

Home is where the hearts are

A qualitative study on home-making practices of expatriate families in the Brainport region of the Netherlands and the role of the Get in Touch program

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Preface

Since the beginning of my academic career, different cultures and the way they interact with each other have always fascinated me. Though my Bachelor's in Business Administration did not satisfy this fascination, the Master's programme in Human Geography definitely did. Though the various courses proved to be a good fit, the Master's thesis was a struggle. Even though it may have taken some time, I can definitely say that I am satisfied about the research you have in front of you; a research that not only caters to my interests on cultural differences and interactions, but one that is contemporary in nature as well.

Before proceeding, I would like to express my gratitude to various persons. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Pascal Beckers, by introducing me to the topic and by providing extensive help and feedback during the whole process. I would further like to thank Carola Eijssenring and Ed Heerschap, who introduced me to the Get in Touch family and who have helped my research as best as possible, for which I would also like to thank all of the GiT spouses. For providing both advice and company, I would like to thank my fellow Human Geography students. And last, but definitely not least, I would like to thank my family, who have always supported me in every step of my academic career.

Summary

The purpose of this research is twofold. Primarily, it aims to develop new insights into the way expatriate families make an effort to ‘feel at home’, achieved through so-called home-making practices. It is argued that this is a crucial topic to require more understanding of; due to adjustment problems, many cases of early terminations of expat contracts have been documented. A troublesome development, as the influx of expats can increase a region’s competitive advantage. Secondly, this research aims to study the possible influence of a social support program on these home-making practices.

The specific setting for this research is the Brainport region of the Netherlands, a major technological breeding ground, which hosts a large number of expats. For the region, talent retention is a crucial endeavour, making insights into expats’ home-making practices valuable. For nearly ten years, a social support program for international spouses called Get in Touch (GiT) has been a life changer for expat families; due to the program’s impact, less instances of an early departure of expats have been documented.

As such, this research delves deeper in the situation of expat families in the Brainport region. Through a combination of qualitative research methods, home-making practices of these expat families’ will be documented, and the possible influence of the GiT program on these home-making practices will be unravelled.

Research question: *“How do expatriates families in the Brainport region engage in home-making practices and what role does the Get in Touch program play?”*

Key words: *Expat families, home-making, social support, semi-structured interviews, participant observations, thematic analysis*

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1. Introduction & research question

1.1 Introduction

Expatriates, or expats for short, are individuals who, usually, have been sent by their companies to live and work in a foreign country on a temporary basis (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). Becoming an expat can be advantageous for the individual expat, as embarking on an ‘expat adventure’ increases their chances of long-term success in their careers; significant international experience can lead to an increase in wage, performance, promotions, and chances for high-level executive positions (Benson & Pattie, 2008). International assignments are not only advantageous for the individual expat; it is desirable for the host region to have numerous expats living and working in the region, as this increases the presence of international talent. A larger pool of talented people, furthermore, can increase a region’s competitive advantage; internationally talented people accumulate and impart knowledge, employ a wide arrange of networks, and have the ability interact appropriately in different cultural contexts (Florida, 1995; Collings, McDonnell & Scullion, 2009).

While these advantages sound promising, many expat adventures are not without challenges. A prominent challenge expats face is the adaptation to their new place in the host country; an expats’ cross-cultural adjustment to the host country is a key element to the success of the assignment (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Caligiuri, 1997; Hack-Polay, 2012; Kealey and Protheroe, 1996; Sappinen, 1993). This is not a novel thought, as research on cross-cultural adjustment has received much attention (Caligiuri, Philips, Lazarova, Tarique & Burgi, 2001). The adjustment process that the expats’ spouse undergoes, however, is often overlooked (Bauer & Taylor, 2001). This is problematic, as poor adjustment by a spouse is a main factor contributing to an early departure from the host country (Bauer & Taylor, 2001; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

The city of Eindhoven is the largest city and capital of the province of Noord Brabant, as well as the fifth largest city in The Netherlands. The city and its surrounding area host a large number of expats. This region is also known as the Brainport region, as it is the major technology node of the Netherlands (Maldonado & Romein, 2009). Most of the expats here have brought their partners, and sometimes children, along with them. While the expats themselves have employment and quickly become part of a community of expats, their partners often find themselves in a difficult situation. As mentioned earlier, the adjustment of spouses is often overlooked, and this is also the case in the Brainport region. The spouses join their partner in moving to a country where they do not know the language, do not have a job, and do not

have a social circle. Many of the expats' partners start experiencing loneliness and unhappiness, and in a few cases, this has led to an early termination of the expats' employment contract. In these cases, the expats decided to go back to their country of origin much earlier than planned, because their partners felt so out of place. (Eijssenring & Van Hoorn, 2013).

This spousal adjustment problem led to the birth of the Get in Touch (GiT) program, a program that aims to help partners of expats to obtain a social foundation in Eindhoven. The GiT program has been active for around nine years, with great success so far. Many spouses showed an increase in happiness and a decrease in loneliness thanks to GiT, and furthermore, less early departures from the Brainport region due to spousal inability to adjust were documented (Eijssenring & Van Hoorn, 2013).

The current study delves deeper in the problem of adjustment, and more specifically, in home-making practices. It is argued that the process of adjustment becomes much more difficult if an individual does not feel at home in the host country (Johnson & Sandu, 2007; Ward & Styles, 2005; Thurber & Walton, 2012). This process of feeling at home is achieved through so called home-making practices, which are "actual day-to-day domestic living experiences that transform a house into a home," (Bilecen, 2017). While research on home-making practices has been conducted extensively with regards to migrants, much less research on this topic has been done with regards to expats (i.e. Bilecen, 2017; Meijering & Lager, 2014; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Rivlin & Moore, 2001). It is, however, a topic that needs additional research in regards to the desire for talent retention. Insights into the possible home-making practices of expats can be useful for a region, as it desires to retain talent for as long as possible. Furthermore, this research has a specific focus on the GIT program. While the project has proved to be a success, this research investigates whether or not GiT has been a crucial factor for expat families to stay in the region.

1.2 Societal relevance

When an individual or a couple takes the journey abroad, either temporarily or for an unspecified amount of time, they would need to make an effort to feel themselves at home at this place abroad. After all, feeling at home, or at least feeling like you belong somewhere, is an important factor for adjustment (Johnson & Sandu, 2007; Ward & Styles, 2005; Thurber & Walton, 2012).

The expats and their partners in the Brainport region usually reside in the area for a couple of years. During these years, they possibly transform their new place in the host country into a home, through the so-called home-making practices. It is necessary to find out if, and in

what way, they make use of varying home-making practices. The GiT program might be an important factor in these home-making practices. As mentioned before, there have been a few instances where the expats' contract was terminated earlier than planned, as the partner was unable to adjust. This has, however, occurred much less in the past years, possibly signalling the success of the GiT program.

The reason why having an overview of expats' and their partners' home-making practices is in need of investigation has to do with talent, and more specifically the retention of talent. Expats are called knowledge migrants for a reason; they are, in general, highly-educated and skilled people, who bring their specific knowledge, talents, and expertise to their temporary destination. The arrival of many of such knowledge migrants creates a large pool of talents, and international talent can be an important factor for competitive advantage (Collings, McDonnell & Scullion, 2009). As such, it would make sense for organisations to have a desire to keep this international talent in the region for as long as possible. The longer talented knowledge migrants stay in a region or within an organisation, the more organisations can make use of this talent, and the higher the chance of creating competitive advantage.

An important factor that comes into play regarding staying in a place or leaving has to do with feeling at home. If someone feels at home in a certain place, they are more inclined to stay there. This is why insight in the home-making practices of expats and their partners is so important, as it provides information if and in what way they make themselves feel at home. A better understanding of these practices allows the region to develop further onto this, enabling more expats and their partners to feel at home, thereby improving the factors for retaining international talent in the region.

One of the focus points in this research is the GiT program. The program in its current form is successful; responses of expats' partners after participating have been overwhelmingly positive (i.e. Eijssenring, 2011; Eijssenring, 2020; Eijssenring & Van Hoorn, 2013; Eijssenring & Van Hoorn, 2014). It is not yet known, however, what specific elements from the project are determinants for its success. Furthermore, it is not known if the GiT program is a specific reason for expats and their partners to stay in the Brainport region.

This research, as such, provides insight in home-making practices of expats and their partners in the Brainport region, as well as the role that the GiT program plays in these practices. This insight can be useful for the municipality of Eindhoven, as well as for the Technical University that is located there, given this institute's desire to retain talent in the region. The knowledge obtained from this study can help the Brainport region to develop further on the

factors that enable knowledge migrants to feel at home, and thus increase the chances that their talent remains in the region.

1.3 Scientific relevance

The main subject of research to which the current study relates to is the process of home-making. The main stream of thought that forms this subject is that a person, whether a migrant or not, has to feel at home in order to have a positive feeling about the place in which this person lives. The general idea is that a person engages in home-making practices in three ways; home-making through objects, home-making through people, and home-making through cultural aspects (Bilecen, 2017; Boccagni, 2014; Bonini, 2011; Butcher, 2010; James, 1994; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009; Meijering & Lager, 2012; Philipp & Ho, 2010; Slettemeås, 2013). Many studies have been conducted regarding home-making practices of migrants (i.e. Bilecen, 2017; Meijering & Lager, 2014; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Rivlin & Moore, 2001); however, research that specifically focuses on expats and expat families is scarce. It is necessary to investigate whether knowledge migrants engage in home-making practices as well, especially when knowing that they will most likely stay in the host country only temporarily.

Secondly, much research has been conducted on the cross-cultural adjustment of expats (Caligiuri, Philips, Lazarova, Tarique & Burgi, 2001); however, as mentioned by Bauer & Taylor (2001), the adjustment process of spouses is often overlooked. Furthermore, the studies that did focus on the spouses of expats, either focussed solely on the spouse (Ali, Van Der Zee & Sanders, 2003; Herleman, Britt & Hashima, 2008; Luring & Selmer, 2010; Mohr & Klein, 2004), or were quantitative in approach (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Black & Stephens, 1989). The current study is innovative as home-making practices are considered family home-making practices, through conducting research both the expat and the spouse.

1.4 Research objective & research question

The objective of this research is twofold. Firstly, it is to explore the home-making practices of expatriates working in the Brainport region and their partners. Secondly, it is to obtain a better understanding of the role of the GiT program on these practices. Just as the objective of this research is twofold, so is the research question. Firstly, it aims to investigate the home-making practices of expatriate families. This is achieved through three sub-questions, each of which highlights a critical aspect of home-making practices. All three, home-making through objects, home-making through people, and home-making through cultural aspects, are elaborated on in the next section.

Secondly, the research question specifically aims to investigate the part that the GiT

program plays in these home-making practices. This is where the fourth and last sub-question comes into play. As such, the main research question is as follows:

“How do expatriate families in the Brainport region engage in home-making practices and what role does the Get in Touch program play?”

This research question can be divided into the following sub-questions:

“How do expatriate families in the Brainport region engage in home-making through objects?”

“How do expatriate families in the Brainport region engage in home-making through people?”

“How do expatriate families in the Brainport region engage in home-making through cultural aspects?”

“What role does the Get In Touch program play in these home-making practices?”

In the next section, the relevant literary framework will be explored, which will be used to answer these questions.

2. Literature review & conceptual framework

2.1 Preface

This literature review starts with a short introduction to the new economics of labour migration, which showcases how decision-making processes regarding migration are not solely in the hands of the labour migrant, but involve the whole family. The review then moves to a discussion on home-making practices, which are the main elements of the framework.

2.2 New economics of labour migration

In the past, migration studies tended to focus on the labour migrant worker as the individual actor (Ho, 2006; Ryan, Sales, Tilki & Siara, 2009). This neoclassical view of labour migration focuses solely on the migrant as the individual decision maker, and the decision to become a labour migrant is purely based on financial value (Taylor, 1999; Arango, 2000). Theories on new economics of labour migration, however, argue differently. While the basic principle of rational choice as the main argument for migration remains the same, the new economics of labour migration movement argues that migration is a family strategy, one that is not necessarily geared towards the maximization of income. Instead, migration is a strategy towards the diversification of sources of income (Arango, 2000; Sana & Massey, 2005).

As deciding to become a migrant can be seen as a family strategy, so is the decision whether or not to stay a migrant. Whether a migrant family stays in their current country of residence or goes back to their country of origin is not just reliant on the individual labour migrants' choices. Any family member's inability to adjust is a major factor for expatriate turnover; in other words, an early departure from the host country (Black & Stephens, 1989, Shaffer & Harrison, 1998, 2001).

2.3 Home-making practices

An important factor that can influence staying in the host country or leaving, is whether or not one feels at home; it is crucial for the adjustment process (Johnson & Sandu, 2007; Ward & Styles, 2005; Thurber & Walton, 2012). Feeling at home is achieved through so called home-making practices (Bilecen, 2017; Boccagni, 2014; Belk, 1992; Dayaratne & Kellett, 2008; Meijering & Lager, 2012). Home-making practices can be defined as "those actual day-to-day domestic living experiences that transform a house into a home", (Bilecen 2017). People in all cultures engage in home-making, or at least, creating a place where they feel like they can be themselves (Dayaratne & Kellett, 2008). Furthermore, it is an active process; a reflective and developing relationship between an individual and a domestic place (Rivlin & Moore, 2001). These living experiences are crucial aspects when it comes to home-making. People living in a country other than the one they were raised in, whether they are knowledge migrants or other kinds of migrants, 'make their home' through the use of three different kinds of techniques; these are home-making through objects, home-making through people, and home-making through cultural aspects (Bilecen, 2017; Boccagni, 2014; Bonini, 2011; Butcher, 2010; James, 1994; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009; Meijering & Lager, 2012; Philipp & Ho, 2010; Sletteameås, 2013). It is argued that a house cannot truly be considered a home, or it is not possible to feel at home, if either of these living experiences are absent. All three variations of home-making practices are elaborated upon further in the next subsections.

2.3.1 Home-making through objects

Home-making through objects translates itself into different kinds of objects, usually originating from the country or culture in which the migrant was raised, being placed in the house (Bilecen, 2017, Boccagni, 2014; Meijering & Lager, 2012; Philipp & Ho, 2010). These objects vary greatly, as they range from furniture to decorations to household items. Often, these are items unique to the migrant's native country or culture (Philipp & Ho, 2010). In many cases the migrant brought these objects along with them when they started their journey of living abroad; in other cases they were given or sent to them by family members or friends. In

all cases, these objects have a certain emotional value, as they remind the migrant of the place where they were born and raised. They help them feel at home in the place where they live now (Bilecen, 2017; Philipp & Ho, 2010). For these objects, not so much the functional meaning but the symbolic meaning is what makes them used for home-making (Meijering & Lager, 2012). According to Belk (1992), these symbolic meanings can manifest themselves in two ways; either the object is related to other people, or it is related to other places and cultures. Furthermore, the interiors of migrants' houses often physically mirror their connection with their respective homelands (Boccagni, 2014).

These objects are not limited to objects indoors. Home-making through objects also takes place in the form of landscaping; different kinds of trees, plants, and flowers that are reminiscent of the immigrants' native country are planted and nurtured in gardens to recreate the landscape of home (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009). These gardens can become a place of memory and nostalgia, reminiscent of familiar landscapes, and this familiarity in turn becomes part of the migrant's new life (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009). This establishes a link between home in the native country and home in the host country, which helps the migrant to regain a sense of belonging (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009).

2.3.2 Home-making through people

Home-making through people translates itself into having people around that make you feel like home (Bilecen, 2017; Meijering & Lager, 2012; Butcher, 2010). They can either be family members who travelled along with the migrant to the new place, or they are friends or acquaintances living in the same place as the migrant who to a degree share their cultural background. These social ties, as well as the informal socializing, are fundamental elements of home-making practices (Bilecen, 2017; Meijering & Lager, 2012).

Intergenerational relations play an important part in these processes. The presence of children, grandchildren, or on the other hand parents or grandparents plays an important role in what is considered to be 'home', (Bilecen, 2017; Butcher, 2010). These intergenerational relations, as well as spouses, are key figures in the informal social protection that for a large share occurs at home (Bilecen, 2017).

However, it is possible for a migrant to not have family members or friends in the host country. In other words; no people to which they can relate. It is not always possible for family members to join the migrant to the host country, or perhaps the migrant has a difficult time connecting with people in the host country. While this makes it harder for the migrant to adjust to the host country, home-making through people can still be achieved through various

communication techniques (Bonini, 2011; Mason, 2007). Mobile phones and email make it possible for the migrant to be in contact with their loved ones in the host country on a daily basis. Though it is only a partial substitute, using these forms of communication can help the migrant experience a slight sense of home, even though their loved ones are far away (Bonini, 2011).

In short, home-making through people occurs when a migrant has people around them, for example family members or friends, that help them feel at home. Even when these people are not physically close to the migrant, home-making through people can still happen through various communication techniques.

2.3.3 Home-making through cultural aspects

Aside from objects and people that enable migrants to engage in home-making practices, various cultural aspects make it possible to feel at home in the host country. These cultural aspects are food, media, and religion.

Buying, preparing, serving and eating different kinds of typical food from the migrants' country of origin can provoke strong memories of the past; food can enable positive nostalgic moments (James, 1994; Philipp & Ho, 2010). The tastes and smells can make a migrant reminisce about their native upbringing or about the people in their country of origin (Philipp & Ho, 2010).

Another cultural aspect that helps migrants to feel more at home in the host country is the media (Bonini, 2011; Slettemeås, 2013). Watching movies or television shows, listening to music, or watch and read on the internet, all from the migrants' country of origin, helps them to stay connected to their country of origin and to feel more at home in the host country (Bonini, 2011; Slettemeås, 2013). These media practices play a large role in shaping home, while physically being away from home (Bonini, 2011).

A final cultural aspect often used for home-making is that of religion. In many cases, migrants move to a host country where either a different religion is practiced, or where religion in general is practiced to a lesser degree, perhaps even not at all. In other cases, migrants experiencing difficulties adjusting to the host country are found to turn to religion to deal with these difficulties (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009). In both cases however, religion is an important home-making tool, which is done in three ways; rituals, altars, and aesthetics (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009). Rituals usually take the forms of blessings or cleansings, where the house is prepared in such a way that daily religious activities can be practiced and other people can be welcomed. For many religions, having an altar in the home is essential, as

it is the usual place for regular prayers and offerings. Finally, various religious art and decorations in and around the house are an important aesthetic for many religious people (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009).

2.4 Conceptual framework

The theory described in this section has been visualised in a conceptual framework. Please see this framework below.

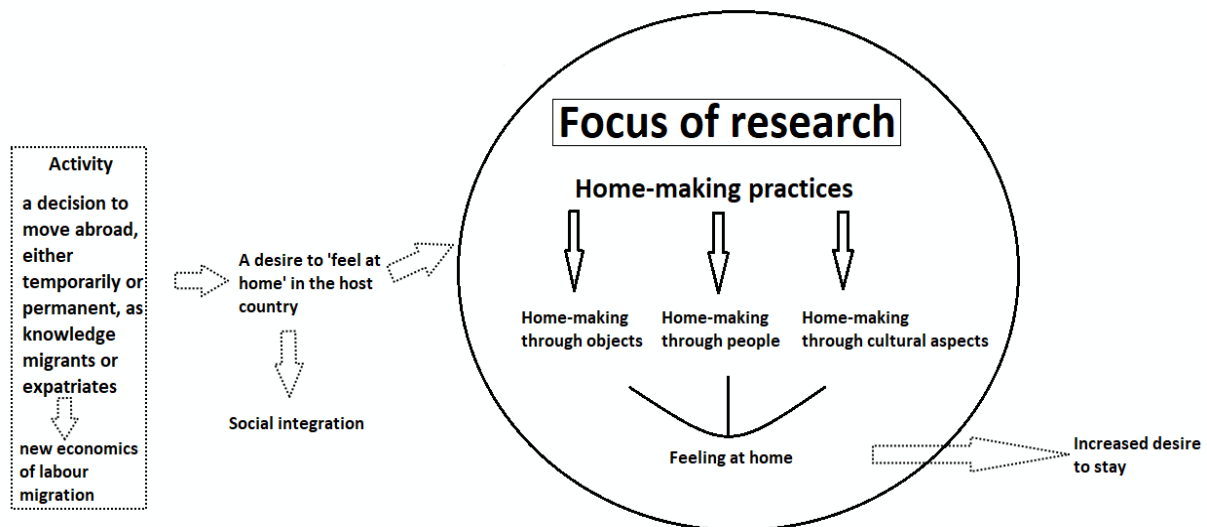


Figure 1 – Conceptual framework

In short, a family deciding to go abroad, in this case as knowledge migrants, will experience a desire to feel at home, which is an important factor for social integration. In order to achieve this goal, the family engages in home-making practices, which can be done in three ways; home-making through objects, home-making through people, and home-making through cultural aspects. This enables the family to feel at home, and thus be more socially integrated in the host country. This, in turn, increases their desire to stay in the host country. As can be seen from this conceptual framework, as well as from the literature review in general, the specific focus of this study will be on home-making practices. For clarity purposes however, the conceptual framework includes the whole context. This context starts with a family decision to move abroad, leading to a desire to feel at home in the host country, and employing home-making practices to achieve this.

3. Methodology, methods & techniques

3.1 Preface

This chapter presents a critical discussion on the methodological part of this research. The section begins with a general consideration of the relevant research philosophy, after which it is argued which research approach has been chosen. Subsequently, it will be elaborated which research strategy has been employed. The chapter then provides an overview of the GiT program, its history and context, and it is argued why this program specifically has been chosen for this research. Afterwards, the details of the research strategy will be outlined. The chapter ends with an overview of the analysis process.

3.2 Research philosophy

In the first chapter, the following research question for this study was presented:

“How do expatriate families in the Brainport region engage in home-making practices and what role does the Get in Touch program play?”

This research question is subjective in nature. The main focus is the way people feel about things, and the way they experience certain things. In this case, the research concerns itself with the way expats experience the making of their home and how it makes them feel; it aims to capture these individual living experiences and stories. Relating these assumptions to existing literature on research philosophies, it can be argued that the current study is interpretive in nature. Interpretivist researchers are concerned with viewing the world through the subjective perceptions and experiences of participants (Schwandt, 1994; Thanh & Thanh, 2015; Willis, Jost & Nilakanta, 2007). Furthermore, according to Willis, Jost & Nilakanta (2007), an understanding of the context in which research is conducted is a crucial aspect of interpretivist research. On the opposite side of the spectrum of research philosophies is the positivist approach. Positivist research views truth as objective; it aims to explain phenomena through means of transparent data, specific facts, and observable actions (Xinping, 2002). Furthermore, the idea exists that the universe conforms to perpetual and rigid laws of causation, with keywords such as impartiality, measurement, objectivity and repeatability (Aliyu, Bello, Kasim & Martin, 2014).

As such, interpretivist research philosophy is relevant for the current study. The stories of participants are what matters most for the research question; their experiences and perceptions on home-making are the crux of this research. The way participants engage in home-making is inherently subjective, as there is no universal truth to the mentioned problems.

As such, the research is not positivist in nature. Finally, as mentioned above, in interpretivist research, the specific context is crucial. This is also the case in the current study, where the context, expatriate migration to the Brainport region, is pivotal in the interpretation of the gathered data.

3.3 Research approach

In the previous subsection it was mentioned that, in an interpretivist research, data is interpreted through the experiences and perceptions of participants. The way this data is gathered depends on the chosen research approach, which concerns itself with the way data is collected, analysed, and interpreted (Creswell, 2014).

Data can be collected in many different ways. There are, however, three main approaches to go about this process. This is either a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach, or a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2014; Muijs, 2010). In quantitative research, according to Muijs (2010), phenomena are attempted to be explained by collecting numerical data, which are then analysed using statistical methods. Data collection oftentimes happens through the use of surveys. Qualitative research, on the other hand, focuses on the meanings and interpretation of social phenomena and processes (Jupp, 2006). According to Jupp (2006), qualitative research aims to explore people's interpretation of the world through subjective meanings, as well as the difference in the construction of reality, for example through language, images, and cultural artefacts. Many possible methods for data collection exist in qualitative research, for example interviews, ethnography, participant observation, case studies, life histories and document analysis (Jupp, 2006). Finally, in a mixed-methods research, both quantitative and qualitative data is collected. A mixed-methods approach includes the assumption that through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, a more complete answer to a research problem can be given (Creswell, 2014). As such, data collection can occur through a variety of methods, both quantitative and qualitative in nature. For the current study, the qualitative approach was adopted; the research question calls for the interpretation and subjective meanings of expatriates and their partners, in specific, the way in which they engage in home-making practices and how they experience the GiT program. To capture these stories and feelings, qualitative research methods, such as interviews and observations, are the most appropriate (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). During an interview, for example, interviewees are able to express their thoughts and feelings elaborately, and it gives the researcher the possibility to ask follow-up questions. In qualitative research, a crucial purpose is to get insight and in-depth information, which is achieved through a process of strong consideration and empathetic

understanding (Thanh & Thanh, 2015; Punch, 2009). Quantitative research, of which numerical data and statistics are the characteristics, would be less suitable for the current study. As mentioned before, this research aims to capture stories and experiences of participants, and a survey would be a too limited method to fully achieve this. The crucial elements of depth and insight are unlikely to be achieved through these methods (Thanh & Thanh, 2015; Punch, 2009). As there is no need for qualitative methods of any kind, a mixed methods approach would also not be suitable.

3.4 Research strategy

In the previous subsection, it was argued why a qualitative research approach would be the most suitable for this research. This subsection discusses the research strategy that was employed. There are many different possible methods for data collection within qualitative research. These can include interviews, participant observations, document analysis, case studies, and ethnographic studies, among others (Jupp, 2006; Sofaer, 1999). For the current study, a combination of these methods is employed, in order to provide a complete answer to the main research question and the various sub-questions. This combination consists of three main methods; in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis.

Interviews involve asking a series of questions during a meeting or dialogue between people, usually between an interviewer and a participant, where personal and social interactions occur (Jupp, 2006). The purpose of interviews is to provide in-depth information about participants' experiences, views, attitudes or motives of a certain topic or situation (Turner III, 2010; Gill, Steward, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). Interviews are most appropriate where not much is known about the study phenomenon, or where comprehensive understanding of participants is desirable (Gill, Steward, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). In the current study, participants' experiences and perceptions and in-depth information about their situation are core elements of the research; as such, the interview is a very suitable method.

Participant observations can be done when the researcher participates in the everyday life of a social setting, where experiences and observations are being recorded, and where meanings and realities of people are uncovered and revealed (Jorgensen, 2015; Jupp, 2006). In the current study, the influence of the GiT program is an important element, which can be documented through participant observations. As such, it is a crucial method to employ. The third main method is document analysis, which involves the in-depth examination of documents that are relevant and significant to the research (Jupp, 2006). For the current research, it can provide insights into the influence of the GiT program.

An interesting method used in qualitative research is the case study. A case study is an in-depth investigation of a current social phenomenon within its context, using a variety of sources of data (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Jupp, 2006). While the current research does make use of a case, namely the GiT program, it merely attempts to capture the influence that it has on a much broader phenomenon; expats' home-making practices. The study does not solely focus on the GiT program.

3.5 The Get in Touch program

3.5.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this research, a specific focus lies on the GiT program as a possible influence on expats' home-making practices. Home-making practices can take on multiple forms, such as through objects, people, or cultural aspects, and by being able to engage in these practices a migrant can feel at home (Bilecen, 2017; Boccagni, 2014; Belk, 1992; Dayaratne & Kellett, 2008; Meijering & Lager, 2012). Feeling at home, in turn, is a crucial influence on the migrants' adjustment process and the decision to stay or to leave. (Johnson & Sandu, 2007; Ward & Styles, 2005; Thurber & Walton, 2012). The introduction mentioned that many expats in the Brainport region decided to go back to their country of origin early, due to their spouses' inability to adjust to life in the host country. After the introduction of the GiT program, however, this number declined, showcasing the success of the program (Eijssenring & Van Hoorn, 2013). Due to the program, expat families are more inclined to stay in the region, signalling the possible influence of the program on expats' home-making practices.

In this section, the GiT program is discussed in more detail. First, the history of the program and the context in which it has been developed are explained. Secondly, the characteristics of the program is discussed, as well as how it has evolved throughout the years.

3.5.2 Context

The city of Eindhoven, the largest city and capital of the Noord-Brabant province, as well as the fifth largest city of The Netherlands, and its surrounding area, hosts a large number of expats. This region is also known as the Brainport region, as it is the major technology node of the Netherlands (Maldonado & Romein, 2009). According to Decisio, an economic consultancy bureau, 12.300 international knowledge migrants were active in the Brainport region in 2017, a number that more than doubled since 2010. Many of these expats have brought their partners, and sometimes their children, along with them, which is in correspondence to the theory on new economics of labour migration (Arango, 2000; Sana & Massey, 2005). This

theory views some forms of migration as a family strategy and a family decision, of which expats in the Brainport region are examples of. Immediately after arriving in the Netherlands, however, a discrepancy between expat and spouse develops in some cases. The expats themselves have employment and become part of a community of international colleagues. Often times, this is not the case for their spouses. Their spouses find themselves in a difficult situation, with no employment, no social network, in an unfamiliar place. Like mentioned earlier, the adjustment of spouses is often overlooked, and this was also the case in the Brainport region (Eijssenring, 2011; Eijssenring & Van Hoorn, 2013; Eijssenring & Van Hoorn, 2014).

This is where the Get in Touch program comes in. The GiT program was developed by Carola Eijssenring, who noticed some scattered signals from international spouses in various international networks. These signals were all related to unacknowledged needs and wishes of international spouses. Around the same time, the Human Resource department at Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e) had been picking up similar signals among their own international staff. Due to the rapid internationalization of scientific and technologic developments in the past decade, TU/e saw a huge increase in international staff members. On one hand, this is a logical phenomenon due to globalization, but on the other hand, active recruitment of international staff members was a necessity, due to a rise in needs for top technical scientists and engineers. As of now, one in three employees at TU/e is international. The human resource department at TU/e has started several programs to help international colleagues with their adjustment process, and to make them feel more at home. While the international colleagues received much highly valued help regarding their adjustment process, due to the university's efforts, their spouses were oftentimes unable to cope with the aftermath of migrating to Eindhoven. They felt lost, lonely, and experienced a lot of culture shock, to name a few things. Spousal well-being, however, has a large influence on the success of international assignments. Indeed, literature studies rank spousal well-being as equally important as well-known factors such as job satisfaction or company loyalty. It seemed that spousal unhappiness was a prominent issue, and often times a primary reason for an early termination of the international assignment. An anchored home appears to be a key factor for the success of international assignments (Eijssenring, 2011; Eijssenring & Van Hoorn, 2014; Bauer & Taylor, 2001; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

3.5.3 Characteristics

As such, Eijssenring created the Get in Touch program, which can best be described as a social support program. Its goal is to help international spouses to discover people and places

in Eindhoven, and to build their own personal network in their new place of living. This goal is achieved through weekly activities, where attending spouses meet each other in small groups. These weekly activities consist of trips, tours, and meetings, at different cultural, social or otherwise relevant locations in and around Eindhoven. Different festivities, local as well as international are being celebrated together, oftentimes with inclusion of the partners. Aside from the weekly activities, a variety of side activities have taken shape. Examples are dancing groups, music groups, Dutch language classes, and creative workshops, among others (Eijssenring & Van Hoorn, 2014; Eijssenring, 2020).

The GiT program is very informal in nature. For international spouses wishing to join, there exists a permanent accessibility to the program; they can join anytime, leave anytime, and come back anytime however they like. Furthermore, participation to the program is completely voluntary. There are no necessary requirements before joining, and nobody is obligated to join either. There are cases of spouses who join the program every week, while others join only once or twice a month.

The informal nature is also present in the way the weekly meetings are organised. Eijssenring is not only the creator of the program, but also the person who leads the activities each week. She does this with a very positive attitude and genuine interest, which is a main reason why the program has such a warm and welcoming atmosphere. She is a person that never judges, and she immediately makes spouses feel like a part of the group from the very first time they join a meeting.

3.5.4 Throughout the years

For nine years in a row, the GiT program has been an important element in many international spouses' lives. This subsection focuses on the way the program has evolved throughout the years. Though much has changed in all those years, the program knows many consistent factors as well, one of which is the program's target group; international spouses. The composition of this target group has remained relatively the same as well; spouses ranging from twenty-five to thirty-five years old, either recently married or living as a couple, with either very young children or no children, and all living in or around Eindhoven, which is oftentimes their first place of living outside of their country of origin. Secondly, the GiT program is consistent in that the content of the GiT meetings has always varied, following the various wishes and needs of the target group, although some successful trips, tours, themes and workshops have been repeated throughout the years (Eijssenring, 2020). Finally, spouses' feelings towards the GiT program have generally remained the same throughout the years; they

have consistently been overwhelmingly positive.

Reactions and reflections on the GiT program and its contents have been recorded throughout the years at various moments, and even though the program has seen changes, feedback has always been positive and everyone feels good about being or having been a part of GiT. The program started in 2011 as a pilot. A report on the results of pilot was made, which led to some early conclusions regarding the effect of the program for the spouses. Three main conclusions were made, which is that the pilot program resulted in an expansion of the spouses' network, a decrease in spouse's culture shock, and a way for spouses to share stories and struggles (Eijssenring, 2011).

As the pilot program proved to be a success, the decision was made to proceed with the program. An article in 2013 provided some insights into the results and impact of the program, more than two years after the first pilots. According to this article, GiT has had many positive influences on the spouses. Aside from the three results which were concluded from the 2011 report, two years later, the positive influence that GiT had proved to be even greater. Aside from an expanded network, a decrease in culture shock, and sharing stories, GiT has led to less feelings of isolation, more connection with the new hometown, less homesickness, easier obtaining more practical information, easier finding one's way around the city, and an experience of a warm and safe atmosphere (Eijssenring & Van Hoorn, 2013).

A different report about a year later, near the end of 2014, showed some other interesting conclusions aside from the ones mentioned in the 2013 article. For example, older participants that are no longer actively joining the weekly activities, still stay in touch with the group. Furthermore, they would like to 'give back' something, meaning they would like to actively do something for GiT, as the program has done so much for them. Another conclusion from the report states that it is easier now in comparison to 2011 for newcomers to gain a larger network, as the group has become so large and diverse. Furthermore, over the past few years, many Dutch volunteers have joined GiT one way or another. This makes it easier for newer spouses to learn about Dutch habits and to find their way in and around Eindhoven. Finally, the possibility has arisen that different target groups regarding spouses are being served in different ways. For example spouses that have children, or spouses that are doing academic studies, can join in on different activities that cater to their needs (Eijssenring & Van Hoorn, 2014).

In 2019, reactions and comments on GiT by a large variety of spouses were documented by Eijssenring. These comments were made through an online questionnaire, an online blog, or social media. A few of the recurring reflections that can be seen are as follows. First, spouses note that GiT has been useful to them on many levels, such as making the switch to Dutch

society, gaining long term friendships, picking up their own personal life, and gaining consciousness about their new life and upcoming transitions. In general, it has been an enriching and empowering support in the development of different skills, as well as an investment in personal growth. Second, over the past few years many friend circles have started to develop, where spouses go out together, meet up, and help each other, not only during the weekly GiT meetings but most notably outside of them as well. Third, not just for the spouses, but for the partners GiT is an enrichment as well. As they state, due to GiT their partners feel less lonely, happier, and more connected, which in turn has a positive impact on the partner's life as well. Fourth, GiT has made it easier for couples to stay in Eindhoven, even after the initial duration of their stay has passed. Furthermore, it appeared that to some spouses, the presence of GiT was an important reason for them to move to Eindhoven in the first place. Fifth, though there's a huge variety in people that join GiT, many spouses do not consider this as something negative. Quite the contrary, as it gives them an opportunity to meet even more people and to get to know even more cultures and backgrounds. They see this as an enriching opportunity. Sixth, GiT has led to many other institutions opening their doors, which led to the possibility for several spouses to get involved in plans and programs of such networks. Examples of this are city hosts, guides for certain events, and volunteering. Indeed, it is win/win situation, as spouses obtain more insight in Dutch society, while organizations benefit from the spouses' enriching views and visions. In general, spouses have broadened their horizon and their network, which has all been thanks to the GiT program (Eijssenring, 2019).

3.6 Data collection

Earlier in this chapter it was mentioned how a combination of research methods are used as a means of collecting data. In this subsection, these research methods are explained in more detail.

3.6.1. Semi-structured interviews

The first and foremost research method is the interview. As mentioned earlier, interviews involve asking a series of questions during a meeting or dialogue between people, usually between an interviewer and a participant, where personal and social interactions occur, with the purpose to provide in-depth information about participants' experiences, views, attitudes or motives of a certain topic or situation (Jupp, 2008; Turner III, 2010; Gill, Steward, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). An interview can take on three fundamental forms, unstructured, semi-structured and structured, ranging from informal and naturalistic to very organised with a prescribed list of questions (Jupp, 2008; Gill, Steward, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). For this

research, the semi-structured interview is the most appropriate. The semi-structured interview, as defined by Gill, Steward, Treasure & Chadwick (2008), consists of several key questions to define the research area to be explored, but also allows the interviewer to deviate in order to focus on certain topics in more detail. For the current study, this would mean that the interview would consist of several standard questions with regards to home-making practices and the GiT program. If needed, however, certain responses were elaborated upon by asking follow-up questions, which differed from the standard set of questions.

The focus of this research lies in the way expat families in the Brainport region engage in home-making practices, and the influence that the GiT program has on these home-making practices. As the research can be seen as twofold, such are the interviews; as the interviews are semi-structured, the first half consists of a set of questions regarding home-making practices, while the second half consists of a set of questions regarding the influence of the GiT program. Theory on home-making practices has been described in detail in the literature review chapter of this research. Through operationalization, which is the process of making theoretical concepts measurable (Jupp, 2006), literature on home-making has been made into a set of questions to be asked during the interviews. The theory on home-making was divided in three elements, which were home-making through objects, home-making through people, and home-making through cultural aspects. The operationalization followed the same structure, in such a way that no elements have been left out. The second half of the interview focuses on the influence of the GiT program. The questions for this part were not derived from literature, but instead aim to allow the participant to describe their GiT experience as complete as possible. The appendix contains the complete interview guide, which shows how each interview is introduced, as well as the list of questions.

The target group for the interviews are expat families in the Brainport region, of which the spouse is or has been a part of the GiT program. In order to provide a complete overview of the situation, expat families that are interviewed should vary in country of origin, as well as in time spent in the Brainport region and in the GiT program. The semi-structured interviews as such are not done with individuals. Instead, the interviews are held in the form of double-interviews, as they are conducted with both expat and spouse simultaneously. This method provides the full picture of expat families' home-making practices and the influence of the GiT program. Furthermore, these double-interviews showcase the interplay between expat and spouse regarding home-making. Should the family have children, it is possible for them to be present during the interview. Ideally, given the focus of this research on home-making, the interviews are conducted inside participants' homes. This place is where the actual home-

making practices take place, and it can provide a better understanding of these home-making practices. Furthermore, it can allow the expat family to provide context to their responses. If, however, the expat family desired for the interview to take place somewhere else, for example at the workplace or in a public setting such as a café or restaurant, this was arranged accordingly.

Contact with possible expat families for the interview has been made through the GiT program. Familiarity with many GiT spouses has been created by becoming a member of the program. Through this familiarity, a certain degree of trust was established, which increased the chances of conducting the interviews at the families' homes. The actual request for an interview was a combined effort with Carola Eijssenring. Many of the GiT spouses felt uncertainty with regards to agreeing to take part in an interview, and it was argued that the chances of finding enough participants would be increased if they were approached by Eijssenring, who they trust. As such, the process of approaching expat families for an interview was as follows. An introductory text was written which briefly explained the purpose of the research and of the interview, as well as how long it would take, why it preferably would take place at participants' homes, and how anonymity was guaranteed. The appendix contains the complete introductory text. Eijssenring then proceeded to send this text to numeral expat families, with an added personal request to participate in the interview. A total of thirty expat families were approached this way. All thirty of these families had been living in the Brainport region for a long period of time, ranging from five months to six years. All of the spouses were or had been a part of the GiT program, ranging from having joined a couple of times to having been a part of the program for multiple years. Furthermore, the approached expat families varied greatly in countries of origin, as only a few of the thirty families hailed from the same country. After Eijssenring forwarded the introductory text for the interview, further contact with expat families, such as agreeing to the request, details of the research, and making appointments for the actual interview, took place directly through email. This contact, however, proved to be difficult. Most expat families did not respond to the initial forwarded introductory text, even after several reminders. Some that did answer the initial email, stopped responding after making contact.

In the end, of the thirty approached expat families, a total of seven of them agreed to take part in the interview. Regarding these seven, two came from Iran, while the others came from Egypt, Spain, Colombia, Nepal, and Hungary, respectively. Some of these seven people had been living in the Brainport region for a long time, the longest being six years, while others had only arrived in the Netherlands around five months ago. Logically, some spouses had been with the GiT program for a few years, while others had only joined several times. As such,

while a total of seven interviewed families may be considered few, the characteristics of these families match well with the characteristics of the whole target group; expat families in the Brainport region, who vary in country of origin, in time living in Eindhoven, and in time spent with the GiT program.

As mentioned before, ideally the interviews took place at the participants' homes, and it would be preferred if the expat and spouse were to be interviewed simultaneously. This condition was met for six of the seven interviews, as one spouse preferred to have the interview in a public setting. Furthermore, her husband was not able to join the interview due to his work. Regarding the six other interviews, all of them took place at the expat families' homes, and occurred with both expat and spouse simultaneously. In one of the interviews, the family's two young children were also present. All interviews were similar in length, ranging from forty minutes to one hour. Finally, all interviews were recorded using a recorder application on a smart phone, which had been made clear to the participants beforehand, and which all of them agreed to. These recordings were then used to transcribe the interviews in full detail.

3.6.2. Participant observations

The second research method is participant observation. As mentioned earlier, participant observations take place when the researcher participates in the everyday life of a social setting, where experiences and observations are being recorded, and where meanings and realities of people are uncovered and revealed (Jorgensen, 2015; Jupp, 2006). In the current research, participant observations have been done during several weekly GiT meetings. As mentioned in the previous subsection, the GiT program fundamentally consists of weekly meetings and activities, where Eijssenring takes the group of spouses to various places in or around Eindhoven.

A total of five participant observations were conducted during various GiT meetings. These were stretched out over a period of time, for two reasons. On one hand, this increased the chances of getting in contact with as many different international spouses as possible. On the other hand, this opened up the possibility to do participant observations during a variety of GiT meetings. Both reasons give a more complete picture of the influence of the program, as more spouses and multiple activities are being observed. In order, the five meetings that were observed consisted of the following activities; a painting workshop, a book club, an afternoon in a parc, a walking tour, and a social workshop. During these meetings, various conversations and discussions occurred with and between spouses, about their feelings, thoughts, and experiences regarding GiT. After every participant observation, a recap of the meeting was

written down, which showcases how the meeting went, what kind of activities were done, and most importantly, how the attending spouses experienced it.

3.6.3. Document analysis

The third and final research method is document analysis. Document analysis, as mentioned earlier, involves the in-depth examination of documents that are relevant and significant to the research (Jupp, 2006). The GiT program was first introduced in 2011, and since then, various recaps and articles have been written and published, and several surveys have been conducted, regarding the activities of the program and the effect that it has on international spouses. In order to gain insights in the influence that the GiT program has on expat families' home-making practices, these various documents have been studied.

3.7 Ethics

Issues related to ethics are present in any kind of research, and as such, in qualitative research as well (Orb, Eisenhower & Wynaden, 2001). This subsection explains how possible ethical issues can arise in the current research, and how these can be dealt with. Orb, Eisenhower & Wynaden (2001) identify a few possible issues in qualitative research with regards to ethics. The first issue arises when there is a lack of transparency or clarity for participants, which can happen when the researcher's role is not known. An example of this issue can be an observation where the participants do not know they are being observed. A second issue can arise during interviews, when the topic at hand is a sensitive issue. An example of this issue is that painful experiences for the participant can be triggered due to a sensitive topic that is being discussed (Orb, Eisenhower & Wynaden, 2001). In the current research, the first issue was not a problem. Before conducting research, most notably the participant observations, participants were made aware of this research, and all of them gave consent. With regards to the second issue, it can be argued that the interviews contained sensitive topics. Indeed, topics such as depression, loneliness, and homesickness were quite common, and asking questions about these topics could trigger painful experiences. However, all participants for which these topics were at one point a problem in their lives, mentioned that they had overcome them. A reason why they overcame these problems is the GiT program, which was a main topic in the interviews. They gladly spoke about the way GiT helped them in their struggles, and as such, discussing these sensitive topics was not an issue.

Confidentiality is a final relevant ethical issue for this research. In the current study, it is not possible to collect data anonymously. As such, it is critical that data needs to be collected, analysed, and reported without compromising participants' identities (Kaiser, 2009). To the

participants it was made clear that anonymity is guaranteed. To achieve this, the transcriptions of interviews are devoid of personal information such as names and age; merely participants' country of origin has been written down. The same goes for the recaps of the participant observations.

3.8 Validity and reliability

Two important criteria in academic research are validity and reliability. This subsection argues why the current study can be considered both valid and reliable.

3.8.1 Validity

In qualitative research, validity refers to the suitability of the tools, processes and data. It concerns questions such as whether the research question is appropriate for a desired outcome, whether the chosen methodology is appropriate for answering the research question, whether the research design is valid for the methodology, whether the sampling and data analysis is suitable, and whether the results are valid for the sample and context (Leung, 2015). In quantitative research, a distinction can be made between internal and external validity. In qualitative research, however, this terminology differs. In qualitative research, internal validity can best be described as credibility, while external validity can best be described as fittingness or transferability (Beck, 1993; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Credibility in qualitative research concerns the question as to how vivid and faithful the description of the phenomenon is (Beck, 1993). One course of action to achieve credibility is through accurate record keeping (Noble & Smith, 2015). In the current study, credibility is achieved by extensively documenting collected data; interviews have been recorded and transcribed in full detail, and recaps of the observations have been written down. A second way to achieve credibility in qualitative research is through data triangulation, where a more extensive set of results can be produced by combining different research methods (Noble & Smith, 2015). In the current study, three different research methods were employed; semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. This combination provides a more complete picture of the situation, and as such increases this study's credibility.

Fittingness or transferability in qualitative research concerns the aspect of applicability; the researcher provides an extensive description of the research process, to enable the reader to assess whether findings are transferable to their own setting (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The current study has described comprehensively how research has been conducted. Regarding the interviews, it has been made clear not only what kind of questions were asked and why, but also how and where they were conducted. Regarding the observations, it has been made clear

in which setting they took place, why they took place in that particular setting, and which elements were focused on. As such, the criterium of transferability has been met.

3.8.2 Reliability

In quantitative research, reliability concerns the exact replicability of processes and results (Leung, 2015). In qualitative research, however, reliability can best be described as consistency or dependability (Leung, 2015; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In order to achieve consistency, it is necessary to provide an audit trail, which means maintaining a complete description of decisions made, reflective thoughts, sampling, employed research materials, development of findings, and data management (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In the current study, the context in which research has been conducted has been described extensively. Furthermore, the research process has been discussed thoroughly, by arguing which decisions were made, which methods were used, and how participants were chosen. Finally, reflective thoughts on the process have also been illustrated. Considering these arguments, the criterium of consistency has been met as well.

3.9 Data analysis

3.9.1 Thematic analysis & coding

Through the use of interviews and participant observations, a large body of written data has been collected. In order to analyse this written data, the strategy of thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis, according to Braun & Clarke (2006) is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. This method can, in a broad sense, be employed in two ways; inductive thematic analysis and deductive thematic analysis. Inductive thematic analysis is data-driven, where the process of coding the data is done without an attempt to make it fit into a pre-existing coding frame. Deductive thematic analysis, on the other hand, is theory-driven, where the process of coding is related to a specific research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given the fact that the current study is theory-driven, with a pre-determined research question, the latter form of thematic analysis will be used.

Braun & Clarke (2006) further distinguish six phases within the process of thematic analysis. The first phase starts by having an understanding of the collected data, as well as being able to notice initial patterns. Regarding the interviews, for example, this phase is initiated through transcribing these interviews. The second phase involves studying the written data thoroughly, where different words, sentences, or paragraphs are labelled with codes, resulting in a list of different codes corresponding to different parts of the written data. In the third phase, these codes are being grouped together into overall themes related to the relevant theory, and

in the fourth phase, their significance in relation to the research question is defined. In the final phase, results of the analysis are presented (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This coding process as described by Braun & Clarke (2006) was applied on the thematic analysis of the interviews as well as the observations, through the use of the ATLAS.ti software program. In the next subsections, this process is described in detail.

3.9.2 Coding the interviews

The coding process followed the same structure, due to the thematic analysis for this research being deductive in nature. Regarding the first part of the interview, on expat families' home-making practices, the interview data was coded whenever an interviewee mentioned or showed certain objects related to their culture of origin, which they either brought to the Netherlands themselves or which were gifted to them. In many cases, these included different kinds of decorations, household items, or photographs. The interview was also coded whenever an interviewee mentioned certain meanings or values that these objects had to them, which could for example be symbolic or functional. Another code was given whenever an interviewee mentioned people in their personal network, such as family, friends, or colleagues, whether they live in Eindhoven or in the respondent's country of origin. Once again, another code was given whenever the value that this personal network has to the respondent was mentioned. The notions of various cultural aspects, such as food, media, or religion, were given codes as well, as well as the interviewee's value of these different cultural aspects. Regarding the second part of the interview, on the GiT program, the text was coded when the spouse mentioned how long they have been or had been with GiT. Some of the spouses were veterans and had been joining the weekly program for years already, while others had only been in Eindhoven for a couple of months. Further coding of the interview was done when the spouse mentioned anything about the GiT group, such as her relationship with other spouses, or how they felt about Eijssenring. Finally, the interview was coded whenever a spouse mentioned anything related to the value that GiT has for them, such as what they enjoy about it or what kind of influence it has on their life.

After the initial coding process, the codes were grouped into different themes, as per the third phase of the coding process by Braun & Clarke (2006). The first theme is Objects, which covers all codes that have to do with objects that the interviewees have in their homes, which either have their origin in the interviewees' country of origin or resembles the interviewees' culture of origin. Furthermore, this theme covers codes that express the value or meaning of these objects, why and for how long they have had them, and whether or not they have a home-

making function. The second theme is People, which covers all codes related to the interviewees’ personal networks. These include codes about their family, where they live, how often they see them or talk to them, and how they feel about the distance between them. Furthermore, codes related to the interviewees’ friendships or friend circles, and what these mean to them, were also included in this theme. The third theme is Cultural Aspects, which covers codes related to the interviewees’ use of various cultural aspects from their country or culture of origin. These include mentions of preparing and eating various types of food, listening to music, watching television, or practicing a certain religion. Furthermore, this theme covers the value that the interviewees attach to these cultural practices, and whether they play a role in their home-making. The fourth and final theme is Get in Touch, which covers all codes related to spouses’ participation in the program, their thoughts towards the weekly meetings, their feelings towards the other members, and their general experience of the program and the influence it has on their daily lives.

An example of the coding tree for the theme Objects can be found below. Please refer to the appendix for all the coding trees.

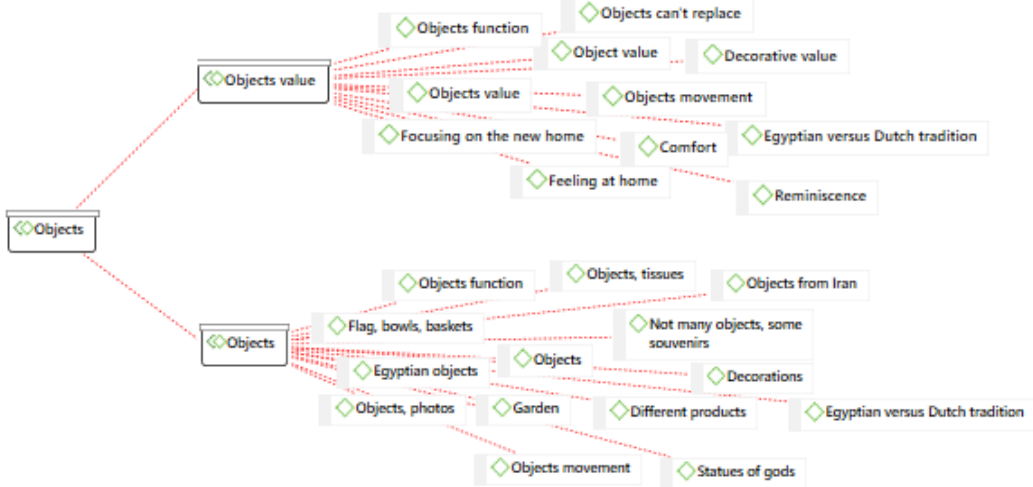


Figure 2 – Coding tree ‘Objects’

3.9.3 Coding the observations

A total of five participant observations were carried out for this research. These observations were done during the weekly GiT meetings, which were actively joined. The meetings vary greatly in activities and group composition; sometimes the group actively walks around town, while other times they meet somewhere and discuss a variety of topics. Furthermore, sometimes as many as twelve spouses join, while other times the group consists of four or five spouses. The five activities that were joined and observed were, in order, a

painting workshop, a book club, a parc afternoon, a walking tour around Eindhoven, and a social workshop. Similar to the interviews, the observations were written down extensively, and have been coded using the same coding process as presented by Braun & Clarke (2006).

Observation data was coded whenever spouses seemed to find themselves in a very relaxing atmosphere, such as getting a warm welcome, or whenever seemingly very natural conversations took shape. Codes were also given whenever Eijssening showed genuine interest and involvement regarding the spouses, or when spouses showed this to other spouses. Another code was given when topics of daily struggles were talked about, or when spouses talked about difficulties they have regarding living in Eindhoven. When Dutch culture was being talked about, or when spouses mention their own cultural norms and values, the observation data was also coded. Further codes were given to the text when spouses learned something new through the GiT meeting, or whenever knowledge about a certain topic was mentioned. The same goes whenever it was observed that GiT helps spouses to find a goal in their lives. Finally, whenever the concept of branching out became prevalent, meaning other activities or networks that have their roots in GiT, the observation data was also coded.

These codes as well were grouped into different themes. The first of these is dubbed Culture, where all codes regarding spouses' difficulty with Dutch culture have been collected, as well as codes regarding spouses' culture of origin and cultural differences between spouses. Codes that showcase spouses' difficulty with adapting in Eindhoven, as well as their daily struggles, were also included in this theme. The second theme was named Goals, and it includes all codes that showcase that, through GiT, spouses learn something new or gain or share knowledge about certain topics or about Eindhoven. Codes about spouses finding a goal in life, as well as the concept of branching out, have also been collected under this theme. The last theme has been dubbed Flow, and it includes all codes that showcase the relaxing vibe that GiT has, such as the friendly and informal way things go. The natural conversations and voluntary character of GiT, as well as the interest that all the GiT members show in each other, and Eijssening's involvement in the group have also been put under this theme. An example of the coding tree for the theme Goals can be found below. Please refer to the appendix for all the coding trees.

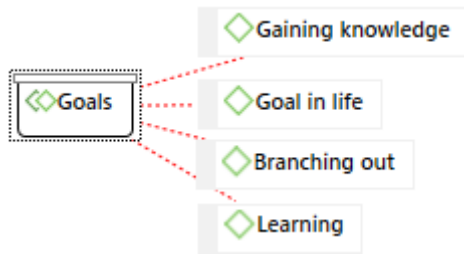


Figure 3 – Coding tree ‘Goals’

4. Findings

4.1 Preface

In this section, general findings of the analysis of this research are presented. These start by providing an overview of the general situation of expat families in Eindhoven. Secondly, findings on home-making practices are presented in the order of which they relate to the research question, namely home-making through objects, home-making through people, and home-making through cultural aspects. Whether these different forms of home-making help expat families to feel more at home is also elaborated on, as mentioned in the conceptual framework. Finally, findings on the impact of the GiT program on these home-making practices are provided.

4.2 Adapting in Eindhoven

4.2.1 Grounding

“I have no idea what I expected. I think maybe the hardest was to start making the household, and keep it alive, and keep it going.”

“Without our parents.”

- Hungarian couple on moving to Eindhoven

For most knowledge migrants, going on an expat adventure is a huge and difficult step, and expat families in Eindhoven are no exception. For many respondents, coming to Eindhoven meant they had to live abroad for a long period of time for the first time in their lives, while for some even, it goes as far as moving out of their parents’ home for the first time. Indeed, one spouse from Nepal mentioned how, before coming to Eindhoven, she had been living with her parents for nearly thirty years. One expat couple from Hungary had a similar experience; they moved in together in Eindhoven, whereas before both of them were still living with their parents.

“For me, because of employment, yes, living here was difficult for me. I didn’t have an idea what should I do for work, or profession, and it took two years to finally, partly, find my way. But the worst part for me was the work part.”

- Iranian spouse on adapting in Eindhoven

For all respondents, moving to Eindhoven meant to leave their social network behind; they leave family and friends and move to a place where they do not know anybody. For the expat himself, however, this problem gets alleviated right from the start. Through TU/e, the expat finds full-time employment and social contacts, usually in the form of other international co-workers. Furthermore, through various activities, TU/e facilitates different kinds of social support for its international workforce. For the spouse, however, this is not the case. While the expat immediately finds employment and becomes included in a social network, the spouse has neither. After coming to Eindhoven, for a large share of her week, the spouse has nothing to do, and no one to connect with. This situation is something all respondents were familiar with.

4.2.2 Difficulties in connecting with the Dutch

It can be argued that this is part of the life that the expat family chose; indeed, they made the decision to accept the job offer in Eindhoven and leave their country of origin behind. All participants were aware of this, however, all of them also had certain expectations about Dutch people and Dutch culture; expectations, particularly regarding social contacts, that made them believe their situations would not be as difficult as what it turned out to be.

“I don’t feel like a part of Eindhoven, no. It feels like I’m not allowed to be. I try to be a part of Dutch culture, and to speak Dutch, but I am always treated as a foreigner. On the street, people always switch to English. I think there’s a degree of institutionalised racism.”

- Spanish expat on Dutch culture

Indeed, almost all respondents expected to relatively quickly be able to become a part of Dutch culture, and to establish connections and friendships with Dutch people. One couple from Spain, who had been living in Eindhoven for almost six months, talked about how they felt like they did not feel a part of Eindhoven or Dutch culture in general. Even more so, they felt like they were not allowed to be a part of it. They make an attempt to speak Dutch, to do and live like other Dutch people, but, as they observe, this is never accepted. When interacting with them, Dutch people immediately switch to English, even when an attempt to converse in Dutch is made. When out in public, the couple mentions, they feel like they are always treated

as foreigners; never as fellow inhabitants of Eindhoven. To them, it feels like a community which they are not fully allowed to enter.

“It was strange first, for me, but our friends are expats, not Dutch. I expected that we move here and we would have a lot of Dutch, not friends, but people to see often. But our friends are....”

“They are mainly expats, some people we met in Get in Touch or the sports program. There is one Iranian couple living here in this building as well, we got in contact with them.”

“And we have Hungarian friends here.”

“Yeah also. And yesterday we were with some Hungarian people who live here in Eindhoven.”

- Hungarian couple on friendships

Furthermore, almost every interviewed couple mentions how they expected to find Dutch friends and establish deep connections with Dutch people, but how this never happened. One spouse from Colombia said that while she had been living in Eindhoven for a couple of years, she has never managed to make Dutch friends. They are nice, and friendly, but not open for deep connections and friendships, as she states. She has nonetheless tried to establish these friendships, as it would surely make her feel more at home in Eindhoven, but to no avail. The couple from Nepal and the couple from Hungary mentioned the same; they have not been able to make Dutch friends, and while the contact with Dutch people is fine, just as the Colombian spouse mentioned, it stops at a collegial or professional level.

“It’s very difficult, they are really....they are nice, but not...not...they are not open for deep connections, for like a real friendship, no. No. They already have their friends. (...) ...in the last year I met amazing women, and we exchange knowledge, and we chat, and we talk, and we see each other, but these are all like in a professional level. That’s it. So yeah, I think it would be easier and nicer to, yeah, to have Dutch friends.”

- Colombian spouse on connecting with the Dutch

4.2.3 Loneliness and culture shock

Clearly, expectations about Dutch culture and Dutch people are not met, which leads to two main problems for expat families in Eindhoven, namely loneliness and culture shock. Particularly for the spouses, these are serious struggles. One spouse from Egypt mentioned how lonely she felt after first arriving in Eindhoven, nearly six years ago. Lonely because she missed

the people in her life who are still in Egypt, and lonely because there used to be nobody she knew in Eindhoven. One spouse from Colombia found herself in the same situation; she did not know anyone and did not have a job, which made her feel incredibly lonely. Loneliness was also a problem well known for a spouse from Nepal. Before coming to Eindhoven, she had always lived with her parents, and her loneliness was mostly caused by missing them so heavily.

“Most probably, almost everyone I know here, has a depression. Including me, by the way. (...) We all have this because it’s, you know, feeling lonely. It’s not easy. You are working, you are eating well, you are dressing well, you have insurance. (...) But something is missing.”

- Egyptian spouse on loneliness

In all these cases, loneliness caused to spouses to become severely depressed. The Egyptian spouse mentioned how she suffered from depression, and that she felt very uncomfortable to go out of her apartment. Becoming depressed, as she said, was not just the case for her alone, but for almost every international spouse she was in contact with. All of them faced depression one way or another, caused by loneliness and culture shock. The spouse from Nepal missed her parents to such a degree that she got seriously homesick and depressed, which became so extreme that it completely paralysed her daily life. Finally, the Colombian spouse had such a severe case of depression, that she could not even bring herself to perform basic tasks. At one point, she even contemplated taking her own life, which showcases exactly how difficult life can be for international spouses in Eindhoven.

4.3 Home-making through objects

“I think once we started decorating, for example when we started hanging pictures, I think they made a little home here, right? Because the furniture is provided by the apartment, so we had nothing of our own, let’s say. When you started decorating, having pictures on the wall, and those things, here and there, then it’s kind of like home, like our place, that kind of feeling.”

- Nepalese spouse on decorations

When looking at expat families in the Brainport region, the importance of home-making through objects varies greatly. The main reason, or the main cause in this sense, has to do with the expat families’ culture of origin, and more specifically to what extent it differs from Dutch culture. In essence, the greater the difference in culture, oftentimes related to distance, the more the expat family engages in home-making through objects. As it seems, expat families from vastly different continents and cultures than the Netherlands, such as South America or Asia,

are more inclined to place different kind of objects from their culture of origin in their home in Eindhoven than expat families originating from other European countries such as Hungary or Spain.

4.3.1 Function and value of objects

One family from Egypt, for example, has many types of furniture, as well as a huge variety of cups, cutlery, glasses, and plates that are either from Egypt or Egyptian in style. In Egyptian culture and Egyptian homes, a large share of the furniture is solely used when guests are visiting; the rest of the time these objects are never touched. This family, however, tried to break that tradition after moving to Eindhoven, as they realised that this tradition is not observed in the Netherlands. Instead, they try to combine both cultures, by selecting the elements from both cultures which they personally like the most. This way, they feel like they have the best of both worlds. Regarding the specific Egyptian or Egyptian-style objects and pieces of furniture, they noted that using them or looking at them makes them feel comfortable, as well as a way to stay connected to their culture of origin. She does stress however, that these objects cannot in any shape or form replace her home culture. They are a way to stay connected to it, and having them makes her comfortable, but it never replaces what she misses.

“They’re beautiful. Because they are different and they remind me, every object is an emotional connection to what I miss, and what I do. (...) Because I’m a diver, I used to live by the ocean and I’m a biologist, so that’s the way that I still connect with that. Of course it’s sentimental, I value them more than something else. They remind me of where I lived, or the moments I shared, or trips I made with my family, those kind of things.”

- Colombian spouse on cultural objects

One spouse from Colombia has many objects that remind her of, as she called it, her previous life. Growing up near Colombia’s seaside, she was a diver and a biologist by profession. In their house near Eindhoven, this family has put up many decorations referencing this. These include artwork such as paintings of the sea, small decorations such as pearls or shells, and large decorations such as a replica of a swordfish hanging on the wall. Furthermore, a typical Colombian style hammock hangs in their garden. The sentimental value of these objects is quite extensive, as the spouse states, for it reminds her of Colombia and her origins. She misses her country of origin quite a lot, however, through these objects she can still connect with this previous life of hers on a daily basis, which comforts her and makes her feel more at home.

Besides objects of decorative value, one family from Nepal had many objects with a functional value as well. These functional objects include many Nepalese types of bowls, baskets, and plates, mostly used for serving various types of food. They use these often, as they often prepare Nepalese food. Besides these functional objects, they possess many different types of decorative objects such as a large Nepalese flag, small, colourful woven objects, and many photographs, all hanging on the wall of the apartment. Furthermore, a glass cabinet with small statues and figurines of different types of deities and other religious or spiritual characters has been placed quite prominently in their living room.

4.3.2 Cultural distance and objects

“We like this apartment, we made this our home, our place. So the photos on the wall, and the pillow that she uses from Hungary for example, they help us feel more at home here.”

- Hungarian expat on home-making through objects

Quite on the contrary, however, can be found in the responses of a Spanish expat couple in Eindhoven. When asked about objects which are from Spain or resemble Spanish culture in any way, they could not think of anything. One reason could be that the difference in cultures is not that large, or not large enough. At least, that seems to be the case for this couple. Furthermore, one couple from Hungary possessed mostly personal objects or everyday household items, such as a pillow, or a certain type of Hungarian tissues. While these objects do help them feel at home in Eindhoven, they did not carry much sentimental value. As such, the greater the difference between an expat families' culture of origin and the Dutch culture, the more they seem to be inclined to engage in home-making through objects. This is, however, not at all peculiar. When a migrant comes from a country with a culture vastly different than the Dutch, the chances of experiencing culture shock and facing cultural barriers are far greater than when a migrant comes, for example, from another European country. Indeed, according to Ward, Bochner & Furnham (2001), the greater the cultural distance, the likelier the possibility of intercultural problems arising. In order to deal with this culture shock or to overcome these cultural barriers, expats seem to make use of things that are familiar to them. Objects that remind them of their home country, or that make them feel more connected to their home culture, can in this sense be a way to achieve this.

4.4 Home-making through people

4.4.1 Living without family

“We call, and internet makes everything easier, and with Skype you can even see them. But still, it is not the same as living with them. (...) It is hard. Sometimes you really feel lonely and you just need a hug, you will not get it if you are only talking for hours.”

- Egyptian spouse on family members

Home-making through people can be divided in two different types; home-making through family members and home-making through friends. Home-making through family members usually takes place when the migrant has other family members living close by in the host country, such as parents or siblings. While the respondents have their partner, and some of them have children, none of them have any other family members living in the Netherlands. As such, theoretically, home-making through family would be a difficult process for expat families in Eindhoven. While all of them have chosen for this life and to move to Eindhoven, the degree to which they miss their family members, or to what extent they find it difficult to live here without them, varies greatly.

4.4.2. Value of communication

However, there is one thing that all respondents have in common regarding their family members who still live in their country of origin; they are still in a lot of contact with them. Usually through social media or video chatting, all respondents talk with their family members on a weekly, and sometimes on a daily basis. For some of them this is fine, while for others this is hardly satisfactory.

“I was homesick. I had never been away from my parents for an unseen future. I would go outside of my city for work and all, but I knew would always be back, but not this time. I had been with them for 30 years. (...) The relation we had, I was so open to my father, we would talk about everything. I never expected that relationship with my parents, you know, it was really strong.”

- Nepalese spouse on missing family

The spouse from Egypt, for example, notes that she talks and sees her family members almost every day, however this is not enough for her. Just seeing and hearing them is not the same as physically being with them. Even though by now she is used to it, it is still a struggle she faces regularly. The same sentiment is shared by the Nepalese family, who mention how difficult it is for them to be so far away from the rest of their families. While they call them

multiple times a week, they express wishes that they would like to be able to visit them more often. However, as they mention, this proved difficult due to various health related issues. As such, they have not been to Nepal for more than a year. This is very difficult for them, most notably for the spouse. Before coming to Eindhoven, she had never lived away from her parents, and being so far away from them was the main reason she developed a severe case of homesickness.

For one Iranian couple, living here without their other family members is very hard. They miss them dearly, however, modern communication helps them immensely to cope. The primary reason why it is so important to them is because they want to know their family's situation at all times. They want to know what happens in their lives and if they are safe, and receiving these positive updates helps them to stay calm and more comfortable.

“That was not my issue. Missing family or friends is not my issue because I have been living in many places for a long, long time. So I move, and move, and move. (...) I’m used to living away, so I make friends here, and then I move, and make other friends there. It’s not like Dutch people who have had the same friends from primary school. No, I don’t have that. I’m not attached. Not attached to things, you know. Not attached to a house, I never had one house, I had so many that I don’t have my memories attached to that house or that place or that city. The last city I was, I was for five years. So yeah, I don’t have that.”

- Colombian spouse on living away from family and friends

The spouse from Colombia mentions how she hardly experiences any difficulties by living so far from other family members, as she is very much used to this situation. For her, she has been living away from her family for around twenty years, and as such has become a normal situation. She is a person that has known to travel for a large share of her life, and while she did experience many struggles in her adapting process, missing family was not one of them.

For many others, however, such as the Egyptian or Nepalese spouse, moving to Eindhoven was the first time they moved away from the country where they grew up, for some even the first time living anywhere other than the house of their parents. In these cases, the removal of home-making through family became a difficult situation.

4.4.3 Community

“Yes, there is a large Iranian community, especially in east part of the city. When you are walking in the street you can hear Persian, so it feels like home.”

- Iranian expat on community

For some respondents, whether or not home-making through people is achieved depends on the presence of other migrant families in Eindhoven that hail from the same country or region. One Iranian couple mentioned how there exists a large Iranian community in Eindhoven, most notably in the eastern part of the city. They mention how they can even hear people speaking Persian as they walk outside. Furthermore, they have Iranian neighbours who they often see and speak with. As such living here in Eindhoven does not feel foreign to them; it is almost as if they were still living back in Iran. A different couple from Iran shared the same sentiment, as they too value the large Iranian community in Eindhoven. Through this community, they managed to establish friendships with other Iranian people, who they now meet with almost every day.

“The Egyptian community is very big here. We have groups, you will find groups. For example the group I’m in, we are 8 families, and we are very close. We meet every then and now, and we make for example potlucks, and things like that.”
- Egyptian spouse on community

The Iranian community is not the only ethnic community in Eindhoven. The same goes for the Egyptian community, as mentioned by the Egyptian spouse. She sees many people within this community as good friends who she often meets with. For her, having this community comforts her, and it gives her people to talk to and to do activities with.

4.5 Home-making through cultural aspects

“The food definitely, we do a lot of cooking, Mediterranean cooking...or the music, like Catalan or Spanish music, and the news as well. Those things remind us of home.”
- Spanish spouse on cultural aspects

Home-making through cultural aspects can take on a few different forms. In this subsection, four different kinds will be discussed; home-making through food, home-making through media, home-making through music, and home-making through religion.

4.5.1 Home-making through food

For all of the interviewed expat families, food is a very important factor for home-making. Making and eating certain dishes, as well as preparing certain ingredients, provokes certain feelings of home. The taste and smell reminds them of their past, where they come from and the way they grew up. One spouse from Colombia states how she also uses food as a way to keep her children connected to her heritage, as she notices how little by little they started to

forget about Colombia. The Nepalese spouse says that cooking Nepalese food reminds her of her mother's cooking, someone she misses dearly, and through food she feels more at home in Eindhoven. Furthermore, all respondents noted how easy it was for them to acquire the necessary ingredients; through Arabic shops, or food markets, almost any ingredient for any dish can be bought. The couple from Hungary mentions how there's a market every Saturday, where a Hungarian man sells different kinds of Hungarian ingredients and food. While they do not make typical Hungarian dishes often, but when they do, they oftentimes go to that market.

"We usually invite friends to come over. You know dumplings right? Our friends prefer to come to our place to eat those instead of going to a restaurant. They say that we like to come to your place, and not eat out, because you cannot find the same taste."

- Nepalese spouse on Nepalese food

Interestingly enough, while some respondents go to specific restaurants every now and then, this is not the case for most of them. While most of them enjoy making and eating food that relates to their country of origin, whether it is purely because they enjoy it or because it helps them to feel at home, this almost always happens at home. For some respondents, such as the Hungarian couple or the Nepali couple, there are simply not many restaurants specialised in either Hungarian or Nepalese food. As the Nepalese couple mentions, in order to go to a restaurant where they specialise in Nepalese food, they would have to go Amsterdam, a more than 1.5 hour drive. Furthermore, it seems that for most respondents, actually preparing the food themselves is an important process. Preparing food is a way for them to reminisce about home. However, it is not just purely making and eating food because it's familiar to them, or because it reminds them of or connects them to their home country. Besides these reasons, most respondents stated that they simply dislike Dutch food.

4.5.2 Home-making through media

"Yes, the commentary. It has to be Colombian, because no other gives you adrenaline and makes your heart pump. Here it's really boring, you wonder if they are even there. So yeah, that, definitely. I have to arrange my streaming so I, sometimes watch a match from the Netherlands, or from Germany, but I hear the sound from Colombia."

-Colombian spouse on television

Home-making through media can be split into three different forms; television, movies, and news. For most respondents, television or movies were no factors in home-making. In a

few cases, however, respondents mentioned that they regularly watch certain television shows or movies from their country of origin. For example, one couple from Iran noted that they watch an Iranian movie every now and then, while another Iranian couple watches a few Iranian television series. The spouse from Colombia mentioned how, besides a few Colombian television shows, the one thing she has to watch in Colombian are football matches. The reason, as she says, has to do with the commentary, which she refuses to watch in Dutch. Besides these examples, however, most respondents stated that they did not watch a lot of television in their country of origin, and this did not change after moving to Eindhoven. In many cases, television is used to either watch international television shows on Netflix or through other websites.

“Yes, I’m news addicted. I really have the passion to follow the news. Maybe something happened and I don’t know, and I really want to know. So yes, we have different sources of news, we check it through our phone, or the website.”

- Iranian expat on news

The news from their country of origin, however, is something almost all respondents follow very closely. In most cases, this happens through websites of certain news stations or through various social media. For some cases, such as the spouse from Colombia or the Hungarian couple, they follow news through radio. Every morning they turn on a radio station, Colombian and Hungarian respectively, and hear the news. Seeing how they miss their home country or home culture, it makes sense that they would want to know the current events happening there every day. Furthermore, they have family members or friends still living there, and they want to know if these people are safe. One Iranian couple most notably mentions this; Iran being a country where tensions of many different kinds are not uncommon, they want to be aware of developments and situations on a daily basis. The husband even admits he struggles with a certain news addiction; he wants to be aware of the situation in Iran at all times, and as such, browses news websites multiple times every day.

4.5.3 Home-making through music

“When I’m here alone in the morning I usually turn it on and listen. Because in the morning, there are three guys talking about random stuff, and they play music, so it’s just a regular morning program. But I feel more comfortable when I listen to that.”

- Hungarian expat on radio

The third cultural aspect is that of music, which, for all of the interviewed couples, is a very important factor for home-making. Listening to music from their country or culture of

origin, or listening to the radio, or searching for songs on YouTube, is something every interviewed couple does regularly. One couple from Hungary wakes up every morning with the Hungarian radio, because these sounds are what they are used to waking up to; these sounds makes them feel at home. In the same vein, one couple from Catalonia, Spain, listens to Catalan or Spanish music almost every day.

- "I play music when I leave home in the morning, and actually I start my day with that music, so it calms me down. (...) I remember the first day I wanted to work there in Spain. During the distance between my house and the place I worked in the university I played those songs, and they helped me a lot to calm down."

- "So is music a way to cope with not living in your own culture?"

- "Yes. For me, yes."

- Iranian expat on music

The most interesting music related home-making practice was told by an Iranian couple, as they mentioned how in the past they never used to listen to Iranian music. Growing up, they mostly listened to American music, however, now that they have grown older and have moved away from Iran, they listen to more and more Persian songs. It reminds them of home, it gives them positive nostalgic memories, and, most importantly, it is a way to calm down and feel comfortable.

4.5.4 Home-making through religion

"You know, for example, regarding the canonical version of Islam, she should wear hijab, but she's not wearing it. There's no problem with not wearing your hijab, because I understand the Quran in my way. So I can call myself religious, but perhaps if you ask another religious person, they would say no, no he's not religious."

- Iranian expat on religion

The fourth and final cultural aspect is that of religion. Research has shown that many migrants start practicing religion more often after moving abroad, as a way to embrace something that is familiar to them and provides them with comfort (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009). However, this is hardly the case for expat families in Eindhoven. When asked whether respondents considered themselves religious, most of them stated that religion does not play a part in their life. Some of them, however, practice religion. One Iranian couple, for example, stated that they see themselves as Muslim, but they practice it in their own way. In their words, they follow some Islamic principles, while at the same time disregarding others. One example

they gave is the hijab; according to the canonical version of the Quran, a woman should wear a hijab; however, in the case of this couple, they have decided that the spouse does not have to wear one. Their practice of religion, however, did not change after moving to Eindhoven, and it has a minimal impact on their feelings of being at home. The Egyptian spouse, however, did feel like religion played an important part of her feeling at home. While her actual practice of Islam did not change much after moving to Eindhoven, the people with whom she prays and attends services at the mosque did change. Through religion, she not only found contact with other people in Eindhoven, she also meets them at the mosque multiple times a week. Religion plays an important part in her life, and it was a way for her to feel more at home.

4.6 The role of Get in Touch

This subsection elaborates on the role that the Get in Touch program plays on these various forms of home-making practices, and on the process as a whole.

4.6.1. Get in Touch and objects

Though not every expat family employs home-making through objects, the GiT program does have a certain influence on this process. The actual placement of certain objects in an expat family's home is decided long before the spouse joined GiT, and as such is not influenced by the program. However, regarding the value of these objects, GiT does come into view. Oftentimes, the weekly GiT meetings consist of a variety of workshops or events, in which some of these objects fulfil a prominent role. During these meetings, spouses can bring objects to their country or culture of origin, and the cultural value of these objects, as well as spouses' personal value is shared and discussed. Some of these events, one of which was also observed, was a cultural event hosted at TU/e, where multiple stalls were present, all correlating to a different country. At these stalls, different cultural objects or foodstuffs were presented and games could be played, among other things. The GiT program also had a stall, in order to provide information about the program and its activities to visitors. One of the ways in which this was done was through the spouses' efforts, who joined the event and brought many different cultural objects with them. They showed them, used them, and talked about them, not only to the visitors of the event, but to each other as well. While this was an example of such an event hosted by TU/e, several other of these so-called stall events, such as the International Fair, or events hosted by companies such as ASML, were moments where GiT was also present.

One of the subjects of the survey covered the specific GiT activities, and how they were valued by the spouses. Results showed that these types of activities, most notably the stall event described above, are valued greatly by spouses. In some cases, spouses even ranked these

activities as their number one. It gives spouses the possibility to share and discuss their cultural backgrounds, through the use of a variety of objects, handicrafts, and food, in an open and judgment-free way. This, in turn, helps spouses to feel more at home. This shows that through the use and value of certain cultural objects, with the facilitation through GiT events, home-making through objects is realised.

“I ask them, and they have been here for a long time, to help me to do something. They helped with everything, for example when I want to learn a language, I have a question about Dutch, they helped me, everything. (...) They’re friends, they’re real friendly and I think they are my first friends here. (...) They are my first friends.” -

- Iranian spouse on other GiT spouses

4.6.2. *Get in Touch and people*

Home-making through people, as it turns out, is a much more important form of home-making for expat families in Eindhoven. While the expat usually immediately gets included into a large, existing network due to his work, the spouse finds herself in a much more dire situation. Indeed, as mentioned in the introductory paragraph of this chapter, loneliness is one of the main problems that international spouses are facing. The GiT program, however, provides a cure for this loneliness. It is tackled by taking the spouses along in a vast network, as well as giving them the opportunity to meet people who face the same struggles as them. Meeting, talking, and hanging out with people who are quite similar in this sense, can be a successful recipe for creating deep connections and friendships. Looking at the results of the survey, as well as talking with spouses during interviews, they all see the other members of GiT as a group of really good friends, and in a lot of cases even as a second family. These are people they do not just meet during the weekly GiT activities, but also on different days of the week. Indeed, they do not connect with each other as a sort of obligation, as something they feel like they have to or should do because they are a part of the GiT program; they genuinely see each other as friends. As it turns out, making friends through GiT is not such a difficult process after all, at least a lot less difficult than almost all spouses thought at the beginning.

“Oh it was very good. We made a little trip to Strijp-S, and we visited a lot of shops, maybe a museum, and I liked it. There were almost 10 girls! There was a girl from Nepal, and she has been in Budapest twice already, and we talked a lot about Budapest. Last June, we invited her and her husband to our wedding. Carola also came.”

- Hungarian spouse on her very first GiT meeting

Specifically, during the interview, one couple from Iran mentions how valuable this is, as they are able to compare it with examples from their own experiences. Before coming to Eindhoven, the couple had a different expat adventure in another country, where no such thing as GiT existed. For the spouse, her contacts there were extremely limited, but here in Eindhoven, she has found a group of friends in a relative short time, as she has only been here for half a year. The couple from Nepal also provides examples of other people they know where nothing similar to GiT exists, where loneliness is a huge struggle as well. However, a cure such as GiT is not present there, which is why this couple is so grateful to be a part of the GiT program. The spouse gained a lot of friends from GiT, and she mentions how the group feels like a warm family to her, where everyone, whether they are veterans or newcomers, is always accepted. The statements of a different spouse, from Hungary, reflect these feelings; at the very first meeting she immediately felt part of the group. The same goes for the spouse from Spain; she has only joined about four times, but enjoys it a lot and already completely feels part of the group.

4.6.3 Contact with spouses

As demonstrated above, many of the spouses face the same struggles and hardships; loneliness, culture shock, homesickness, to name a few; however, just meeting people in the situation as you, does not automatically create a meaningful friendship. With GiT however, it is all about the contact, on the way spouses are being treated, how they are included into the group, and the informal way that GiT can have a place in their lives.

“You know like, it’s really difficult to go out of the apartment sometimes, in the sense like I feel comfortable at my own place, and, so you really have to mentally prepare yourself to go out, to meet people, and you have to first think about okay, where am I going, so how do I get there, so the process of reaching there is sometimes too much that I just hold it back, or skip that. But then I think about the GiT spouses, they would ask if I was coming or not, it was more motivating, they are friends and waiting for us. And then it was okay I go, I can go this way or that way.”

- Nepalese spouse on GiT meetings

This contact, in essence, can be seen as the reason why spouses greatly enjoy spending time with the GiT group, and why it seems so relatively easy for them to make friendships. Regarding this contact, the keywords is informality, in which the most notable element is the way Eijssenring interacts with the spouses, whether they join for the very first time, or whether

they are GiT veterans. Contact with spouses is made, is maintained, and is tied off; this goes for new spouses, veteran spouses, but also for spouses who cannot join the program anymore.

“She was preventing this (culture shock), she was making us avoid this by... we talk about Dutch culture, we used to talk about our own cultures, so if you do this in this culture, it means that meaning, but in other it means that, so it makes it easy for us. (...) So you understand what they are doing so you don't have this shock, so you feel, okay, yeah I know what this is for.”

-Egyptian spouse on culture shock

4.6.4 Get in Touch and cultural aspects

Regarding home-making through cultural aspects, GiT definitely has a certain influence on the process, and more specifically regarding the gap between the spouses' cultural aspects and Dutch cultural aspects. Previously, it was mentioned how loneliness was one of the most common struggles that international spouses are facing; the other is culture shock. Culture shock occurs due to the sheer difference in Dutch culture and the international spouse's culture of origin. However, due to the different activities, GiT also provides a cure for this culture shock problem. The way Dutch people do things is covered extensively, and it helps them understand this. Things they used to find strange or weird suddenly seem a lot less so, and this relieves some of the culture shock.

In many activities, the conversations, between spouses as well as between spouses and other people, oftentimes involve cultural related things. It helps them understand that different cultures or groups do different things, or have different norms and values, and it also puts the culture in which they grew up in in perspective. As can be seen from the interviews and observations, spouses value these types of talks and discussions greatly. GiT, in turn, provides them with a safe space to do this. It is a group without judgments of any kind, where many spouses find themselves in similar situations, and where cultural topics can be shared freely. This helps them to not only understand Dutch culture more, but their own cultural background as well. This is crucial for the spouses to anchor better in their new existence, and to be able to feel at home in Eindhoven. In this way, GiT plays a significant role in the process of expat family's home-making through cultural aspects.

5. Conclusions, discussion & recommendations

5.1 Conclusions and discussion

In the previous chapter, findings on the thematic analysis of the interviews and

observations were presented. In this chapter, these findings are used to provide answers to the research questions that were presented in the introductory chapter of this thesis. The research question that was posed was as follows:

“How do expatriate families in the Brainport region engage in home-making practices and what role does the Get in Touch program play?”

In order to provide answers to this question, it was divided into four sub-questions. In this subsection, answers to these sub-questions are given.

5.1.1 First sub-question on objects

“How do expatriate families in the Brainport region engage in home-making through objects?”

There is a large variety in the way expat families in Eindhoven use cultural objects, such as decorations or furniture, for home-making purposes. For some families, the use of objects is an important tool in their process of home-making. Objects such as decorations that reference their country of origin, or dishes used for certain types of food, are a way for these families to feel at home; looking at or using them provides them with comfort and it connects them with their past. For these families, home-making through objects is used extensively. Literature on home-making through objects supports these remarks. Research by Bilecen (2017) has shown that Turkish migrants in Germany gain feelings of home and belonging through material objects, most notably through various Turkish decorations as well as everyday Turkish dishware. Meijering & Lager (2012) found the same results by showcasing how Antillean migrants in The Netherlands gained a sense of home through various everyday household items and decorations, and research by Philipp & Ho (2010), furthermore, has shown how South-African migrants in New Zealand make home through a variety of South-African style objects. In the current study, the Egyptian and Nepalese family employed home-making through objects in a similar way; decorations from their country of origin are prominently displayed in their homes, and Egyptian or Nepalese-styled household items, such as furniture or dishware, are used every day. These families use these objects for the same reasons found in other literature, as a way to feel at home and gain a sense of belonging. Using certain dishware, or looking at certain decorations, invokes a certain feeling of comfort and familiarity, which are important elements for feeling at home. An interesting case is that of the Colombian spouse, who had many objects and decorations that referred to Colombia, or, more notably, the Colombian seaside where she grew up. Being around these objects and decorations almost all the time made her feel comfortable and at home. Research by Boccagni (2014), showed how migrants from

Ecuador, a different South American country, engaged in home-making while living in Italy. Interestingly enough, there is a notable similarity with the Colombian spouse from the current study, as in both cases, home-making involves actively referencing the homeland through objects and decorations.

Some families, however, do not engage in home-making through objects at all, as they have very few cultural objects in their homes, and in some cases none at all. For these families, certain objects that are typical from their country of origin, barely play a role in their process of feeling at home; they either hold no specific function or value, or do not provoke significant nostalgic feelings or emotions. This does not imply that they do not engage in home-making at all; other forms of home-making might be important to them, but the use of objects does not. In the current study, the Spanish and Hungarian families, as well as both Iranian families, were families that have not, or to a minimal degree, engaged in home-making through objects. Their homes, with regards to furniture and decorations, generally resembled any modern Dutch home, which was something all of these families were content with. They do not feel the need to fill their homes with specific cultural objects, as in their cases, feeling at home is disassociated from objects and their sentiments and values.

These remarks are not supported by existing literature on home-making through objects. However, looking at these families from a broader perspective, one could say that they come from a country with minimal cultural differences compared to the Netherlands. Just as The Netherlands, Spain and Hungary are European countries, and one could argue that the cultural barriers for these families were not that high. Other families, such as those from Egypt or Nepal, had to face much higher cultural barriers due to the larger cultural distance. It seems that the higher the cultural barriers, the more expat families attach value to certain objects, and are as such more inclined to engage in home-making through objects.

Contradicting this statement however, is the process of home-making of both Iranian families. Arguably, Iran is a country with a large cultural distance relative to the Netherlands, and given the previous statement, this would mean that Iranian families would be inclined to engage in home-making through objects. This is, however, not the case, as both Iranian families included in this study have not felt the need to make use of certain cultural objects. This would mean that home-making through objects is not always related to cultural distance.

There is, however, a different finding that these families have in common, which may be the reason why home-making through objects plays no part in their situation of home-making. All of these families mentioned how adapting in Eindhoven has been relatively easy for them; problems such as loneliness and culture shock were not very notable for these families, and

their transition into life in the Netherlands went relatively smooth. At least, when compared to some of the other families. It seems that this relatively easy adaptation is the reason why they are a lot less inclined to use the function and sentimental value of objects for home-making.

5.1.2 Second sub-question on people

“How do expatriate families in the Brainport region engage in home-making through people?”

Home-making through people can take on multiple forms, such as through family or friends. For expat families in Eindhoven, home-making through people primarily takes form in the relationship between husband and spouse. Indeed, the expat and his spouse made a collective decision to move to the Netherlands together, and to start a new life here. In some cases, such as the Nepalese and Hungarian families, moving to Eindhoven became the first opportunity for husband and spouse to actually live together. For the Egyptian, Colombian, and one of the Iranian cases, moving to Eindhoven also meant bringing their children along, which for them, besides the husband-spouse relation, means a second primary form of home-making through people.

For the larger share of families, however, home-making through people is not fulfilled, as problems such as loneliness and homesickness are very common and, in some cases, very severe. This inability to achieve home-making through people is twofold. On the one hand, this inability is related to other family members. While the couple moved together here in the Netherlands, other direct family members such as parents or siblings stayed in their country of origin or moved somewhere else. This absence of family has been, for many families, a reason why they feel lonely or homesick. Looking at existing literature on home-making through people, it seems that the presence of other family members is indeed an important factor for someone to feel at home. Meijering & Lager (2012), for example, showed how Antillean migrants in the Netherlands emphasised how much it meant to them that other family members lived close by. Bilecen (2017), furthermore, demonstrated how the presence of other family members can be an important factor for the improvement of migrants' social protection. This is clearly something that many expat families in the Brainport region have been lacking.

In all of these cases, however, contact with other family members is still established regularly, as through contemporary technology, talking to and seeing other family members can be done easily. All families value this greatly, and they actively make an effort to do this on a regular basis; all families mentioned how they talk to their family members in their country of origin at least once a week. Bonini (2011) showed how technology such as video calling and emails enables a Filipino migrant in Italy to remain in contact with family members back home

extensively, and how, because of this, home-making through people can still somewhat be realised. In the current study, this can be seen as well. While the expat families miss their other family members dearly, the fact that they can talk to them and see them whenever they want to is something they value greatly. For some families, such as the Spanish and one Iranian family, living with their beloved, and sometimes children, and regularly video calling with other family members back home is satisfactory. For others, such as the Egyptian and Nepalese family, only seeing and talking is not enough; they miss actually being around them a lot more.

As mentioned earlier, the inability for many expat families in the Brainport region to achieve home-making through people is twofold. While the absence of family members was one cause, the absence of other social contacts is a second cause. As could be seen from the findings of this research, almost all families experienced a tremendous difficulty in establishing social contacts. In a few cases, the existence of an established community, such as an Iranian or Egyptian one, proved to be a relatively easy way for families to become embedded in a social network. Research on Antillean migrants in the Netherlands by Meijering & Lager (2012) on Antillean migrants in the Netherlands showed the same findings, as the large Antillean community has been extremely valuable for them. For a large share of families in the current research, however, this is not a given. Most notably, contact with local, Dutch people proved to be difficult, while actually establishing friendships with them has been impossible. The research by Meijering & Lager (2012) showed the same issues, as many Antillean migrants mentioned how difficult it has been for them to establish satisfying social connections with Dutch people. Interestingly enough, most families expected to become friends with Dutch people, but all of these expectations were met with disappointment.

5.1.3. Third sub-question on cultural aspects

“How do expatriate families in the Brainport region engage in home-making through cultural aspects?”

Multiple cultural aspects can become tools for home-making. For expat families in the Brainport region, there are three that stand out; food, music, and news. Regarding food, preparing, eating, and sharing food from their country of origin is something that gives comfort, and reminiscing of home through the tastes and smells makes it easier to live here; this value that food brings is shared by almost all families. Research by Philipp & Ho (2010) on South African migrants in New Zealand showed the same findings, as it demonstrates how preparing and eating certain types of South African food created certain tastes and memories from home. Through food, sights, sounds, smells and tastes of a migrants’ country of origin can be recalled,

which many families in the current study felt as well. This form of food nostalgia is an important tool for home-making. Furthermore, the actual preparation of food also provides value, which is something expat families in the current research mention as well. Preparing and eating food from the country of origin, sometimes together with other people with the same cultural background, gives more feelings of home than going to a specific restaurant. The research by Philipp & Ho (2010) also showed how South African migrants in New Zealand disliked the local food which was also a reason why they mostly prepared South African food. This is also the case for many expat families in the current research, as they mention how they simply dislike Dutch food.

Music is, for many expat families, a way to feel comfortable, and waking up to a certain radio station or listening to certain songs makes them feel at home. Existing literature on music as a specific tool for home-making, however, is scarce. Bonini (2011) mentions how music or radio can be a way to momentarily 'return' home for a Filipino migrant in Italy, and Slette-meås (2013) notes how Islamic migrants in Sweden oftentimes listen to Middle-Eastern radio or music. However, there is not much further elaboration, and music as a tool for home-making is otherwise not covered extensively. For expat families in the Brainport region, however, it appears to be an important factor in their process of home-making.

The news is a third important tool for home-making for expat families in the Brainport region. All respondents mentioned how often they follow the news from their country of origin; they want to be aware of the contemporary situations in their countries of origin at all times, as many of their family members and other loved ones still live there. The news, contrarily to music, is covered more extensively in existing literature. Bonini (2011), for example, showed how a Filipino migrant in Italy reads Filipino news many times a day, and while he is online on his computer, the news is always open. Many expat families in the current research also have this tendency to always being up-to-date with current situations in their respective country of origin, while one Iranian respondent even called himself news addicted. Being able to at any times be aware of situations in their country of origin gives them gives them comfort, and, in a certain way, it helps them to live in a different part of the world. Existing literature shows a variety of other cultural aspects which can be used as tools for home-making of migrants. Findings of research by Bonini (2011) and Slette-meås (2013) showed how migrants oftentimes use television and movies as a tool for home-making, however, findings of the current research are not supported by this. While some expat families, most notably the ones from Iran, mentioned how they sometimes watch certain television shows or movies from their country of origin, the larger share of respondents did not feel the need to. Finally, Mazumdar & Mazumdar

(2009) findings of research on Hindu migrants in southern California showed how these migrants oftentimes use religion as an important home-making tool. In the current research, the family from Nepal considered themselves Hindu, however, they mentioned that their religious practices did not change or increase after moving to the Netherlands. Further findings of the current research also show how, for the larger share of expat families, religion is of no importance in the process of home-making.

5.1.4. Fourth sub-question on the role of Get in Touch

“What role does the Get In Touch program play in these home-making practices?”

The GiT program has a certain influence on all three different forms of home-making. Regarding home-making through objects, the GiT program provides spouses with the opportunity to explain and share values and sentiments that certain cultural objects have for them. Regarding home-making through people, the GiT program provides spouses with an extensive network and the opportunity to meet many people, and it can serve as a catalyst for deep connections and friendships. Regarding home-making through cultural aspects, the GiT program provides spouses with knowledge and information related to Dutch culture, as well as relieving culture shock.

While it can be argued that the GiT program influences all three forms of home-making, home-making through people specifically stands out. Through GiT, spouses are able to get in contact with each other; through this contact, spouses find out that there are others facing the same struggles as them, which proved to be a catalyst for friendships. The importance of these friendships, or at least, regular contact with peers also becomes clear from the results of research by Butcher (2010). This research showed how social connections of Australian expats in Singapore mostly consisted of other expats, which matches with the current study’s findings. Furthermore, one of the hardest struggles for spouses prior to becoming a member of the GiT program was loneliness, which in some cases led to severe depressions. Getting to know people and making friendships through GiT has been incredibly valuable to them, and it truly positively changed their lives.

Besides loneliness, culture shock is another struggle that many spouses were dealing with prior to their introduction to GiT. Through GiT, a large share of this culture shock is being cured, which, in turn, helps the spouses to feel more at home. Indeed, spouses mention how the relieve of culture shock makes it easier for them to live here. In this sense, the GiT program can be seen as a form of cross-cultural training; Selmer (1999) argues that cross-cultural training is an important tool for the successful adjustment of expats. By providing expats with knowledge

regarding culture in the host country, the adjustment process can be improved. In the current study the same results can be seen; spouses gain knowledge regarding Dutch culture, which in turn relieves some of the culture shock and helps them feel more at home.

The above discussion on the role of the GiT problem on home-making practices solely focuses on the spouses, which makes sense due to GiT's target group being spouses as well. The research question, however, focuses on the expat family as a whole, not just on the spouse. However, it can be argued that when a spouse feels more at home, her partner does as well. Indeed, during several interview it oftentimes became clear that the GiT program has helped the spouse to feel more at home, which the partner mentioned as a reason why he feels more at home as well. As such, while the GiT program focuses on international spouses and proves to be a positive impact on their home-making practices, it indirectly helps spouses' partners as well. In line with these findings is research by Shaffer & Harrison (2001). Results of this study showed that the better adjustment of spouses, the better the adjustment of their partners is. The same conclusions can be drawn from the current study.

5.1.5 Main research question

“How do expatriates families in the Brainport region engage in home-making practices and what role does the Get in Touch program play?”

Though there exists a large body of literature on migrant home-making practices, research that specifically focuses on expats is scarce. This research has shown that expats in the Brainport region engage in all three forms of home-making practices, albeit not always the same as cases in existing literature. Research by Walsh (2006) shows how British expats in Dubai engage extensively in home-making through objects; through various British-style decorations and dishware, home is conceptualized and created (Walsh, 2006). In the current study, it was proposed that cultural distance and home-making through objects could be related, which the findings by Walsh (2006) are examples of. Existing literature on home-making through objects (i.e. Bilecen, 2017; Meijering & Lager, 2012; Philip & Ho, 2010) shows how home-making through objects is an important tool for any migrant, however, several cases in the current study do not engage in this form of home-making at all. This contradiction seemed to be related not only to cultural distance, but to the adjustment process in general. Other research on expats' home-making practices, such as by Butcher (2010), showed how home-making through people usually occurs through peers; social connections of Australian expats in Singapore are usually other expats, and not locals. Results of the current study match with these findings, as contact with Dutch people proved to be very difficult to establish. Existing literature on migrants'

engagement in home-making through people (i.e. Bilecen, 2017; Meijering & Lager, 2012; Bonini, 2011) show the importance of this form of home-making, and importance that can be concluded from the current study as well.

Existing literature on migrants' home-making through cultural aspects (i.e. Philip & Ho, 2010; Bonini, 2011; Slettemeås, 2013; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009), shows how important they are in order to gain a feeling of home. While results of the current study agree with these findings, there exists a difference in the actual cultural aspects that stand out. In the current study, cultural aspects such as music and the news were of great importance, while others such as television or religion proved to be less significant.

Finally, the influence of a social support program on home-making practices has not been found in existing literature. It can, however, definitely be concluded that the GiT positively influences expat families' home-making practices. The program helps expat families in their engagement in all three forms of home-making, most notably home-making through people, leading to them feeling more at home.

5.2 Reflecting on the research process

In this subsection, a critical reflection of the research process will be discussed. It starts with the way contact with spouses has been made, and then turns to the specifics of the semi-structured interviews and the participant observations.

5.2.1 Approaching spouses

At first glance, it would seem that, regarding the influence of GiT, one prominent observation can be made. This would be that all spouses are incredibly positive about GiT, and about the influence it has on their life, their network, and their future. Indeed, as can be seen from the results of this research, not a single spouse has negative feelings of any kind towards GiT. It seems to be the perfect program for newly arrived international spouses in Eindhoven, one that is crucial and indispensable for their personal and professional development.

However a couple of remarks need to be made regarding these conclusions. A first remark is related to the interviews, and more specifically, about the way interviewees had to be approached. The interview respondents, as mentioned, were expat couples, of which the spouse has joined at least a couple of GiT meetings. Due to the participation of multiple GiT meetings a certain degree of trust was established with the spouses. However, many of them were hesitant to have the interview at their homes. This does make sense, if one looks at it objectively. First of all, it was necessary to approach as many different spouses as possible, as this would improve the chances of being able to do a sufficient number of interviews in order to provide an answer

to the research question. While a couple of spouses were aware the research, this was not the case for everyone. Secondly, even for those spouses that were aware of this research, it was a big step for them to invite someone to their home in order to conduct an hour-long interview. It proved to be too difficult to ask them directly, and while there was familiarity, the degree of trust was not large enough. As such, while spouses could be asked directly, the chances of finding a sufficient number of interviews this way were too slim.

As such, while discussing this, the conclusion was made that in order to find a sufficient number of interviews, the best option was to approach the spouses indirectly, through efforts of Eijssenring. A small introductory text was written, which explained the goal of the research and why the interviews are crucial. This text was sent to Eijssenring, who in turn sent it forward to a wide selection of spouses, all of whom have or had been part of GiT. Because all of the spouses knew Eijssenring very well and trusted her, they were much more inclined to agree to the interview. While Eijssenring approached a wide array of spouses, this method can be questioned. Indeed, as Eijssenring is the founder of and tender to the GiT program, a positive result of this research is beneficial to her. This could have been reflected on her selection of spouses who were to be interviewed about their feelings towards the program, among other things.

In reality however, seeing the huge variety of approached spouses, this would not have had an impact on the couples that have been interviewed. However, another remark regarding those couples that did agree to be interviewed needs to be made. Among other things, the interview was meant to record spouses' feelings towards GiT, in order to improve and sustain the program for the future. As such, by agreeing to be interviewed, couples directly helped the GiT program and its future. In order to find as many interview respondents as possible, this was explained to them through the introductory text as well. One could argue that in order to agree to be interviewed and to help GiT, a spouse has to feel positive about the program, the weekly activities, and the person leading it. Those spouses that did not enjoy being a part of GiT would be a lot less inclined to agree to such an interview; after all, this would have them reserve time and space in order to help a project which is not that valuable to them. This could mean that results are somewhat skewed, and that spouses that have been interviewed do not entirely represent the total group of spouses. Furthermore, there could have been spouses that joined GiT only once and who never came back, either because they did not enjoy the activities, or perhaps found no connection with the group. Spouses such as these had not been approached for an interview, and even if they had been, they would most likely not agree to participate.

As mentioned earlier in this paragraph, spouses had been approached indirectly through

Eijssenring, in order to increase the chances of being able to do a sufficient number of interviews. This proved hardly to be the case, however. Around thirty spouses had been approached, varying in age, nationality, family situation, and amount of time spent with GiT. Of those thirty, however, many did not respond to the interview request, even after multiple reminders. Furthermore, with those spouses that did respond, contact did not go very fluently. Many stopped responding after initially agreeing to an interview, others could not find the time due to work or vacations. A few spouses told me in person that they would respond later, which they never did, while a few other spouses agreed to do the interview in written form, however, after e-mailing them the questions, a response never got sent back. As such, of a total of thirty spouses had been approached, however, in the end an interview was conducted with only seven of them and their partners.

5.2.2. Interview locations

Prior to the start of the field study, it was planned to conduct a total of ten interviews. However, it became clear that only seven could be done, which is unfortunately a lot less than was planned beforehand. This harms the reliability of this research; with a total of ten interviews, the results would have been much more reliable. However, as it proved to be rather difficult to find and maintain contact with possible interview respondents, not much could have been done to improve the study's reliability. Furthermore, the overall target group for interviews was limited; interviewees had to be expat couples of which the spouse is or has been a member of the GiT program. As such, it was not possible to find more possible interviewees besides the initial approached group.

While the overall number of interviews is lower than was planned for, a great variety in interviewees was established, most notably regarding nationality and duration of stay in Eindhoven. All but two interviewees came from unique countries from various continents; Europe, South America, West Asia, and the Middle-East. Furthermore, some interviewees had been living in Eindhoven for multiple years, while others had only arrived a couple of months ago.

An important element of the interviews was that they ideally were to be held at the interviewees homes. The main topic for the interview was home-making practices, and having the interview at interviewees' homes allows for a better understanding of these home-making practices; it allows the interviewees to provide context to their statements, and interviewees can show examples. All but one interviewee agreed to this location of the interview; the other interview took place at a café in the centre of Eindhoven. The respondent, a spouse from Egypt,

did not feel comfortable inviting me to her place, which, for the sake of the research, was not ideal. The interviewee mentioned many different cultural objects, however, because she could not show examples, and due to her difficulties with the English language, it was hard to grasp the functions and values that these objects fulfil for the respondent. The six other interviewees, however, all agreed for the interview to take place at their homes, and this proved to be valuable. One reason for this was that it allowed interviewees to actually search for home-making related elements in their homes, without having to name them from the top of their head. One couple from Hungary, for example, actively looked around their apartment for Hungarian objects, and by finding them they could talk about the meaning this particular object has to them, or the value it gives them. If this interview were held at another location, they perhaps would not have thought of certain objects, as they would have had to mention them purely by memory. One other reason for the value of the location of the interview, was that it was much easier for interviewees to show what certain elements mean to them in relation to home-making. One couple from Nepal, for example, had one of their walls full of pictures of memories they cherish. Being able to actually show these pictures in person, it was much easier for them to talk about it and to sense the value of these pictures. One spouse from Colombia, on the other hand, was really fond of coastal and sea objects, due to her past near the Colombian coastline. Actually seeing these objects, such as a replica swordfish on the wall, paintings of sea, and certain types of pearls, provides a much better overview of interviewees' process of home-making than merely hearing them talking about these elements.

5.2.3 Double-interview style

Another important condition for the interviews was that they would be held with both husband and spouse together. The idea behind this was that interviewing both the husband and spouse together would provide the full picture of the expat family's home-making practices, as well as the interplay between the both of them. Again, six out of seven interviewees agreed to this double-interview style. The one interview where this was not the case, was the same interview where the previous condition regarding the interview location was not met, namely the interview with the Egyptian spouse. Besides not feeling comfortable doing the interview at her home, her husband could not find the time to join her for the interview. Even though two conditions had not been met, the interview was still a valuable addition to this research, as it provided some insights in an international spouse's home-making practices, as well as her thoughts and feelings towards the GiT program. Regarding the other six interviews, however, they were all held with both husband and spouse, and this proved to be very valuable. It

explicitly showed how not the individuals but the family employs the process of home-making, as they complemented, affirmed, and sometimes corrected each other. Indeed, doing the interviews with husband and spouse together showed that not only migration is a family-strategy, but so is the process which comes afterwards; making home. As mentioned earlier, due to difficulties with regards to finding interview respondents, only seven could be done. Due to this low number, one could raise questions about the validity of this research and its results.

5.2.4 Value of the observations

Besides the semi-constructed interviews, other forms of field study have also been employed in this research, such as various participant observations. These proved valuable mostly for the second part of this research, regarding the influence of the GiT program. During the observations, the way spouses experience the meetings and the way Eijsenring establishes contact with them could be seen very clearly. Though spouses mentioned the positive influence that GiT has on their lives during the interviews, actually witnessing it directly proved to be very valuable.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendations for further research

In this subsection, suggestions for further research are provided in response to conclusions of the current study. One strand of possible further research comes as a result of the relationship between ability to adapt and home-making practices. Results of this research have shown that the less smoothly an expat family's adaptation process, the more likely they are inclined to engage in home-making practices, most notably home-making through objects. Indeed, those families that experienced the most difficulty in adapting to the Netherlands and Dutch culture, were most likely to use a variety of cultural objects in their process of home-making. Further research could aim to find out whether this truly is the case, and whether this applies to other forms of home-making as well. Furthermore, research can be conducted to find out whether this applies to all migrants, besides expats.

A second suggestion for further research is related to the connection of expat families and local, Dutch people. As can be seen from the current research, almost all expat families experienced difficulties in connecting with Dutch people. While the contact itself oftentimes was fine, truly establishing friendships with Dutch people has been an impossible to achieve task for all expat families. Moreover, almost all expat families mentioned how their expectations were different than reality; before coming to the Netherlands, many expected to relatively quickly become friends with Dutch people. None of them managed to do so, however,

not even some who have been living in Eindhoven for more than five years. Further research could aim to find out why this is the case, and how it is possible for such a large share of people to have expectations which all have not been met.

5.3.2 Recommendations for the Get in Touch program

In this subsection, a specific focus will go to the GiT program and its future, and recommendations will be given which aim to make sure the program will be sustainable for the future. Over the past few months, contact has been made with many GiT spouses, and all of them have been incredibly positive about the program, however, it is of importance that this remains this way in the future. Indeed, the benefits that GiT brings for individuals as well as society at large have been made clear previously in this chapter. As for now, not much should change. Every GiT spouse enjoys GiT the way that it is, and as such, there is no reason to make changes. All spouses enjoy the wide range of weekly activities, which allows them to get to know Eindhoven, meet new people, and make new friends. Furthermore, the formalities are also sufficient the way they are, aiming at the frequency of meetings, timespan of meetings, or size of the group. Besides the meetings, all spouses are very fond of Eijssenring, about the way she makes contact with them, leads the group, and most notably about her welcoming and natural vibe. However, looking at the future, two remarks need to be made.

The first remark is related to the target group of spouses. As of now, the group consists mostly of spouses of international employees at TU/e, and as such, the program is catered to their needs. However, during all those years also quite a number of other international spouses have participated in the GiT program, but on a personal membership. The GiT program, therefore, catered to their slightly different needs as well. However, the goal is to make the program even more broadly suitable for more international spouses in the Brainport region. The GiT program might not be suitable for international spouses with specific needs, or who find themselves in a different phase in their lives compared to current GiT spouses. The possibility exists that the group changes, whenever GiT is getting upscaled for a larger pool of international spouses, and perhaps this means that there should be added other formats than weekly activities.

The second remark is related to Eijssenring, and about her distinct way of running the GiT program. She is a suitable person for the job, which is something all spouses agree on. In fact, for some spouses she is the very reason why they join the weekly activities. However, at some point in the future, Eijssenring will have to retire, and it would be worthwhile to see if someone else could take over the GiT program and retain the spouses' engagement. The question then becomes who this could be, with what kind of personality and with what kind of

characteristics. In the survey, the role that Eijsenring fulfils was an important element; one question that was posed asked whether or not respondents would still join GiT, if someone other than Eijsenring would be taking it over from her. Of all respondents, not even one third stated that they would still join. The rest either stated that they were not sure, or that they would not join anymore. As such, in order to make GiT future proof, it would be recommendable if someone could be found to take over eventually, and the challenge is to find someone that is suitable, in order to continue and further develop the positive trend that GiT has been providing for over ten years and counting.

6. References

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7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Introductory text for an interview

Dear (name),

As you probably know, I'm doing a research internship at Living In/Municipality Eindhoven and Indigo Wereld, of which the Get in Touch program makes part. I do this internship for my Master thesis research, which I'm writing about the way expat families make their home in a host country, and the role that Get in Touch plays in this process.

In order to conduct this research, I have created an online questionnaire, which you probably already received. Besides, I would like to do a few in-depth interviews with expat couples living in the region Eindhoven, like yourself. This interview will cover questions on the way people feel at home, and the factors that enable this. Furthermore, the role of Get in Touch in this process will also be covered.

You would be of great help to me if you would allow me to have this interview with you and your partner, together. The interview would take about one hour of your time and, if desired, the results can be made completely anonymous. The interview would preferably take place at your home. This makes the setting a lot more informal, and I can experience with my own eyes how you and your partner shape your home here in Eindhoven. Furthermore, this would mean that there is no need for you and your partner to travel somewhere for the interview.

Thank you very much for reading! I hope I have made my request clear, and I hope to see you soon for the interview.

Kind regards,

Thiemen van Zeeland

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Interview guide

Introduction

1. Express thanks for inviting me to their home

2. Introduce myself → Name / age / studies
3. Short summary of the topic → what it's for / what it's about / what kind of questions
4. Ask if both spouse and partner can introduce themselves → name / age / country of origin / how long they have been in Eindhoven / children
5. Ask about their home → how long have they been living here / how is it different than the way they lived in their country of origin

Main questions

Home-making through objects

1. Do you have any objects from your country of origin / culture of origin?
 - 1.1. Give examples
 - 1.2. If yes: Ask if they can show them / talk about them / explain their functions
 - 1.3. If no: Why not?
2. If yes: Did you bring them with you or were they sent to you?
3. If yes: Why do you have them / What do they mean to you?
 - 3.1. Just for decorations or for a practical function?
 - 3.2. Are they a way to make yourself feel more at home?
4. If they have a garden: Do you recreate things from your country of origin in your garden?
 - 4.1. For example plants / flowers / design

Home-making through people

5. Do you have any other family members here in Eindhoven?
 - 5.1. Brothers/sisters / cousins / children / etc
 - 5.2. If yes; do they make it easier for you to feel more at home here?
 - 5.3. If no; do you miss them? Are you in a lot of contact with them? In what way?
 - 5.3.1. Does this make it difficult for you to live here? Why or why not?
6. Are you satisfied with the amount of people here that you can call friends?
 - 6.1. If yes; In what way / how did you meet them / how often do you see them?
 - 6.1.1. Mainly Dutch people or mainly other internationals / expats?
 - 6.1.2. What do they mean to you / do they make you feel more at home in Eindhoven?
 - 6.2. If no; In what way / how would you like to see this changed?
 - 6.2.1. Does it make life difficult for you here?
 - 6.3. Are you still in a lot of contact with friends from your country of origin?
 - 6.3.1. Do you miss them / Is it hard to be here without them?
7. If the couple has children: How many children do you have? / How old are they?
 - 7.1. Did they come with you here or were they born here?

- 7.2. How does it make you feel to raise children in a different country than your country of origin?
- 7.3. Do you prefer to go back to your country of origin with them, or do you prefer raising them here?

Home-making through cultural aspects

8. Are there any place where you can buy food or ingredients from your country of origin?
 - 8.1. What kind of food / ingredients?
 - 8.2. Do you go there often?
9. Do you often prepare and eat food or dishes from your country of origin?
 - 9.1. If yes; Why? / Does it help you feel more at home?
10. Do you watch a lot of television or movies from your country of origin?
 - 10.1. If yes; How? / Why?
 - 10.2. If no; Why not?
11. Do you keep up with the news from your country of origin?
 - 11.1. Watching television, movies, or the news from your country of origin, how does it make you feel? Does it help you to feel more at home? Do you miss your home country?
12. Do you listen to a lot of music from your country of origin?
 - 12.1. If yes; Why? What role does it play in your life?
13. Are you religious? If yes, which religion?
 - 13.1. If yes; how do you practice religion? Through rituals / altars / masses
 - 13.2. If yes; do you have any religious decorations? Describe / show / function
 - 13.3. How does religion help you while being away from your country of origin? Or does it play no part in this process?

Get in Touch

14. How long have you been with GiT?
15. After how much time after arriving in Eindhoven did you first join?
16. How was your first GiT meeting like? What did it do for you or mean to you?
17. Are you still actively joining GiT?
 - 17.1. If yes; how is it now for you? In what way does it help you in your life?
 - 17.2. If no; why not? Do you miss it? In what way did it help you in your life?
18. Do you feel that GiT has provided you with a larger network?
 - 18.1. If yes; In what way? More friends / more job opportunities / etc
19. How do you see the GiT group?
 - 19.1. Like a group of friends? Or more like a second family?

20. Do you think GiT has helped you to feel more at home in Eindhoven?

20.1. If yes; In what way? Through the people / through activities / through cultural events / etc

21. How do you think your life would be without GiT? Would you still feel at home in Eindhoven? Or would this process be much harder.

Outro

22. Express thanks

23. Wish them good luck in their future endeavours and a nice evening

End of interview

Appendix 3: Coding trees

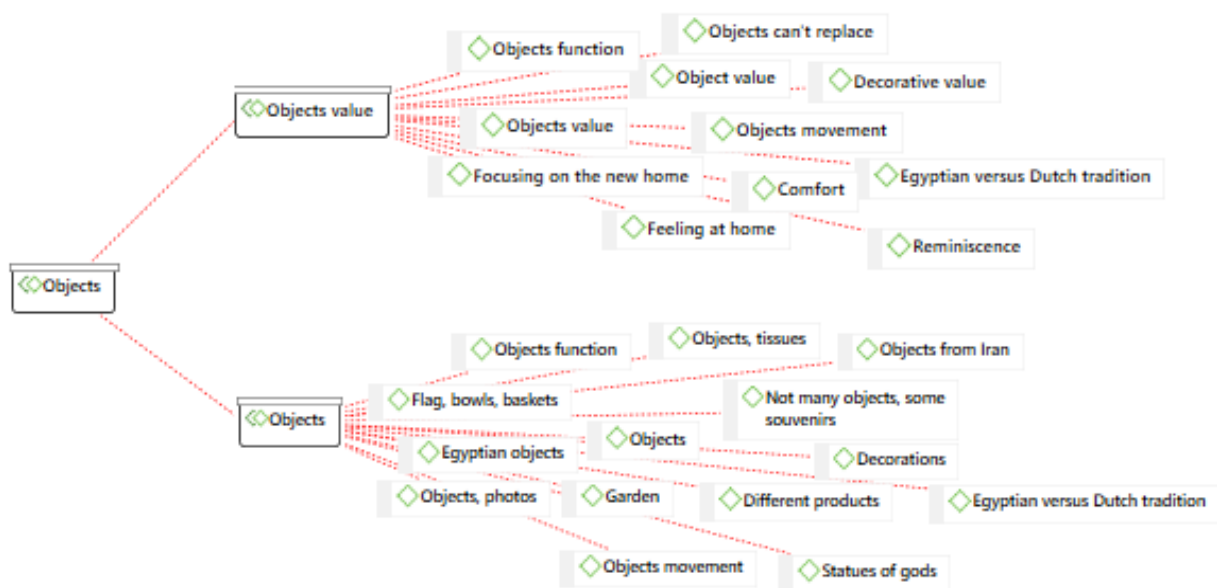


Figure 4 – Coding tree 'Objects'



Figure 5 – Coding tree 'People'

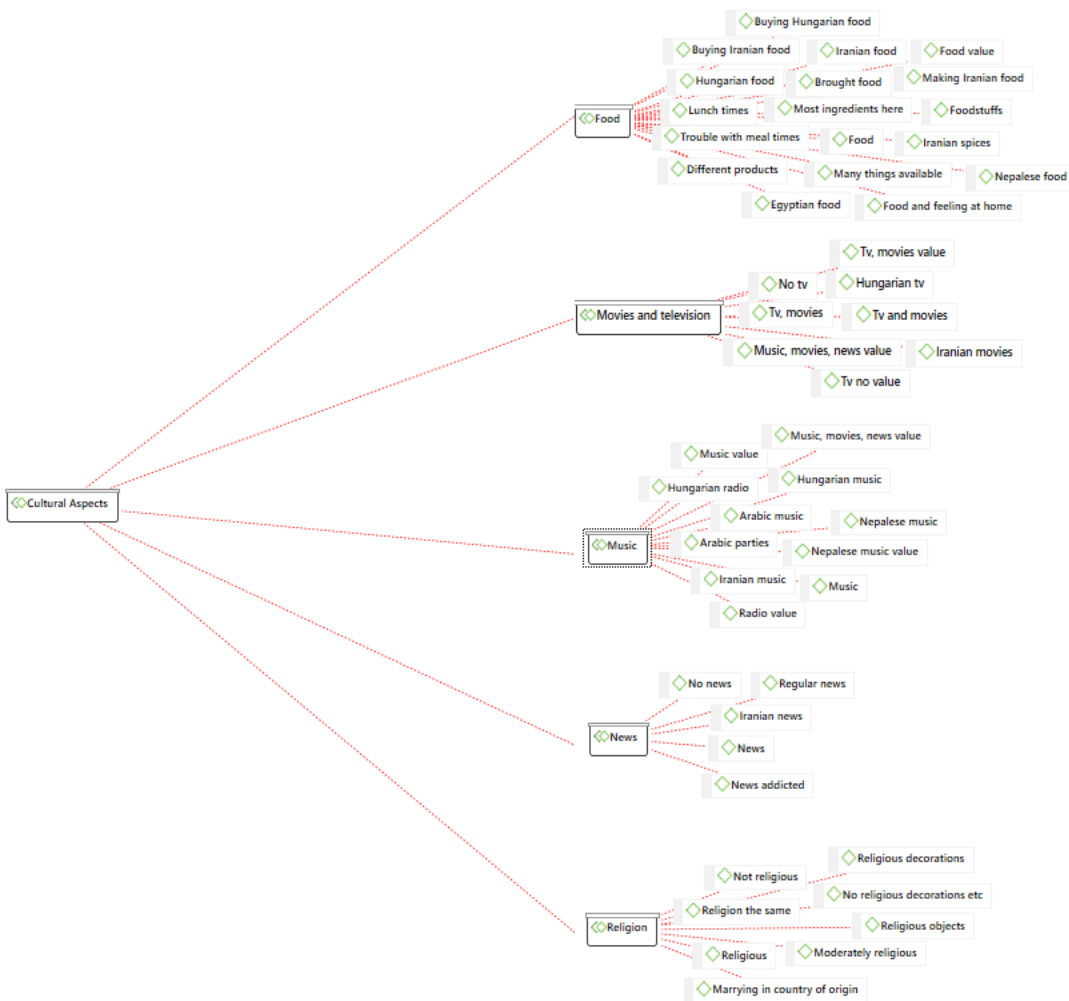


Figure 6 – Coding tree 'Cultural Aspects'

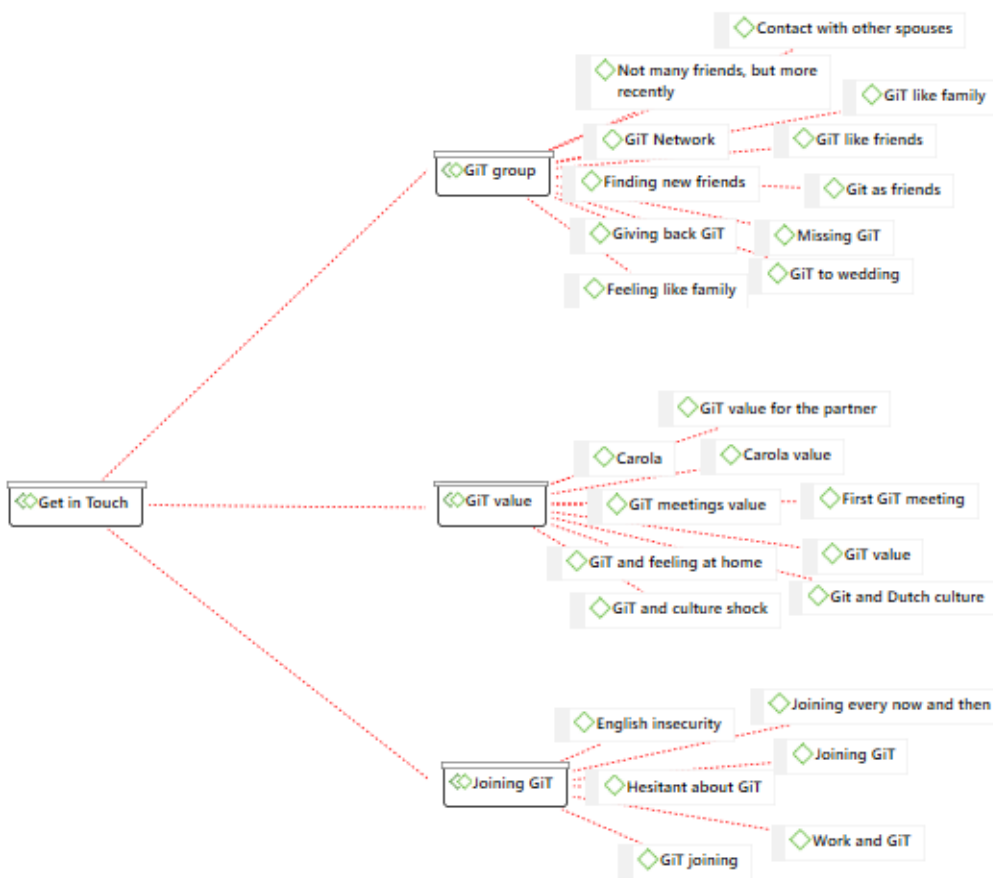


Figure 7 – Coding tree ‘Get in Touch’



Figure 8 – Coding tree ‘Culture’

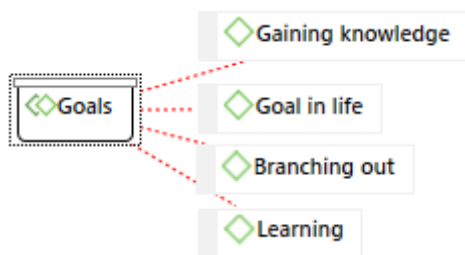


Figure 9 – Coding tree ‘Goals’



Figure 10 – Coding tree 'Flow'