I don't sense a lot of differences'. Concerning cultural similarities and difference both Hannah and Jacob do not experience Dutch culture strongly: 'we don't really experience a lot'. Thus, a common experience is that Dutch and German culture is perceived as being quite similar. These similarities lie in smaller things, but the essence is the same, or as Timo puts it: 'The funny thing is that I feel like that some of the cultural differences are actually not that big. It's kind of similar in a way that of temperament and all this kind of stuff'. Separate similarities were not named that much, not as much as needed to be a common experience. Some named sports, religion, punctuality, 'Grundlichkeit', pub culture and more, but each of those aspects was named by only 1 or 2 respondents. What did come out was that Dutch and German culture is very similar in general and separate similarities were named only in small amounts. Some respondents mentioned that they had not thought about similarities before, but only of differences. Many people may not notice similarities, because they are the same. Timo for example named a number of similar aspects that are similar, but may go unnoticed. Ricardo declared that he

had never thought about similarities before: 'I actually never thought about similarities between German and Dutch people'. As similarities as hard to spot it is not surprising that some respondents state that they have never thought about similarities before.

Thus, separate cultural similarities were named only in small amounts and cannot be considered as a common experience among German students. The one thing that can be considered as a common experience among the German students is the sense that Dutch and German culture is very similar in general. The general culture is similar, which has caused some respondents to have never thought about similarities before. Not really sensing a 'Dutch' culture could be related to this, since one might argue that one only senses a culture when he senses a cultural difference. Cultural similarities may go unnoticed, as they are considered to be 'normal'.

**4.1.4 Cultural differences**

Although cultural similarities were not sensed so much, cultural differences were sensed extensively by the respondents. One thing that was experienced a lot was that the respondents consider the Netherlands to be more relaxed than Germany. Filip describes his experience as follows: 'But I always have the feeling that the Dutch people are way more, much more relaxed'. Annika as a similar experience: 'I think everything is more relaxed and not everything is so strict'. This experience was shared by the bulk of the respondents. Almost all respondents experienced a similar sensation, namely that the atmosphere in the Netherlands is more relaxed than in Germany. Germany seems to be seen as uptight sometimes, whereas the atmosphere in the Netherlands is considered to be more laid-back and less stressful.

Another difference that is experienced has to do with study associations. Many respondents revealed that study associations are quite big in comparison to Germany. Hannah sums up her experience with regard to study associations like this: 'Well, I mean, there's differences with regard to student culture. Like we already talked about the study associations, it's really a big thing here'. Thus study associations are considered to be big in the Netherlands, whereas they are considered to be small in Germany. In addition, the study associations in Germany are considered to be for a small part of the student population. The experienced difference has to do with the sense that study associations in the Netherlands are perceived to be for all Dutch people.

Another perceived difference, which is related to the difference in size of study associations, is that German students think that Dutch students have more of a focus on fun during the study in the Netherlands than in Germany. Many respondents stated that during the study period, the focus does not lie solely on studying, but on extracurricular activities as well. Timo states that 'Dutch students are more focused on a good student life'. Part of this good student life seems to be about being in a study association. Some respondents mention that German students have got more of a focus on studying and making a career, whereas Dutch students are more focused on a good student life. Annika explains why the difference in study attitude between Germans and Dutch: 'But this is due to when you apply for a job in Germany, everything is based on grades and in the Holland it is not. In Holland it's more about what you did in addition to your studies'.

Another experience that was sensed by many respondents was a difference in food and food variety. Many respondents stated that food and diet life in the Netherlands is different than in

Germany. The way in which this is experienced, however, is not shared by the respondents. Julian mentions that the snackbars and snacks are different, whereas Jacob and Hannah say that the Netherlands can improve on its bread. Tanja notes that fried foods and common in the Netherlands and declares that 'that's [frying food] something really Dutch to me'. Thus an experience difference in food is a common experience among the German students. The manner in which this is experienced differs though.

A final experience that can be ranged under the label of 'cultural differences' is the sense that cultural differences are actually not that great. There were perceived differences, but they laid in general atmosphere being more relaxed, study attitude and food. In general, many respondents argued that the differences are minor. Anna, for example, mentions that she does not notice 'a lot of differences'. Alexander, who also spoke about differences in study attitude, declared: 'But there are not many big differences'. Thus, although cultural differences are perceived between Germany and the Netherlands, they are not that great. In fact, many respondents consider the Netherlands and Germany to be pretty similar in many ways. Only in some areas there are subtle cultural differences.

### 4.1.5 Culture in general

In addition to experiences concerning cultural differences and/or similarities, the German students spoke about other aspects of culture in general. These aspects have been ranged under 'culture in general', as they do not belong to one specific group. Several different comments have been made by the bulk of the respondents. These comments differed in most cases and cannot be called 'common experiences'. The experiences described by the respondents are very diverse and are about, for example the closing time of pubs, enjoying that movies in the Netherlands are spoken in the original language, the liking of Dutch treats like stroopwafels, Dutch police being strict and enjoying that people help you in English or German when they notice that you are not fluent in Dutch. Many of the experiences are separate opinions about a certain event or something the respondents experienced. For example, one respondent states that the friendly rivalry that exists between Germany and the Netherlands is a fun way to come into contact with the Netherlands. These experiences do give an insight into the respondents experience, but not into the common experience of all German students. Many more separate experiences were found, but they cannot be called common experiences as they are experienced only by a small amount of respondents.

### 4.1.6 Handling of cultural differences and similarities

Even though Dutch and German culture is perceived to be quite similar in general there are some differences. These differences are handled by the respondents in certain ways. This subsection will feature the ways in which the respondents handle the differences and will reveal the common experiences concerning this topic.

The common attitude that the respondents have towards the cultural differences revolves around accepting cultural differences between the Netherlands and Germany. Accepting and embracing the cultural differences is key in coping with them. Hannah describes it as follows: 'Well, I guess if you come to a different country you just have to, to a certain extent, embrace it'. An interesting point is made by Filip when he describes how he deals with the perceived cultural difference of the

Netherlands being more laid-back than Germany: 'You soak up the laid backness, which is good in some aspects, but also bad in some aspects. It's good, because it gives you that general relaxed feeling, but you can also get sucked into the relaxedness and simply do nothing'. Thus accepting the differences is key in handling them, even if those differences might be beneficial or disadvantageous.

In accepting cultural differences many respondents have a similar attitude, namely to be open minded. This open minded attitude lies close to the attitude of accepting the differences that has just been described. The attitude Ricardo has towards people from a different is 'being pretty tolerant to people who do things differently'. Having an open minded outlook on cultural differences is common for most respondents and can be viewed as a common experience in handling possible cultural differences.

Another cultural difference has to do with food and diet life. As many respondents argued food in the Netherlands is different from food in Germany in some ways. In handling the difference in food, some respondents said they went to Germany to bring food to Maastricht. Jacob, for example, used to go to a German bread store, but it closed, so now he brings bread from Germany sometimes: 'There was one [German bread store] on the market, but it closed like 1 or 2 months back. Sometimes I actually bring bread from Germany'. Bringing food from Germany is another way in which respondents cope with perceived cultural differences. The first 2 ways that were discussed, accepting differences and being open minded, are mental attitudes the respondents have. The final way, bringing food from Germany, is a practical manner in which respondents try to cope with existing cultural differences.

### 4.1.7 Contact with Dutch people in Maastricht

The contact that German students have with Dutch people is one of the key topics in this investigation. During the interviews with the German students many different insights and common experiences concerning contact with Dutch people in Maastricht were discovered.

One common experience is that the casual contact the German students have with Dutch people in Maastricht is good. This casual contact can be described as superficial regular contact the German students have with Dutch people for example in the supermarket or during tutorials at the university. This contact does not describe friendships of any kind, but only superficial contacts with Dutch people in Maastricht. 'Superficial contact with all of them is great' is how Jacob describes his casual contacts with Dutch people. Tanja, for example, also has good casual contacts with Dutch people in her quire and during tutorials: 'Ehm, yeah, well I'm in a quire and we have a lot of Dutch people there. That's already one connection. And then just randomly at parties and stuff'. The German students have contact with Dutch people in a variety of places in Maastricht, such as in supermarkets, cafés, tutorials at the university, sports clubs and other social events. Some German students meet Dutch people via sports, like Ricardo: 'Like, I play unihockey at the unisports and most of them are Dutch. Like 90% are Dutch people and that's where I actually get in touch with Dutch people. Yeah, when you go out to watch soccer you always get in touch with other Dutch people'. These quotes are examples of how the respondents feel about having casual contact with Dutch people. Besides these contacts being good, the casual contacts the German respondents have with Dutch people are also on a regular basis. In addition to having good experiences in terms of casual social contacts with Dutch people, the German students also think Dutch people are very friendly. This has already been

illustrated in section 4.1.1, which outlines the feelings the students have in Maastricht.

As was written already, the superficial contact is not to be mistaken with friendships. Many of the respondents argued that they do not have many Dutch friends or no Dutch friends in some cases. Peter, for example, says he has a few Dutch friends: 'I also have a couple of friends who are Dutch'. He also says that the majority of his friends is German, which will be outlined further in section 4.1.8. Hannah, for example, has 2 Dutch friends: 'I've been really good friends with 2 Dutch people'. A similar sound can be heard from most respondents, namely that they have some Dutch friends, or none in some cases. A common experience that came forward was that many respondents do not know many Dutch people and do not have many Dutch friends. 'I don't have a lot of Dutch people to talk to' is how Anna describes her experience in terms of contact with Dutch people. Thus, contacts with Dutch people are experiences as very positive, but not very intense. Many respondents describe their social contacts with Dutch as good, but superficial; superficial in the sense that no close friendships have developed. Some respondents do have 1 or 2 Dutch friends, but the overall contact with Dutch people seems to be limited to casual contacts. The absolute majority states that most close friends are German, which will be outlined further in paragraph 4.1.8.

In addition to have good social contacts with Dutch people, albeit no (or few) close friendships evolved, many respondents state that they never had major problems with Dutch people. Annika, for example, says 'I've never experienced any bad situations'. Peter describes his experience as follows: 'I mean, we're not too much involved with each other, like, there are no direct problems; that we don't get along'. This describes the common experience relating to social contacts with Dutch people in Maastricht quite good. Most respondents did not have problems with Dutch people, then again, most the contact they have with Dutch people is casual and not very intense. Similar sounds can be heard from other respondents, namely that they never had major problems with Dutch people.

Although most respondents never had major problems with Dutch people, they do seem to sense that some native Dutch people in Maastricht may be annoyed by the large presence of German students. 'I have the thing that some Dutch people can be a bit annoyed by all of the German students' is the experience of Filip. Zoe also mentioned that Dutch people in Maastricht may be annoyed by the large amount of Germans: 'Well, I think it kind of comes back to the first point we said about the Germans not being too popular here'. Many German students have the experience that native Dutch people, and sometimes students at MU as well, may be annoyed by the large amount of Germans. Although the students feel that some native Dutch people might be annoyed by the large amount of German students in Maastricht, the overall experience with Dutch people is that they are very friendly. Annika states that: 'most of the people are really nice and friendly, so it's not that I have the feeling that I feel unwelcome'. This experience is broadly shared by the respondents. So even though the respondents feel that some native Dutch people are annoyed by the German students, the overall experience they have with Dutch people is that they are very friendly.

### 4.1.8 Contacts with German people

The interviews brought several shared experiences forward concerning social contact with other German people in Maastricht. As was already portrayed in section 4.1.7, social contact with other Dutch people is fairly limited. Social contact that the respondents have with German people in

Maastricht is far more extensive though.

Almost all respondents argued that they mostly have contacts with other Germans in Maastricht. When asked with whom they had contacts in Maastricht, the absolute majority of the respondents replied that they had contact mainly with people from Germany. 'I have contact with mainly Germans' and 'I would say mostly Germans' and examples of answers of Peter and Valentin to this question.  Similar answers can be heard from almost all respondents. They all replied that most contacts they have in Maastricht are with other Germans.

Having established that the German students have mainly social contact with German students, it becomes necessary to document shared experiences concerning the nature of those social contacts. These social contacts do not remain superficial, as they did with Dutch people, but are a lot more intense actually. Many respondents indicated that their close friendships were with mainly German people in Maastricht. 'My best friends are all German, so like most of them are German' is how Annika describes the nature of social contacts she has with Germans in Maastricht. The bulk of the respondents mentioned that his/her friends are German. Especially the close friendships are mostly with German people.

Another shared experience, which is related to having more friends, has to do with the sense that one meets people via the people he knows. Timo: 'it is a gradual process that by knowing somebody you tend to have a circle of friends that are closely connected'. Meeting people and having contacts can lead to having other social contacts. As has been explained above, most contacts that the German students have are with other Germans. Tanja has a similar viewpoint as compared to Timo: 'Like, you get to know these and you get to know their friends and it kind of builds, like your little community'. So it seems that many German students meet people via friends and other social contacts. As most of their friends and social contacts are German it seems to be evident that after a while a German circle of friends is established. It must be noted, though, that this connection is based on what the respondents have said in the interviews. It is by no means a causal relation of any kind.

More on the social contacts of German students can be found in sections 4.1.9 and 4.1.10, where the experiences concerning the large amount of German and group forming will be outlined.

**4.1.9 Large number of Germans**

Interviewing the German students for their experiences in Maastricht brought up many insights concerning their experiences there. Some insights were shared by only a few respondents, whereas other insights were common for many. One experience, though, proved to be common for every single interviewed respondent. All respondents said that they feel there are many Germans in Maastricht. Some, such as Anna, argued that there are simply 'so many Germans here'. Ricardo described his experience by saying that 'there's quite a big German community [in Maastricht]'. The sense that there are many Germans in Maastricht truly is a common experience, as all respondents admit there they feel that there are a lot of Germans in Maastricht. In fact, superlative after superlative was used to express the amount of German people in Maastricht. Peter would argue that the Germans 'really took over'.

The notion that there are many German people in Maastricht is experienced as positive by

some and negative by others. Tanja, for example, considers the large amount of Germans to be positive, since 'it's also nice that you have a lot of Germans'. However, the respondents who see the large amount of Germans in Maastricht as negative greatly outnumber those who consider it to be positive. Phrases such as 'they took over' and 'they overwhelm the city' can be seen as phrases with a negative connotation.  In addition, some respondents speak out loud that they see the large number of Germans as negative.

Another experience, which is closely related to the large amount of Germans in Maastricht, is the sense that it is easy to have contact with people from Germany 'just because of the availability', as Jacob puts it. Filip also gives an insight: 'I surely notice that I'm German, because there are so many Germans and they always start to speak to you in German as soon as they recognize that you're German'. Thus, the notion that the German students have got contacts mainly with other Germans and are friends almost solely with other Germans is not strange at all. Since there are so many Germans in Maastricht, the respondents do not find it hard to get into contact with other Germans. Many respondents indicate that they do not find it difficult to meet other Germans. Thus, feeling that it is easy to meet other German people can also be called a common experience.

As the reader might conclude from this section, group forming between nationalities might take place in Maastricht. The next section (4.1.10) will reveal the common experiences related to this topic and will reveal that the German students have a clear opinion on this topic as well.

**4.1.10 Group forming**

As has already been indicated, group forming based on nationality does take place between students at Maastricht University. This section will reveal the experiences that were given by the respondents concerning this topic.

The sense that group forming between nationalities at Maastricht University takes place has already been hinted at. Group forming, meaning that Germans stick with Germans and Dutch stick with Dutch in terms of social contact, is experienced by nearly all respondents. As has already been described in the previous section, the German students have the most and most intense social contact with other German students in Maastricht. Interaction with Dutch people seems to be limited to more superficial conduct. 'It's always the 2 groups, the Dutch and now even more Germans' is how Zoe experiences the situation. The forming of groups based on nationalities is an experience commonly known to the respondents.

A common experience, which is related to group forming, is that many respondents experience a language barrier. There is a barrier that obstructs Germans and Dutch from really having contact with one another like they have with their own nationality. This language barrier stems from the sense that Germans often do not speak Dutch and the Dutch do not speak German. Annika describes it likes this: 'but at some point it's always hard to integrate with each other, since there is a language barrier'. Being asked why she does not have a lot of contact with Dutch people she replied: 'because of the language barrier'. Thus, a language barrier obstructs Germans and Dutch from integrating with each other as they would with their own nationality.

Of course, English could be used to overcome the language barrier, but the respondents beg to differ. Another common experience, which is related to group forming and the language barrier, is

the sense that speaking the mother language is easier. In addition, speaking the mother language makes it easier to make contact, which also adds to the group forming. Filip feels that even though his study material is in English it is easier to discuss it in German: 'Even though the learning material is in English, talking about it and explaining things is much more easy if somebody does it to you In German'. Alexander would agree and states: 'I think it is always easier for you to talk in your mother tongue'. Especially in a group the mother language prevails, simply because it is easier to speak. Annika: 'Like if you are in a smaller group it's not a problem at all like you wouldn't mind talking in English, but with the more people you are, the more you are willing to switch to your mother language'. The respondents feel that speaking the mother language is easier. As it is easier to speak, it also becomes easier to make contact with others of your nationality. A good example is Filip's experience concerning study material, which has been mentioned above.

### 4.1.11 Communication with nationalities other than German or Dutch

Even though the research revolves around strangeness of German students towards Dutch people in Maastricht and social contact of German students with Dutch people, the respondents have also shared a few experiences about communication with nationalities other than German or Dutch. Not only do the German students have contacts with other Germans and Dutch people in Maastricht, they also have a lot of contact with international people. The term 'international people' is used to describe people who are not Dutch or German, but are of another nationality. Peter, for example, mentions that although he mainly has contact with Germans, he also has contact 'with Dutch people, together with Germans, with English people, Polish people, it's international'. Thus, the respondents not only have contacts with only Germans and Dutch people, but also with people from countries other than Germany or the Netherlands.

### 4.2 Overview

In this chapter the common experiences of the respondents have been outlined. All experiences that the respondents have revealed in the interviews have been analyzed. The experiences which proved to be common for many respondents have been described in this section. Whether valuable or not to the research, all common feelings of the students have been illustrated in this chapter. Having revealed how the students feel in Maastricht, it becomes necessary to use what has been said to answer the partial research questions. The partial questions can be found on pages 5 and 14. In chapter 5 the insights gathered in this investigation will be used to find an answer to the partial questions.

# 5 Analysis

Having reported all common experiences in chapter 4, it is possible to analyze these findings. In this chapter the described experiences will be evaluated and used to provide an answer to the partial questions. First in paragraph 5.1, the results concerning cultural differences and similarities will be analyzed. Next, in paragraph 5.2 the results revolving around social contacts of the German students will be analyzed. In paragraph 5.3, typification will be the central theme that will be analyzed.

## 5.1 Differences and similarities

The respondents have revealed many insights concerning differences and similarities between the German students and the Dutch people in Maastricht. One common experience revolves around the sense that the German students do not strongly experience Dutch culture at all. Many respondents think that the Dutch and German cultures are fairly similar and that the essences of both cultures are the same. The respondents named a few individual similarities, but these differed among the respondents. The sense culture was not experienced strongly and that culture was perceived to be quite similar is the dominant stream of thought. Differences between German students and Dutch people in Maastricht only lie in details. Thus, perception of the self (German) and the other (Dutch person in Maastricht) seems to be fairly similar, since the overall feeling among the respondents is that both cultures are quite similar. Although the students clearly see themselves as sharing similarities with the Dutch people in Maastricht, differences also exist. Differences between the self and the other lie in smaller things, such as a more relaxed and laid back attitude towards life in general. Another difference has to do with study associations in Maastricht. These are quite big compared to Germany and many Dutch students are in a study association. Here, the perception of the self is also different from the perception of the other, since the respondents are used to smaller study associations in Germany. Food and diet life was a difference as compared to Germany. Here, the other (Dutch person in Maastricht) is also seen as being different from the self (German), since the respondents are used to different foods and a different diet life. Here, strangeness is present in a subtle form, since the self is seen as being different from the other. As these differences are small and similarities are great, strangeness most likely exists in a mild form, since the self and the other are seen as different through smaller aspects such as attitude towards life and food and diet life.

These differences were handled in 3 different ways, of which 2 concerns mental attitudes. Both mental attitudes may be called similar, as they both have to do with accepting these differences. One common mental attitude is that the German students accept the differences and embrace them. It revolved around being tolerant towards others (Dutch people in Maastricht) who might do things in a different way than German people. Another common mental attitude that the students have is to be open minded and tolerant towards people who do things differently. Not judging, but accepting differences from those who do things in a different way is a common approach towards dealing with cultural differences. Here, some respondents argued that they try to learn from those cultural differences. By accepting differences they acknowledge that an other actually is an other. They accept that strangeness exists and are at peace with that. By being tolerant towards others who might behave in a different way they respect that the other is different and do not try to force him to be different. In

addition, by learning from the other, they try to diminish feelings of strangeness by bringing the perception of the self closer to the perception of the other. A third manner in which cultural differences were handled was of a practical nature and involved bringing food from Germany that was not available in Maastricht. Here, the respondents try to minimize the amount of strangeness that the other place (Maastricht) invokes by bringing a physical part of their home place (Germany) to the strange place.

In addition to differences and similarities, many respondents argued that they feel at home in Maastricht. This took time, as it took time to get to know people and establish a friend group. But as this was done, the students started to feel at home in Maastricht. Thus, feelings of strangeness had likely declined as they started to feel more at home. They started in a strange city where they, mostly, did not know anyone. At this point the students likely felt strange in the city. As they created their own little community the feelings of strangeness melted away. Now that the students feel comfortable they have made the city their home.


## 5.2 Social contacts

The contact that the students have with Dutch people in Maastricht can be described as being of a superficial nature. This means that it can be characterized as casual contact with Dutch people during grocery shopping or during tutorials at the university. This contact takes place on a regular basis. They experience this contact as very pleasant. The respondents enjoy having contacts with Dutch people and have never had any major problems with Dutch people in Maastricht. 'Superficial contact with all of them is great' is how Jacob describes his social contact with Dutch people in Maastricht. Similar sounds can be heard from many respondents. As has been said, this social contact can be characterized as casual or superficial. The students argue that they have few, or no, Dutch friends. The sense that the students have superficial contacts on a regular basis with Dutch people in Maastricht could be related to a sense of strangeness. As was argued earlier, strangeness might cause feelings of freedom and, with that, superficial contact with others. Here, the students have superficial contact with Dutch people, which they very much enjoy. Feelings of pleasure and freedom seem to be present when interacting with Dutch people, since they have regular contact with them. These feelings could cause the students to leave their familiar grounds and interact with others. Settling in Maastricht most likely came with the desire to meet new people and live in a new environment. Having contacts with others can be seen as a manifestation of strangeness due to feelings of freedom to meet people.

As has been argued, strangeness can manifest itself in many different subtle ways. Social contacts of the German students are not limited to contact with Dutch people, but also involve contact with Germans in Maastricht. In fact, most social contacts they have are with other Germans. The interviews revealed that social contact with Dutch people in Maastricht is limited, and only concerns superficial contact. In addition, almost all close friendships are with other Germans. In Maastricht, the German students have social contacts mainly with other Germans. In addition to having mainly German contacts in Maastricht, a common experience for the students was that almost all respondents have mainly German friends. The close friendships are mostly with Germans for almost

all respondents. This could be linked to feelings of comfort when interacting with other Germans. One experience that was disclosed during the interviews was the existence of a language barrier. This language barrier stems from the sense that Germans often do not speak Dutch and the Dutch do not speak German. Even though English can be used, and is used, to overcome the language barrier, group forming among Germans still takes place. Speaking the mother language is considered to be easier and also makes it easier to make contact with other Germans. The German students find that it is easier to express themselves in German than in English, let alone Dutch. Making contact with other Germans is also easier than with Dutch people, because of the mother language. Thus, interacting with other Germans feels more comfortable for the students due to the same language. Overcoming the language barrier could be seen as a challenge. Instead, preference was given to familiarity, i.e. speaking German with other Germans. The other, i.e. other German, and the self are much closer connected than the self and a Dutch person due to a difference in language. Here, less strangeness exists between the respondents and other German, than between the respondents and Dutch people due to a difference in language. By interacting mainly with other German they reduce experiences of strangeness to a minimum.

Thus, strangeness seems to be present is subtle ways, namely that the respondents do feel free to have social contacts with others in Maastricht. They have superficial contacts with Dutch people in Maastricht and enjoy this very much. On the other hand, they do find it more comfortable to have social contacts with other German in Maastricht due the fact that they speak German. By doing this, strangeness is reduced to a minimum.

The respondents have stated that they feel at home in Maastricht. They enjoy studying in Maastricht and really like the city of Maastricht. Feeling at home took some time for the respondents, which had to do with the sense that they did not know many people in the beginning of their time in Maastricht. Over time, they developed friendships and made the city their home. It took time to get to know people, but after a while many respondents had found their own group of friends. One respondent referred to it as her 'little family'. In the beginning, the city of Maastricht and its people were strange to the respondents. They did not feel at home yet, because they did not feel comfortable yet. They did not know many people and did not know the city itself yet. Strangeness was likely present in a large amount. By meeting other people, and other Germans, they started to feel more comfortable and more at home. A part of the self, namely contacts with Germans, was lost when moving to Maastricht. Therefore, confrontation with the other seemed to be more challenging, since the other was present everywhere. By meeting other German a part of the self, namely German contacts, was regained and the comfort level rose. After meeting people and making friends (with Germans) they became more comfortable and started to feel more at home.

In the chapter 2 it was argued that the positive side of strangeness caused more social contact and that the negative side of strangeness caused less social contact. This was visualized in figure 2. In practice it turned out that a sense of more or less social contact did not apply for the German students. What did matter was with whom the students had contacts. They mainly had contacts with other Germans in Maastricht. Contact with Dutch people in Maastricht, albeit perceived as very positive, was limited to superficial contact. Thus, this part of the theory does not seem to hold in

practice, as the amount of contact the German students have is not influenced by feelings of strangeness. Feelings of strangeness influence with whom the students have contact, not the total amount of contacts.

Group forming seemed to take place causing the German students to form their own community in Maastricht, having only limited contacts with Dutch people. There was a clear sensation of in-group and out-group behavior. In-group, meaning contacts with other Germans, consisted of the bulk of the social contacts. These contacts were also the most intense. Out-group, meaning contacts with Dutch people in Maastricht, was limited to superficial contacts. As was argued, this group forming occurred mainly due to a language barrier.

It can be argued that the German students form their own community in Maastricht. They are part of Maastricht, but are seen as others (Germans) at the same time. Thus, at the same time they are not completely part of Maastricht as well. They occupy an ambivalent position, being part of Maastricht, but being separate from it at the same time. Being part of Maastricht, they are close to the native people of Maastricht. However, by having their own community, they seem to be remote from it at the same time. Thus, it seems that the theory concerning feelings of ambivalence, which was outlined in chapter 2, was very applicable for this case.


## 5.3 Typification

Typification was a sensation that was felt in very delicate ways by the respondents. Even though little of the common experiences relate to the German students feeling that they are reduced to a few basic characteristics, there were feelings of typification in Maastricht.  This has to do with the sense that the students feel that some Dutch people are annoyed with the large number of German students. The students are made aware of this by comments of Dutch people such as 'oh, another one'. All in all, however, the students think that Dutch people are very friendly. They thoroughly enjoy having contact with Dutch people and enjoy studying and living in Maastricht. Here, the German students are reduced to a few characteristics, since numerals are used to describe the German students. By saying something such as 'oh another one', the students are seen as being a dime a dozen. This means that the Germans are seen as a set of characteristics and not as a full human being in all its complexity.

One way in which the German students typify Dutch people is by stating that they are very friendly. Many of the respondents see Dutch people as very friendly people. By seeing Dutch people as being very friendly they reduce them to a set of characteristics. Even though this kind of typifying is positive it can still be called typification.

Still, the degree to which German students feel typified by Dutch people and typify Dutch people themselves seems to be small. Only the two experiences, which were mentioned above, revealed feelings of typification. Even though the students feel that some Dutch people may be annoyed with the large amount of German in Maastricht, the general experiences about Dutch people are very positive.

The fact that positive typification takes place among the researched respondents is in contradiction with the theory about typification. The theory, as can be read in chapter 2, has a rather negative connotation. Reducing a person to a set of characteristics and, thus, seeing him as less than

an equal, was portrayed as negative. However, this research has shown that typification can also have a positive connotation. By seeing Dutch people as friendly, the German students reduce Dutch people in Maastricht to a certain set of characteristics. These characteristics, however, are positive. This broadens the view one can have on typification. Typification does not necessarily have to be a negative experience. Instead, it can also have a positive connotation depending on the characteristics the individual is reduced to.

## 5.6 Overview

In this chapter the results, which were outlined in chapter 4, were analyzed. The common experiences of the students, which were charted in chapter 4, have been used to for analysis relating to the concept of strangeness. By analyzing the data, a picture concerning feelings of strangeness among German students, who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht, has been painted. All that remains now is to answer the main research question and conclude on the experiences of the students relating to strangeness. This will be done in the next and final chapter: chapter 6. Furthermore, recommendations for further research will also be given.

# 6 Conclusion and recommendations

In the previous chapter the partial questions have been answered. All that remains now is to conclude the research by answering the central research question. This will be done in paragraph 6.1. In addition, recommendations for further research and a reflection will be given in paragraph 6.2.

## 6.1 Conclusion

This research has tried to chart experiences of strangeness of German students, who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht. The amount of German students in Maastricht, who study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht, is, with approximately 2500 students, large. Many things about strangeness have been written, by different authors in different time periods. Aspects that were described in the literature have been used to devise a theoretical framework that to provide a definition of strangeness, and a framework for analyzing strangeness, for this research. In order to find out if these German students experience strangeness towards Dutch people in Maastricht and to see how it influences social contacts of the students, 14 German students have been interviewed. These students study at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht as well. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that there was ample space available for the students to share their experiences concerning strangeness and their social contacts. The interview guide can be found in appendix 2. To refresh one's memory, the research question of the bachelor thesis research shall be stated below.

Research question: *To what degree do German students, who follow a complete bachelor or master program at the University of Maastricht and live in Maastricht, experience a feeling of strangeness towards Dutch people in Maastricht and to what degree does this feeling of strangeness influence social contacts with Dutch people in Maastricht of these German students?*

With the insights gained from the analysis it is now possible to answer the main research question. The first part of the research question relates to strangeness and asks to what degree German students, who follow a complete bachelor or master program at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht, experience strangeness towards Dutch people in Maastricht.

Strangeness is a concept that can manifest itself in different, subtle ways. When the perception of the self is different from the perception of the other, one sees the other person as being different from the self. Here, strangeness comes into play. The respondents, coming from Germany, see many cultural similarities between Germany and the Netherlands. The perception of the self thus lies close to the perception of the other. Cultural differences were also spotted by the respondents. Several differences, which were outlined in chapter 4, were experienced by the German students, which reminded the German students that they are 'others' in Maastricht. The perception of the self, in this instance, differs from the perception of the other, which causes them to see differences. Since the similarities are great and the differences are small, strangeness seems to play a small, delicate role. The differences lie in details and are not considered to be fundamental differences. When coping with the differences, the students try to be open minded and tolerant. With that they do not attempt to bring the perception of the other closer to the perception of the self. Instead, they try to learn from the Dutch people in Maastricht and, with that, bring the perception of the self closer to the perception of the

other. In addition, by bringing food from Germany to compensate for lack of German food in Maastricht, they bring a part of the self back to the strange city.

One common experience for the students is that they enjoy studying at Maastricht University. They enjoy the group work, which comes with the Problem Based Learning system that is used at Maastricht University. In addition, they like Maastricht as well. The overall feelings about Maastricht were very positive, and the students like the city for its relaxed atmosphere and friendly inhabitants. The students stated that they feel at home in Maastricht. Feeling at home took some time, since it took time to get to know people in Maastricht and make friends there. After a while, once they got to know people and made friends, they felt at home in Maastricht. Here, experiences of strangeness manifest themselves largely in a positive way, as the students feel comfortable in Maastricht. Feeling at home in Maastricht took time, which presented a challenge for the German students. Getting acquainted with the city helped them to overcome this challenge and feel comfortable in Maastricht.

The second part of the research question revolves around the influence that feelings of strangeness have on the social contacts with Dutch people in Maastricht. As has been written in chapters 4 and 5, the students mainly have social contact with other Germans in Maastricht. In addition, close friendships are virtually all with other Germans, although a few respondents stated that they have 1 or 2 Dutch friends. Still, most friendships they have are with Germans and most social contacts in general are with other Germans. Social contact with Dutch people is limited to casual contact. This contact can be seen as contact with Dutch people during tutorials at the university, or during grocery shopping. The contact that the students have with Dutch people in Maastricht is perceived as very positive. The respondents mostly said that they very much enjoy having contact with Dutch people. Feelings of pleasure and comfort seem to be dominant when interacting with Dutch people in Maastricht, since the respondents enjoy having contact with Dutch people there. On the other hand, feelings of challenge or threat are also present among the respondents. The majority of the social contacts is with other German students. Here, a language barrier obstructs contact with Dutch people and improves the contact between German students. Expressing oneself in the mother language is seen as easier and, in addition, the students think the same mother tongue makes it easier to make contact with other Germans. The language barrier provides a challenge which could have been overcome in order to reduce feelings of strangeness. Instead, they chose for familiarity by interacting mostly with other Germans. Strangeness thus seems to be present in two ways, namely both in feelings of pleasure and freedom and in feelings of challenge. It is clear that both feelings are subtle and might differ in strength. The feelings of strangeness might also be noticed by the respondents, but might manifest itself in more delicate ways.

A clear discovery that was made with this research is the sense that the dichotomy between the positive side of strangeness and negative side of strangeness does not hold in practice. In practice, strangeness works in subtle ways. A division between a positive and negative side is difficult to see in practice. This division was depicted in figure 2 in chapter 2. Theories about strangeness were quite clear about a division between feelings of pleasure and feelings of threat. In practice these feelings might be hard to see and might exist in other forms. Feelings of threat may for example be hidden in

feelings of challenge or in a process of group forming. In fact, both positive and negative sides might interplay and mix at the same time. Thus, the concept of strangeness is far more subtle than is described in the existing theories. This research has shown that strangeness is a very subtle concept that may be hard to see and that may manifest itself in many different ways.

## 6.2 Recommendations and reflection

With this research I have attempted to make an empirical contribution to the theories around strangeness. Maastricht has been taken as case study, where German students, who follow a complete bachelor or master program at Maastricht University and live in Maastricht, have been researched for feelings of strangeness. As strangeness can influence social contacts, this has been investigated as well.

This research has shown that strangeness works in delicate ways. Different feelings, invoked by feelings of strangeness, were present. Hints of strangeness were present. An example is the fact that the respondents found it a lot easier to name cultural differences rather than similarities. Even though Dutch and German culture was seen as rather similar, individual similarities were a lot harder to spot than individual differences. When the perception of the self is different from the perception of the other, strangeness comes into play. Because there are differences, people adopt different strategies in handling with those.

As strangeness is a concept that works in subtle ways, more research would benefit the existing knowledge of how strangeness works. Maastricht has served as a case study for this investigation. In order to get a better picture of the concept of strangeness, and of the ways in which it manifests itself, more case studies ought to be studied. The amount of empirical research concerning strangeness still is quite limited. Therefore I would recommend that more empirical research revolving around this topic is done in order to get a better understanding of strangeness in all its facets.

Many of the theories and writings about strangeness and related topics are dated. New theories that explain strangeness in today's world are necessary, since the world of today is different from, say, the world in 1995 or 1950. New theories concerning strangeness might bring about a new perspective on this topic and provide a better understanding of strangeness in today's world. Existing theories fail to take into account the complexity of human life. The existing theories make quite a clear-cut dichotomy between feelings of pleasure and threat, as if it were either one or the other. In practice, strangeness works much more delicate. The dichotomy does not seem to hold in practice, since both feelings might be present at the same time. Therefore, more empirical research should be done in order to obtain a more realistic and practical view on strangeness.

As this research is a bachelor thesis research focusing solely on 1 case, further research could be done on another case, or on multiple cases. Maastricht is a unique case, with unique characteristics. Another research could, for example, be done on a different case with different features. By studying more cases, more insights on strangeness could be gathered on this topic. As Maastricht is one single case, it is unclear to what extent the unique features of Maastricht interplay with the experience of strangeness. By studying and comparing more cases, more insights can be gathered about strangeness.

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# Appendix 1

## Kritische literatuurbespreking: Strangeness en Otherness

- *Bert Hegger*

*Before I will commence my literature review I will first explain how I studied the literature concerning 'strangeness'. First, I skimmed a number of sources to get a broad picture of strangeness and related concepts. I searched for scientific papers and books concerning strangeness and related concepts to get an image of the concept and important writers and philosophers. After this I looked more closely at scientific papers and books concerning strangeness and otherness. Many sources proved to be useful, which have created a diverse portfolio of literature.*

*The literature study has given me a clear idea of the concept of strangeness, otherness and concepts related to these. From the literature study a few different topics and concepts came up that explain what strangeness is. In this critical review of literature I will first, by using the literature, determine what strangeness is, and what strangers are. After this a paragraph on the closeness and remoteness, which characterizes strangeness, will follow. Finally a picture of strangeness in today's world will be given.*

### Strangeness and strangers

Strangeness, and strangers, are topics that are becoming more and more visible in society, as society is becoming more diverse. Most Western European nations and even cities have very diverse populations. The city of Amsterdam alone is home to 175 different nationalities (Iamsterdam, 2013). Whether it is about people migrating to a new place who are considered to be strange, and feel strange themselves, or about students coming from abroad to study in another country. The world is becoming ever more globalised and strangeness is felt more and more among more people. First of all, a distinction between strangeness and strangers must be made. A stranger is a person who is culturally, socially, racially, or in any other way different from a host group. Strangeness is a feeling, an experience, which may exist between social actors (Marotta, 2010). This feeling of strangeness can exist in every relationship (Simmel, 1950). Therefore experiencing strangeness does not necessarily mean that one is a stranger (Marotta, 2010). An interesting example is given by Gurevitch concerning the revelation of otherness in one's parent. A child usually is emotionally close with his parents and sees, for example his father, first and foremost as his father. When the child sees the father in a different setting, for example at work with coworkers the father has a different identity, namely that of a (co)worker. The father is disconnected with fatherhood, which can create a distance between the child and the father. This can lead to feelings of sadness and anger, since reality and identity no longer correspond with each other (1988).

Simmel describes the stranger as 'the person who comes and stays tomorrow' (1950). This person does not belong to a group, but is an element of a group. This is characterized by a sensation of closeness and remoteness in the relationship with the group, which will be outlined further in the next paragraph (Simmel, 1950). According to Bauman, the stranger has no obligations to another

person of group. The contacts the stranger has are superficial, due to mutual estrangement. This, thanks to the 'universal otherhood of city life' may lead to pleasure and freedom, as the stranger has no obligations and can make superficial contact only (Bauman, 1995). Another way the stranger may be perceived is as a threat. The stranger 'ante portas', meaning 'at the gate', is someone that needs to be kept at bay. This notion deals with an 'idealized conception of the secure home' (Bauman, 1995). The home receives its meaning from the opposition between risk and control, danger and security and can be viewed as a safe haven, or a comfort zone (Bauman, 1995). The stranger, or migrant standing at the gate, distorts this comfort zone and creates fear. The fear of being overwhelmed by others, that delete the known world and identity (Van Houtum & Pijpers, 2007). This would cause a desire to keep the stranger at bay, which would diminish interaction with that person. A third way of viewing strangers, according to Bauman, is to view the stranger as 'Janus faced'. The city can bring the stranger both pleasure and danger, both opportunity and threat. The postmodern city may be inviting and pleasurable and sinister and menacing, which are contradictory cultural offers. Since the stranger may use both offers, he is described to have two faces. Both faces are blurred (Bauman, 1995).

A process that strangers undergo when they face a dominant host group is a process of objectification. A person, perceived as a stranger, is abstracted to a certain type and is not treated as an individual (Rundell, 2004). This typification is constantly upheld (Gurevitch, 1988). The making of the stranger is done by people themselves, by refusing to recognize people as human beings (Jacobsen & Poder, 2008). By reducing a person to a few 'typical' characteristics one fails to recognize another as a complete human being, which can create an experience of strangeness with that person. By failing to recognize people as human beings, i.e. typifying them, we create strangers. They are in many ways denied access to society and are a product of the ordering of the host group and are made strange. This kind of thinking leaves out a third possibility, apart from 'us' and 'them' (Jacobsen & Poder, 2008).

By making order, and making culture, we create a border. Creating a border is a 'process of spatial differentiation' (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2001). Thus, it is an active process done by people. Furthermore, borders both reject and erect othering. By creating a cohesive order, differences inside the borders are meditated. However, new differences are created with those that live outside the borders. This is known as the paradox of borders (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2001).

One form of othering can be described as Orientalism, as described by Said (1994). In this form of othering, one 'world' is compared with another 'world', namely the Orient and the Occident. In this theory the othering of the Orient is discussed, in which the Orient is seen as morally inferior and therefore barbaric compared the Occident. Here, the Occident is considered to be the norm and an 'other' is created that is seen as different and therefore morally inferior to the 'Occident'. The Orient is compared with this norm and seen as inferior, since it has different norms and values than the Occident (Said, 1994).

Strangeness is a sensation, an experience that one may experience in every relationship to a certain degree (Simmel, 1950). This sensation of strangeness, or otherness, is characterized by feelings of nearness and farness at the same time, which will be outlined in the next paragraph. The feeling of otherness is an obstacle for mutual understanding. Here it is assumed that 'communication

in interpersonal relations in dependent upon the supposition of sameness of the self and the other' (Gurevitch, 1988). One side of strangeness is that it does not constitute interpersonal communication. Strangeness can be seen as the realm that lies between the host society and the other (Gurevitch, 1988). In order to communicate one must assume that the other and the self are the same. Typification of the other, which happens with strangers, thus obstructs mutual understanding and communication. An interesting point is shown by Rouchy, who states the differences between two individuals who meet and two groups who meet. When two individuals of a different nationality meet, they often look for similarities of experience. This is often not perceived as a threatening situation. When two groups of two different nationalities meet cultural differences are more easily spotted. This can invoke a feeling of strangeness towards the other group, as group identity, and the differences between the identities are more easily spotted (2002).

The positive side of strangeness is that it may lead to more contacts, due to mutual estrangement. People feel estranged from one another and do not feel obligations towards each other. This can lead to a momentary link, a superficial contact between people (Bauman, 1995). Simmel acknowledges the freedom associated with being a stranger. He states that being a stranger in a place may result in freedom, due to the lack of commitments the stranger has to this place (1950). This is in concurrence with Bauman's philosophy, which states that the positive side of strangeness is freedom due to lack of obligations towards each other, which, as has been written, can create superficial contacts between people. These two sides of strangeness, both positive and negative may exist simultaneously, as strangeness consists of closeness and remoteness at the same time, which will be outlined in the next paragraph.


**Ambivalent position**

As has been stated before the experience of strangeness is characterized by feelings of remoteness and closeness at the same time (Morakhovski, 2000). In the time of global communication and globalization individuals may be physically close, but emotionally remote. The distinction between 'here' and 'there' becomes vague, due to the so called time-space compression. 'There' can be 'here' and 'here' can be far away. Thus, the division between spaces is becoming blurred and strangerhood and strangeness are no longer temporary conditions, but may be a way of life for some (Morakhovski, 2000). Since people may be emotionally remote, but physically close, feelings of familiarity and unfamiliarity can develop towards these people. A sensation of ambivalence can prevail, where a person might not be part of a group, but is an element of a group. The stranger is accepted into the group, but is detached from it at the same time (Simmel, 1950). Due to this ambivalent position, being close and remote at the same time, fear might be produced in a society, since the stranger is part of the society and detached from it at the same time. The stranger violates a border, and is part of both the new society and the old society (Jacobsen & Poder). It is a space between categories, which undermines binarisms such as 'friend – enemy'. He occupies a space, which is characterized by indifference. The present day stranger, also referred to as cosmopolitan stranger, is neither friend nor enemy and has a normal attitude towards others (Stichweh, 1997).

As has been written this ambivalent position causes fear in the host society, since the stranger

violates borders and occupies a space 'in between' worlds (Jacobsen & Poder). They stand on the threshold of two worlds, namely the new society and the society where he comes from. This fear could be reduced by taking on a cosmopolitan attitude. Cosmopolitanism is a humanistic ideal, which revolves around the willingness to tolerate others. Studies have shown that cosmopolitan people accommodate diversity and conceptualise otherness in such a way that it reduces or even eliminates a sense of threat (Calcutt & Skrbis, 2009). This orientation could be related to a sense of common humanity, where people are hospitable to others on the basis of their shared humanity. As Kant describes it one should 'treat others with peace, as long as he treats you with peace' (Rundell, 2004). A typification of strangers is out of the question, as this focuses on differences and does not focus on common humanity. Jacobsen & Poder argue that one should treat a stranger as a representation of himself and not as an unwanted peculiarity (2008). It must be noted that cosmopolitanism is not an historic inevitability, but a cultural and cognitive orientation. People must actively practice this orientation to make it a reality (Calcutt & Skrbis, 2009).

The ambivalence which has been written about is not fixed, but changes over time. Firstly the description of oneself changes over time and is fluid. In addition, the intersection of self-perception and perception of the self by others is subject to change (Young, 2005). It can change when one goes from one social environment to the other. In addition, the problem of otherness, as David & Rawls call it, is different and differently constructed in modern differentiated societies (2006).

The space 'in between' could be referred to as Thirdspace. Thirdspace is limitless and can be viewed from all angles. All comes together in thirdspace, abstract and concrete, subjectivity and objectivity (Soja, 1996). It is a space that goes beyond binarisms such as friend-enemy and is open to strangeness. This space can be seen as a heterotopia, where borders have become blurred. There is a rejection of order of sameness and an acknowledgement of differences (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2001). Today, most people have this third status, and have an indifferent attitude to others. In an urban environment strangers are invisible or omnipresent, they are not distinct social figures (Stichweh, 1997).

**Strangeness through the years**

Traditionally, insiders and outsiders of a society were divided by a clear boundary. This boundary separated the insiders of a given society from the outsiders of that society, thus establishing social cohesion among the insiders of the society (David & Rawls, 2006). Today, our society is modern and differentiated. For this reason there are fewer grounds against which the creation of otherness could produce social cohesion (David & Rawls, 2006). People are constantly exposed to those with different beliefs and characters because of globalization. By clearly demarcating 'us' from 'them' one would focus on differences between people, which serves no purpose as we are constantly confronted with strangers. Social cohesion must now be created between people with different beliefs and characters. Through a shared commitment to interaction, boundaries between people can be overcome and equality can be achieved (David & Rawls, 2006). Mutual orientation and trust are crucial to interaction. Differences must be overcome through reciprocity and trust. Focusing on 'coordinated activity required by everyday encounters becomes a foundation for intelligibity and social

order' (David & Rawls, 2006). These everyday encounters can be seen as situated practices, or a situated solidarity. This means that people ought to show a certain level of solidarity towards others who share a mutual orientation to the same situated practice (David & Rawls, 2006). Othering the other is an obstacle for mutual understanding and does not constitute interpersonal communication. Instead, separation and difference lead to estrangement from each other (Gurevitch, 1988). By focusing on similarities and common humanity, boundaries can be overcome. Othering, which is an active process, would create boundaries and borders.

Through situated practices strangeness can be overcome and interaction can take place between people. They have certain requirements, which are necessary for interaction to succeed. Firstly, trust is necessary for a situated action. This comes down to the notion that people should be able to participate in practices based on their competence (David & Rawls, 2006). Social class, culture or race ought to be irrelevant in situated practices. Otherness would exclude others from situated practices, which would diminish interaction between people. Since strangers, or others, often produce fear in a society due to their ambivalent position they are kept at a distance (Jacobsen & Poder). A second requirement of situated practices is justice, which relates to equality of accessibility of daily practices. Without equality, modern society would fail, since social contradictions between social groups would form. This would prevent forms of social engagement. Inequality between social groups threatens social solidarity and intelligibity (David & Rawls, 2006). Reflexivity is a third requirement for situated practices. This is related to the interpretation of what another person says. In a conversation one person speaks, while the other interprets. He then conveys his recognition to the other. The reflexivity here is the back and forth process of speaking and interpreting, which is a mutual obligation in order to interact (David & Rawls, 2006). The fourth requirement to situated practices is the benefit of the doubt, which takes into account that an interpretation in a conversation is sometimes not understood (David & Rawls, 2006). Related to this is the common humanity argument, which states that one should focus on similarities and on common humanity. A mistake of interpretation is part of a common humanity.

**Necessary research**

Although several studies on strangeness have been done so far, the extent to which strangeness has been investigated in practice seems limited. An example of a study is the investigation to the sense of belonging among high school students representing 4 ethnic groups by Faircloth & Hamm (2005). This was a quantitative study, analyzing a large amount of high school students on certain domains using statistical analysis. Since the sense of belonging was the topic of investigation, it could be related to the concept of strangeness, as strangeness could hamper with a sense of belonging. Another example of a study was the othering across time and place in the Suikoden video game series. In this qualitative study, fan websites of the Suikoden game were analysed by Schwartz (2008). A questionnaire was filled out by 11 users and a textual analysis to analyse the function of online discussion was carried out. Another example of a study related to strangeness is the study of discrimination of non-western migrants in the Netherlands at the labour market (Andriesen, Nievers & Dagevos, 2012). What I have not found so far were studies concerning experiences of strangeness or

otherness among groups of people in a certain society. Such a study could be used to measure strangeness and otherness, and with that see how well this group is integrated in a certain society. As has been written, strangeness has two sides, namely a positive and a negative side. The positive side, associated with freedom, encourages contact between people. The negative side, associated with the stranger an enemy, or someone to be kept at bay diminishes contact between people. I have not been able to find a research focusing on both aspects, to find out if a certain side is dominant. This could explain the integration of a certain group in society. Many studies concerning integration of different cultural, ethnic and social groups have been done. These studies may focus on for example the acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands or ethnic diversity and study performances in secundary school (SCP, 2013). What I miss are studies revolving around the concepts of otherness and strangeness. Otherness and strangeness may be positive and negative to social interaction and has, according to Bauman, two faces (1995). It may be seen as 'Janus faced'. It can, as Gurevitch describes, be negative, but it can also be a positive experience. Being a stranger in a city can invoke feelings of pleasure and excitement. The city is new to a person and offers all sorts of pleasures and excitements (Bauman, 1995). Thus strangeness, in a city, can be characterized as being two faced, invoking positive and negative feelings. So far, studies that look for feelings such as these seem to be very scarce. An interesting topic, of which I have not found much research, would be an investigation of the experiences of strangeness of international students in a certain student city. Some cities have a very international university, which adds to the cultural and social diversity in a city. This could be a topic where the notions of otherness and strangeness could be used to investigate experiences of international students in a city. If strangeness were to be strongly present among these students, it might lead to less interaction with other groups. On the other hand, strangeness in a student city could lead to pleasure, due to the ample amount of opportunities and pleasures that can be found in the city. The negative side of strangeness could lead to typification, or even to separation and difference between groups, which counteracts the diversity and ethnic 'mosaics' that some cities try to create. In contrast, it could also lead to more interaction, if the positive side of strangeness, revolving around opportunities and happiness, has the upper hand. The city of Maastricht, for example, wishes to be a 'mosaic' of different cultures, and wants to be a tolerant city (Weling, 2005). This city has a very diverse student population, since 43% of all registered students of Maastricht University is international, meaning nearly 7000 students at the University of Maastricht are international students (Maastricht University, 2012). This could be a case that could be investigated.

Since every relationship has elements of strangeness, one would need to investigate the degree of strangeness experienced in a certain group. Too much strangeness could mean that the group does not interact much with the host society. Furthermore, groups often cluster together (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2001). Group – group communication may feel threatening to the members, since cultural differences are more easily spotted (Rouchy, 2002). This could enhance group clustering even more, and with that, diminish interaction between the groups. Since the city is 'Janus faced', positive sensations could also be of influence in the social relations in a city. One could investigate strangeness in a city and research how both faces of strangeness in a city interplay, for example among a group of international students.

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# Appendix 2

**Interviewguide**

The goal of this thesis is *to contribute empirically to the theories around strangeness and gain insights in the experience of strangeness of German students, who follow a complete bachelor or master program at the University of Maastricht and live in Maastricht, towards Dutch people in Maastricht by analyzing to what degree strangeness is experienced and how it influences social contact between these German students and the Dutch people in Maastricht.*

**Introduction**

1) State why I would like to interview the student, namely that it is for my bachelor thesis research.

2) (If not asked in advance) Ask if I can record the interview. State that it is for research purposes only. Ask for e-mail address as well, will only be used for contact if my supervisor deems it necessary, for example to check if the interview really took place.


1) **What's your name?**

2) **What's your age?**

3) **Where are you from in Germany?**

4) **What do you study?**

5) **What's your e-mail address? (Only for checking, for my supervisor, your e-mail address will not be mentioned in the research)**

6) **Why did you come to Maastricht?**

7) **What's it like studying in Maastricht?**

8) **Coming to Maastricht, how do you feel when being in Maastricht?**
   -Why?

**9) Do you notice that you are an international student in Maastricht? Or that you are German? In what way?**

        -How does this happen?

        - Why?

**10) Being a German in the Netherlands, how do you experience Dutch culture?**

        -Do you experience differences?

        -How do you experience these differences?

        -Why do you perceive it as a difference?

        -In what way?

**11) Do you also notice similarities?**

        -Why?

        -How do you experience these similarities?

        -In what way?

**12) How do you see these differences/similarities?**

        -What do you do to cope with differences/similarities?

        -Why?

**13) Maastricht has an international ambiance. With whom do you have contacts exactly in Maastricht?**

        -Why?

        -How much contact do you have with Dutch people?

        -How much contact do you have with German people?

**14) Like was said before, Maastricht has an international ambiance, how do you experience contacts with Dutch people?**

**15) Is there anything you would like to tell me more about your experiences in Maastricht?**

**End**

Thank for interview

Give stroopwafels as thanks for giving the interview