Brabant is Here

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Making Sense of Regional Identification

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PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan Tilburg University
op gezag van de rector magnificus,
prof. dr. E.H.L. Aarts,
in het openbaar te verdedigen ten overstaan van een
door het college voor promoties aangewezen commissie
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door

Sandra Wagemakers
geboren op 26 november 1989 te Hilvarenbeek

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Chapter 1
Introducing Brabant

pictures: Sandra Wagemakers

Introducing Brabant

> We remember the extraordinary, the things and people that seem weird or stand out for some reason; that act out of the ordinary, that go beyond what's usual. But often it's the ordinary, the normal people on the street that set the sphere of our days, of our lives. (Wagemakers, 2010)

This quote was once written for my personal photo blog, but the thoughts I described then, are also reflected in my research today. It is not the powerful over-arching notions of Brabant that give us a grasp of what it means to live in this Dutch province, but rather the small moments, those acts of ordinariness in which we forget that it *is* Brabant, that make it what it is.

Throughout the past years, I mapped these moments relating to Brabant. It was often a difficult task, because how can you locate something you are, yourself, almost oblivious to? I have also heard many people speak about Brabant in many different ways. Friends would tell me that a colleague, child, friend, family member, or random stranger would say something that had some relation to Brabant. When I presented something about Brabant, people spontaneously started to share their first experience with Brabantish culture; I saw all kinds of things. In this introduction, I want to recall some of these reactions. Though all these occurrences may just be anecdotes, *together* they give an impression of what Brabant means to the people inhabiting it and the people looking at it from the outside. Although these experiences are not part of my regular data collection, they all shaped my research. They provided the backdrop to my research and to what I found. They are also essential to how I have understood everything surrounding me. In this sense, these impressions about Brabant constitute the essence of this dissertation.

So now you may be wondering, what is this place called 'Brabant'? A geographical answer would define Brabant as a province located in the south of the Netherlands, bordering Belgium. To be precise, the province is actually called North Brabant, as it was once annexed to a larger area, known as the Duchy of Brabant, which existed from the Middle Ages until 1795. The Belgian provinces of Flemish Brabant, Walloon Brabant, Antwerp, and the Brussels-Capital region now

encompass the southern part of that former duchy. Of course, although I may use the term 'Brabant', just as almost all the people around me do when talking about *North* Brabant, I do not refer to this Belgian part. This distinction was enough for a provincial political party to propose a change of name, but partly because of the costs involved, this did not eventuate (Van de Griendt, 2013). As most people in the Netherlands use the term 'Brabant' to refer to North Brabant, and this dissertation is about the people living in this province, I will follow the Brabant tradition here and use both Brabant and North Brabant to refer to the Dutch province and not its Belgian neighbours.

Brabant also contains 2.5 million inhabitants, which means that around fifteen percent of the Netherlands' inhabitants live in this province (Statistics Netherlands, 2015a). Brabant can boast its share of the largest-sized cities of the Netherlands including Eindhoven, Tilburg, and Breda, which are respectively the fifth, sixth, and ninth largest municipalities of the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2015c). Brabant's capital is 's-Hertogenbosch, more commonly referred to as Den Bosch. Around 38% of Brabant's inhabitants live in 'very densely urbanized' or 'densely urbanized' areas,[1] and with 507 inhabitants per square kilometre, it is close to the average of the Netherlands of 502 inhabitants per square kilometre (Statistics Netherlands, 2015d). While the symbolic 'central' provinces of Utrecht, North Holland, and South Holland have a higher population density, concerning the 'peripheral' provinces, Brabant is among the more densely populated. Brabant can also be divided into four NUTS-III regions (which correspond with the COROP regions): West, Mid, Northeast, and Southeast.

However, facts about the geography and demography of Brabant are perhaps not so interesting and certainly not the focus of this study. Such a description surely covers what Brabant is, but it does not describe what Brabant means to those inhabiting this province. This is what interests me; what does Brabant mean to a Brabander? As I have just outlined, Brabant clearly exists. I would argue that (North) Brabant is not *just* an institutional entity. My observations and research gave me the impression that Brabant is often discursively named, which connotes an understanding that is both implicit and communal. People also often discuss Brabant without problematizing the term. That is, while this term is often associated with stereotypes and 'objectively' invalid ideas of what Brabant entails and who Brabanders may be, this is partly irrelevant. The idea that this 'imagined' Brabant exists is telling in itself. We want it to be there, and so it is. Precisely because this 'we' is not a top-down institution, because 'we' are the people living here and elsewhere. In the following chapters, I will map this 'imagined' Brabant, using different methods and tools to show how *this* Brabant is maintained; visually and verbally, online and offline, in the private home and in the public space. Borrowing concepts and theories from cultural studies, sociology, and media

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[1] 'Very densely urbanized' is here defined as an area with more or equal to 2500 addresses per square kilometre and 'densely urbanized' as between 1500 and 2500 addresses per square kilometre.

studies, this dissertation has as its central focus the way in which people make sense of Brabant and how this Brabantish feeling is shaped and negotiated in everyday life. Following with this conceptual framework, I will use the remainder of this chapter to (re) introduce the research site. I will introduce 'my' Brabant, 'my' methods, 'my' research, 'my' dissertation, and, last of all, 'myself'.

Doing this research made me realize that Brabant was all around me. Even though beforehand, many of these signs were already around me, unconsciously accepted, it was only once I began this dissertation that I started to recognize them. I saw flags and banners, I heard and saw people using dialect, and I overheard many references to Brabant. As my attention became more focused on Brabant, I realized that, indeed, Brabant is here and it is an integral part of many people's everyday reality. Brabant is here because Brabant is everywhere around us, surrounding us without realizing. Brabant is here because it consists of 'our' everyday surroundings. Brabant is here, because it is where the Brabander is located; it is that which is close to the Brabander's home. I will just give a couple of examples to get an idea of the omnipresence of Brabant.[2]

Many of the references to Brabant are made unconsciously, which seems to the currency of its cultural symbols. However, connections to Brabant can also be made consciously, awkwardly and even artificially, which too, tells us something about the need for this connection. Over the past years, I have occasionally seen how the regional broadcasting news channel *Omroep Brabant* attempted to make the news relevant to Brabant in this manner. Responders sometimes thought it was ridiculous to 'Brabantize' something as this following comment on a news article illustrates:[3]

> Most of the travellers (...) were from Zeeland but some were also from Brabant and South Holland.[4] That must explain it or what? Was there really nobody from Utrecht or Gelderland? Or maybe someone who lives in Amsterdam now but who was born in Mariahout or Zijtaart?[5] Why always that forced "Brabant" connection? Who cares? (Response to news article on *Omroep Brabant*, 23 April 2015)

[2] Most data – including but not limited to tweets, interviews, online messages, and television episodes – were originally in Dutch. All translations into English are the author's. Usernames are removed and pseudonyms are used to guarantee anonymity despite some respondents' approval of using their real names.

[3] The news article is about an enormous multiple vehicle collision in the province of Zeeland, in which also people from the province of Brabant were involved.

[4] The parentheses were inserted by the commenter as this first sentence of this comment is a quote of the article: 'Most passengers who got involved in the enormous accident were from Zeeland, but among them there were also Brabanders [link to other news article] and inhabitants from South Holland. Emergency services from Brabant [link to other news article] helped their colleagues from Zeeland after the accident' (Kapteijns, 2015).

[5] The choice for Mariahout and Zijtaart does not seem to be a coincidence as singer Guus Meeuwis, who is considered exemplary for Brabantishness by many, was born in Mariahout and Brabantish comedian Theo Maassen grew up in Zijtaart.

Often, people told me about some Brabantish aspect about themselves when they heard about my research. Someone told me that she felt a 'click' with another Brabander at the office, merely due to the fact that they were both born in Brabant but were now living and working elsewhere. This desire to connect to Brabant is so strong that again, like the news article, if it is not unconsciously present, it will be forcefully made.

Around me, I also saw people praising Brabant and associating it with all kinds of positive notions. After participating in a charity event at a school in Brabant, one person responded on a blog: 'I truly enjoyed your effort, hospitality, warmth, inspiration, guts, creativity, happiness, enthusiasm, atmosphere... in other words... "Brabantishness".' Another person had learnt first-hand, after visiting Brabant for several years, the Dutch saying that you had to 'have another beer – this is Brabant – and you cannot stand on one leg', indicating that one (drink) is not enough. Someone else also identified this form of Brabantishness, writing as a comment on a news article: 'Brabant right. You do not have to be crazy to live here but it makes everything a lot easier.' I came across a Facebook page and a pop up event specifically aimed at Brabanders who live in Amsterdam: 'For all you import Brabanders, who help the restaurants and bars in Amsterdam to flourish and thanks to you, exuberance can also be found in the capital.' Even when people move out of Brabant, they may feel a connection with other people from their area. Some still want to celebrate that stereotypical exuberance with other people with their origins in Brabant. When IKEA started selling doormats with the chequered Brabantish flag and the text, *Houdoe* (Bye) on it, many responded to this message. On a Facebook post discussing the rug, some people commented on how it was sacrilege to wipe your dirty feet on the Brabantish flag. Others commented on the irony of putting the Brabantish word for bye on a rug, as it would suggest that people should leave right after they entered one's home. Not at all in keeping with the aforementioned stereotype. A few even noted that IKEA had done it wrong with seven rows of squares on the flag rather than six. Others simply enjoyed it and wanted this Brabantish rug for themselves.

This and countless other stories illustrate that 'Brabant' is alive and kicking. Often, these stories alluded unconsciously or consciously to the stereotypical image of the exuberant, partying Brabander. But this image was not always cast in a positive light. Sometimes regional exuberance was taken for arrogance, or the identification of a region with certain behaviour as monopolizing. Yet, whether positive or negative, the region itself is paramount in the discussion of Brabant identity. Paasi (2011) in his discussion argues that many studies and scholars take the region for granted. However, this is not the case for my study. In contrast, I do not take the region for granted when I examine how people identify with Brabant and what Brabant means to them. I do not assume that people's assertions about Brabant are based on 'objective' differences or that Brabanders are different from other (Dutch) people, despite the fact that that Brabant is often named – quite

literally. Nor do I assume that when speaking about 'Brabant', people refer to a specific administrative entity associated with the established province. Similar to what Skey (2011) found in his research in Britain concerning the term *British*, people often use the term *Brabant* without thinking. However, when asked what the term entailed, many had great difficulty in defining it. While all my observations show that *some* notion of Brabant exists and is experienced, throughout this study, we will look at what this notion actually *is*. This dissertation therefore explores how this regional identification is shaped and negotiated within everyday life.

What Are Identities?

Throughout this study, I focus on collective identities related to place. Place plays an important role as a foundation of identification. People attach themselves to places and in particular 'a special kind of place: the home' (Easthope, 2009, p. 71). Home is not confined to the boundaries of one's house, but may encompass a much broader, ill-defined notion. Home is therefore physical as well as symbolic (Morley, 2001). As such, this (physical) place can range from a large unit such as Europe to a small one such as a neighbourhood, street, or apartment block. Place, and also Brabant, here can connote the more administrative concrete physical location, in contrast to the more imaged virtual idea of space. Simultaneously, place, and Brabant, may be associated with imagined symbolic ideas about what it means to live somewhere. Furthermore, being a Brabander is not an individual act, it is about collectively belonging to a community. Following Anderson (2006), this community is imagined, as people do not know all of its members, and never will, yet there is a common feeling of belonging together to this, imagined, community. Once, Brabant may have been referred to as a strict category. In 1982, when Kuypers stated that Brabant does not exist, this was still a somewhat controversial idea. Scholars had only started to deconstruct the concept of identities as fixed structures. However, nowadays, many scholars have come to accept more constructivist notions on identities.

An essentialist perspective on identities would argue that people are determined to ascribe to a specific identity and that identities are based on fixed criteria. One needs to 'possess' a specific set of criteria, and if you meet these, you are a Brabander. Moreover, this perspective seems to suggest people have an inner unchangeable core that states who they are. However, it has long been argued now, that this is not the case with (cultural) identities. One is not born a Brabander, but one becomes a Brabander. One may be *born* in Brabant, and as a result have obligations and rights associated with this, but that does not mean one *necessarily* identifies with or is identified as a Brabander. Identities are social constructions as they are created and changed through interaction and interpretation (Blommaert, 2005; Edensor, 2002; Jenkins, 2008). For this reason, some scholars prefer the term

identification, rather than identities, as it suggests that it is a process that is never completed. However, others continue to use the term 'identity' or 'identities' but have reconceptualised it and rather than referring to a fixed essentialist entity, refer to a more strategic and positional form of identity. This means that identity is neither stable nor exactly the same across groups of people: 'Identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions' (Hall, 1996, p. 4). My perspective on how I perceive identities and identification after I have conducted all this research will be explained further in the second part of the next chapter *Describing Brabant*. For now it is important to remember that, based on the literature and my own research, the view on identities I am taking throughout this dissertation, is one that emphasizes that identities are not stable concepts, but are heterogeneous plural social constructs that are constantly (unconsciously) subjected to reaffirmation and negotiation.

Why Study Regional Identification (in Brabant)?

Even though I have already hinted at the existence of an identification with Brabant, one may wonder: why study these people? Why does it matter? In this section, I will explain that this study has both societal and scientific relevance. A good deal has been said about identities, both in science and in society, but scholars have not often engaged with the way in which people identify with their region. In this dissertation, I intend to go beyond the idea that identification is a 'feeling', but attempt to characterize what this means. Moreover, I will trace in what ways this 'feeling' is being shaped, expressed, and negotiated in everyday life, specifically in relation to contemporary media practices.

In a globalizing world, scholars have argued that people's territorial identifications are changing as their orientation moves away from the national; either towards the global or towards the local. I will elaborate on the meaning and theorized consequences of globalization in the third chapter *Tracing Brabant Over Time*. Yet, it is important to already note some aspects. While living in a globalized world, the local still has profound influence on people. It is neither the case that people have 'no sense of place' anymore, nor that global options and opportunities do not affect people at all. People seem to appeal to new scales of identification more frequently. Yet, many people still live close to where they were born (Appadurai & Morley, 2001).[6] Place, next to mobility, continues to be an important aspect of identities (Easthope, 2009). Still, while people increasingly move across the world, whether

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[6] For Dutch numbers on migration outside of one's own, one's parents' and one's (great)grandparents' birth village, interesting visualisations be obtained from Meertens Institute:
http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/migmap/

physically (permanently or for travel), in their imagination (through the use of media), or through consumption patterns, "rarely, however, does this sense of connection with 'home' become permanently shattered" (Skey, 2011, p. 159). People continue to identify with their localities and regions. In addition, it is important 'to avoid constructing an over-sharp contrast between the global and the local (…). Rather, we should ask: how exactly, do the new horizons of distance and 'reach' affect the local, the everyday, or the quotidian?' (Appadurai & Morley, 2011, pp. 40-41). My dissertation is not about the *effect* of the processes of (new) global reach, but it does go into this dialectic by examining what it means for people to identify with their locality and region in the present day. In this dissertation, I discuss and engage with phenomena that would not have existed without the Internet. This of course does not necessarily mean that they are not rooted in pre-existing social practices and discourses, but it does allow to engage with this local-global dynamic. For instance, in the fourth chapter, I elaborate on the interplay of more general 'white trash' repertoires with ideas of what is Brabantish. I examine how ideas may have a bigger general logic than is sometimes assumed. The global and local are entangled with each other, as people move continuously across different geographical scales (e.g. Edensor, 2002), something I will explain in depth throughout this dissertation.

Thus, these processes give the backdrop to my dissertation and give rise to new questions. While regional identities are often spoken about and engaged with, both in public and scientific debates (e.g. Duijvendak, 2008; Terlouw, 2012), such discussions often do not focus on what it means to identify with one's region. Bottom-up processes of *regional* identification are not widely researched yet, in particular in combination with (online) media. In this sense, Brabant is a case study for examining regional identification in a globalizing world. This dissertation is the outcome of a process in which I tried to make sense of regional identification and of the ways in which people identify with their region, rather than just explore expressions of regional identity. Part of this outcome is my conceptualisation of identification as outlined in the second part of the second chapter (see the section entitled *Identification: The Self, Others, and Structures* and the sections following it*)* and in my final chapter *Understanding Brabant*. In this sense, this dissertation builds on existing research on identification (for instance from Skey, 2011) by examining how people identify with their locality and region, and, more specifically, how this process of regional identification works.

Furthermore, the choice to study Brabant to analyse regional identification also has societal and scientific relevance. Scholars before me have problematized the notion of 'one' Brabant while acknowledging that people do identify with Brabant (Bijsterveld, 2009a; Mommaas, 2014). Bijsterveld (2009a) argued that identities, and thus also Brabantish identities, are complex and multifaceted. He argues that *The* Brabant with one religion (Catholicism), one shared past, and one shared language (Brabantish dialects) never existed. Everyone interprets his or her own

Brabant (slightly) different. Mommaas (2014) maintained that while Brabantishness used to be anchored in serious conceptions tied to religious elements, now it is to be found in elements of everyday life. Following these scholars, my dissertation continues to problematize concepts of Brabant, by further examining what this notion of Brabantishness means to people. Rather than focusing on what and how people conceptualize this identity of their region, this dissertation examines what this regional identification means and how people act upon their regional identification in their everyday lives.

Moreover, the Netherlands is relatively small and despite the fact that it is small, regional differences are still experienced. In daily life, many decisions are made not only at the provincial scale, but also at municipal and federal scales. Thus, living in Brabant is not bound by social rights and obligations to the same extent as living in a nation (e.g. social benefits, paying taxes, television channels), which makes it again, particularly interesting to analyse. In 2012, the government announced long-term plans to unite several provinces in a larger region, to result in five larger regions instead of the current twelve provinces, starting with a merging of the three provinces Noord-Holland, Utrecht, and Flevoland. Later, the five super-provinces were amended to seven regions as it was argued that Friesland, Limburg, and Brabant could remain separate provinces because of their strong identities (e.g. Jonker, 2014). The merging of three provinces already encountered so much resistance among the public and the provinces, however, that these plans have not been put into further motion. This shows that, despite the relatively *perceived* unimportance of the (political) *institution* of the province, people still identify with it.

Given the lack of research on regional identification, and the importance of regional identities within contemporary society, I research regional identities in Brabant from a bottom-up perspective. This dissertation on regional identification goes beyond a mere characterization of a region, but aims to unravel how people make sense of and engage themselves with their region. The choice for Brabant is then functional. Indeed, other regions would have made viable options as well. In fact, I hope that my conclusions about regional identification in Brabant can transcend the borders of the Netherlands to other regions and places as well. Yet, the choice for Brabant is also explained by the fact that *I* am doing this research. Because of this, I have the ability to reflect on my own position as a Brabander. This reflexivity would not have been the same if I had researched another place, even if I had started to live there too. Before elaborating and reflecting on this further, I will describe how I have studied regional identification.

How Am I Studying Brabant?

To make sense of regional identification in Brabant, to examine how regional identification is shaped and negotiated within everyday life, I conducted several

studies. This research was conducted over the period of three years. Throughout these years, my view on my research subject has also advanced. The concepts and theories used within this dissertation were thus not a pre-set framework upon which I tested my data. Rather, this is a step-by-step, data-driven dissertation. Borrowing concepts and ideas from other scholars and basing myself on my own data, I have made sense of regional identification by using a diversity of studies. These diverse case studies highlight different yet interlocking aspects of what it means to live in Brabant and to identify with this region. Rather than examining more traditional aspects of regional identities, I engage with contemporary products and young people. Media thus play an important role in this dissertation, as media are an important aspect of (young) people's everyday life and it is one of the places through which regional identities are expressed. In order to give a background to these current processes, I investigated whether people's attachment to their region had changed throughout the past decades. Furthermore, I examined in diverse ways how people make sense of celebrities and media and the intertwining aspects of local and global in this respect. I analysed what happened when 'traditional media' came to town and when the town came to social media, as both show a reversal of marginality in different ways.

As a consequence, this study draws on a variety of methods. I will shortly introduce them here and explain them in depth in the appropriate chapters. First though, as I have already mentioned, an integral part of my research was my own surroundings: Brabant. I never stopped observing and questioning what was happening around me (though not always with the same level of attention). Every time I heard the word 'Brabant' or any derivatives of it, I focused on what was being said and done. These spontaneous ethnographic observations often clarified my data analysis and shaped and formed how and what data I was going to collect next.

In addition to this research attitude, which resulted in more scattered data, I also engaged in various forms of data collection and analyses. First, shortly after starting with my project, I conducted focus groups with adolescents. This data gave me a better position as a researcher and helped me define what identities (in Brabant) are. In order to understand regional identification, I first started with trying to understand what Brabant meant to people. The interpretation of these data can be found in multiple places in this dissertation, but most notably, in the second (*Describing Brabant*) and fourth (*Interpreting Brabant*) chapters. Of course, this data also shaped the rest of my research. An in-depth explanation of the focus groups is reported in the second chapter.

Besides these focus groups, I conducted secondary data analyses of quantitative data. These quantitative datasets were part of Eurobarometer, International Social Survey Programme, and European Value Studies and range from 1971 to 2014. This large-scale data analysis was conducted to understand and put regional identification within the perspective of the last decades. However, rather than taking the

statistical results for granted, I critically engaged with this data collection and what the results really tell us about regional identification. This will be further examined in the third chapter *Tracing Brabant over Time*. Other quantitative survey data I have used was collected by PON in 2005. This survey was only conducted among Brabanders and members of the panel were chosen by application rather than being randomly selected. The specific panel I used was the first Brabant panel. It was conducted in November 2005, had 733 respondents, and is weighed for region, age, and gender.

While the focus groups and large datasets were useful in one way, it also provided me with the awareness that to understand regional identification within contemporary society, it is more fruitful to explore situations in which people talk about their region, but do not necessarily call it identity. Because of that, I started to look at the posts and responses to *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* (9GAG Brabantish style) and several versions of *'Inhabitants' Be Like* Facebook pages for various regions in Brabant. This case study gave an impression of how people engage with their region online. On these Facebook pages, people actively reflected upon their locality. Rather than fully examining the kind of identities people put forward in these posts, this case helped understand the process of identification underneath these expressions. It helped me understand how people shape their (online) practices related to the region. Here I use a combination of a more qualitative interpretation and quantitative analysis through coding these local and regional Facebook pages. This will be explained further in the fifth chapter, *Constructing Brabant on Facebook*.

Next, I analysed the crime-drama television series, *Smeris*, in a qualitative way and looked at the responses the series generated, both online, with Twitter in particular, and in personal interviews. Precisely because *Smeris* engages with a locality that is not often featured on television, it was an interesting case for understanding underlying processes of regional identification. This television series engages with the city of Tilburg and the region of Brabant. Here, I was mainly interested in how people engage with these representations and how this matters for their regional identification. A more detailed description of the methods I used here will be explained in the sixth chapter, *Consuming Brabant through Smeris*. While these interviews may be primarily focused on the television series *Smeris*, I also asked the participants about their identification with their localities. These responses also informed the interpretation of my data of others parts of my dissertation and the content of these interviews consequently advanced the work in other chapters.

Lastly, I analysed the comments on Flabber, a website where the original *New Kids* sketches were posted.[7] I started to analyse engagement with *New Kids* because these sketches and films were often characterized as Brabantish, but I had the feeling there was more to it. To understand this phenomena and how it relates to

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[7] http://www.flabber.nl/series/new-kids-on-the-block

regional identification, I started to analyse the comments on this website. In total, I collected approximately 2750 posts, the majority of which were posted between 2008 and 2010. I particularly looked at the posts that referred to Brabant; almost half of these posts were comments on three particular sketches. In addition to looking at posts, I thematically coded messages in the programme Atlas.ti where I paid attention to both the message and the user name. These comments have informed my argument elaborated on in the fourth chapter, *Interpreting Brabant.*

Who Am *I*, Studying Brabant?

> You are not a real Brabander. Because if you would move elsewhere sure you would miss your family and friends, but you won't miss it here. (Comment to me, December 2015)

An introduction to this topic of Brabant does not come without an introduction to myself. Who am I? Or rather, who is the Brabander within me? This is important, because who I am has greatly influenced my research. I choose how to conduct this research and what to focus on, but also, who I am influenced this research in different ways. My view of life has shaped this dissertation, a view of life based not only on theoretical notions, but also my own experiences. Who I am affects how people have reacted towards me, even *who* would react to me. While some have criticized the incorporation of who you are, when it comes to scholarly research, others have encouraged reflection on the self. Maxwell (1996), for instance, recommends writing researcher identity memos. Research is never objective, but strict objectivity has never been my aim. So let me introduce myself, so I can introduce to you 'my' Brabant in the rest of this book.

When I was younger, I never expected I would end up doing a PhD on regional identities in North Brabant. I felt this way not only because I did not envision myself doing a PhD, but also because I never imagined that I would study regional belonging. Since I was young, I wanted to explore the world and see what was out there. When I got the chance to spend a year in the Unites States after high school, I gladly jumped at the chance. I had never planned to study in Tilburg upon my return. I wanted to go to another university, further away from home. However, the bachelor programme in Liberal Arts and Sciences at Tilburg University appealed to me so much that I stayed in Tilburg anyway. If this study had been elsewhere, in the same shape and form, I probably would have gone there. So, I ended up in Tilburg after all, at least for a while. During my studies, I still wanted to go abroad, and so my journey took me to Argentina. Shortly after I returned from South America, I fell in love with what some people would consider a 'real' Brabander. I was accepted in Rotterdam for a research Master's degree of my choice and for a while, I considered living there. However, with classes only a few days a week, and my social life and boyfriend closer to Tilburg, I continued to live in Brabant. Towards the end of my Masters, I even started living in Hilvarenbeek

again; the town I was born in and never thought I would end up living in again. Ten years ago, I had only (figuratively) crossed out ONE place on the entire world map, where I did not think I would live, and that was Hilvarenbeek. Yet, I ended up there after all. We even bought a house there. Still, I like to travel and now my Brabander boyfriend and I travel together. Often people ask me (or us these days), 'so where are you off to next?'

With this short overview of the places where I lived now described, I want to go back to the quote that started this mini-biography. A person dear to my heart said it to me on a December day in 2015, and I think it sums up very well how I stand regarding my feelings of place. I feel at home here, but I can easily feel at home elsewhere as well. If I were to move, clearly, I would miss some aspects of Brabant, but not others. When I started doing this research at the end of 2013, I did not really feel like a Brabander. I was born in Brabant, (although one of my parents was not) and I had lived in Brabant for most of my life. Nevertheless, I did not feel very connected and grounded. I can easily feel at home in different places. To be honest, if it were not for my boyfriend, I might not even have continued to live in Brabant. While my affinity with Brabant has since changed, I am not confined by it as some others are. Now, let us reflect on my change as Brabander over the years. Why have I started to identify more with Brabant?

One reason may connect to my boyfriend and living in Hilvarenbeek. As just mentioned, he is the reason I live in Hilvarenbeek, and part of the reason I go to all kinds of activities in Hilvarenbeek. I engaged more with Hilvarenbeek and consequently, with Brabant. I did not simply live in Brabant but engaged with it. Related to this, and surely also because of the research I have conducted, is the fact that I got to know Brabant better; I became more familiar with it. In that sense, I might be attached to the place where I live. I know my way around here, I know what it is like, I know what to expect; I recognize it and it is familiar. As we will see throughout this dissertation, knowledge, familiarity, and recognition play a significant role in identification.

Also related to these previous points is that aspects of Brabant that were once unconsciously and non-reflexive, now become apparent to me. Ironically, while perhaps not my own preferred choice, growing up and living in Hilvarenbeek often seemed to legitimize my research. Since I started this research, people found it interesting to know exactly where I lived, as if it legitimized doing this research in the first place. Without knowing about why I live in Hilvarenbeek, and because it is the village I was born in, I have the feeling that people often presume that I experience a sense of attachment to this town. I was often framed as a Brabander and people ascribed this appellation to me for various reasons. However, while such individual remarks may have been innocent and small, together they provided me with more awareness of where I was located and who I am (to others).

Outline of the Book

In this dissertation, I am making sense of regional identification in Brabant. How are people's identifications with Brabant shaped and negotiated in everyday life? Within this dissertation, I chose for different ways of studying Brabant as this diversity illustrates different points about regional identification. A large part of my research consists of how regional identities are enacted in and through the media. Media are an integral part of our everyday life, and online and offline worlds are highly entangled and interconnected. These case studies highlight in different ways how Brabant is incorporated within the everyday lives of people. Simultaneously, while expressed in different environments, many striking similarities among the different case studies were found indicating how people make sense of Brabant. So how is the rest of this dissertation organized?

The next chapter, *Describing Brabant,* gives the necessary background information on Brabant to contextualise the entire dissertation. Before going into details on regional identification, I will shortly describe Brabant's history. Building on existing literature, I will describe how Brabant was perceived in the past and how it has come to develop to what it is now. Here I will elaborate on how Brabant was once a dominated province, but has developed itself economically, culturally, and socially. Traditionally, Catholicism has been an important part of this Brabantishness, and thus due reference is made to this. After having this context on Brabant, I will move onto the second part of this chapter. How do people characterize Brabantishness now? What do they consider to be part of a regional identity? However, before elaborating on Brabant specifically, I will expand on what (regional) identities are. More specifically, by examining the responses to the focus groups I have conducted I will elaborate on the essentialist identity repertoires that are often used in describing what Brabant is.

After this elaboration on Brabant, I continue with the question of whether regional identification has changed over time and if so, how. In a globalized world, it is sometimes argued that (national) borders have become less important in favour of transnational connections. Simultaneously, people have argued that this global world has resurrected local and regional identifications. How is this reflected in Brabant? How does Brabant compare with the rest of the Netherlands in level of attachment? I used surveys dating from 1971 to 2014 in this third chapter, *Tracing Brabant over Time*, to explore these relationships.

Third, after this analysis, in the fourth chapter, *Interpreting Brabant*, I focus on what 'Brabant' means to the people inhabiting this province. By using focus groups and other data I have gathered, I elaborate on how people's interpretation of Brabant is connected to proximity and being close. Furthermore, I go into detail about what Brabant means in relation to other forms of identification.

Fourth, after these chapters focusing on how Brabant is perceived, we move to processes of identification in Brabant, especially in relation to media. More important than the issue of global or local media, is 'how the local and global are articulated' (Morley & Robins, 1995, p. 2). I analysed what happened when 'traditional media' come to town (TV series *Smeris*) and when the town came to the media (*Facebook*). In the fifth chapter, *Constructing Brabant on Facebook*, I examine the engagement with some explicit identity markers online and I specifically look at the adaptation of the meme *'Inhabitants' Be Like* and posts shared on *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants*. After the examination of Facebook, I move to another medium, television, in the sixth chapter: *Consuming Brabant through Smeris*. I expand on the television series *Smeris,* the first season of which was filmed in the rarely featured Tilburg and the second season in the frequently filmed Amsterdam. I examine how people engage with the local colour of this television series.

Finally, I integrate all that is discussed in the seventh and final chapter *Understanding Brabant.* Here I draw all these threads together in order to answer the core question of this dissertation on how regional identification in Brabant is shaped and negotiated in everyday life.

Chapter 2
Describing Brabant

pictures: ranking the stars exercise from
conducted focus groups

Describing Brabant

Even in small countries such as the Netherlands, regional differences play a role. As such, this chapter will explore Brabant's history and particular characteristics in detail in order to highlight these differences. In this chapter, I will firstly describe some of Brabant's (stereo)typical characteristics by looking at its history. I will hereby highlight Brabant's development of a self-consciousness, its association with being a farmer's province, its relation to Catholicism, and its exuberant nature. Once we understand the foundation and origins of many of these Brabantish characteristics, the chapter will explore how people perceive themselves and others as Brabantish. I will reflect, and critique on, how people make sense of what Brabantishness is to them. The aim of this chapter is to give a background to regional identification in Brabant. To understand regional identification and the processes that play a role in identification, it is useful to first get a grasp of what people consider as being Brabantish and how they think about Brabant. Looking firstly at the Netherlands as a whole, several distinctions can be made regarding religion and politics. While nowadays the Netherlands is quite secularized, traditional religions are still visible in a religious geographical divide in the Netherlands. This 'Bible Belt' runs from the southwestern part of the Netherlands in Zeeland to the northern parts of Overijssel and contains many Orthodox Protestants. Moreover, the area above the big rivers (the Meuse, Rhine, and Waal) is largely a Protestant area, while below these rivers, Catholicism is the more commonly practised religion. The use of the river as a mark of this separation is used often by people, not only when referring to religion, but also in other everyday practices. *Boven de rivieren* (above the rivers) and *onder de rivieren* or *beneden de rivieren* (below the rivers) are commonplace phrases. While traditional religion has declined significantly in importance in the Netherlands, some of these (originally religious) differences are still visible because of this separation. For instance, in the south of the Netherlands, the festive *Carnaval* with its Catholic origins is not celebrated in most of the northern parts of the Netherlands. Together with Limburg and Belgium, Brabant is characterized by its exuberant ('Burgundian') lifestyle. Alcohol consumption and eating good food are also part of this image, as well as a very social and neighbourly manner. And so, the formerly Catholic *Carnaval*, full of

drinking, music, and festivities, has now been reworked as a symbol of Bra-
bantishness. This geographical distinction is also reiterated through language use,
as the pronunciation of a hard *g* is present in the north of the Netherlands and in
the south, the *g* is pronounced more softly.

In the Netherlands, we can observe another form of separation; this time, a tra-
ditional centre-periphery dichotomy. This symbolic centre, located in the west of
the Netherlands, is called the *Randstad*, and it encompasses the inhabitants of the
big cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. The *Randstad* is
often seen as a highly urbanized area, which is then juxtaposed against the rest of
the Netherlands, now identified as the provincial area, the countryside. This sym-
bolic central area – Holland – is perceived as the economic, political, cultural, and
social heart of the Netherlands in contrast to the 'provincials' who lag behind. It is
important to note here that Holland does not refer to the entire Netherlands as is
sometimes mistakenly assumed. Brabanders may refer to themselves as Hollanders
occasionally, for instance, when they are cheering for the national team (*Hup
Holland Hup* – Go Holland Go). The titles of several Dutch television programmes
refer to Holland rather than the Netherlands without much public resistance, such
as *Heel Holland Bakt*, which is the Dutch equivalent of *The Great British Bake Off*.
At other times, Holland may represent the *Randstad* or centre. As this dissertation
focuses on regional identification, in particular that of Brabant, the term Holland
will not be used as a synecdoche for the entire country, but will always connote the
part of the Netherlands that is considered the symbolic centre. This use of 'Holland'
may reflect part of their dominance in the Netherlands, which inhabitants in other
provinces may condemn. When we come to looking at Brabant's particular history,
we will see how this centre-periphery dichotomy has affected this province's
identity.

Geographical variance is not only experienced outside Brabant. Indeed, Brabant
is not the homogeneous unit outsiders may sometimes perceive it to be, although
Brabanders themselves may sometimes also act as if it is. In what follows, we will
see how the idea of a homogenous Brabant runs implicitly through many of the
characteristics of Brabant I describe, even though differences (whether they be
geographic or religious) are apparent. Brabant contains, for example, both urban
cities and rural landscapes. We will also discover that while a large portion of
Brabant is traditionally associated with Catholicism, different areas in Brabant
could be characterized as Protestant. While the stereotypical aspects on Brabant
may differ from an outside perspective, it is important to note that internal differ-
ences between Brabanders are also experienced (Bijsterveld, 2014a). For instance,
the newspaper *BN De Stem* devoted an entire series called *Talking (Typical) West
Brabant* (*Sprekend West-Brabant*) to West Brabantish identity constructions. This
series clearly indicated that West Brabant was quite different from the rest of
Brabant, and both people from West Brabant and from the rest of Brabant experi-
enced this (Schapendonk, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). Before elaborating on these

stereotypes and characteristics further, I will go into some historical aspects to understand these divisions and the context of regional identities in Brabant better.

Emancipating Brabant

To understand how a regional identity in Brabant has come to exist, I will provide some context about Brabant and its history. Brabant arose from, what was articulated as a subjugated position, to an economically well-off province with a consciously developed idea of being different from other provinces.

In the Republic of the Netherlands during the eighteenth century, the province of Holland dominated the entire country, politically and economically. Around 45% of the people lived in this part of the Republic. They paid the most taxes, and farming was relatively less important than in the rest of the Republic. In this economic situation, Brabant was not lagging behind the rest of the Republic, but rather, Holland was ahead of the other provinces (Brusse, 2014).

After 1900, the industry sector gained importance, particularly in Brabant. A general increase in prosperity was observed and this economic wellbeing also meant social progress for the province. This formed the basis for further advancement on a more self-conscious level (Van den Eerenbeemt, 1996a). After this important political and social emancipation from Holland, which began in the late nineteenth century, cultural emancipation slowly followed (Van den Eerenbeemt, 1996a). With the rationalization of labour, a bigger differentiation arose between lower- and higher-educated labours. The more regulated organizational structure of leisure activities also gave rise to more self-development. Furthermore, because of the increased educational level, people became more conscious of their identities. In particular, P.C. De Brouwer and Hendrik Moller contributed to this cultural emancipation. De Brouwer played a large role in the stimulation of a provincial pride, by founding the *Genootschap Ons Brabant* (Association Our Brabant) and was one of the initiators of the organization and cultural magazine *Brabantia Nostra.* Brabantism, the growing self-development of Brabant, was the underlying idea for almost everything De Brouwer communicated. Moller was specifically important in the field of education, as he was one of the initiators of *Katholieke Leergangen* (Catholic Studies), an educational institute to educate secondary school teachers, and *Ons Middelbaar Onderwijs* (Our Secondary Education). In addition, Moller opened up perspectives for the cultural emancipation of Brabant, for instance, through encouraging interest in art and literature in Brabant (Van den Eerenbeemt, 1996a). As Brabant prospered in several domains, including an increasingly industrialized society, people felt a similarly increasing pride as Brabant caught up with the rest of the Netherlands. Brusse (2014), however, argued that this image of Brabant was only partly true: although Brabant had been doing very well economically, the province had not caught up completely with the rest

of the Netherlands yet. While pride was justified, the constructed positive self-image led to overlooking negative aspects.

In any case, the self-constructed image of a positive and burgeoning Brabant gave rise to a sentimental, emotional Brabantish self-consciousness. These changing aspects were a confirmation of Brabant's emancipation. However, paradoxically, some people were afraid that this increasing modernization and equalization would lead to a loss of what was considered the core of being Brabantish. In the newspapers, readers could regularly encounter comments on the dissatisfaction with Holland's[8] domination, as well as a resistance towards modernization and equalization, and fear for a degradation of Catholicism. This Brabantish dissatisfaction was in 1935, formalized around the cultural magazine *Brabantia Nostra,* which articulated the deterioration of the essence of Brabant. Contributors to *Brabantia Nostra* positioned themselves against the individualization of society and argued for a respect for nature and a close-knit family life. In these romantic, conservative views of Brabant, Holland was the bad guy, and for those people affiliated with *Brabantia Nostra*, a Hollander was perverse, arrogant, and uncivilized (Van Oudheusden, 1996c).

The relative importance of this association and magazine subscribers must be noted here. The people supporting *Brabantia Nostra* had no intention of separating themselves from the rest of the Netherlands, but instead argued for a more pluralized Netherlands. In general, they held a more moderate form of campaigning than, for instance, their Flemish counterparts advocating the Flemish case. Moreover, the magazine *Brabantia Nostra* never had more than two thousand subscribers, so it was not widely supported within Brabant. *Brabantia Nostra* claimed that the true Brabander was Catholic, romantic, rural, nostalgic, and fiercely anti-Holland. Naturally, such sentiments were met with irritation by those who were excluded from this categorization, as well as those included. Plenty of Brabanders were annoyed by these kinds of expressions of provincialism. Moreover, *Brabantia Nostra* connected the Brabantish idea to Catholicism, suggesting both were synonymous. While the majority of the Brabant population was indeed Catholic, around twelve percent of the inhabitants were Protestant, particularly in the north-west corner. Despite the fact that these Protestant inhabitants may have lived in Brabant for generations, they were not considered Brabanders by the magazine's adherents. During the Second World War, *Brabantia Nostra* had to cease its activities in 1942, though the ideas still resonated in policy afterwards (Van Oudheusden, 1996c).

In 1960, more than half of the working population in Brabant worked the industrial sector, which was much higher than average in the Netherlands. While in the beginning of the twentieth century, the average wages of people in Brabant were much lower than the national average, Brabant gradually started to close this

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[8] Remember here that Holland does not refer to the entire Netherlands as is sometimes assumed but to the provinces North and South Holland in opposition to Brabanders.

gap. However, this did not happen uniformly within Brabant as in some of the areas, people were still paid fairly little (Brusse, 2014). Bikes were highly important at that time as they had transformed from leisure and luxury product to a conventional form of transportation for the everyday worker (Van den Eerenbeemt, 1996a). In fact, bikes became so central to Brabant lifestyle, that their use was incorporated into the so-called welfare plans of 1947-1949 by De Quay. In these urban plans, the idea was to develop industrial zones that were linked to the local village, allowing employees to bike to work within a maximum radius of six kilometres. This geographical dispersion of the industrial economy would make sure people did not have to move to another (bigger) town for their job. This, of course, confirmed in the mind of the Brabander, the social benefit of location; people would not have to be removed from their roots and be displaced within the larger and anonymous cities. It was also a way to control the spreading industrialization, while still profiting from its economic benefits. However, the rise of the motorbike and car quickly foiled the somewhat romantic notion that the distance to work could be expressed in biking kilometres (Van de Donk, 2014).

At that time, people perceived the industrial sector as one of the most important sources of prosperity and expected it to stay that way. At the same time, that industrial work gained importance, and although less people worked in the agricultural sector, agricultural production per person and per hectare increased (Brusse, 2014). Due to the mechanization and introduction of agricultural machines, unemployed young farmers had to move from the villages to the cities and started to work mostly in industrial work and later in the service sector. The mechanization, the increased role of technology, and increased automation of production processes not only affected the agricultural sector, but also industrial processes, as they required fewer workers to reach the same production level. However, because of the increased need for production goods, this sector nevertheless thrived for a long time (Van den Eerenbeemt, 1996b). The time following the 1960s, however, is characterized by the rise of the service sector, which took place much more slowly in Brabant than in the rest of the Netherlands (Brusse, 2014).

The emancipation process of Brabant seems to have been finished after the Second World War and though some of the ideas still resonated within policies, no real active action was taken that appealed to this nostalgic Brabantish feeling. While some people tried to take action to resurrect this self-conscious Brabant, there was not much public support for it (Van Oudheusden, 1996a). Overall, Brabant had increased in economic importance in the past centuries. For example, in 2000, the GDP was higher than average in the Netherlands. With big companies in the past and present such as Philips, VDL, and ASML, Brabant had caught up with Holland. In fact, nowadays, Brabant is one of the most industrialized areas in the Netherlands (Brusse, 2014).

Thus, this short overview of Brabant's history illustrates that together with an improved economic situation, the social and cultural understanding of inhabitants

in Brabant changed. In the first half of the twentieth century, Brabant had become self-conscious, and was proud of its achievements and had developed itself on scientific and cultural grounds (Van den Eerenbeemt, 1996a). Brabant has developed from a region that perceived itself as being behind and dominated by Holland to a province that matters on a national scale. As a consequence, Brabanders started to feel proud and a growing self-awareness led to several initiatives that stresses this pride (e.g. *Brabantia Nostra*). Particularly because of Brabants economic contributions to the Dutch economy, some people feel as if these centre-periphery dynamics are still unfairly reiterated, particularly in the cultural sense. Such feelings of unfair treatment 'tend to resurface now and then' (Van Gorp & Terlouw, 2016, p. 14).

Catholics in Brabant

Now that we have a better background of Brabant's history, I will highlight three aspects that have been (traditionally) associated with Brabantishness. First, I will discuss the Catholic nature of Brabant with its roots in history, as I have just hinted at already. This Catholicism used to be very important for Brabantishness, but now has a minimal role. Second, the centre-periphery dynamics not only relate to the dominance of the *Randstad,* but also to how rurality is an integral component of the centre-periphery dynamics. Brabanders may sometimes be characterized as country people (farmers), not so much in the sense of the work they carry out, but in the sense of their (senti)mentality Finally, *Brabantia Nostra* already connected the Brabanders to exuberance and this characteristic is still gladly upheld. These three aspects will contextualize Brabant further to give the necessary background to the findings in the rest of my dissertation.

In Brabant, the period of 1850-1950 has been particularly characterized by a strong orientation towards the Catholic Church. In 1848, freedom of religion ceased to be a private privilege and became a fundamental constitutional right. A law was even passed that obstructed the King from having any influence on the Catholic Church's decisions. In the nineteenth century, regional traditions were re-appropriated by religious organizations, which made it seem as if religious identity and regional unity were identical. During this century, Brabant (and Limburg) was increasingly equated with Catholicism (Nissen, 1996b, p. 167). By the first half of the twentieth century, life in Brabant was governed by the Catholic Church to a greater extent than ever before. This governing was frequently connected to regional traditions and unity. This time-period was characterized by a high level of Catholic influence, particularly in the domains of education, health care, and social and cultural associations (Bijsterveld, 2009c).

In a pillarized society,[9] Catholicism governed large part of people's lives in Brabant. After the Second World War, disbanded Catholic organisations were rebuilt and they aimed to restore the strong influence Catholicism had on people's everyday life. However, with the depillarization of the Netherlands in the 1960s, the importance of religion decreased. Not only did regular church attendance drop, but the practices of those who attended church changed as well. Simultaneously, people stopped living by some of the norms and rules of the Church, for example, regarding divorce and contraception, and trusted more to their own conscience. With this, the self-evidence of Catholic Brabant decreased. Many organizations dropped *'Katholiek'* (Catholic) from their names, demonstrating the loosening of ties with Catholicism (Nissen, 1997). For other organizations this took much longer as, for instance, my own university only changed its name from *Katholieke Universiteit Brabant* (Catholic University Brabant*)* to *Universiteit van Tilburg* (Tilburg University) in 2001. Many other organizations still happily uphold the Catholic name. For example, *Katholieke Plattelands Jongeren* (Catholic Rural Youth) still has its Catholic reference despite the affirmation that their activities are not bound to religion anymore (KPJ Brabant, 2014). Over the years, however, priests, friars, churches, and other religious elements disappeared from the streets, giving way to non-religious people to take on similar tasks within cultural and social domains (Bijsterveld, 2009c; Nissen, 1997). These changing practices illustrate that the Catholic identity ceased to be visible in all aspects of everyday life in Brabant as the pressure of being Catholic disappeared.

These changes are also reflected in the number of Catholics. In 1809, 88% of the inhabitants in Brabant considered themselves Catholics, and this remained relatively stable over the following decades, as in 1899, 1930, and 1947, 87-89% of the population still considered themselves to be Catholic (Knippenberg, 1992; Statistics Netherlands & NIWI, 1999, 2006). In subsequent years, however, this percentage dropped significantly: in Limburg down to 66% and Brabant as low as 49% by 2014. Despite this drop, the percentage of Catholics in Brabant is still much higher than in the other provinces. The number of Catholics ranges from 5% in Friesland and Groningen to 22% in Gelderland. Not only are inhabitants of Limburg and Brabant more likely to indicate they are Catholic, they are in general more likely to consider themselves religious. Of the population, only 25% in Limburg and 38% in Brabant does not consider themselves religious whereas in the

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[9] Pillarization refers to the politico-denominational segregation of Dutch society into vertical 'pillars' based on ideological grounds (i.e. Catholic, Protestant, and socialist). These pillars shaped the everyday life of individuals as the segments determined the choice for school, media, political party, etc. Depillarization is the disappearance of the strict organisation of life into these (categorical) pillars.

east, west, and north of the Netherlands the percentages of non-believers are much higher (respectively 47%, 55%, and 62%) (Statistics Netherlands, 2015e).[10]
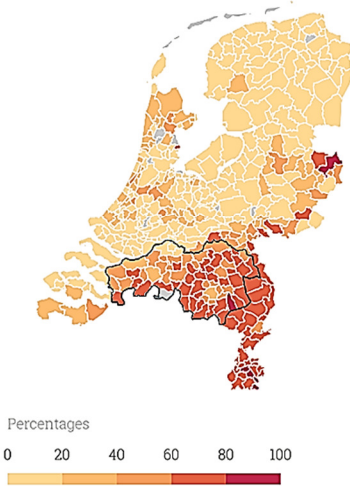
Figure 2.1a Percentage of Catholics per municipality (2010/2013) with Brabant outlined
Figure 2.1b Most frequent religion per municipality (2010/2013) with Brabant outlined
(Data from Statistics Netherlands, 2014)

The percentage of Catholics in the Netherlands is visualized on a more detailed level in Figure 2.1a (Statistics Netherlands, 2014). This map, based on the percentages of Catholics per municipality, shows that these religious borders differ only slightly from the administrative borders of Brabant. In some of the municipalities in the northwest of Brabant, Protestantism is the most frequent religious orientation. Although often associated with Catholicism, Brabant was never homogeneously Catholic. Moreover, some dominantly Catholic municipalities are found in Limburg, Gelderland, and Overijssel.

While this map illustrates that many inhabitants still identify with being Catholic, few inhabitants of Brabant actually regularly attend religious services. Many people may indicate that they are Catholic or religious in general; in Brabant

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[10] All these percentages of religious people are based on one-stage questioning, which means that in one question people are asked about their religious denomination. In a two-stage question people are first asked whether they are religious or not and then which religion they attend. In two-stage questionnaires the number of religious people is significantly lower, particularly among Roman Catholics and Dutch reformed (*hervormden*) (Schmeets, 2010).

and Limburg, people visit the church less frequent than in other provinces, with only five to six percent visiting a religious service every week. In contrast, in other provinces (except for North Holland), the percentages for church attendance are much higher ranging from ten percent in Drenthe and Groningen to twenty-one percent in Zeeland (Statistics Netherlands, 2015e). This difference is also explained by the Bible Belt, which covers a strip of land from Zeeland to the northern parts of Overijssel where many Orthodox Protestants live. Church plays a large role in these regions and people often hold on to more traditional values here as well. This area is shown in Figure 2.2 by the darker municipalities with a higher frequency of regular churchgoers and the red municipalities in Figure 2.1b, which contain a majority of Protestants. Within these same regions, church attendance is much higher than average in the Netherlands and consequently the average of the other provinces is raised by these municipalities.

Regular church attendance per municipality
2010/2013

Percentages

| 0 | 14 | 29 | 43 | 57 | 71 | 86 | 100 |
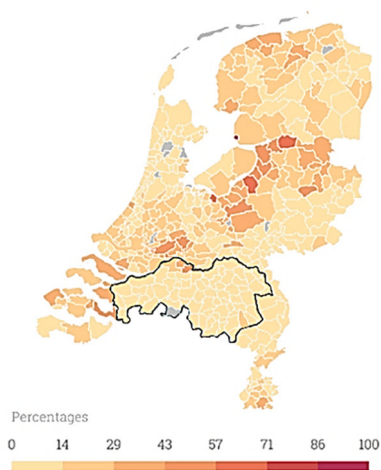
Figure 2.2 Municipality (2010/2013) with Brabant outlined
(Data from Statistics Netherlands, 2014)

Furthermore, differences in church attendance can be observed between different religions. Not even a fifth of the Catholics attend church at least once a month, while two-thirds of the Orthodox Reformed religious group (*gereformeerden*) and almost a third of the Dutch Reformed (*hervormden*) attend church regularly (Schmeets & Van Mensvoort, 2015). It seems people are more likely to call themselves Catholic without attending church, whereas Protestants not attending church might stop considering themselves religious altogether.

Finally, while I have described how Catholicism became less important in contemporary society, some contemporary practices may still have Catholic origins.

For instance, while *Carnaval* has Catholic roots,[11] the way in which it is celebrated today may not relate to religiosity anymore.

Hence, this section has shown that while Catholicism has generally decreased in importance in Brabant, becoming less visible within everyday life, it has not disappeared altogether. While a large process of secularization and depillarization has taken place, the Catholic spirit of Brabant is still visible within certain practices and the higher number of Catholics in the southern provinces. Many inhabitants still affiliate with being Catholic and some traditions with Catholic origins are still practised in contemporary society. For many older inhabitants, being Catholic might mean much more than just a religion due to the way Catholicism was embedded within society in their youth.

Brabant's Rural Quality?

Brabant is often associated with a rural environment with underdeveloped, backward, and dumb inhabitants; a stereotype that – like many others – has its origins in the past. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the farming rural countryside was perceived as a central component of the Brabantish identity (Bijsterveld, 2009b). In this section, I will unravel a little further what has been said about Brabant's rural quality.

Even though to an outsider, Brabant in its entirety may be called 'rural', within Brabant there is a great diversity and a division, which could be called rural and urban, or countryside and city. Indeed, referring to someone from a big city in a so-called 'rural' environment less 'urban' is not an exclusive Dutch phenomenon (cf. Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2003). As mentioned earlier, Eindhoven is the fifth, Tilburg the sixth, and Breda the ninth largest municipality of the Netherlands. However, 41% of Brabant's inhabitants do not live in an urban area (Statistics Netherlands, 2015c, 2015d).[12] For example, Tilburg was, going right back to the nineteenth century, a collection of villages rather than a city. However, with the industrialization process, this changed drastically within Brabant and especially so in Eindhoven, with the coming of the famous light bulb manufacturer, Philips, playing a large role. This industrialization process, and its accompanied development of city life, generated some resistance, as I mentioned earlier. As such, the countryside was taken up as an essentially Brabantish characteristic. With a fear of modernization, the Catholic elite tried to protect the countryside. The city was perceived as a morally reprehensible place where individualism and irreligiousness flourished. The countryside was not only contrasted against city life, but also

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[11] Though religious institutions were not always positive about *Carnaval* throughout history (Van de Laar, 2011).

[12] In Brabant, 18% of the population lives in an area which is 'not urban', defined as a municipality with an average of less than 500 addresses per square kilometre and 23% lives in an area 'not really urban' or sub-urban with 500 to 1000 addresses per square kilometre (Statistics Netherlands, 2015d).

presented as the better alternative. Against this background, the previously mentioned welfare plans of De Quay were made, as people would not be taken away from their roots by having to move away from the villages to the cities (Janssen, 2014). In the sixties, urbanization was finally embraced in Brabant. While city life was still contrasted negatively against life in the countryside, the moral undertone largely disappeared (Janssen, 2014). Additionally, the love for the countryside particularly contributed to the suburbanization of the countryside. For example, the aforementioned welfare plans of De Quay meant that every village also had an industrial park (Bijsterveld, 2009b).

Nowadays, this contrast is less present as the city and countryside are intrinsically connected economically, socially, and ecologically. Urban planning has embraced this increasingly over the years. Old and partly hidden lanes and canals are being restored as links between city and countryside to articulate the connection. Increasingly, these links between city and countryside can be observed in bottom-up developments as consumers and producers work together to care for their surroundings, reflecting a new symbiotic relationship between the city and countryside (Janssen, 2014, p. 336).

This intrinsic connection might also be noticed in people's (daily) movements. One may question to what extent people living in rural areas who spend much time in more urbanized areas actually grow up in a rural atmosphere (Haartsen & Strijker, 2010). This is also visible in people's daily movement for different reasons (e.g. going to work, school, shopping, visit friends or family). For example, 96% of the inhabitants of Dutch villages with less than 3000 inhabitants are outside of their own village on a weekly basis. They do not necessarily go to the city, as around half of the villagers visit the city weekly, but it does illustrate people rarely just live in one place (Vermeij, 2015). The province is a complex but integrated whole. The strength of the inter-city networks is growing, particularly in relation to business. Concurrently, on a smaller scale, relationships between neighbouring municipalities are becoming stronger. This means that, rather than acting on a pure local scale, people make use of facilities (such as shopping and leisure) on a slightly larger scale. They may visit adjoining places for these purposes (Tordoir, 2014).

However, despite the increasingly recognized connection between rural and urban, city and villages, and people's movement within these different spaces on a daily basis, some people still reiterate contrasting ideas, such as that people in cities are less social and less likely to connect with their neighbours than villagers. The romantic ideal of the slow peaceful quiet countryside is still contrasted against the quick hurrying city (Bijsterveld, 2009b). While Dutch research does indicate some (small) differences between villages and cities, this is not uniformly supported. Despite the fact that people in villages have slightly more contact with their neighbours, people in cities are equally likely to provide informal help to their neighbours as people in villages (Steenbekkers & Vermeij, 2013). Some Dutch research even suggests that people in cities have a larger social network and are

more likely to have more informal helpers (Mollenhorst, Bekkers, & Völker, 2005). Thus, while research does not necessarily uniformly support the idea that people in villages connect more with their neighbours, people may still feel as if differences exist.

This idea is also reiterated on a larger scale, where people from the *Randstad*, almost uniformly seen as city-people, are contrasted against the other 'rural' provinces including Brabant. Despite this increasing connection between the countryside and the city, people often still iterate rural ideas about Brabant. The supporters from the Football Club PSV from Eindhoven refer to themselves as *boeren* (farmers/country folk) as this is a name they were previously scolded for. Moreover, while many Brabanders may not think about themselves as farmers, the connection with landscapes and the enjoyment of the countryside may still be iterated. For instance, the rural landscapes is used in the tourism industry, which profits from the 'authenticity' of the farming and rural life (Rooijakkers, 2002).

Accordingly, while Brabant is quite diverse in terms of urban and rural aspects, Brabant is not as rural as some of the other provinces in the Netherlands, and many people do not exclusively live in one place as their daily movements suggests, the traditional image of Brabant as the countryside may still be iterated.

Exuberant Brabant

Finally, *Brabantia Nostra* connected Brabant to an exuberant lifestyle. This idea of a 'Burgundian' Brabant, where people are hospitable and friendly, and where people love to party and have fun, is still reiterated by people and gladly made use of by the tourism industry (Bijsterveld, 2009a; Nissen, 1996a; Verkaar et al., 2006). This exuberance and communal feeling is sometimes also connected to the (previously) Catholic nature of the southern provinces. It has been argued that Protestantism is a more individual religion than Catholicism, and as a result, Catholics are more socially oriented. Some experiments have supported this idea (Cohen & Hill, 2007) and this is also suggested as one of the reasons for an exuberant Brabant (Nissen, 1996a).

In a questionnaire conducted in 2005 by PON among people who live in Brabant, respondents indicated what they thought about first when they hear the word, 'Brabant'. Around a quarter of the respondents indicated *gezelligheid* (roughly translated as a combination of sociability, conviviality, and cosiness) (Verkaar et al., 2006). Brabanders oppose themselves to 'arrogant' people from the *Randstad* by arguing that their region is one of *gezelligheid*, *gemoedelijkheid*, and *gastvrijheid* (roughly translated as sociability, conviviality, cosiness, and hospitality). In the research by Verkaar et al. (2006), many respondents indicated that they considered social bonds to be characteristic of Brabant and argued that Brabanders participated more in social life and are more directed towards their family and friends than people from other regions. Regardless of whether these stereotypes are based

on objective facts, it is felt and iterated in that way by some Brabanders. The idea of Brabant as a region in which there is always some event going on is gladly upheld by its inhabitants (Bijsterveld, 2009a) as well as the tourism industry. Brabant is represented as a place where you can get some rest, walk through the forest, and be spoiled in cosy villages and towns (Rooijakkers, 2002, p. 182). Even if this is not based on reality, but only imagined, it does not make the experience less authentic (Rooijakkers, 2002).

This exuberance not only connected to sociability, but also to the consumption of good food and drink (i.e. alcohol); enjoying life. These ideas about Brabant are not new, but were already current from the beginning of the twentieth century. Particularly, these feelings were attributed to people from the east of Brabant as this quote from 1928 shows:

> They love to eat and a bit too much too. Also drinking wine and beer. Their hospitality provides an excusing explanation of this behaviour perhaps. Their body is immensely well cared for because they think and act slowly, but work themselves to the bone through their determination. (My translation, Van Ginneken, 1928, p. 171)

This quote reveals that that these ideas about exuberant Brabanders was already iterated in the beginning of the twentieth century. The typical characteristics in terms of consuming alcohol and food are linked to the social characteristics that may also form part of being an exuberant people-person.

To illustrate whether such stereotypes still offer some truth, I will examine this stereotypical idea of a 'Burgundian Brabander' through some data. This serves as an exemplary of whether stereotypes might be based in some reality, or whether it is more an exaggeration of minor differences (Rooijakkers, 1996). In trying to decipher whether Brabanders are indeed the exuberant (Burgundian) persons they claim to be – at least more than the people from the west are – I start with analysing their alcohol use. Statistics Netherlands (2013) reports Dutch people's drinking behaviour. As for the years 2008-2011 (averaged), they have indicated the percentage of heavy drinkers in each of the provinces. Heavy drinkers were here defined as someone who drinks at least once a week 6 or more glasses of alcohol on one day. These numbers are standardized, meaning they have weighted it for factors such as age and gender.

At a first glance, we can note that North Brabant is the province that, with 11.8%, contains the highest percentage of heavy drinkers. Using the reported standard error, we can conclude that there are more heavy drinkers in Brabant than in Gelderland, Flevoland, South Holland, Utrecht, and Zeeland. No significant differences are observed when comparing them to the other provinces. Indeed, this still means there are more heavy drinkers in Brabant than some other provinces, but certainly not all. Perhaps, religious elements may also play a role here, as the Bible Belt is located in these provinces. Moreover, Statistics Netherlands reports twenty percent of non-drinkers in Brabant. Comparing Brabant with the other provinces,

only South Holland has more non-drinkers than Brabant, and none of the provinces have less abstainers than Brabant.

Using additional data from Statistics Netherlands (2015b) from the year 2012, we can observe a difference between the southeast of Brabant (the region of Eindhoven and surroundings) and the rest of Brabant. In the southeast, people are more likely to consume alcohol than the rest of Brabant and also more than in several other regions in the Netherlands. However, when looking at heavy drinkers, the differences do not apply anymore within Brabant. Still, all three GGD regions in Brabant are more likely to contain heavy drinkers than regions in South Holland, Zeeland, and Utrecht.

Data from European Social Survey (2014) indicate that, when controlling for level of education (no significant differences), age (older more frequent), gender (women less), and being religious (being religious less), no significant differences between Brabant and the west (as combination of the provinces North Holland, South Holland, and Utrecht) and Brabant and the north and east (as a combination of the provinces Groningen, Friesland, Drenthe, Overijssel, and Gelderland) can be observed in the frequency of drinking. In Limburg however, people report less frequent alcohol consumption. Concerning the quantity of drinking, calculated as the number of grams consumed on the last weekend, based on only those who do consume alcohol, no significant differences are observed when comparing to the west and the north and east of the Netherlands. However, those who drink in Limburg are more likely to have consumed more than people from Brabant. Finally, in terms of binge drinking, people living in Brabant are reported to do this more often than people in the west or in the north and east of the Netherlands.[13]

Next to alcohol use, food consumption may also be an important aspect of being Burgundian. The Eurobarometer 64.3 from 2005 (European Commission, 2012h) contains some questions on food consumption including 'I would rather eat my favourite food than watch my favourite television show' and 'I most enjoy eating when I am with family or friends'. People living in Brabant are slightly more likely to enjoy eating with family or friends than people in the west (as a combination of the provinces Utrecht, North Holland, and South Holland), but this effect largely disappears when controlling for religion. Not being religious, compared with being Catholic, negatively contributes to enjoying food most when accompanied by family or friends. No significant differences within the Netherlands are found with reference to the preference of favourite food and favourite television program.

Finally, being hedonistic may also be a characteristics of Burgundian. In the European Social Survey, some questions with regard to this are included (European

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[13] Binge drinking was here indicated by showing respondents cards with six different combinations of drinks. (For women: five glasses of beer, five glasses of wine, three glasses of wine and one cocktail, etc. For men: five bottles of beer, three bottles of craft beer, five alcoholic mixed drink, etc.). Respondents were asked how often they had consumed this amount in the past year (i.e. daily, weekly, monthly, etc.).

Social Survey, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012). People in Brabant are equally likely as people in the west or north or east of the Netherlands to say that they are like someone who finds it important to have a good time, and like someone who seeks to have fun and do things that give him/her pleasure.

As a conclusion, we can see that, some small regional differences exist concerning alcohol use and food consumption. Brabant does indeed drink, although not necessarily more often or in greater quantities. However, people in Brabant are more likely to be binge-drinkers. We see that, particularly in the southeast of Brabant, people seem to consume more alcohol. With regard to enjoying food and life, differences are not as big and are particularly explained by religious differences. The results, overall, do not suggest that Brabant is very different from other regions in the Netherlands.

Identification: The Self, Others, and Structures

Now that I have sketched an outline of how Brabant was traditionally characterized, I will move to a second line of argument within this chapter on to how Brabantish identities are currently characterized by people in Brabant. In my introduction, I emphasized that identities are not stable concepts, but are heterogeneous plural social constructs that are constantly (unconsciously) subjected to re-affirmation and negotiation. However, before moving on to Brabantish identities, I want to highlight several more aspects of identities that are important in my understanding of identities. Specifically, I will elaborate on how identities are a combination of how one sees the self, how one is seen by others, and how structural constraints may affect this process of identification.

While this flexibility may suggest a sense of agency, it is important to stress that people cannot always freely choose their identity. I want to emphasize several elements here. First, the importance of institutions is paramount to understand national identities (Skey, 2011), but also local and regional ones. For national identities, this is even more applicable, as from birth, one is classified with a particular nationality and has the rights and obligations that are associated with this citizenship. Despite increasing global circulations of goods, many rules and regulations are still organized at the state level. For example, rules on opening hours of institutions and shops, national holidays, and age requirements are decided at the national scale, but incorporated within everyday habits (Edensor, 2006). The content and the way in which subjects are taught at primary and secondary school is greatly influenced by national rules. It is important to realize that such institutions are human-made, and the idea of a nation (and a province) is socially constructed. Yet, it is so powerful that many consider it simply a fact of life, that living in a world of nations is a natural condition and taken for granted (Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2006; Skey, 2011; Thompson, 2001). It is easy to forget the human agency of many of our constructs. As Skey writes: 'Put bluntly, without the activities of

people there are no national (or, indeed, any other, social) formations' (Skey, 2011, p. 150). Thus, while institutions are paramount, and certainly influence how individuals perceive the world, it is within the everyday habits that people enact the national and the local. Sixty years ago, the affection for Brabant was articulated by official channels in a serious manner. Notions of Brabant depended on assumptions of the dominant Catholic religion, the region, and its history (Mommaas, 2014). Though institutions give a backdrop to people's identities, people themselves make and reproduce these (national) identities, both sixty years ago and now. This emphasis on people brings me to my next point.

Identities, any form of identities, are a negotiation between internal and external aspects, a combination of ascribing and subscribing, 'an interaction between how we identify ourselves and how others identify us' (Jenkins, 2011, p. 49). What I mean with this is that identities are never created in isolation, but are based on the interaction with others. What Brabant means to a particular person living in Brabant is not just based on his or her own ideas but also on how people outside of the group and other Brabanders categorize him or her. Through the process of categorization, people may subscribe to particular identities; through identifying with a category of 'Brabanders', people feel as if they belong to this group. However, identification is not only based on self-evaluation: people who subscribe to a certain identity are not necessarily seen by others as belonging to that particular identity group (cf. Day, 1998; Spotti, 2007). My data also illustrated this case. Bas, one of my respondents in my focus groups in Helmond, considered himself a real Helmonder. He identified himself as belonging to this group and constantly articulated this. When talking about who was most Brabantish in the focus group including Bas, one of Bas' classmates immediately said Bas should be on top of the list. The rest of his group agreed with this. In the other focus group I conducted in Helmond, however, some of the respondents did not perceive Bas to be Helmondian or Brabantish at all because he could not speak the dialect and used non-existent words:

Henhq:	And Bas is just a wannabe Helmonder
Participant:[14]	Yeah really fucking fake-Helmonder, absurd man!
Sandra:	Why do you consider him a wannabe Helmonder?
Bram:	Yeah he really speaks really broad Helmonds [dialect] and then he makes up a couple of Helmonds words. In Helmonds, you have just words that really exist, then he adds another vowel at the end that isn't actually Helmonds and so on. And also just [uses] Brabantish words, just actually, to be tough he speaks Helmonds, but he totally can't do it.

(Focus group, Helmond, May 2014)

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[14] Sometimes I am unsure which participant in my focus group made a particular statement. In this case, I will use 'participant' rather than the pseudonym I gave them.

Bas tries to be a real Helmonder, but according to some of his classmates, fails miserably at it. Bas' attempts to be a Helmonder are not accepted as genuine; rather he is considered 'fake'. This fragment illustrates that you need others to validate your identities; you may subscribe to identities but then they are not always ascribed back to you.

Certain structural constraints can also hinder subscription to a particular identity. Existing social structures and institutions may constrain people in specific positions. People may lack particular resources to 'become' something else (Morley, 2001). These two aspects, having particular resources and the view of others, are indeed related as, for instance, the lack of such resources may be a reason for other people to categorize someone differently. For example, others may not as readily accept someone as a Brabander if they speak with a Rotterdam accent, despite whatever feelings of belonging the person might have. Identity claims are contextual and it is not necessarily so that people either possess an identity or not. Instead, people can have identities to a certain extent (cf. Hage, 1998, pp. 51-55). Having some, but not all, of the possible cultural dispositions may lead to a degree of being considered a Brabander. Brabantishness, or any type of identity, may be measured on a spectrum scale, where one can be more or less of that identity. People may accept someone to be part of the in-group, but not as much as someone else. Someone may be considered a Brabander, but clearly, he/she is less of a Brabander than the one who is really typically Brabantish.

Those whose 'status is recognized *without question* will not only have a more settled sense of identity, and access to whatever benefits the in-group accrues, but these people are also able to make judgements about the status of other people' (Skey, 2011, p. 31). Thus, the ones belonging to the in-group have more power to judge others as belonging to that in-group as well. This means that a Brabander may categorize someone as a Rotterdammer, and within a Brabantish context is able to make a powerful assertion of the Rotterdammer as an outsider, as a non-Brabander. Within the context of Rotterdam however, the Brabander may have less to say about that person being a Rotterdammer. Within that context, the Rotterdammer who is without question accepted as a Rotterdammer is more qualified to make claims about this. Thus, the higher up the spectrum scale you are, the more power you have to decide and shape the criteria that forms the spectrum scale itself.

Accordingly, what I want to emphasize here is that identities are a combination of 'the self-evaluating individual' with their 'ongoing struggles for recognition and belonging, as well as the established social hierarchies that channel, and constrain, these processes' (Skey, 2011, p. 22). Thus, people do not decide their own identity categories by themselves, but may be affected by other people and structures that affect such processes.

Active and Unreflexive Identification

While I have stressed the importance of institutions, others, and self-evaluations, this may suggest that feelings of belonging are based on calculated actions and choices. However, this is often not the case as they are part of the routine actions of everyday life and part of our natural surroundings (Skey, 2011). People often do not make national choices because they wish to act 'national', but because of other practical circumstances (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008). For instance, many Dutch people work for companies in the Netherlands, not because they specifically choose for a Dutch one, but because they choose for a particular line of work and this company is close to where they live. 'Choosing [...] can thus be like choosing a toilet – the signs on the doors tell people where to go. In this sense, "choosing" is hardly a "choice"' (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008, p. 544). People may not think about their choices consciously as they are part of their routine way of handing, of common sense unreflexivity. Therefore, while this discussion on identities might have suggested identities are a conscious choice; this is only part of the story. Many of the things that people do in their daily lives are unreflexive and automatic (Edensor, 2006; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008; Skey, 2011). Following on Billig's 'banal nationalism', besides 'overt displays and self-conscious cultural assertions, national identity is grounded in the everyday, in the mundane details of social interaction, habits, routines and practical knowledge' (Edensor, 2006, p. 17). Moreover,

> [B]elonging to a region or place is not a self-evident thing even if people often identify themselves with their home region. However, many of them simply do not reflect these facts in spatial terms in their daily life. What we do call as an identity is rather performed in daily life practice. (Paasi, 2011, p. 14)

However, while I have now mentioned some unreflexive processes, and how (national and regional) identities are an integral part of our everyday lives, many people's conceptions about identities are different. People often act *as if* the region is a fixed thing with essentialist criteria. In a process of essentialization, people link specific marks to generalizing scripts (Koven, 2016). People can have multiple identities and negotiate within them (e.g. Spotti, 2007), but we often use them in an essentialist way. In the introduction, I have already named many instances in which people made use of the word Brabant without any problem. I will now explore this phenomenon further, by reflecting on how people use some markers of Brabant to define Brabantishness. However, before going deeper into that, I elaborate on the use of the focus groups.

Focus Groups

In 2014, I conducted several focus groups with adolescents. Focus groups are a form of group interviews or discussion with a small group of people (Cronin, 2008). They can help to elicit how meaning is constructed in consultation with others. Focus groups can be used to assess both the content that is generated by people's talk about particular subjects, and the interaction between different persons (Munday, 2006). Therefore, I focus not only on the content of what is being said, but also on the way in which the participants communicate with each other and on the dynamics within the groups.

Focus groups can be conducted with strangers or people who are already familiar with each other. The use of pre-existing groups has the advantage of re-sembling a more natural setting. Besides, individuals may remind each other about situations they have encountered together. In a group with strangers, respondents may be more likely to disclose sensitive information without the fear that this information may trouble them after the focus group (Bloor, Frankland, Thomson, & Robson, 2001). However, as my topic does not seem to be very sensitive, I have chosen for pre-existing groups. In addition, as respondents were familiar with each other they could reflect on each other's Brabantishness, which was beneficial for my research.

Scholars disagree on the ideal size of a focus group. With more participants, the focus group becomes more difficult to moderate. In larger groups, the risk of a dominant person controlling the situation is greater as quiet people may not have a chance to speak and may feel frustrated about this (Bloor et al., 2001). Focus groups with as little as three participants up to groups consisting of twenty individuals are used. Bloor et al. (2001) have suggested between six and eight participants as ideal, Barbour (2007) proposes a maximum of eight participants with a minimum of three, and Peek and Fothergill (2009) advise between three and five. I decided to have groups of between three and eight participants, leaning more towards a smaller than a larger group. Of course, the actual number may differ because of no-shows or extra people joining the table. In the end, my focus groups consisted of a group of eight, a group of seven, (these two groups remixed on a second occasion in a group of seven and six, as two students were absent), a group of five, and two groups of four.

The focus groups were homogeneous in the sense that they were conducted with adolescents living in the same area and attending the same class. This also implies a homogeneous level of education within a single focus group. Moreover, the respondents were approximately of the same age. However, they were hetero-geneous with regard to place of origin and ethnicity to different extents.

Focus groups sessions were conducted in three different places with a total of 28 participants. In the Netherlands, pupils of twelve years of age are streamlined into different levels of secondary education ranging from the lowest (VMBO) to

middle (HAVO) to the highest level (VWO). Two focus groups were conducted with seven and eight respondents between thirteen and fifteen years old from a multicultural school in Tilburg. This was a third year HAVO class, the middle stream in secondary education. Some respondents were born and raised in Brabant, others were born outside of the Netherlands (e.g. Belgium, Morocco) or had parents who were born and raised outside the Netherlands (e.g. Albania, China, Morocco). Consequently, many of them identified with these nations instead of (or as well as) identifying with the Netherlands. The same respondents from this HAVO class participated in a second session two weeks later, but two respondents were absent and the group composition differed from the first sessions. Another focus group consisted of five boys between thirteen and fifteen years old from Vlijmen who attend a pre-university (VWO) high school in the larger neighbouring city of 's-Hertogenbosch. These respondents were Dutch, but some were born in or have parents who grew up in other provinces in the Netherlands. Two final groups both consisted of four boys between fourteen and sixteen years from a VMBO school in Helmond. Most respondents grew up around Helmond. One classmate whom we talked about, but was absent in the focus group had lived in a foreign country and one absent classmate had a non-Dutch parent. All focus groups were conducted by me, but during the second two sessions in Tilburg a research assistant (Aafke Lettinga) was present.

Besides asking questions, focus groups can also have exercises (Kitzinger, 1995). This focusing exercise is 'an attempt to concentrate the group's attention and interaction on a particular topic' (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 43). One commonly used task is a ranking exercise, where 'the discussion about the rankings serves to illustrate the deep differences (along with some important similarities) in the tacit understanding of each different group' (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 43). One of the core exercises in my focus groups was 'ranking the stars', where participants were asked to rank celebrities from most Brabantish to least Brabantish. As the notion of identities is a little abstract, talking about celebrities and their Brabantishness helped to make this more concrete and thereby eased the discussion. Talking about celebrities' Brabantishness gives an idea of how adolescents apply identification. Celebrities were chosen because both the participants and researchers are familiar with them. Additionally, celebrities both reflect and shape social reality and audiences play a large role in constructing celebrities (e.g. Ferris, 2007). People can use celebrities to reflect on their own identities. In this case, audiences can project regional identities on celebrities and in turn, celebrities can symbolize what it means to be from Brabant to audiences. The ranking exercise also corresponds with the idea that identities are not either/or categorisations. People can have and express different modalities of belonging (Hage, 1998).

Table 2.1 Celebrities used in the different focus groups

Celebrity	Profession	Location	Tih	Tilz	Vlij	Hel1	Hel2
Gers Pardoel	Rapper	Born in Nijmegen, grew up in Kaatsheuvel, lived in Rotterdam, lived/lives in Tilburg	X	X	X	X	X
Theo Maassen	Comedian and actor	Born in Oegstgeest, grew up in Zijtaart	X	X	X	X	X
Sylvie Meis (previously known as Sylvie van der Vaart)	Presenter, actress, model	Born in Breda	X	X	X	X	X
Guus Meeuwis	Singer in Dutch, singer of unofficial anthem of Brabant called 'Brabant'	Born in Mariahout, lives in Tilburg	X	X	X	X	X
Tim Haars	Actor (known from *New Kids*)	Born in Maaskantje, lives in Amsterdam	X	X	X	X	X
Patrick Martens	Actor, TV presenter	Born in Breda, lives in Amsterdam	X	X	X	X	X
Braboneger (Steven Brunswijk)	Comedian, extensively uses dialect	Born in Surinam, grew up and lives in Tilburg	X	X	X		
Ireen Wüst	Speed skater[15]	Born in Goirle, lives in Friesland	X	X	X		
Roy Donders	Reality TV star 'Stylist of the South'	Born and lives in Tilburg				X	X
Michael van Gerwen	World champion darts	From Vlijmen, Boxtel, Gemonde	X	X	X	X	X
DJ Tiësto	DJ	Born in Breda			X	X	X
Frans Bauer	Folk singer	Born in Roosendaal, lives in Fijnaart		X	X	X	X
Gerard van Maasakkers	Singer in dialect	Born in Nuenen, lives in Budel[16]	X	X			
Leon van der Zanden	Comedian	Born in Helmond	X				
Freek Bartels	Musical star	Born in Tilburg	X				
Yvon Jaspers	TV presenter	Born in Boxtel	X				

[15] The first focus groups took place during the Olympic Winter Games 2014. Ireen Wüst won a gold medal shortly before the first focus groups.
[16] In June 2015, after all of the focus groups had been conducted, Gerard van Maasakkers announced he would leave Brabant and move to Ghent, Belgium (De Bekker, 2015).

For this 'ranking the stars' exercise I chose celebrities who differed in age, gender, profession, ethnic background, hometowns (including some born or currently living outside of Brabant), and how they emphasized their 'Brabantishness'. I printed photos of these celebrities with their names on it. The photos were selected by googling images. Sometimes the profession of the individual was visible. This was particularly the case for athletes for whom more neutral photos were lacking. Of course, this also illustrates the athletes in their natural surroundings. In all cases, it was made sure that 'orange', which is often depicted as the Dutch (national) colour, was not prominently present. Based on the adolescents' familiarity with the celebrities, I adopted the selection of celebrities I used in the focus groups. In Table 2.1, the different celebrities and their profession and location are displayed.

The changes between the different focus groups were made because of adolescents' familiarity with the celebrities and because I wanted to include a celebrity from their home area (Michael van Gerwen for the focus group in Vlijmen for example). In Helmond, I tried to include someone from Helmond (Leon van de Zanden) but the boys were unfamiliar with him and therefore I eliminated him.

Besides the celebrities, participants also ranked their classmates in a similar exercise. In Helmond and Tilburg, respondents ranked all classmates, regardless of whether they attended the same focus group or not. In Vlijmen, the participants only rated each other. This further illustrated how the adolescents applied identity labels on people with whom they were very familiar: their peers. Moreover, additional questions were asked and other small exercises were conducted. However, the main task of the focus groups was the ranking exercises. After I conducted the focus groups, I transcribed the complete recordings. In total, I recorded a little over five hours. I used Atlas.ti to organize my notes, codes, and comments on the transcriptions. I thematically read over them and my data were leading me in my interpretations.

A Cumulative Conception of Brabantishness

While identities are subject to negotiation, and are not based on some fixed criteria, people often act as if identities have particular characteristics. People often essentialize identities when communicating with others and when explicitly talking about Brabant. Moreover, people act in ways that suggest regional identities, like national ones, have a cumulative nature as some people are recognized to be more regional than others. Having accumulated the appropriate linguistic, physical, and cultural characteristics may render someone as more Brabantish (cf. Hage, 1998, pp. 51-55). A 'real' Brabander therefore has enough features to be considered as a member of this in-group (cf. Blommaert & Varis, 2013). Others may fall in between the categories of not Brabantish at all or 'almost' Brabantish.

These notions of the cumulative conception of Brabantishness were also essential to the ranking exercise in my focus groups, in which respondents ranked people from most to least Brabantish. The ranking exercise assumed that gradations of Brabantishness exist, and none of my participants questioned this idea. However, while a difference in being Brabantish was not questioned, it was difficult to differentiate between several celebrities or classmates who were Brabantish to a similar extent. Several groups placed different celebrities and classmates on an equal level, indicating they were equally Brabantish. One group in Helmond situated three celebrities on the floor thereby distancing them (spatially as well as socially) from top-ranked Brabanders on the table. The groups clearly differentiated between 'not at all', 'somewhat', and 'a lot', but differences within these categories were often more nuanced and differed largely per participant.

The respondents' discussions were mostly about different qualities, in the broadest sense of the word, which individuals may possess, that make them Brabantish. Specifically, I will focus on factors that affected the placement of celebrities and classmates on the ranking. I will not give an exhaustive list of aspects that ascribe people with Brabantishness, but will give some examples of how particular elements may function as a way to distinguish Brabanders from other (Dutch) people. Specifically I will detail on language use, being Dutch, being born in Brabant, and 'remaining ordinary'. Moreover, I will analyse how people's self-conception of some of Brabants' characteristics as already named (e.g. being exuberant) contribute to a higher self-conception of being a real Brabander.

Language

Language use is often said to be a characteristic of Brabant. The soft *g* of the accent of the southern provinces in the Netherlands and Belgium is something that quickly comes to people's mind when discussing what Brabantishness is. Moreover, Brabantish identities may be highlighted by using words from dialects or pronouncing words in a particular way. In this sense the words do not simply refer to their literal meaning (e.g. *Houdoe* means bye), but they also index their social meaning (*Houdoe* is Brabantish) (cf. Silverstein, 2003). A particularly telling example of a word indexing a social meaning is how people call (French) fries. How a Dutch-speaking person names this yellow, fried potato depends on their place of origin. A Dutch person using the word *friet* indicates that he/she is from the southern part of the Netherlands or Belgium, whereas using *patat* indicates a northern origin (cf. Stroop, 2011; Swanenberg, 2015). While sometimes these words may even be used explicitly, or thought of as being used explicitly, to indicate one's origins, many times these words are unconsciously used because it is part of someone's regular way of speaking.

Until the 1970s, most people in Brabant spoke both dialect and standard Dutch. While dialect was more frequently used in the informal social domain, standard Dutch was mainly learnt through official education (Swanenberg, forthcoming).

Nowadays, however, instead of speaking both Dutch and dialect, (young) people are using a form that is in between the two, recognisable as Brabantish through specific word use (e.g. *houdoe* or *gij/ge* for you) and pronunciation (e.g. soft *g*). While dialect use has changed, as dialects have come to reflect and borrow more from neighbouring language, effectively turning local dialects into regiolects, young people still use a diverse spectrum of language (Swanenberg, 2014).

My focus groups also illustrate that adolescents consider speaking dialect or having an accent as one of the most important aspects for ascribing someone as Brabantish. Respondents also make a distinction between speaking dialect and speaking Dutch with Brabantish features. For instance, some respondents in my focus group highlight the difference between only speaking with a soft *g* and using dialect. However, what these participants consider dialect may actually be a form of regional accent or regiolect:

> Sandra: Why do you say Steven? [Brunswijk, aka Braboneger]
> Alex: Because of his accent, because if Gers Pardoel is singing everyone in the Netherlands listens to him, so it is not like if he speaks Brabantish that people can't understand him when he's singing or something.
> (Focus Group, Tilburg, February 2014)

Here, Alex not only refers to how Braboneger's use of dialect is more Brabantish, but also how it can function as a way of excluding others. When Braboneger says something in dialect, people outside of his region may not understand. Roy Donders' reality television show is frequently subtitled because otherwise not everyone would understand him. In comments about *New Kids* on Flabber.nl, some people wrote that they did not understand everything that was said, while someone else from Brabant might seriously question the notion that someone would have problems understanding *New Kids*. If someone speaks a Brabantish dialect or regiolect, people consider that person more of a Brabander than when speaking with a Brabantish accent alone, although having a Brabantish accent is often enough to be indexed as a Brabander. Many Brabanders have countless encounters with people who ask: 'Are you from Brabant? I can hear it.' It is no surprise then that some of the respondents refer to such encounters when 'proving' how Brabantish they are.

Simultaneously, an analysis of data from PON (2005) reveal that people who identify more with Brabant are also more likely to exhibit Brabantish speech patterns. There is a significant relationship between Brabantish language use[17] and considering oneself Brabantish to a greater extent, also when controlling for age, living in the countryside, level of education, being born in Brabant, duration of

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[17] This is computed by taking the mean of three questions: I speak most of the time Brabantish dialect, I often use Brabantish words such as ... , and I speak with a soft *g* on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). This measure has an acceptable Cronbach's alpha of 0.684.

living in Brabant, and having most family living in Brabant.[18] Indeed, one can speculate about the direction of influence. Do people who speak more dialect consequently feel more Brabantish, or are people who feel Brabantish, speak more frequently in dialect? Indeed, perhaps both are true as they mutually reinforce and influence each other.

Language use seems to work in multiple ways. People may ascribe others and themselves with being Brabantish when they hear them speak Brabantish, but people's subscription to Brabantish identities also corresponds with more Brabantish language use. Indeed, this language use is related to other contributors of a Brabantish identity. Language use does not stand on its own, but it may also be mediated because of the expectations that this language implies. For example, using dialect may give people the impression that someone has lived in Brabant for a long time already, or that one has remained true to oneself and the province of Brabant. Indeed, indexicalities, utterances of behaviours suggesting specific identity positions, are not random, but follow a structural order. This means that indexicalities create a set of expectations regarding other indexical elements (cf. Blommaert, Westinen, & Leppänen, 2014). As will become apparent when discussing other markers of identification (e.g. being born in Brabant), such indications of identities are interrelated.

Is Dutch a Prerequisite?

In my multicultural focus group, it became clear that Brabantishenss was sometimes equated with Dutchness. Some respondents did not consider themselves Dutch, let alone Brabantish. This relates to the taxonomy of identification (cf. Jenkins, 2011, p. 80) as a category can be subdivided in different (opposing) categories. Identities are layered in the sense that being European is subdivided in countries, which can be split up in provinces, which can be separated further in regions, which can be divided in towns, which can be separated in different neighbourhoods, etc. Indeed, one can also think of other subdivisions such as West European and East European, the north and south of the Netherlands, etc. Thus, one can identify with these different places on different scales. Such a scale is thus a type of place one can identify with on a particular level. Identifying with the 'other' in a larger category (e.g. on country scale) may be accompanied with not identifying on a subdivision of that scale (e.g. a province of a different country). Depending on

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[18] This is based on a regression analysis on Brabantish language use (N=727, R²=.471). Besides considering oneself a Brabander on a scale from 1 to 5 (p<.001), being born in Brabant (p=.026), having the majority of one's family living in Brabant (yes is more, p=.003), level of education (no difference between middle and low, p=.180; high less than low, p=.027), and age (25-39 year olds more compared to 55+, p=.028, other age groups no difference) contributed significantly to self-reported higher use of Brabantish language. The other variables I controlled for did not contribute significantly to more Brabantish language use: most family born in Brabant, duration of living in Brabant in categories of 20%, having lived outside of Brabant, region in Brabant one inhabits, living in the city vs. a village, and gender.

the context, one of these 'scales' may be triggered (Jenkins, 2011). For instance, some (second-generation) immigrants did identify with being Dutch but not with Brabant. Chang was born in Tilburg but did not consider himself Brabantish because '[his] entire family actually comes from China, so... yeah.' When I asked him whether he felt Dutch, he was indecisive. He hesitated to say he was not Dutch, but did not accept being Dutch either. Later when listening to the tape, I heard one of participants even saying to me, 'you are also a bit blond, [a joke] well, never mind' indicating that according to him, I asked a stupid question as the answer was self-evident in his appearance. In another group, Zanou stated that she was Moroccan and when I ask why she was a Moroccan, she said, 'Because I was born there.' People start to laugh and I feel like defending myself for asking such a question. Here, features that connote a different nationality may play a role: they look 'foreign', they speak 'foreign' languages, but most of all they were born abroad and/or have family abroad.

Of course, people who do identify with one locality and another country also exist. Being Brabantish may not be a threat to being part of another nationality to the same extent that being Dutch implies. Being Dutch may require giving up one's other nationality, whereas being Brabantish does not mandate such obligation. Although many respondents from the multicultural focus groups in Tilburg were not perceived as Brabantish, were they to make that distinction among themselves, they would determine it on the length of stay in the Netherlands. The less time classmates had lived in the Netherlands, the less Brabantish they seemed. The classmates used the proximity of the culture in this case. Belgium is closer in culture to the Netherlands/Brabant than Spain; thus, the Belgian girl was more Brabantish than the Moroccan girl who had lived in Spain before coming to the Netherlands.

However, characterizations of Brabantishness are not always self-evident at first sight. Someone's physical characteristics may suggest they are 'foreign', as was the case for Zanou and Chang. Sometimes, however, it becomes explicitly clear that one's appearance deviates from the hegemonic idea of being a white Brabander. This becomes explicitly clear with Steven Brunswijk: the Braboneger (Black Brabander), as he calls himself. His physical characteristics, which initially point to his Surinamese heritage, is perceived to mismatch the way he speaks; a paradox reflected in his name. He uses this in his comic shows where he plays with both identities. When people see him, they do not consider him Brabantish, but when they hear him speak, they realize he is, in fact, a long-term resident. When I played a video clip of Braboneger, people's opinion about him changed:

Participant: He speaks very broad Tilburgs [dialect]
Participant: How he, how he ... speaks
[multiple]:   Yes
Paul: You don't just have an accent like that

Isabel: No
Participant: No
Paul: That must be picked up from somewhere
Isabel: Yeah that is from here for sure.
Paul: Usually from the parents. But it looks kinda funny. Just that appearance
                 with that accent.
(Focus group, Tilburg, February 2014)

In this fragment, it can also be observed that, as mentioned earlier, language use does not stand on its own, but is entangled with other ideas about what it means to be Brabantish (or Tilburgian). The respondents consider him Brabantish because using (Tilburgian) dialect signifies the Braboneger is from around Tilburg. Dialect use is connected to having parents that speak this dialect, as evinced by Paul's remark that such language use is usually learned from one's parents. Dialect use may also connect to (long-term) residency and being embedded within the Tilburgian society. Both of these are also connected to being Brabantish or Tilburgian. His typical Tilburgian language use seems to override his appearance as a non-Brabander, legitimizing Steven Brunswijk as a Brabander. Such perceived discrepancies of appearance and language use occur more frequently. For instance, a Dutch person from outside of Brabant wrote the following to me:

Haha, my bus driver was Moroccan with a soft G, strange man!
(WhatsApp-message, December 2015)

People who do not fit with the hegemonic white notion of being Dutch/Brabantish may not be characterized as Brabantish at first sight. In fact, they may be distanced so much from Brabant that speaking in a Brabantish accent or in dialect may cause some small estrangement. Thus, people who are not born in Brabant, but outside the Netherlands, are not immediately recognized as Brabander. However, when having other characteristics that indicate some Brabantishness, they may still be considered 'true' Brabanders. In a similar way, people who are born in another province in the Netherlands may need other ways to legitimize themselves as Brabanders.

Import Brabanders & Long-term Residency

People not native to the province, but who have lived a large part of their life in Brabant are also considered Brabantish. The concept of 'import Brabander' is commonly used. This indicates someone has been 'imported' into Brabant (from another province in the Netherlands) and thus is differentiated from a 'real' Brabander.

In addition, such notions of being 'import Brabander' may also relate to other aspects such as being embedded within the local society and language use. As I

already mentioned, people connect language use to a (long-term) residency or having learnt a dialect (in their youth) from their parents. For example, someone told me about her sister-in-law, who, despite having lived in Brabant for over 25 years, still does not understand everything: 'And then she asks, what is that? And then you really have to think hard about how to say this in Standard Dutch.'

Birthplace plays a role in the sense that people feel it legitimates someone as a 'true' inhabitant. Frequently, respondents differentiate between being a Tilburger, Bosschenaar, Brabander, etc., in terms of being born there and feeling Tilburger, Bosschenaar, Brabander, etc. People may, as they say themselves, *feel* '100 percent' Brabanders, but because they are not born in Brabant, they differentiate this from *being* a Brabander. Some (self-made) definitions of a 'true' inhabitant depend on ancestry, for instance, that someone needs to be established in a village for three generations before he/she can consider him-/herself a true inhabitant. However, as one can imagine, while people may not have been living for three generations in the same place, they still consider themselves, and are considered by others, as 'real' Brabanders, Tilburgers, or Eindhovenaren. People may identify with, and feel as if they are inhabitants, and probably would call themselves inhabitants of a particular place on many occasions. Yet, as my interviews revealed, birthplace remains an important factor in legitimizing this identification:

Sandra: But you do [identify] with Den Bosch
Janus: Absolutely! I said already even though I'm not a Bosschenaar, I do feel like a Bosschenaar. I'm also pretty active in the C*arnaval* scene now. Couldn't be any other way, right? 'Cos Oeteldonk [the name given to Den Bosch during *Carnaval*], right? And I feel 500% Oeteldonker to be honest.
Sandra: Why do you say you are not a Bosschenaar, but feel like one?
Janus: I was born in Dongen [mid Brabant], so that's closer to where you live. And I moved from Dongen to Vlissingen [city in the Dutch province Zeeland], from Vlissingen to Breda and then to Den Bosch, but I was eight, eight or nine, I am not exactly sure, when I lived in Den Bosch. So that actually says more about how often I moved in my first years than uh... but yeah, I would never want to leave Den Bosch.
(Interview with an extra in *Smeris* living in Den Bosch, July 2016)

'Remaining Ordinary'

Another stereotypical aspect of Brabanders is their ordinariness. The typical Brabander does not look like a pop star or is dressed for the occasion. Rather, s/he looks ordinary. Indeed, such appearances do not only connote a particular Brabantish identity, but also, can be associated with a particular type of person, a posh or preppy one, that is in contrast to the typical 'ordinary' Brabander:

Bas: Yeah but I think that Roy Donders also remained true to his own, I think, really
         is a Brabander.[19]
(Focus group, Helmond, July 2014)

Bas and others in Helmond attribute the characteristic of 'remaining true to one-self' to several celebrities, including Roy Donders. This specific trait of 'acting nor-mal' is often associated with being a Brabander, but also with Dutch celebrities in general (cf. Chow & De Kloet, 2008; Reijnders, Spijkers, Roeland, & Boross, 2014).[20] Celebrities are praised for their ordinariness and how normal and down-to-earth they are. Celebrities do not adjust to fit in with the rest of the Netherlands. They are not ashamed of their background, behaviour, and language use. Particularly in Helmond, the boys in both groups continuously talked about this element of being a Brabander. People who are more showy and 'fake' are not considered Brabantish. For instance, Sylvie Meis is considered 'Barbie, the second' and many respondents dismiss her as a Brabander at least partly because of her posh look.

    This down-to-earth, laid-back attitude is associated with Brabant in the case of both celebrities and ordinary people. In Helmond, the boys spoke about classmates who remained true to themselves and who were not easily ashamed were considered more Brabantish. More frequently, such notions about Brabanders as down-to-earth persons are iterated:

Sofie: But sometimes you have those people who behave high and mighty. Because I
         also play sports somewhere where there is also an actor from *Komt een man bij
         de dokter* [Dutch sketch programme]. I swim with him in the same lane there.
         He's a really nice person, he's not like 'oooh I am arrogant'. Just enjoying
         swimming with his son. Yeah, we are Brabanders. We're down to earth.
 (Interview with an extra from *Smeris*, living in Tilburg, June 2016)

In the case of celebrities, the idea of ordinariness has another implication that may strengthen its connection to Brabant as it may relate to celebrities' approachability. Remaining ordinary may also be associated with not betraying Brabant by contin-uing to live there. As such, these celebrities are more embedded within the local society. If celebrities continue to live in Brabant, people may be more likely to en-counter them. Meeting celebrities informally on the street can invoke a local feel-ing and belonging (Williams, 2013, p. 165). The ordinariness and approachability of celebrities may stress their Brabantishness. Stressing their ties with their surround-ings, combined with the possibility of randomly meeting them on the street, may

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[19] I purposively translated it to 'true to his own' because the speaker makes a similar mistake in Dutch.
[20] *Doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg (*Just act normal, that's crazy enough) is considered by many a typical Dutch catchphrase.

Table 2.2 Regression analysis on considering oneself a 'real Brabander'

		Model I		Model II	
		B	**SE**	**B**	**SE**
Born in Brabant		0.113	0.130	0.003	0.112
Lived outside of Brabant		**-0.316*****	0.095	**-0.254****	0.081
% lived in Brabant (80-100%)[21]	Less than 20%	**-0.520****	0.183	**-0.465****	0.157
	20 – 40%	**-0.669*****	0.172	**-0.642*****	0.149
	40 – 60%	**-0.381***	0.149	**-0.362****	0.128
	60 – 80%	-0.177	0.147	-0.116	0.127
Majority family born in Brabant		**0.433*****	0.120	**0.336****	0.103
Majority family lives in Brabant		**0.406*****	0.102	**0.254****	0.088
Language use[22]				**0.310*****	0.032
Helping and being open[23]				-0.028	0.055
Exuberant people-person[24]				**0.309*****	0.040
Enjoying Brabantish Landscape[25]				**0.165*****	0.035
Region (mid Brabant)	Northeast Brabant	0.064	0.093	0.003	0.080
	Southeast Brabant	**0.190***	0.090	**0.161***	0.078
	West Brabant	0.139	0.095	0.132	0.081
City		-0.040	0.064	0.010	0.055
Age (55 +)	15 – 25	-0.230	0.132	**-0.254***	0.119
	25 – 40	**-0.214****	0.082	**-0.314*****	0.074
	40 – 55	**-0.206****	0.079	**-0.194****	0.068
	Woman	-0.013	0.062	0.012	0.053
Education (low)	Middle	-0.176	0.108	-0.129	0.092
	High	-0.182	0.102	0.017	0.089
Religion (Catholic)	Not religious	**-0.243****	0.082	-0.083	0.071
	Different religion	-0.163	0.111	0.018	0.096
Constant		**3.782*****	0.188	1.187	0.286
N		727		727	
Adjusted R Square		.446		.596	

Significant at *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

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[21] This is calculated by the number of years someone has reported to live in Brabant divided by his/her age.

[22] Language use is, as in the section earlier, a combined factor of a self-measurement on a scale from 1 to 5 for having an accent, using Brabantish words, and using dialect.

[23] People had to respond on a 5-point scale whether they agreed with statements related to (Brabantish) mentality. Based on a factor analysis I distilled two factors, being helpful and open and being an exuberant people-person. Being helpful and open is a combination of four variables, two on being helpful (one with regard to family, one with regard to neighbours) and talking to other people including strangers, and being hospitable (door always open for visitors). Cronbach's α = .662

[24] The second factor was based on two variables, being a people-person and being exuberant (Burgundian). Cronbach's α= .660

[25] Based on the average of two variables scored on a 5-point scale: being attached to the Brabantish landscape and when going out, I like to do this in Brabant. Cronbach's α = .731

emphasize several celebrities as Brabanders. Accordingly, part of their Brabantish-ness may lie in the fact they are not only *from here* but they continue to *be here* (Lettinga, Wagemakers, & Swanenberg, 2015).

Considering Oneself a 'Real Brabander': An Analysis

So far, I have elaborated on what respondents consider to be Brabantish character-istics. Such aspects include Brabantish language use, being born and having lived in Brabant for a long time, but also stereotypes such as remaining 'ordinary', being exuberant, and being hospitable. I will further illustrate this with data from PON (2005). With these data, I analyse whether people who have particular character-istics associated with Brabantishness, do indeed consider themselves more often 'true Brabanders'. The PON data I used to analyse this included the question: 'If on a scale from 1 to 5 you would have to indicate to what extent you consider yourself a 'real Brabander', what grade would you give yourself?' with 1 being 'not at all Brabander' and 5 'real Brabander'. When conducting a regression analysis on this variable, as depicted in Table 2.2, several things can be noted.

First, several characteristics related to living in Brabant and having family in Brabant are significant. Being born in Brabant does not contribute to the model, probably because this factor is already weighed in by considering the amount of time people have lived in Brabant. People who have not lived the majority of their life in Brabant are less likely to consider themselves true Brabanders. However, between the groups 60-80% and 80-100% the difference is not significant. This may suggest a tipping point exists in the duration of living in Brabant, combined with the fact that having lived for 100% in Brabant is controlled for by the question of having lived outside of Brabant. Thus, the lack of difference seems between 60-80% and 80-99%. Besides, whether the family is born and lives in Brabant is also important. People with many family members in Brabant may consider themselves more of a true Brabander. This may be because of ancestry aspects as mentioned earlier, and because having family in one's province may mean they are embedded through family within their region. Having family in Brabant may also relate to the amount of time spent within this region.

Second, socio-demographic variables that affect whether people consider themselves real Brabanders only include people's age, whereby older people (55+) are more likely to consider themselves true Brabanders than people from younger age-ranges do. Education, surprisingly, does not affect this, nor does living in a city. Being irreligious also contributes negatively to feeling as a true Brabander. People in southeast Brabant seem slightly more likely to consider themselves real Brabanders. When adding language use, however, both of these effects disappear.

Third, some of the typical characteristics of being Brabantish seem to co-exist with people's self-understanding as real Brabanders. People who speak more often in a Brabantish manner, people who consider themselves to be more exuberant, and people who feel more attached to the Brabantish landscape are more likely to

consider themselves true Brabanders. While the inclusion of language use made the effect of living in the Southeast of Brabant disappear, the inclusion of the landscape enjoyment made it significant again. Possibly, this is because people in the Southeast of Brabant may go to Limburg or Belgium. However, considering oneself hospitable and open towards others does not contribute significantly to indicating oneself as a true Brabander.

Table 2.2 also shows that the Adjusted R Square is quite high. This suggests that the variables included in the models explain a high portion of variance. In other words, the included significant variables are good indicators of people's self-indication as true Brabander.

So, When Is Someone a Brabander?

These aforementioned characteristics of Brabanders do not form an exhaustive list. Rather, I tried to give an overview of what criteria are commonly associated with Brabant and how people evaluate Brabanders as Brabanders. I have showed how language use may play an important role in this regard, as it is an immediately recognised feature that is tied with other aspects of being Brabantish (e.g. having lived in one's town for a long time and being embedded within the local society). One important aspect not yet mentioned is how people identify themselves as Brabander and may articulate this. In my focus groups, this became evident as people articulated their (dis)identification with Brabant. Other times, people may show this by wearing a Brabantish scarf or expressing their pride verbally.

Another aspect that may be used is people's behaviour, particularly stereotypes associated with Brabantishness, but also practices such as celebrating *Carnaval*, rarely going outside of Brabant, or being very involved in the local community life, may be characterized as Brabantish. Indeed, possessing these different markers of identities does not *make* someone a Brabander. Rather, such symbols may reference to others what kind of identities one possesses. Consequently, these characteristics are sometimes taken by people as (fixed) determinants of being Brabantish. One may say that if someone does not speak Brabantish, s/he is not a true Brabander. Based on my research, I have the impression this occurs mostly, though not exclusively, when *explicitly* referring to Brabant. While identities are constructed, people still often take them to be based on fixed criteria, such as language use and birth place when talking explicitly about them.

While such essentialist criteria may be named, this does not mean people apply these criteria to each and everyone, including themselves. Brabanders may characterize Brabanders as 'people' persons, but do not necessarily consider themselves that way (Verkaar et al., 2006). A respondent with a somewhat hard *g* still felt like a true Brabander. Janus, a respondent from a *Smeris* interview, elaborated on the different identities of Tilburg and Den Bosch, indicating that the Bossche identity is a white-collar culture, in contrast to the blue collar working mentality of Tilburg.

Janus identified with Den Bosch, despite the fact that he could not recognize himself in a white-collar culture at all. An identity may be associated with a place, and someone may identify with this place. Paasi (2003, 2009) distinguishes this as 'identity of a region' and 'regional identity'. The identity of a region refers to discourses surrounding a region, whereas the regional identity, or regional consciousness, indicates identification with the region by people themselves. Yet, as these observations illustrate, even if people talk about this identity of a region, and as such contribute to the continued existence of this place-identity, this does not mean they identify with this particular version of that place-identity themselves.

Finally, I want to remark that while some characteristics, particularly linguistic style and birthplace, are determinants of being a Brabander that are easily named by people and are often much more ambiguous. Research shows that recognizing someone's ancestry based on appearance is often flawed. While many people had numerous experiences of misidentifying someone as (not) being part of the same ancestry, a majority still had the idea that they could identify someone based on physical characteristics. When comparing the characteristics named by these respondents, the physical features were so wide-ranging, even contradictory, that it could hardly be said to be a characteristic. People argued that they recognized people with their ancestry because of some intuitive sense (Waters, 1990).

My research shows we cannot dismiss these 'essentialist' criteria, but 'intuition' was often as important as some specific characteristics. It was difficult for participants to name specific criteria to which Brabanders should adhere. Moreover, when differentiating between 'real' (very) Brabantish persons and less Brabantish individuals, some sort of 'feeling' or 'intuition' may also play an important role. Simultaneously, when asked about it explicitly, and using conscious thought, respondents started to sum up some characteristics. However, this does not mean that in their daily life and practice, individuals always use these characteristics to determine how Brabantish someone is. Sometimes, these characteristics are used, particularly with acquaintances and strangers. One respondent pointed this out in an anecdote: 'I get that sometimes too, once, I was with my parents on a holiday and then there are just people and [...] and they say like oh are you from Brabant?' (Focus group, Tilburg, February 2014). However, often, for people with whom one is more familiar with, these basic characterizations are not as important. Knowledge creates a more nuanced scale for characterization.

Participants tried to articulate why their classmates were considered Brabanders. While often they used the cumulative concepts I described to characterize their classmates and celebrities as Brabantish, other times they seemed to define this person more intuitively, based on some sort of feeling. Thereafter, they tried to find characteristics that supported this intuition. Correspondingly, I have observed that the more one knows about some place or person, the more diverse it may seem. Knowing many Brabanders may make you realize they are in fact very

different from each other. Perhaps this is why *as a Brabander* it is so difficult to describe why one person you know is more Brabantish than the other person is. For people you are very familiar with, thinking about them as a Brabander may be a feeling, a cumulative sense of knowledge that is not easily expressed. Consequently, when asked explicitly about it, this 'typical' Brabander may then be used as a starting point for thinking about factors that determine someone's Brabantishness. These Brabantish characteristics are partly useful to ascribe to regional identities, particular for people one is unfamiliar or hardly familiar with. Yet, these characteristics are perhaps also articulated after that initial intuitive process. Together with other discourses used to construct Brabant, these features are used in determining one's degree of Brabantishness.

Final Remarks on Brabant

Historically, together with Limburg, Brabant was set apart from the northern parts of what is now the Netherlands. The physical barrier of 'the big rivers' also formed a symbolic line of difference. Such differences direct, but do not determine, contemporary choices and characteristics (cf. Bijsterveld, 2014a). *Brabantia Nostra* claimed in the first half of the twentieth century that the true Brabander was Catholic, romantic, rural, nostalgic, and fiercely anti-Holland. Nowadays, people still speak about Brabant's rural and exuberant characteristics. 'Below the rivers', people are more often Catholic rather than Protestant, speak with a soft rather than hard *g*, call their fries *friet* and not *patat*, and are stereotypically considered to be exuberantly enjoying their good lives with good food and a great deal of alcohol. In contrast with the symbolic centre, the *Randstad*, Brabant is considered peripheral despite its urban structure. Brabant is more densely populated than many of the other provinces in the Netherlands and cities and villages are intertwined.

As we have seen, such characterizations are not necessarily based on actual reality. Nor does it mean that when people articulate and reinforce such identities for their cities, that they identify with them personally. However, notions of a hospitable, friendly, and rural province are still reiterated, and gladly encouraged by people. It is not so much whether or not Brabanders *are* different, but also that people *experience* themselves as different. They *feel* they are different from non-Brabanders, and this difference is frequently expressed. Although places and provinces have quite a lot in common, to each, they feel as the 'other' (Rooijakkers, 1996; Verhoeven, 2015). Precisely among people who seem to have a lot in common, the small differences are exaggerated. Symbols may facilitate the exaggeration of these differences (Rooijakkers, 1996, p. 8). Inhabitants of Brabant are quite aware that localities within Brabant differ from each other, yet shared symbols and sentiments do give rise to a common feeling for Brabant (Mommaas, 2014). This chapter has mainly focused on how people characterize others and themselves as

Brabantish through the help of discourses on Brabant. While such characterizations may be interesting, it is perhaps even more important to understand people's identification with their region. Many Brabanders are proud of their province, they are attached to their region, and to the town they come from. Has people's attachment to their region changed over time? Does it differ from other regions in the Netherlands? This will be covered in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Tracing Brabant over Time

pictures: Berend van Breda

Tracing Brabant over Time

In the previous chapter, I have discussed several discourses about Brabant that are articulated by people or organisations. For instance, discourses surrounding the Catholic province of Brabant containing down-to-earth exuberant people-persons who speak in dialect, or at least, with a soft *g*. I also discussed how people may feel differently in their identification with Brabant and may not associate themselves with these discourses. In this chapter, I will go further into people's identification with their region. More specifically, I use data on people's attachment with their village or city, their region, and their province. While identity is, strictly speaking, not just attachment, many scholars do see attachment and identity in a similar way, and these concepts are related to each other (Antonsich, 2009; Lewicka, 2011). This is something I will reflect further upon in this chapter as well.

In a globalizing world, in which goods, people, information, and communication flow transnationally, some scholars argue that people feel more attached to their locality and region, while others argue the opposite; that people feel decreasingly attached to their locality. The central issues in this chapter delve into this argument in order to assess whether people in Brabant have felt more attached or less attached to their region over the past decades. Through longitudinal data, I will explore whether and how the period is related to regional identification and belonging. For this, I will use data from several sources, including the European Value Studies, Eurobarometer, and International Social Survey Programme

A Globalizing World?

Before analysing whether changes in Brabant occurred in the past decades, it is important to understand the context and the arguments that are made about changing scales of identification and why scholars have argued that people feel more or less attached in a globalizing world. To do so, let us first take a closer look at what globalization is. Many scholars have commented on how globalization is not a new phenomenon as people have been moving over the world throughout history. Additionally, while people argue that with increased global communica-

tion the world will change, the fear of novelty and change rising from communi-
cation methods was already present with the invention of the printing press. What
is called globalization in our times refers to the interconnectedness and mobility
that has taken global proportions (Wang et al., 2014). Central to globalization is
the time-space compression as the physical boundaries and spaces seem to become
less important. While communities worldwide have always been interdependent
on each other and connected, the Internet and other communication technologies
have accelerated this process to unprecedented proportions. The speed with which
material and immaterial goods, people, and information move globally has
changed aspects of daily life (Beck, 2000a; Blommaert, 2010; Tomlinson, 2002[1991];
Wang et al., 2014, p. 1). Globalization implies that nation states and their borders
and laws become less important as people increasingly live and act on a global scale
(Beck, 2000b; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2009). Economically, but also in other do-
mains, people are less bound by state borders. People may communicate online
with people from other countries, watch 'foreign' television programmes, and read
news reports about events occurring in other parts of the globe. As a result, it has
been argued that people are less tied to their geographical areas, but operate on
more global scales (Beck, 2000b).

What is implied in the consequences of globalization is that the importance of
national aspects has decreased, because of an increased interconnectedness on a
global scale. People are not necessarily confined to national boundaries anymore.
People travel to other countries and within the European Union people often do
so without even having to show a passport. Online, people may converse with
people from all over the world. The geographical distances and physical boundaries
are less important, and therefore, it has been argued that national identities are
also fading away. Some scholars have even argued that a more homogenized stand-
ardized culture would emerge as a result. It was thought that particularly the
United States (and also Western Europe) would be able to impose their culture
worldwide. The fear that national identities and cultures are eroding as a conse-
quence of immigration, globalization, and more (legal) power for European organ-
isations, has often elicited xenophobic feelings, as well as counter-reactions among
Europeans.

Globalization, therefore, does not necessarily imply a decrease in the im-
portance of national or regional identities, but may result in its strengthening. The
meaning people attach to their nation or region may take different forms. On the
one hand, globalization can be perceived as a threat and consequently individuals
may become more inward looking. This way of thinking about exclusive attach-
ment suggests chauvinist ideas may be activated to defend the nation and one's
culture; this is done by excluding others (Antonsich, 2009; Chacha, 2013). However,
on the other hand, when people do not perceive globalization as a threat, but see
it as giving rise to more self-awareness, people's national and local identities may
adopt a welcoming attitude. Such a 'culturally thick conception of the nation [can

empower the subject to feel] strong enough in her identity to open herself and her "home" to the Other' (Antonsich, 2009, p. 292). These inclusive attitudes are mutually reinforced by viewing globalization as an asset to one's economic and social opportunities (Antonsich, 2009).

Globalization can reinforce and broaden both the meaning and the level of attachment at a national scale. However, globalization may also *weaken* the meaning and level of attachment at the national scale, as people start to differentiate themselves more on a local scale. The confrontation with other cultures may make one more aware of one's own culture and in a counter-movement, people move downwards towards the local. Globalization, in this view, does not destroy such local identities, but globalization may be 'a significant force in *creating and proliferating* cultural identity' (emphasis in original, Tomlinson, 2003, p. 270). Because of people's awareness of globalizing processes, people look inwards to affirm old boundaries and create new local and regional identities (Paasi, 2009). Instead of citizens feeling attached at a national scale, they may identify instead with their own region.

Furthermore, globalization resulted not only in an increasing transnational flow of products and ideas, but also of people. As moving to a different city, or even country nowadays, does not mean complete isolation from friends and family, people may be more eager to move. As such, it becomes a more deliberate choice to live somewhere, which may be based on feelings of attachment, but may also depend on more practical aspects such as distance to work, school, or other institutions (Meyrowitz, 2005). This more conscious choice may suggest that people will be more attached to their hometown or region today, than perhaps in the past, when one had less opportunities to move to another location. As place becomes a more conscious choice, people may identify more with it (Antonsich, 2009). Because of these different aspects, it might be argued that regional identities, and thus also Brabantish identities, become more important.

Thus, while it has been argued that globalization leads to unification of the world, others argue regional identities have increasingly become a topic of interest, in both society and the academic world (Paasi, 2002). Not only because people want to 'opt out' of globalization (Hall, 1997, p. 183) and use regional identities to profile themselves (Paasi, 2002), but also because by knowing about others, one (re)defines the self (Meyrowitz, 2005).

Existing Research on Different Scales of Attachment

Before looking at the specific situation of Brabant, I will elaborate on existing research in Europe on whether or not people have started to attach themselves more or less to their locality, region, and nation. National attachment and pride in Western Europe generally has remained relatively stable between 1991 and 2005 in most Western European countries. While in some countries, national attachment

has increased, in others it has declined (Antonsich, 2009; Arts & Halman, 2005). Tilley and Heath (2007), for example, showed that British national pride declined over the period of 1981 to 2003, with secularization, higher education and generational differences as explanatory factors. In Western Europe, national pride has increased overall, while attachment to the nation has remained high and stable (Antonsich, 2009). Local and regional attachment also seem to have been relatively stable in Western Europe throughout the period 1991-2007 (Antonsich & Holland, 2014). When asked what geographical unit people identify with the most, people were – and still are – prioritizing their locality or town (Arts & Halman, 2005).[26] Besides, there are cosmopolitans who feel European or citizens of the world and arguably embrace the idea of global belonging, but they are not as widespread as sometimes claimed (Pichler, 2008). These quantitative results suggest that in Western Europe (in its entirety), globalization is neither associated with a decrease in national attachment nor an increase in local and regional identifications, as is sometimes assumed. Differences, however, may be experienced within single countries, but in Europe as a whole, there is no general trend.

Moreover, local or regional attachment does not necessarily stand in opposition to attachment to the nation or Europe. In fact, these different scales of attachment seem to go together quite well. Feeling attached on one scale (e.g. a local scale) may correspond with higher feelings of attachment on other scales (e.g. Europe) (Antonsich & Holland, 2014; Lewicka, 2011; Opp, 2005). Particularly because the European Union promotes regional diversity, it has been argued that identifications with the region and Europe are able to coexist easily. Attachment to one's region is related to a more positive outlook on European integration (Chacha, 2013). Furthermore, how people perceive their locality may overlap with how they regard their region (Antonsich & Holland, 2014).

The correlation between different geographical units is also evident in the case of Brabant. In Table 3.1, the correlations of different scales of attachment are shown. The data I used here come from multiple Eurobarometer questionnaires, in which people were asked to what extent they feel attached to various geographical places. For details on the methodology, see the following method section. As the table with the Kendall's tau-b correlations illustrates (Table 3.1), several scales of attachment are positively related. Particularly the combination of town and region are highly correlated (.639). Likewise, people who feel attached to their country show high levels of attachment to the region, town, and Europe. Questions on the EU, Europe, or the world are included in just a few questionnaires, hence the size of the sample is smaller here, and this may potentially relate to the non-significance of the correlations. Based on this table, we can say that territorial attachment is not an either/or situation but it can also be an and/and situation.

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[26] This may also be (partly) caused by the primacy effect, as locality or town is the first option people can pick (Billiet, 2001).

Table 3.1 Kendall's tau-b correlations using weighted Eurobarometer data (1991-2015) on attachment in Brabant

	Region	Country	EU	Europe	World
Town	**.639***** (N=2149)	**.378***** (N=3092)	-.003 (N=92)	**.316**** (N=76)	-.103 (N=161)
Region		**.413***** (N=2152)	.001 (N=92)	.161 (N=76)	-.129 (N=162)
Country				**.299**** (N=76)	.077 (N=162)

*Significant at *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001*

Method

In order to analyse whether people's territorial attachment has changed over the last twenty-five years, and whether some factors are related to this, I have collected data from a number of datasets, namely Eurobarometer, European Value Studies (EVS), and International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). These are all large-scale longitudinal international studies. They were obtained from zacat.gesis.org except for the ISSP survey from 2014, which is not incorporated there (yet) but was obtained from dans.knaw.nl (Commission of the European Communities, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2012e; European Commission, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2012e, 2012f, 2012g, 2012i, 2012j, 2012k, 2012l, 2012m, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016; European Commission and European Parliament, 2016; EVS, 2015; Ganzeboom, 2014; ISSP Research Group, 1998, 2012).

EVS started in 1981 and is carried out every nine years; hence, subsequent studies were carried out in 1990, 1999, and 2008. In this survey, a question is asked regarding people's first and second identification with a geographical area, giving the choice between locality, region (province), country, Europe, and the entire world. ISSP is an annual cross-national collaboration of surveys and has carried out a survey on national identities in 1995, 2003 (carried out in the Netherlands in 2005), and 2013 (carried out in the Netherlands in 2014). The questions that are of interest to me focus on the extent to which people feel close to their town or city, their province, their country, and their continent.

The Eurobarometer is the most frequently occurring survey instrument, in which multiple studies are conducted each year. The questions that are of concern were asked between 1976 and 2015 (see Table 3.2). In the first years (1976 to 1979), a question was included focusing on which geographical group people belonged to foremost and second. This is a similar question to the question asked in EVS. However, in this case instead of using 'place or city where you live' (*plaats of stad waar U woont),* 'municipality' (*gemeente*) was used. While most of the time this is quite similar, in villages, which are annexed by neighbouring villages or cities, such a question might generate a different feeling. For example, Rosmalen has been a part of Den Bosch since 1996, but many inhabitants of Rosmalen resisted this

annexation and, therefore they may not consider themselves part of the munici-pality, despite their attachment to their *locality*. Moreover, the question is slightly different in Dutch (the English versions are equivalent) as the Eurobarometer asks: '*Tot welke geografische eenheid* <u>*hebt u het gevoel*</u> *in de eerste plaats te behoren?*' (To which geographical group do you <u>feel to</u> belong to first of all?) and EVS uses: '*Tot welke* <u>*van deze*</u> *geografische eenheden* <u>*vindt U*</u> *dat U in de eerste plaats behoort?*' (Which of these geographical groups <u>would you say</u> you belong to first of all?). This difference is very subtle.

In the following years, twenty Eurobarometer surveys were issued that posed a question regarding attachment. The question dealt with how attached people felt to their city or village, their region (only in 14 surveys), and their country, and often also Europe and/or EU and/or the world. Specifically, the surveys stated as part of an introduction to the questions on attachment: '*People may feel different degrees of attachment to their town or village, to their region, to their country or to European Union.*'[27] The specific geographical units that were included depended on the ones that were included in the following questions. For instance, if a question on attach-ment to the European Union was included, the European Union was named, but otherwise not. After this introduction paragraph, people were asked: '*Please tell me how attached you feel...*' and then people were posed with the geographical units of identification just mentioned. While the English phrasing has not changed, up until 2000, the Dutch questionnaire states: '*Wilt u mij zeggen hoe sterk u zich gehecht voelt aan ...*', and from 2004 onwards: '*In welke mate bent u gehecht aan ...*' is used.[28]

Finally, a form of attachment is investigated in the Eurobarometer surveys 69.2 (2008) and 71.3 (2009). After an introduction on how people may think differently about geographical identities, the following question is posed: '*Thinking about this, to what extent do you personally feel you are ...*'.[29] This measured the extent to which people felt European, Dutch, inhabitant of their region, and citizen of the world.

Before moving on to this analysis, I will discuss the construction of the different variables used in the analysis. Besides these dependent measures of attachment, I will discuss some independent variables, which I expect are related to people's level of attachment, of which the theoretical underpinnings for including these variables can largely be found in the second chapter *Describing Brabant*.

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[27] *Mensen kunnen zich in meer of mindere mate gehecht voelen aan hun stad of dorp, aan hun streek, aan hun land of aan de Europese Unie.*

[28] Between 2002 and 2004 it is unknown because the separate cards in the questionnaire are not included for download.

[29] *Wanneer u hieraan denkt, in hoeverre beschouwt u zichzelf als een...*

Problems for Cohort Analysis

An important first remark to make is that while using such large data sets it is difficult to distinguish between age, cohort, and period because of the so-called identification problem. This identification problem means that these three variables, age, cohort, and period, are correlated to each other to such an extent that when having two one can determine the other (Glenn, 2005). It is already difficult to determine which of the three elements actually contributes to the determinant; on the regional scale, one of the crucial assumptions is violated in my research: 'A crucial requirement for cohort analysis is that the studies population be approximately "closed", that is, one into which and out of which there is little movement except through birth (or some other form of creation) and death' (Glenn, 2005, p. 44). Indeed, this is compromised within Brabant, as people are moving to other provinces in the nation. Moreover, it becomes even more problematic because it is quite likely that this migration is correlated with the dependent variable. In other words, people who do not feel attached to their region are probably more likely to move out of Brabant than people who feel (strongly) attached to their region. People who feel strongly attached to Brabant but have lived elsewhere for a while may return to Brabant as well. As such, observed effects might relate to this movement and not to the ageing of the cohort in question. Even the *movement* itself may be related to age, as it can be expected that particularly young, unattached people move out of Brabant when they start studying without returning afterwards. Attached young people who move out of Brabant to study, may also return later. The average moving distance is particularly high among people who move out of their parental home, whereas it is much smaller among, for instance, elderly who move to an institution (Ekamper & Van Huis, 2005). Thus, because of this movement out and into Brabant, cohort analysis cannot be conducted. And so, while I speak about the survey years and age, it is important to keep in mind that it may also relate to people's cohort.

Constructing the Variables

Attachment
Based on the various conceptualisations of territorial attachment or identification, I have constructed several dependent variables on attachment. The different measures of attachment were based on scales from 1 to 4 ranging from strong to not at all. Originally, the plan was to conduct ordinal regression analyses. However, because a large number of 'empty cells' appeared, I had to change this to a logistic regression analysis. Unfortunately, this also means a loss of information. The two highest values were categorized as 'feeling attached' whereas the two lowest values

were categorized as 'not feeling attached'.[30] Because of this loss of information and the fact that people might have attached themselves to a greater extent to their region, I also ran some analysis on 'strongly attached' compared to 'fairly attached', 'not very attached', and 'not at all attached'.

For the ordering of geographical identifications used in the EVS surveys and the first years of Eurobarometer, I recoded the two questions on first and second unit of identification into one variable. People who did not indicate the province as either the first or the second unit of belonging were contrasted with people who indicated the province as their first or second unit of affiliation.

Year of Study
An important variable that I have included is the year in which the study was conducted. In the case of ISSP from 1995, which was carried out in the Netherlands from September 1995 to January 1996, the year 1995 was taken for all respondents in that survey. Similarly for the second ISSP survey, conducted from December 2004 to March 2005, all respondents are coded as 2005. This variable was both used as a continuous variable, as this is more powerful in checking linear effects. This continuous variable was the year in which the study was conducted minus 1990, meaning that the first study from 1991 was coded as 1 and the last study was coded 25 (2015-1990=25). A categorical variable was also used whereby for each separate study a dummy variable was used, even if some of the surveys took place in the same year.

Province
Another important distinction is the categorization of the province of *Brabant*. The province is an administrative code filled in by the interviewer. Besides Brabant, I have also considered other regions in the Netherlands for comparison with this province. The western part of the Netherlands includes the provinces North Holland, South Holland, and Utrecht. In the previous chapter, I mentioned many similarities that Brabant has with Limburg, as both of these provinces are in the Catholic South of the Netherlands. Because of this, Limburg is treated separately. The east and north of the Netherlands are taken together, that is the provinces Groningen, Friesland, Drenthe, Gelderland, and Overijssel. This means the provinces Zeeland and Flevoland are ignored, as they do not fit any of these categorisations. Also, because of their small size, it is also not useful to analyse them separately.

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[30] Attached: strongly attached (*sterk gehecht*) and fairly attached (*nogal gehecht)*; very close (*erg verbonden*) and close (*verbonden*); to a great extent (*in grote mate*) and somewhat (*in enige mate*).
Not attached: not very attached (*niet erg gehecht*) and not at all attached (*helemaal niet gehecht*); not very close (*niet erg verbonden)* and not close at all (*helemaal niet verbonden)*; not really (*niet erg*) and not at all (*helemaal niet*).

Age and Generation

Age is categorized into different age groups. In one of the regression analyses, using age as a continuous variable also fails the linearity assumption, suggesting that age is not linearly related to attachment. Rather it may depend more on one's stage of life. I have categorized age in four different groups: 15 to 24 years, 25 to 39 years, 40 to 54 years, and older than 55 years. The youngest group is relatively small, but the cut-off point is 25 because of the significance of the age with regard to education and moving out of home.[31]

Education

A third independent variable is education. In the Eurobarometer surveys, education is measured by the age at which people completed their education. In most years, respondents indicated their age of completing their education, only for 1995 only a variable was available for 'up to 15 years', '16-19 years', '20 years and older' and 'still studying'; as such, the variable in other years of 'up to 14 years', '15 years' [...] '21 years', '22 years and older', and 'still studying' was recoded into that measure.

ISSP measures both the number of years of education and the level of education. I have categorized the later into low (primary school, MAVO/VMBO), middle (HAVO/VWO/MBO), and high (HBO, WO). For the first year of ISSP (1995), the recoded variables for education are only available with English codes. I have categorized these as low (incomplete primary, primary completed + training, extended), middle (secondary completed, extended + training), and high (secondary + training, university).

For EVS, the age of completed education is used in all four years, and in addition, in 1999 and 2008 a categorization of educational levels is included. The age of completed education is used instead, ranging from 14 to 22. No separate category for those who are still studying is included.

Town Size and Rural-urban Dimension

Another variable of concern is the size of the town. As the previous chapter indicated that Brabant is often related to a rural landscape, the kind of surroundings people live in could be of concern regarding their level of attachment. Research has illustrated that the size of one's community can relate to the level of attachment and that in smaller communities, people report more attachment (Lewicka, 2011). In a number of surveys (see overview in Table 3.2), a question is asked regarding people's self-assessed type of community. People could indicate whether they lived in the countryside or in a village (*op het platteland of in een dorp*

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[31] In 2012, at age 25, 70% of the sons and 85% of the daughters have moved out of the parental home, slightly less than in 2008 (Stoeldraijer, 2014). In the year 2003/2004, the average age of those who completed university education was 25.1 and of those completing a degree at the university of applied sciences (HBO) 23.4 (Statistics Netherlands, 2006).

(in 1991 & 1995: *Landelijk gebied of dorp*), in a small or middle-sized town (*in een kleine of middelgrote stad*), or in a big city (*in een grote stad).* In the ISSP surveys of 2005 and 2014, this question included five answer options. In order to correspond with the ISSP survey of 1995, I have recoded 'a big city' and 'the suburbs or outskirts of a big city' into 'big city'; 'a middle-sized or small city' remains the same; and 'a village' and 'a farm or house at the countryside' is combined as 'countryside or in a village'.

Since this subjective classification of living is not available in all the surveys, I also consider the size of someone's city as registered based on people's location. However, this means that if one lives on a farm in the municipality of Tilburg, one is classified as living in a city of 100,000 inhabitants or more while actually living in the countryside. This is also reflected when we compare the two variables with each other. Though the two variables highly correlate with each other,[32] there are some conceptual differences. While the self-indicated variable of city/village is preferred, for some years, this is not available and thus we have also run some analyses with the size of one's town. As surveys in different waves have used diverse classification systems for the size of town people live in, I have recoded this into 'more than 100,000 inhabitants', 'between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants', 'between 20,000 and 50,000 inhabitants', and 'less than 20,000 inhabitants'. Unfortunately, for the three most recent surveys, the questionnaire derives the size of the municipalities from the town people live in. However, this variable is not included as the number of inhabitants, but recoded into type of community (rural area, towns and suburbs, or cities) and thus cannot be measured in a similar way.

Religion

I have also included religion as a variable, due to the connections between Catholicism and Brabant as explained in the previous chapter. The ISSP survey from 1995 has, contrary to what one might expect, more non-religious respondents than any of the other surveys. This could be due to the way the question is phrased, but this is not entirely clear.[33] Within Brabant, only a small portion of the religious respondents indicated a different religion than Catholic. Because of this, I have recoded this variable into Catholicism, not religious, and a different religion. In the comparisons with the rest of the Netherlands, where Protestantism is the more common religion, I have separated the different religions into 'Protestant' and 'other religions'. This is not implemented in all analyses because of the small number of Protestants in Brabant. In some cases, I have collapsed the categories and only differentiated between 'Catholic' and 'not Catholic' because of the small number of respondents who did not indicate they were Catholics.

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[32] The Kendall's tau-b is 0.606 on all 22581 cases of the Netherlands with both variables available and 0.608 on the 3153 cases from Brabant specifically.

[33] While I do not know what question was exactly used in the ISSP 1995 survey, the ISSP 2005 and 2015 use a one-stage question on what religious denomination people have, with the first option being 'none'.

Childhood Upbringing and Residence Length

One of the most important variables that contributes to place attachment may be the residence length (Lewicka, 2011). Nonetheless, only few surveys have incorporated this variable. The ISSP survey of 1995 included a question on where people had spent most of their childhood (until age 16). People could indicate their municipality (city or village) where they live now, a different municipality (city or village) but still in the same province, in a different province in the Netherlands, and outside of the Netherlands. This variable is used with these categories. Following this question, people were asked how many years in total they have lived in the municipality (city or village) where they live now. This variable is recoded by dividing the number of years by the respondent's age, thus resulting in the percentage of their life they have spent in their current town. This was then coded into 5 groups of 20% each, as I expected it is not a linear relationship as people who have lived here 'long enough' consider themselves attached (Lewicka, 2011). Similarly, in the EVS survey of 2008 a question was included, asking in which town people lived at approximately the age of fourteen.[34] This variable was then recoded into the different provinces by EVS. With this information, I created a variable that indicated whether people lived in Brabant when they were fourteen.

Other Variables

Furthermore, I included people's gender (man/woman) as indicated in the survey. While I have considered including other variables, such as having a Dutch nationality, these were either not measured at enough instances or occurred very few times within the sample. For example, not having a Dutch nationality only covered 41 participants (1%) in Brabant.

Now that we have an overview of the methods and the different variables under scrutiny, the analysis of whether attachment in Brabant has changed over the past decades is reported.

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[34] *In welke plaats woonde u toen u ongeveer 14 jaar oud was?*

Table 3.2 Overview of the variables in the different surveys

Study	Year	Attach to region	Attach to town	Education	Size of town	Categories self-assessed rural urban	Religion	Living in region
EB 36	1991	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#	3	X	
Eb 43.1	1995	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 51.0	1999	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#			
EB 54.1	2000	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#			
EB 56.3	2002	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 58.1	2002	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 60.1	2003	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 62.0	2004	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 63.4	2005	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#	3	X	
EB 65.2	2006	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#	3	X	
EB 67.1	2007	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 67.2	2007		*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 68.1	2007		*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 69.2	2008	*Beschouwt*		Years	#	3		
EB 71.3	2009	*Beschouwt*		Years	#	3		
EB 73.3	2010	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 77.3	2012		*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 79.5	2013	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 80.1	2013		*Gehecht*	Years	#	3		
EB 82.3	2014		*Gehecht*	Years	Cat	3		
EB 84.1	2015	*Gehecht*	*Gehecht*	Years	Cat	3		
EB 84.3	2015		*Gehecht*	Years	Cat	3		
ISSP I	1995	*Verbonden*	*Verbonden*	Categories	#	3	X	Years in town; Childhood upbringing
ISSP II	2005	*Verbonden*	*Verbonden*	Categories	#	5	X	
ISSP III	2005	*Verbonden*	*Verbonden*	Categories	#	5	X	
EB 6	2014	*Verbonden*	*Verbonden*	Categories	#	5	X	
EB 10a	1976	First & second	First & second	Years	#	3		
EB 12	1978	First & second	First & second	Years	#	3		
EVS 1	1979	First & second	First & second	Years	#	3		
EVS 2	1981	First & second	First & second	Years	#		X	
EVS 3	1990	First & second	First & second	Years	#		X	
EVS 4	1999	First & second	First & second	Years & categories	#		X	Region at age 14

Phrasing of the Questions

First, I examine how the questions I am using are phrased. I am specifically interested in what word is used for the concept of attachment and what is used to define the geographical units. As mentioned earlier, attachment and identity are often understood in similar ways. Within this chapter, and by using these data, I have assumed that identities can be measured and ascertained by asking whether people feel attached to their region. In a more ideal situation, I would have been able to look at different forms of attachment, such as social attachment, cultural attachment, functional attachment, and environmental attachment (cf. Vermeij, 2015) or use the construct of place attachment with multiple indicators and where place attachment may be separated from identification with a place (cf. Lewicka, 2008; Williams & Vaske, 2003). However, unfortunately such data are not available for a longer period. Before analysing the differences over time, it is useful to take into account how this attachment is phrased within the different questionnaires. As I already mentioned, the questionnaires used different ways of asking. I will here specifically focus on the Dutch questions and phrases, though occasionally I will put this in an international context.

Most Eurobarometer questionnaires focus on experiencing attachment to one's region (*gehecht (voelen) aan uw streek*). The wording of the question has changed slightly over the years but the terms 'attachment' (*gehecht zijn/voelen)* and 'region' (*streek*) are used throughout. The ISSP survey, however, states: 'How close do you feel to… your province' (*In welke mate voelt u zich verbonden met … uw provincie).*[35] We can observe two important differences between the two survey styles here. First, the word for attachment is different (*gehecht* vs. *verbonden*) and the region is worded differently with the former using a very general concept (*streek*), and the latter, a very specific administrative unit (*provincie*). A third form is used in Eurobarometer 69.2 (2008) and 71.3 (2009). Here, people are asked whether they consider themselves (*beschouwt u zichzelf)* inhabitants of their province. A Kruskal-Wallis Test showed that comparing these three forms, significant differences are observed as H(2)=219.949, p<0.001. A pairwise comparison then demonstrated that each of the pairs were significantly different at p<0.001.

This illustrates how people's associations were triggered differently by various ways of phrasing the concepts. As one can expect, few people did not consider themselves inhabitants of the province. The phrasing seems to suggest a quite factual observation. This becomes even more apparent when we look at attachment to the country, the Netherlands. Very few (less than 3%) of the inhabitants of Brabant did not consider themselves Dutch. This consideration on a national scale may convey an idea of citizenship. In contrast, feeling attached, in both

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[35] Feeling close is perhaps not the best translation of '*verbonden*' but since it is used in the English versions of the ISSP survey, I will use it here as well. *Verbonden* may be better translated as feeling tied to/attached.

phrases, suggests a more emotional bond with the province or region. As a result, it comes as no surprise that people are less likely to report high levels of attachment to this more emotional bond. In general, people are more likely to respond positively when asked about attachment to their region than when asked about feeling close to their province. When examining the different ways of phrasing concerning attachment to the Netherlands and town, all pairs are also significantly different from each other. However, as can be observed in Table 3.3, the effects of the subjective measure of attachment seem smaller for the town and country than for the region/province.[36] This suggests that both the way of phrasing attachment and the specificity of the region/province explains the difference. Similar observations are made when using data from the entire country.[37]

Table 3.3 Effect sizes ($r = Z/\sqrt{N}$) for pairwise comparisons of different measures of attachment in Brabant

	Town	Region/Province	The Netherlands
Attach (*gehecht*) vs. feel close (*verbonden*)	0.093	0.214	0.074
Attach (*gehecht*) vs. consider (*beschouwt*)	n/a	-0.150	-0.210
Feel close (*verbonden*) vs. consider (*beschouwt*)	n/a	-0.428	-0.413

When examining the differences within Brabant between the reported attachment to one's town and one's region, it can be observed that people reported more attachment to the region than to one's town. This is demonstrated by a Wilcoxon signed ranks test using weighted data (Z=4.004, p<.001). In contrast, when examining the reported difference on a sense of belonging to one's town with one's province, people report more attachment to one's town (Wilcoxon signed ranks test using weighted data: Z=−5.707, p<.001). This thus suggests that people may display more attachment to the vague notion of a region than to a town, and more attachment to a town than to a province.

In EB 73.3 (2010), the question on being attached (*gehecht*) is split up into two parts. Half of the people had to indicate whether they felt attached to their region (*uw streek*) and the other half had to respond whether they felt attached to the region in which they lived (*de regio waar u woont*). Taking all countries together, a Mann-Whitney test showed no significant difference between 'your region' and 'the region where you live' (U=87024.131, p=0.230) and no significant difference between 'your city/town' and the 'town/city where you live' (U=87640.990, p=0.578). As I am particularly interested in the *Dutch* phrasing, I also examined

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[36] The effect sizes are based on weighted data, whereby non-integer values are rounded to the nearest integers for the analysis. With unweighted data, results are similar but effect sizes are slightly larger. They are calculated based on the results from the pairwise comparisons from the Kruskal-Wallis Test.

[37] While I have now attributed this change to the way in which the question was phrased, I cannot fully rule out other aspects that may have played a role. The place within the questionnaire, and the institute who carries it out, might be related to it.

the difference specific to the Netherlands. I considered using the Flemish question-naire too, but this has a different phrasing.[38] No significant differences are found in the Netherlands in its entirety both for 'your region' (*uw streek*) compared with 'the region where you live' (*de regio waar u woont*) (U=120.309, p=0.278) and between 'your city or village' (*uw stad of dorp*) and 'the city/village where you live' (*de stad/het dorp waar u woont*) (U=119.989, p=0.250). Nor are significant differ-ences observed in Brabant for this different way of phrasing one's town. Therefore, we can say that people report similar levels of attachment to the region ('*de streek*') as with the region where one lives ('*de regio waar u woont*'). While the use of 'region' still differs from the concept of 'province' or 'Brabant', it gives us some insight in people's identification with their area.

The use of the term 'region' (*streek*) is also interesting as it can be very broadly interpreted. This is also shown by two questions asked in the Eurobarometer survey 36 (1991) and 43.1b (1995). Before asking about people's level of attachment, a question was asked regarding what area people consider their region: 'People often call the area of their country where they live or where they grew up, "their region", the region to which they belong. What do you consider to be "your region", the region to which you belong?' The variety of responses indicates this is far from a strict category, in which people have uniform ideas. In both years, various responses were given and the answers are mostly spread over three subnational regional forms (smaller than NUTS III, NUTS III (e.g. West North Brabant), or NUTS II (e.g. Brabant), while few individuals indicated NUTS I scales (e.g. south of the Netherlands) or higher. However, none of the measures clearly stood out by being named most frequently. This illustrates that the word 'region' is far from an unambiguous category, and it is therefore not surprising this category correlates with feelings of attachment on other scales.

Comparing Brabant with other Regions

With the different ways of phrasing geographical attachment in mind, and before elaborating on the differences over time, I want to compare Brabant with other regions in the Netherlands. In Brabant, people attach (*gehecht*) themselves more often to their region than people in the *Randstad*, but on par with people in the north and east of the Netherlands. When conducting a logistic regression analysis, and controlling for year, gender, education, and age, the results indicate that in the *Randstad*, people are less likely to report attachment to their region (p<.001). In the north and east people are equally likely to report attachment to their region (p=.106), and in Limburg more people report attachment (p=.040). However, when

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[38] The Flemish one uses '*Uw Streek*' and '*De streek waar u woont*' whereas the Dutch one uses '*Uw streek*' and '*De regio waar u woont*'.

conducting a logistic regression analysis on attachment to one's town, no differences between the different regions within the Netherlands are observed.

When looking at a sense of belonging to the province (*verbonden*) a regression analysis, controlling for year, gender, education, age, and town size, illustrated that people in the *Randstad* (p<.001) and the north and east of the Netherlands (p<.001) report less attachment, while people in Limburg report more attachment (p=.029). This is in line with what could be expected. Within popular discourse, people in the *Randstad* are usually considered not to attach themselves strongly to their region or province, yet may still have strong attachments to the town in which they live.[39] Furthermore, while I have taken the different provinces of the north and east of the Netherlands together, there may be more differences within these regions.

Attachment to One's Region

Now, I have come to the main part of my analysis in this chapter, as I will analyse whether *more* or *less* people have been attached to Brabant over the past decades. How has regional attachment changed over time?

First, I conducted a regression analysis with the Eurobarometer data with as many years as possible. In Table 3.4, I included three models alongside each other with this Eurobarometer data on attachment with the region. In the first model, the years 1991, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 are included. This model suggests that no significant differences are observed with regard to the year in which the survey was conducted. This is not the case when including year as a continuous variable, as depicted in the table, but also not when including dummy variables separately for each study. When controlling for the size of one's town, it was only in the survey conducted at the beginning of 2002 that it showed that people had expressed significantly more attachment to their region than in 1991. Since none of the other years contributes significantly to the expressed attachment to the region in Brabant, this change may be explained by other factors than the year in which the survey was conducted.

In this particular survey from 2002, the question on attachment appeared after questions on the enlargement of Europe. It is quite possible that people respond differently to their attachment after having answered such questions. Another possibility could be that since January 2002, people started using the Euro and this change might have affected the reported attachment. In that case, however, you would also expect an increase in national attachment that year, but a subsequent regression analysis does not indicate this. Besides, purely looking at chance, one out of 20 non-significant results could give a false positive; therefore, it is not surprising to see a significant result for one of the years. Moreover, since I was able

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[39] For instance, Rotterdammers may have a strong sense of being a Rotterdammer, but do not consider themselves South Hollanders.

to use two surveys from the year 2002, and no significant differences are found when compared to 1991, we can tentatively conclude that there does not seem to be a trend in people's attachment to their region over the 1991-2015 period.

Furthermore, these models in Table 3.4 show that people's education significantly contributes to the reported attachment. People who have finished their education at a higher age and people who are still studying are less likely to report high levels of attachment to their region. While this also includes people who are still in high school, for students in particular this could be because they have left their hometowns and started to live in a different place than where they were before. Consequently, they may not feel as much attachment to their region (yet). Moreover, the size of the town contributes significantly to people's reported attachment as people living in small or middle-sized towns (less than 50,000 inhabitants) are more attached to their region than people from big towns (more than 100,000 inhabitants). The model, however, does not explain a lot of variance as the Nagelkerke R Square indicates, and only two cases are not classified as 'attached', one of which is correctly identified as 'not attached' and the other is misclassified. This suggests that other variables explaining people's attachment are still missing.

To further explore some actual predictors of people's attachment, I built on this model with another variable. I included whether people perceived their surroundings as more urban or rural. For the years 1999 and 2000, this variable is missing and therefore these years are omitted in the third model in Table 3.4. While the model is significantly improved by adding this variable, similar problems to those reported earlier are still present as all cases are predicted as being attached. Moreover, we can observe that the variable of town size loses its significance, suggesting that people's subjective feeling of living in a rural place is a better predictor. People who live in a small city are less likely to report attachment to the region than people living in a village or in the countryside. This corresponds with the ideas about Brabant as a rural place as discussed in the previous chapter. As I mentioned earlier, while these measures of town size and subjective community size are correlated there are some differences between them. For instance, people who officially live in a large municipality may actually be farmers living in the outskirts of a city but still within the municipality.

Subsequently, I added the variable Catholic. Unfortunately, only three Eurobarometer waves (from 1991, 2005, and 2006) include a question on people's religion. In this fourth model in Table 3.4, religion contributes significantly, suggesting that Catholics are more likely to report attachment to their region. A contribution of being Catholic to people's attachment might have several explanations. One reason might be that people who are not born there, but have come to Brabant at a later age, might be less likely to be Catholics. Instead of an actual relationship between religion and attachment, it may be a spurious one. Second, as I have suggested in the previous chapter, being Catholic results in having a more collective

Table 3.4 Logistic regression analysis on feeling attached (*gehecht*) to the region (Eurobarometer 1991-2015)

		Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
		B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Year (continuous, 1990=0)		-0.005	0.010	-0.004	0.011	-0.017	0.012	-0.004	0.022
Gender (woman)		0.144	0.111	0.205	0.116	0.174	0.127	0.315	0.263
Education (up to 15 years)	16 to 19 years	-0.453*	0.203	-0.473*	0.209	-0.495*	0.234	-0.343	0.460
	20+ years	-0.989***	0.204	-0.979***	0.211	-0.914***	0.234	-0.713	0.453
	Still studying	-1.025**	0.348	-1.029**	0.353	-0.840*	0.407	-2.362*	0.991
Age (15 – 24 years)	25 – 39 years	0.048	0.292	0.064	0.284	0.013	0.325	-1.460	0.886
	40 – 54 years	0.034	0.288	0.018	0.290	-0.039	0.330	-1.653	0.909
	55+ years	0.067	0.291	0.054	0.294	-0.018	0.333	-1.692	0.916
Town size (100.000+)	50.001 – 100.000 inhabitants			0.082	0.182	-0.042	0.229	0.443	0.517
	20.001 – 50.000 inhabitants			0.340*	0.136	0.020	0.217	0.455	0.500
	Less than 20.000 inhabitants			0.293	0.170	-0.273	0.273	0.296	0.565
Rural-urban (countryside or village)	Small city					-0.643***	0.183	0.046	0.425
	Big city					-0.547*	0.254	0.550	0.573
Religion (Catholic)	No religion							-1.197***	0.305
	Other religion							-0.620	0.356
Constant		1.799***	0.340	1.598***	0.359	2.419***	0.463	3.246**	1.083
N		1915		1780		1517		374	
Nagelkerke R Square		.037		.043		.047		.114	
Chi-square		48.195		51.959		47.490		29.200	
df		8		11		13		15	

*Significant at *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001*

feeling, which may also result in a more collective attachment to the region. Religious people may have a more traditional outlook on life, and thus being Catholic is an indicator of a more traditional underlying collective value. Thirdly, the connection of religion and attachment might also relate to Brabant's identities, which used to be intrinsically connected to being Catholic. People being raised in earlier decades may not associate Catholicism with a religion and ritual, but with a way of life that was intrinsically connected with daily activity. As such, they may connect the two unconsciously on a conceptual level. Perhaps the consequences of this are still present. The previous chapter *Describing Brabant* also suggested a combination of these factors is related to religion. When controlling for both language and several variables related to the time spend living in Brabant in a regression analysis on considering oneself a 'true Brabander', religion had no significant effect anymore. Unfortunately, our data for attachment does not allow us to check for all these possible explanations. However, some analyses can be made, such as looking at an interaction effect and whether in other regions (in the Netherlands) Catholics are also more likely to report attachment to their region.

Age may relate to religion because of multiple reasons. Older people are more likely to be religious (Catholic or Protestant) because of ongoing secularization in the Netherlands. Being Catholic or not may make a bigger difference for older people because of the link between Catholicism and Brabant in the past. Because of this, I also analysed a model with an interaction term on Catholicism and age. However, this led to a non-significant improvement of the model (Chi-square of the added step =6.917, df=6, p=0.329).

When exploring religion and attachment in the other areas in the Netherlands, it can be observed that, in comparison to not being religious, Catholicism does significantly increase people's reported attachment to Limburg, the other province associated with Catholicism, and in the west of the Netherlands. Moreover, in Limburg, people who belong to a different religion than Catholicism or Protestantism are also less likely to report high levels of attachment to their region. However, in the north and east of the Netherlands, no significant differences are found concerning religion. While it does not seem likely that Catholicism is generally related to higher levels of attachment, the significant effect in the west of the Netherlands also seems to suggest it is not just Brabant and Limburg's relation with Catholicism that is important. To afford us a better conclusion, I will analyse the rest of the data on attachment.

The logistic regression analysis on attachment to one's town (rather than region) indicates similar factors contribute to attachment. When using year as a continuous variable, no significant effect is reported. When using the study as dummy variables, during a number of years, people have expressed significantly more attachment to their town. In both surveys from 2002, 2003, 2006, and two of the surveys from 2007, significantly more people report attachment to their town. This suggests a slight increase in 2002/2003, but a consecutive decrease to the

original values after 2007. Mostly, this seems because of the significantly fewer people who reported attachment in 1991, the year with which the other years are compared. The years in which people significantly report more attachment do not differ from each other. Inhabitants of towns smaller than 20,000 inhabitants (compared to cities of 100,000+ inhabitants) also feel more attached to their town. Again, when the subjective measurement of living in a village or city is added, the effect of the size of one's town disappears. Compared to Catholics, people who do not consider themselves religious are less likely to report high levels of attachment to their town.

The logistic regression analysis on feeling close (*verbonden*) to the province indicates similar factors as the one on being attached (*gehecht*) to the region, yet, some small differences can be observed. The model indicates that younger people (15 to 24 years old) are less likely to report that they feel connected to the province than people 55 and up. Among the other age groups, no significant differences are found. Perhaps this is because young people who do not feel attached to the province are more likely to leave the province than young people who do feel attached. As such, the more attached grow older in Brabant, which then results in a higher percentage of people who have indicated they feel close to the province. However, the ISSP also lacks a separate category for people who are still studying; something I found was related to not being attached. Since the ISSP data do not treat still studying separately, this variable is incorporated through age, which may explain the results. Moreover, being Catholic contributes significantly to attachment to the province compared with non-religious persons and people with a different religion. As mentioned earlier, this could have several explanations. Again, I examine the analyses in different areas in the Netherlands and include an interaction effect.

Similar to the earlier observations, in the west of the Netherlands, being Catholic also contributes positively to more attachment to the province compared to non-religious persons. However, no significant differences with Protestant and other religions are found. Compared to being Catholic, not being religious, being Protestant, or having a different religion significantly relates to less attachment to the province in Limburg. In the north and east of the Netherlands combined, however, Catholics do not report more attachment to their region than Protestants or non-religious individuals. This could suggest that particularly the connection between Brabant and being Catholic is important for people's attachment. However, this does not explain why being Catholic contributes significantly to people's attachment in the west of the country. Perhaps it is a combination of being religious and the connection with Brabant specifically that underlies the significant effect of Catholicism on regional attachment.

As I suggested before, perhaps it is the case that more Catholics report higher levels of attachment because they have been living in Brabant for a longer period. As people who have moved from other provinces to Brabant are more likely to be

Protestant, this may be the actual explanation for a significant effect of Catholicism on regional attachment. In 1995, the ISSP survey included a question on how long people had lived in their current town, and where people had spent most of their childhood (until age 16). Research consistently shows that length of residence is an important determinant of place attachment (Lewicka, 2011). A Chi-square test indeed shows that people from Brabant who have grown up in another province are more likely to be Protestant. Unfortunately, this information is only available for one year. This means fewer data-points are available, but still this variable is added to the existing model.

As can be seen in Table 3.5, I ran regression analyses using both variables on feeling close to one's province and feeling close to one's town. While the place where people spent most of their childhood contributed significantly to whether or not people reported attachment to their province, the percentage of time people lived in their town did not. An explanation for this could be that within this variable, it is not taken into account whether people have lived in a different municipality within the same province. With regard to town, a slightly different observation is made. People who have lived more than 60% of their life in the town where they now live are more likely to be attached to their town than those who have lived there for a shorter period. However, when controlling for where one lived during one's childhood, the variable does not contribute significantly to the model anymore. It can be observed that spending one's childhood in another town within the same province does not contribute significantly to the model either. However, when the variable on the time having lived in this village is excluded, growing up in another town within the same province does significantly contribute to the model. Among the survey respondents, those who grew up in another town in Brabant may have lived for a longer time already in their current town than those who grew up outside of Brabant. Because of the relationship between the variables of length of time in one's town and where one spent one's childhood, it might be somewhat difficult to predict how the variables contribute to people's attachment. Yet, the analyses suggest that where people live during their childhood is more important than the percentage of the time they have lived in this specific town.[40] It is probably not just the length of time people have lived in a specific village in Brabant, but whether their town is *also* the region where they lived during their childhood. These results suggest that, in Brabant, attachment to one's town and one's province seems to be partly defined during childhood.

In this model, no influence of being Catholic is visible anymore. However, it has to be noted that before adding where people had spent their childhood to the model, when only looking at the data from 1995, the entire model was not significant and religion did not have a significant effect. As such, the lack of data makes it more difficult to predict the dependent variable. Again, some cases have a high

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[40] Similar results are found when using the number of years someone has lived in the town instead of percentage of time spend in that town.

leverage value, suggesting they have undue influence. These cases are people who have spent most of their childhood in another country than the Netherlands. Of these people, half felt attached to their province and the other half did not. Unfortunately, I was not able to detect where these people spent their childhood. In any case, as can be expected, people who have spent their childhood in a different province are less likely to feel attached to their region, while no differences between towns within the same province are found.

Table 3.5 Logistic regression analysis for feeling close (*verbonden*) (ISSP 1995)

	Model I (Province)		**Model II** (Town)		**Model III** (Town)	
	B	**SE**	**B**	**SE**	**B**	**SE**
Education (low)						
Middle	0.067	0.327	-0.106	0.357	-0.116	0.364
High	-0.071	0.356	-0.326	0.373	-0.293	0.380
Age (55+ years)						
15 – 24 years	**-1.636****	0.527	-1.042	0.556	**-1.253***	0.571
25 – 39 years	-0.709	0.399	-0.321	0.430	-0.524	0.443
40 – 54 years	-0.662	0.393	-0.537	0.419	-0.705	0.429
Gender (woman)	0.058	0.273	-0.160	0.293	-0.123	0.300
Rural-urban (countryside/village)						
Small city	0.366	0.419	0.010	0.442	-0.012	0.452
Big city	0.118	0.298	-0.284	0.382	-0.355	0.335
Religion (Catholic)	-0.068	0.306	-0.230	0.323		
Percentage of life having lived in current town 80 – 100%						
60 – 80%	0.687	0.677	0.556	0.816	1.546	1.038
40 – 60%	0.618	0.658	**-0.933***	0.445	0.450	0.864
20 – 40%	0.564	0.684	**-1.095****	0.412	0.480	0.885
0 – 20%	0.637	0.711	**-1.121***	0.438	0.436	0.904
Childhood upbringing (this town)						
Other town in province	-0.662	0.624			-1.389	0.822
Other province	**-2.044****	0.646			**-1.987***	0.831
Other country	-1.308	0.846			-1.407	1.062
Constant	**1.256***	0.486	2.427	0.569	2.567	0.584
N	272		264		264	
Nagelkerke R Square	.153		0.104		0.145	
Chi-square	32.821		19.928	N.S.	28.025	
df	16		13		16	

*Significant at *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001*

Finally, as an important remark, we can see that the Nagelkerke R square is very low in the models that exclude measures on having lived in one's town. This suggests that the included variables in the models only explain very little variance of the dependent variable of attachment. Moreover, some other problems occurred, such as the fact that some models classified *all* cases as being attached to

the region. Both of these aspects – little variance and many misclassifications – suggest the included variables are not very good in explaining the attachment to the region. Only when including variables that relate to living in one's town for a long time, or growing up in Brabant, more variance can be explained and not all cases are classified as being attached. This thus confirms the fact that the year in which a study is conducted contributes very little to whether people feel attached to their province, region, or town. Other variables may be more important, such as the ones that were included in the regression analysis in Chapter 2 on considering oneself a true Brabander. These measures may include living in Brabant, having family in Brabant, language use, and enjoying the landscape.

Prioritizing

In the final part of my analysis of these large datasets, I deal with the prioritizing, which is done with EVS and some of the Eurobarometer surveys. As mentioned earlier, the questions of the two surveys differ slightly as the Eurobarometer surveys use municipality whereas EVS uses city or village. Because of this, and as they are conducted by different organisations, it may be more difficult to compare them. Therefore, I have decided to treat them separately. Here, we use a created variable where 'o' indicates that the province is not named and '1' that the province is given as first or second unit of identification.

I conducted a logistic regression analysis using the Eurobarometer data from 1976, 1978, and 1979 to analyse whether any of the factors contribute to picking the province as first or second unit of attachment. When including the year of the study, gender, age, size of community, and self-assessed idea of living in a village or town in a logistic regression analysis, none of the variables has a significant effect in the model.

Furthermore, I conducted a logistic regression analysis to assess whether, when controlling for the other factors discussed earlier, respondents would indicate their province as a first or second unit of attachment more frequently using the EVS data (1981-2006). The model as displayed in Table 3.6 contains five independent variables (age, gender, age of completed education, religious orientation, and the period of the survey). The year in which the survey was conducted, people's level of education, and people's religious orientation contribute significantly to whether people indicated the province as their first or second unit of identification. I have examined whether an interaction effect between religion and age occurs. While the model is not statistically improved by adding the interaction effect, one of the categories is significant, namely non-religious 40 to 54 year olds. However, as the general effect of 'no religion' disappears, this would suggest that only for this age category being non-religious would be important. Moreover, this model suggests that compared to people 55 and older, people aged between 15 and 25 indicate the province as one of their scales of identification more frequently.

Table 3.6 Logistic regression analysis for first or second unit of identification
(EVS 1981-2008)

	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	B	**SE**	**B**	**SE**	**B**	**SE**
Year (1981)						
1990	0.192	0.243	0.187	0.244	n.a.	
1999	**0.727***	0.260	**0.731***	0.261	**0.551***	0.254
2008	**1.066***	0.246	**1.090***	0.248	**0.867***	0.237
Age (55+ years)						
15 – 24 years	**-1.636****	0.527	-1.042	0.556	**-1.253***	0.571
25 – 39 years	-0.709	0.399	-0.321	0.430	-0.524	0.443
40 – 54 years	-0.662	0.393	-0.537	0.419	-0.705	0.429
Age of completed education	**-0.100****	0.032	**-0.101****	0.032	**-0.103****	0.035
(min=14, max=22)						
Gender (woman)	-0.023	0.161	-0.041	0.162	-0.013	0.183
Religion (Catholic)						
No religion	**-0.608****	0.184	-0.102	0.339	**-0.658****	0.204
Other religion	**-0.946****	0.303	**-0.946***	0.448	**-1.088****	0.348
Size of town (100.000+)						
20.000 – 100.000 inhabitants					0.298	0.230
Less than 20.000 inhabitants					0.261	0.247
Interaction effect						
No religion * 15-24 years			-0.972	0.669		
No religion * 25-39 years			-0.256	0.456		
No religion * 40-54 years			**-1.113***	0.482		
Other religion * 15-24 years			0.692	1.623		
Other religion * 25-39 years			0.267	0.767		
Other religion * 40-54 years			-0.311	0.747		
Constant	0.938	0.537	0.842	0.545	1.011	0.633
N	724		724		562	
Nagelkerke R Square	0.095		0.107		0.118	
Chi-square	52.497		59.822[41]		51.421	
df	10		16		11	

Significant at *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

In these models, I have reduced some of the differences in the reported variables. However, the data suggested that the changes over the period were mainly found on the second unit of identification. Because of that, I have run a separate analysis indicating the province as first unit of identification and a separate analysis with people who indicated the province as the next most important form of geographical attachment. This results into a non-significant model, in which no changes over time could be observed for people's first unit of identification. Only for people's second unit of attachment, the model was statistically significant. The

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[41] No significant improvement of the model compared to Model I.

same variables as for the combined model were statistically significant with similar effects.

Finally, I also ran the analysis for each of the years separately. In 1981, 15 to 24-year-olds were more likely to indicate the province, whereas in 2008 this counted for 25 to 39-year-olds. Contrary to my expectations, adding the variable whether people lived in Brabant at age 14 (only available for 2008) does not contribute significantly to picking the province as first or second unit of identification.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined the paradoxical nature of globalization. The world might become more homogeneous as global items and ideas are spread and people begin to identify more as global citizens. And yet, it has been argued, as more global options are available, people may turn to their local identities and to their local surroundings in order to protect them from erosion. In this view, globalization leads to heterogeneity as localities differ from each other. My analyses suggest that there is no clear trend in the change of people's attachment to Brabant since 1991. The EVS data indicate that over the 1981–2006 period, people more frequently indicate the province as second unit of identification, without a clear decrease in any of the other geographical units. Nevertheless, whether people expressed attachment to their region or not has not changed over the last twenty-five years.

Thus, no clear change in whether people feel attached or not was detected over the past twenty-five years. Some other observations are still relevant though. Age has a somewhat ambiguous role in whether people feel attached or not. This is particularly complex because I expect that people who do not feel attached may be more likely to move out of the province. Moreover, age is related to other measures that are connected to people's attachment such as level of education and religion. People who are still studying are less likely to report attachment to the region. Such students may be (temporarily) in a different region because of study. People who have a lower education are also more likely to feel attached to their region. This corresponds with existing research on local and regional attachment (Antonsich & Holland, 2014) and with research indicating that cosmopolitans are more likely to be highly educated (Pichler, 2008).

In line with existing research (Lewicka, 2011), whether people grew up in Brabant is an important contributor to whether or not people feel attached to their province and town. Using the 1995-survey from ISSP, I demonstrated that, in Brabant, people who have spent the majority of their childhood in another province in the Netherlands are less likely to report attachment to their town and to their province. The amount of time having lived in one's town did not contribute significantly to the reported attachment when also controlling for where one spent

one's childhood. These results suggest that, in Brabant, identification is partly defined within one's childhood.

Furthermore, being Catholic, compared to not being religious, contributed significantly to reported attachment. This was the case in Brabant, Limburg, and the west of the Netherlands, but not in the north and east of the Netherlands. This may suggest it is related to moving patterns, as people who have lived for a shorter amount of time in Brabant are less likely to be Catholic, and perhaps because of the enduring connection of Brabant and Limburg with Catholicism. Unfortunately, the data do not allow us to give a definite conclusion on this.

Furthermore, I want to contextualize these findings a bit further by looking at my qualitative data. Some of these are based on the interviews I have conducted with local audiences of *Smeris* of which the methods are found in the sixth chapter on *Consuming Brabant through Smeris*. As mentioned before, these surveys only allowed me to capture a one-dimension form of place attachment, and while valid and interesting (Shamai & Ilatov, 2005), it may not capture the exact regional identification I am speaking about.

The analyses of the different questionnaires suggested that the most 'factual' definition, considering oneself inhabitant of the region, resulted in the highest reported attachment. The research further suggested a difference between feeling attached *(gehecht)* and feeling close (*verbonden*). While this difference was observed for one's town and also one's country, when comparing the region and the province, more people reported attachment to the region than to the province. This suggests that such an ambiguous term as region may mean something quite different for various people. What has not been researched in this is the difference between using *province* or the name of that province. Using the word *province* may bring to mind more official borders whereas the word *Brabant* may encompass more vague, more intuitive ideas.

While the surveys indicated the difference between feeling attached (*gehecht*) and feeling close (*verbonden*), my interviews also relate the terms to each other, but show that both do not necessarily fully capture identification. When I asked my interviewees whether they felt attached to their region or town, some did relate this to a more emotional identification. Yet others said they were attached or felt connected simply because they lived there, their friends lived there, and they knew their way around. Regional attachment may include an emotional feeling, but some interviewees articulated their attachment in a more practice-based way:

Sandra: Do you also feel close [*verbonden*] to Tilburg?
Suzanne: Yes yes, I work here, I live here, my children go to school here, so yeah it's the place where you live.
(Interview with extra from *Smeris* living in Tilburg, July 2016)

Sandra: Do you also feel close [*verbonden*] to the region?
Sven: Yeah quite a lot I think. I know the streets, I know the *Reeshof* [neighbour-
            hood in Tilburg], I know where the people live. I uh... I just know the way
            around, so yeah, it is a sort of attachment. I experienced a lot.
(Interview with extra from *Smeris* living in Tilburg, June 2016)

However, the fact these respondents do not equate feeling close and being attached
with an emotional identification, does not invalidate my results all together as the
concepts are closely related (e.g. Giuliani, 2003). An (emotional) identification with
one's region may be associated with more attachment as measured by these
surveys. Thus, if people would have increased or decreased feelings of identifica-
tion with their region, this should also be visible within the attachment as
measured by these surveys.

No clear change in whether people feel attached or not was detected over the
past twenty-five years. Having lived in Brabant for a longer time, and/or during
one's childhood, seems a much more important determinant. Many other factors
that might contribute to attachment are still missing in these models. The low ex-
planatory power of the models, as reported with the Nagelkerke R Square, also ex-
emplifies that neither the year in which the survey was conducted, nor the other
included variables, are good determinants of attachment.

While no change in the whether people felt attached to one's region in Brabant
over the last twenty-five years was observed, people may argue that, had the
surveys been conducted fifty years ago, the results may have been different. As
discussed in the second chapter, thanks to the emancipation of Brabant and the
accompanied cultural changes that occurred in the early and mid-1900s, pride and
regional attachment was increasingly displayed. However, the data do not go as far
back, and thus, is unable to check whether increased feelings of attachment have
occurred earlier.

Moreover, changes in attachment may occur for specific parts of the popula-
tion, rather than for the population as a whole. As previously mentioned, cosmo-
politans, who think of themselves as citizens of Europe and the world, are more
likely to be found among higher educated individuals (Pichler, 2008). On the other
hand, I argued that because of globalization people may chauvinistically defend
their own country and region as they want to 'opt out' of globalization. This may
account other people within society. The way I have used the data from these
surveys cannot fully take into account (opposing) changes within segments of
society. The survey data do not take into account how some individuals may have
developed an increased sense of attachment, while others may have experienced a
decreased sense of attachment. If changes occur with regard to attachment to the
region, it may be that such alterations occur in small pockets of society, rather than
that people in Brabant in general have started to attach or detach themselves from
Brabant.

In the beginning of this chapter, I discussed globalization and its perceived op-position, trends towards the local. My data have shown that in Brabant, over the past decades, no clear trend is visible in either direction. Accordingly, this suggests that we should consult other kind of theories. Rather than seeing the movements towards the global and local as oppositional, they may be complementary. Homogenization and heterogenization go hand in hand. People are moving across scales unconsciously as they proceed with their daily activities. Robertson (1995) referred to this blending of the global and the local as 'glocal'. Universal ideas may create particular versions of enactment in different localities. Rather than being passively absorbed by global trends, communities actively negotiate their local identities within a globalized context (Robertson, 1995). Foreign products may be altered to fit the cultural context; global elements are modified to fit local ideas and representations (Khondker, 2004; Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, 2012; Smith, 2009). Global brands adjust their food to the local taste by adding 'localized' products such as the 'McKebab' in India and 'McKroket' in the Netherlands and adjust the preparation technique to fit local preferences (Mak et al., 2012). Aspects of one locality are transported to other localities, but 'the localities do not necessarily become more "global" or "deterritorialized" because of such patterns' (Blommaert, 2010, p. 79). This is supported by the fact that my data showed that within Brabant, people have not started to attach themselves less to their region and locality despite the presence of global or glocalized elements within Brabant.

Thus, one may engage with media from all over the world, engaging with places and people from various locations. People have come to experience more parts of the world, either by moving there physically or through mediated experiences. How people think of where they live, relates to the way they think people live else-where (Meyrowitz, 2005). Yet, despite the fact that we may operate on different scales simultaneously, often unconsciously, and while our experience is always local, but 'increasingly shaped by global processes' (Tomlinson, 2002[1991], p. 177), people in Brabant have not come to attach themselves more nor less frequently with their region. Yet, what their region means and how they interpret Brabant may have changed. This brings me to my next chapter in which I examine what Brabant really means to the people inhabiting this province and how processes of scaling work.

Lul Brabants met me!

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Chapter 4
Interpreting Brabant

pictures: *New Kids*
post on the Facebook page *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants*

Interpreting Brabant

In the previous chapter, I examined changes in people's attachment to their region. I shortly introduced the idea that identities are scaled and people operate on different scales (e.g. local, national) simultaneously. In this chapter, I will examine *how* people live and operate on different scales of identification simultaneously. While such scales may suggest scales of identification are delimited and exact, they are far from this. Let me make this more concrete by describing what the word *Brabant* connotes. In the previous chapter we have seen people feel connected, or attached, to their region. Yet, I have not explained what this *means*. What does it mean to be attached to Brabant? What are we communicating when we speak about Brabant? Brabant often is what is 'proximate', that which is close and is enacted in local everyday settings. In this chapter, I will elaborate on how proximity, the local context in which someone is living, is entangled in what people consider Brabant to mean. Proximity is an integral element in (regional) identification and goes a long way in revealing how Brabant is negotiated in everyday life. Through several cases, including responses to the sketches from *New Kids* and the focus groups I have used, we will explore this notion of proximity in relation to Brabantish identities further.

So What Does 'Brabant' Mean?

Earlier, I discussed how geographical identities may contain different scales of attachment (see: *Is Dutch a prerequisite?* in Chapter 2). One may identify on the local scale (e.g. one's street) or on a more global scale (e.g. the world) depending on the context:

> [O]pposing identifications, which differentiate and divide in one context – from the local to the international – may find themselves subsumed under a shared sense of similarity, in opposition to something or someone else, in another context. (Jenkins, 2011, p. 81)

In our everyday lives, people constantly cross scales of identification often unconsciously, and sometimes quite purposively. People switch from different scales

and may even operate on different scales simultaneously. Moreover, global aspects become part of the context in which local communities and people are constructed (Blommaert, 2010). At the end of the previous chapter, I already gave some examples of how people may modify global aspects to fit with localized customs and beliefs. Producers think of how they can make a television series (from abroad) familiar and recognisable within the local and national context (Adriaens & Biltereyst, 2012). For example, the American television show *The Office* is a cultural adaption to the British original. The programme was modified to fit the localized customs and ideas (Beeden & De Bruin, 2010). On a less purposive level, people may integrate the national flag into their local practices (Jenkins, 2011). Street signs, which may look differently in other countries, give a familiar feeling of the nation in one's own neighbourhood (Edensor, 2002).

Thus, people do not only live in a locality, but also incorporate and use elements from other scales in their everyday lives: 'The connections between these differently symbolic, differently scaled spaces testify to the scaling of national identity' (Edensor, 2002, p. 186). This process of scaling means that the national in Edensor's case, and the regional in my case, is embedded within the local domestic spaces. This is even more explicit for the national scale as when crossing the border to Belgium, one may immediately notice by the look and feel of the surroundings, through the different architecture, signs, and symbols, that one has crossed the country's border. This shows how national elements are embedded within these domestic spaces. Similarly, the regional is also not only enacted at symbolic sites, but also in local and domestic spaces. Thus, people operate on different scales of identification (e.g. national, local) simultaneously and connect the different scales, often unconsciously.

An important part of my findings illustrates how such different scales of attachment with a geographical unit intertwine. When talking about one geographical scale (e.g. Brabant), people may simultaneously communicate on another scale (e.g. the Netherlands or a neighbourhood). In the second chapter, the focus groups revealed that sometimes, being Dutch was a prerequisite for Brabantishness or even that some 'Dutch' characteristics were used in defining Brabantishness.

More importantly, Brabant intertwines with the scales at the other direction: towards the local. Localities are perceived to differ from Brabant. For instance, when consciously thinking about it, people do not equate Tilburg with Brabant. In the previous chapter, I have shown how people respond differently when you ask them about attachment to their town compared to attachment to their region or province. When consciously speaking and thinking about it, people separated the two easily. My respondents in my focus group in Helmond emphasize the difference between Brabantish and Helmondish, as one says to another: 'We are just kind of – we are more Helmondish and you are just pure Brabantish.' Moreover, at other times respondents speak of various places within Brabant. In that

sense, when consciously thinking about it, they separate their locality from their region.

Nevertheless, some sense of a local identification is embedded within Brabantishness, as is illustrated in this focus group in Tilburg:

Aafke (Research assistant):   So you hope you're on top of the list?

Freya: Yeah I... uh I somehow think I will be, because well my entire family comes from here.

Yvonne: Yes mine too!

Isabel: Yes mine too!

Freya: At least all [come] from Brabant. My mother may be from Goirle and stuff but that's [still] North (?) Brabant.[42]

Yvonne: Yeah for me also, really, 100 percent.

Isabel: Yeah for me too.

(Focus group, Tilburg, February 2014)

In this conversation, Yvonne refers to her mother's place of birth, Goirle, a village close to Tilburg. She knows Brabant is more than just the city of Tilburg, but her need to articulate that her mother 'may [only] be from Goirle' (*wel uit Goirle*) illustrates her urge to legitimize her position, although her mother was not born in Tilburg. That she mentions her mother's place of birth by name and then says this is in Brabant seems telling. It seems as if the underlying thought of her message is that despite the fact that Goirle is not Tilburg, she is still a Brabander because Goirle is in Brabant too. If it had been some small town in Brabant further away, claiming that Goirle was in Brabant would seem necessary, because others may be unfamiliar with this town. However, since Goirle is close to Tilburg and also mentioned in the previous focus group, the respondents must have been familiar with the town. In this case, thus, it seems that Tilburg, even excluding its surroundings, defines what Brabant is to these people.

In terms of proximity, these adolescent respondents based their Brabantishness quite often on their personal, local experiences. Sometimes respondents extended their identification beyond their own direct surroundings, but their experiences about Brabant were mostly embedded within their localities. It is about 'our' region, and thus 'our' is often defined by very personal and proximate elements rather than by the explicit borders of that region. When I analysed the 'Ranking the Stars' exercise, this notion of proximity became very apparent. Michael van Gerwen, (Dart World Champion) who was living in Vlijmen (town in Brabant) at the time, was regarded as very Brabantish because 'it puts Brabant in general on

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[42] I am not entirely sure whether she says 'North Brabant' or 'also in Brabant'. It is hard to hear on the record as she speaks fast and swallowed some words. Potentially she may have said something like '*dat ligt dan ook in Brabant*' (that is also in Brabant). If she uses 'North Brabant', it is telling as this name refers to the official demarcation of this province, but is hardly used in everyday life.

the map, that he is champion.' In the Tilburg focus group, one respondent persuaded another into believing that ice-skater Ireen Wüst was more Brabantish than comedian Theo Maassen on the basis of local reasons: she is 'from around here' and has an ice rink named after her in Tilburg.

For this Tilburg focus group, proximity was paramount, with the four highest ranked celebrities all from Tilburg and surroundings. Particularly of interest to us here is rapper Gers Pardoel. While the other (Tilburgian) celebrities were also ranked relatively high by the other groups outside of Tilburg, Gers Pardoel ranked among the lowest in most focus groups. In fact, as can be observed in Table 2.1, Gers Pardoel was born outside of Brabant and lived for a while outside of this region. The Tilburg focus group explained, however, that Gers Pardoel lives/d in the surroundings of Tilburg and recently bought a home in Tilburg. Consequently, this group ranked Gers Pardoel higher. Similarly, when asked about other Brabantish persons whom respondents thought were good examples of Brabanders, they mentioned celebrities from their own surroundings. Because these celebrities are geographically closer to them, these celebrities are more like 'them and more Brabantish.

This proximate identification relates to knowledge. The boys in Vlijmen knew Michael van Gerwen was Brabantish because they knew he lived there. The ability of the Tilburg group to provide details about Gers Pardoel's life enhanced his Brabantishness. Residence thus affords knowledge about one's immediate surroundings. The participants of the focus group, for instance, mentioned that Gers Pardoel lived close by:

Isabel: He [Gers Pardoel] is born in Waalwijk, he is. He lived almost his entire life in Waalwijk.
Sandra: Are you sure about that?
Isabel: Yes because my uncle is also from Waalwijk.
Freya: He also lived in Westpoint [tallest residential building in Tilburg].
Participant: Yeah
(Focus group, Tilburg, February 2014)

Besides knowledge, the feeling of belonging to the same area also contributes to people's Brabantish identities. As belonging is also partly relational (Antonsich, 2010b), such ties can contribute to the feeling of sameness. If celebrities still reside in people's towns, people have the chance of meeting them in the street, and even if this never happens, it might increase a feeling of togetherness (Lettinga et al., 2015; Williams, 2013, 2015). Apparently, to the adolescents in the focus groups, identifying with Brabant is not about Brabant, but the (smaller) area one inhabits: living closer means being more Brabantish. As one is geographically closer to these celebrities because they are from the same area, identities based on geography will be more likely to be ascribed to these celebrities. For these focus groups, it seems

that 'Brabant' is no bigger or smaller than the area of their own town or neigh-bourhood.

To underpin this argument, I test the proximity hypothesis with data the research institute PON gathered in November 2005 via the Brabantpanel (PON, 2005). Respondents indicated whom they consider the most Brabantish athlete and the most Brabantish singer or band. Respondents were provided with a number of options and the possibility to choose someone themselves. I used the following regions to categorize the respondents and the celebrities: West Brabant, Mid-Brabant, North-east Brabant, and South-east Brabant. These reflect the COROP regions, which are created in 1970 for analytical research purposes.[43]

Respondents were much more likely to choose an athlete from their own region (Monte Carlo approach, based on 1,000,000 sampled tables: (9,(N=671), p<0.001)[44]). Likewise, people were also significantly more likely to pick a musician or band from their own region (Pearson's Chi-Square: χ^2=(9,(N=664)=96.520, p<0.001). More specifically, from the most frequently mentioned musicians, Guus Meeuwis (born in North-east Brabant, but has lived in and been associated with Tilburg, Mid-Brabant, for a long time already) is equally likely to be chosen by people from all regions. However, the popular singers Frans Bauer (from Fijnaart in the West) and Gerard van Maasakkers (from Budel/Nuenen in the South-east) were chosen more frequently in West Brabant and the South-east Brabant respectively. These data illustrate how people consider persons from their own (proximate) surroundings to be more Brabantish. In sum, Brabantish was whatever closely resembled the area of which they know it is located in Brabant and with which the respondents were familiar. Proximity seems here so fundamental to regional identity, more than any other marker so far. To continue on this in more detail, I use an example of an online occurrence where different versions of Brabant conflicted with each other.

Lul Brabants mee main

In May 2015, the song *Praat Nederlands met me* (Speak Dutch to me) reached a number one position in the Netherlands song charts. After the release of a cover from Amsterdam, which ridiculed Rotterdam, many other localities followed with their own versions of the song. Patrick Marcelissen, the singer of *WC Experience*, (a Farmers' Rock band from Raamsdonksveer (West Brabant) that sings in dialect), made the cover called *Lul Brabants mee main* (Talk Brabantish to me). At first, a

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[43] COROP regions are largely based on 'the nodal principle', where each region has a central core (e.g. a city). Sometimes this rule is ignored to follow provincial borders, but this seems not to be the case in Brabant.

[44] The Monte Carlo method is used because four cells (25%) have an expected count of less than five and therefore the Pearson's Chi-square is inappropriate. This is because of the lack of famous athletes from the middle of Brabant in 2005. The discussed ice-skater Ireen Wüst was already named, but would only grow to fame shortly after this questionnaire.

clip on YouTube was uploaded with a Brabantish song but with the Dutch (not Brabantish!) lyrics scrolling over the red white chequered Brabantish flag. As such, the text on the screen did not always match the voiced Brabantish words. The clip with the lyrics was shared by the Facebook page *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants*. Consequently, a different audience than the one that usually listens to *WC Experience* encountered the song. The responses illustrate the lack of familiarity with *WC Experience* and the singer Patrick Marcelissen. In the following excerpt, this becomes clear:

> User A: The 'singer' sounds like he's not from Brabant but does try to talk like that (105 likes)
>
> User B: You probably do not know who the singer is... hahahaha (7 likes)
>
> User A: No Clue (0 likes)
>
> User B: Maybe a hint: http://wcexperience.nl (6 likes)
>
> User A: Ah a Brabo [abbreviation of Brabander] after all! Appearances are not what they seem! (2 likes)
>
> User C: 😂😂😂 I heard it immediately! (2 likes)
>
> User D: Lyrics also in Brabantish please (8 likes)
>
> User E: Well *User A*, that's one from the West of Brabant. That's not quite the same as the beautiful Brabantish from Eindhoven and surroundings. (8 likes)
>
> User A: Exactly! (1 like)
>
> User F: He is from Raamsdonkveer, sounds different than from Loon [op Zand - another town] (3 likes)
>
> User G: Yeah even in Brabant they have different accents!! 😃 You can clearly hear that it is really Brabantish! And indeed, I heard immediately that it's WC Experience, haha! (3 likes)
>
> User H: And that you are thanked for you know it hey humbug 😄 [45]
>
> User I: WC experience ❤️
>
> (Facebook, *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants,* written: May 2015, retrieved: 3 December 2015)

The comments on this video illustrate two related aspects. First, singing this song in dialect does not validate Patrick Marcelissen as a Brabander. These comments confirm the importance of knowledge. The comments suggest that a pre-existing notion of knowing that Patrick Marcelissen and/or *WC Experience* are Brabantish is necessary for many (East) Brabanders to perceive this song and the singer as Brabantish. People had to, a priori, ascribe Patrick Marcelissen with Brabantish identities to acknowledge his Brabantish contribution rather than that people ascribed him with Brabantishness on the basis of this song. As I stated in Chapter Two *Describing Brabant*, explicit identity markers of being Brabantish may be expressed, but are not necessarily ascribed by others. Those who were unfamiliar

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[45] This phrase written in dialect ('*En dagge bedaankt zij, da witte wel eej kul* 😄') is without the *eej kul* ('hey humbug') a phrase in dialect often used in Brabant.

with *WC Experience* did not ascribe the identity of a Brabander to Marcelissen. To (East) Brabanders, Patrick Marcelissen's language use was not even regarded as Brabantish – it lacked the power and authority of *proximity* required (in this case) by an East Brabander. Marcelissen missed the required identity ascription of being a Brabander in order to be endorsed as the appropriate singer of such a Brabantish song.

The responses also suggest differences between the various parts of Brabant. People who know Patrick Marcelissen and *WC Experience* responded more positively than those who did not. In turn, people living in the west of Brabant responded differently than those in the east. While I could not identify the origins of all commenters, people occasionally made clear that they were from a different area in Brabant. While some people from the west of Brabant may have argued: 'It does not get more Brabantish than this', some posters from the east of Brabant did not perceive the song as being Brabantish at all:

> User Z: The singer is not from Brabant that he tries to sing but it's just plain wrong
>   for example, it is not 'with me' but with 'men'!!!
> User Y: They are from raamsdonk, doesn't get more Brabant.
> User Z: Well, I am from Tilburg and it is not broad Brabantish. That's it!!
> User X: This certainly is broad Brabantish I am not sure under which rock you live
>   but you can't help it you're from tilburg hea. 😉
> User W: Is the singer from wc experience!! Can't get more Brabantish!!
> User V: Tilburgers don't speak Brabantish but Tilburgs.
> User Z: Tilburgers don't speak Brabantish 😂😂😂😂 You're coming out of an egg!!
>   Then Eindhoven is not brabantish but Eindhoven and den bosch is not
>   Brabantish but bosch etc etc. You can better shut your mouth and go back
>   into your egg with your dumb statements whahahaha.
> User Z: And me is not pronounced as me and if I'm reading correctly I'm not the only
>   Brabander who says that his pronunciations are wrong. 😉
>
> (Facebook, *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants,* written: May 2015, retrieved: 4 May 2016)

While some people acknowledge the differences within Brabant, it is one's own version of Brabant that is the one with the most authority; the one that counts. More specifically, the area that is geographically nearby becomes culturally the most significant; eventually it comes to signify the rest of Brabant. Some people literally argue (ironically) that 'their' area is the real Brabant:

> Can be more in dialect, Eindhovens is the real Brabantish!
> (Comment in dialect on YouTube, Retrieved: April 2016)

> No man you are totally wrong the real Brabantish is from Den Bosch.
> (A response in dialect directed towards the comment above on YouTube, Retrieved: April 2016)

South-east Brabant is the real Brabant :p :D (18 likes)
(Facebook, *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants,* Retrieved: 7 August 2016)

Someone else's Brabant that does not conform to one's own interpretation of Brabant is not just a different part of Brabant, it is sometimes dismissed as not being real. People's own location is *their* central point from which they perceive the world:

Human groups nearly everywhere tend to regard their own homeland as the center of the world. A people who believe they are the center claim, implicitly, the ineluctable worth of their location. (Tuan, 1979, p. 149)

This quote from Tuan highlights the centrality of one's own location; something that is central to how people understand their own identities. Again, proximate surroundings are paramount. People often use the word 'Brabant' while referring to their local surroundings. This is applicable to the ranking of the celebrities, but is also visible in observations in other parts of my data. Brabant entails a feeling of what is close, what is around them, their 'home'. The mental and symbolic maps of what Brabant entails differs along people's location. Therefore, it is no surprise that people from West Brabant may not identify as much with those from East Brabant, simply because of the geographical distance between them. They have different (physical, cultural, and mental) points of reference and it has often been said they feel different, yet do share a common feeling for Brabant (cf. Mommaas, 2014).

Within these examples, we have observed that what 'Brabant' means is largely based on proximate elements. It is anchored in a specific space, in a specific locality, because this geographical identity is about a home, about 'our geographical territory', about the space that is close to someone. This region is in fact much smaller than what could be expected based on the term alone. In this way, it relates to the idea that identities are chronotopically organized as this refers to how identities are based on the specific time (chrono) and space (topic): 'The actual practices performed in our identity work often demand specific timespace conditions' (Blommaert, 2015b, p. 3). My research illustrates this idea as it shows how time and particularly the specific space, the proximate surroundings, influence how someone expresses their identity. Identities are always depending on the specific context of the time and place in which someone is acting, the idea of proximity relates to this in a more specific way. It refers to how geographical identities depend on what is close to someone, to that which is near.

But Is It Really Brabantish?

So, meaning is highly entangled with the place where one is located. Identities are articulated within a specific time and space configuration, or in other words within a chronotope (Blommaert, 2015b). We cannot *just* take an identity out of its specific chronotope, as it is within this specific context, identities should be understood. If we take it out of this specific context and place it onto the next specific one, someone will display different identity enactments.

However, while disentangling such identities is impossible in reality, ordinary people often make the attempt. What I mean is that individuals categorize people based on one aspect of a person's identity. They take an element out and make it exemplary for that entire person. This makes sense, as people often do so to get a grasp of life and categorization is necessary for understanding our world. People often selectively interpret the given information around them in favour of the assumptions they already hold (Tajfel & Forgas, 1981). Using dialect invokes, indexes, all kinds of behavioural scripts that may be related to other types of identity features that are not necessarily related to Brabant (cf. Blommaert, 2015c). However, when speaking about it, people sometimes take it as exemplary for Brabant in its entirety. Different identity repertoires are always intertwined and together communicate a particular persona: 'The performance of identity is not a matter of *articulating one* identity, but of the mobilisation of a whole *repertoire* of identity features converted into complex and subtle moment-to-moment speaking positions' (Blommaert, 2005, p. 232). Through the following example of *New Kids,* I will illustrate how different identities are always mixed and intertwined.

New Kids: White Trash Brabanders

This series *New Kids*, in the beginning known as *New Kids on the Block* as a reference to the nineties boy band, originated as sketches on the website *Flabber*. The first episode, lasting about three minutes, was posted on 10 December 2007. The stories revolve around five aggressive, antisocial, sexist, vulgar, dialect-speaking characters. The episodes are characterized by the frequent use of swear words, explosions, and (fatal) accidents. The sketches are set in a small village in Brabant called Maaskantje. Due to the success of *New Kids*, the short sketches were aired on television and full-length movies were produced in 2010 (*New Kids Turbo*) and 2011 (*New Kids Nitro*). Maaskantje was flooded with media tourists who stole the place signboards and visited the local snack bar that played a prominent role in the sketches. A hit-single was created with the song *Broodje Bakpao*.[46] Young people imitated *New Kids* by using typical expressions from the sketches (*Verrekte mongol!*) and by dressing up as them (during costume parties or *Carnaval*). The first movie *New Kids Turbo* broke several Dutch records: they had a record profit

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[46] *Broodje Bakpao* is the mispronounced Dutch version of baozi used by the characters in *New Kids*.

on the opening night and attracted a million visitors to a Dutch film in a record time of seven weeks. *New Kids* also appeared to be successful outside of the Netherlands. The actors dubbed the German version themselves. They had success in countries such as Belgium and Sweden, and even Japanese and Russian versions appeared.

Evidently, *New Kids* is connected to Brabant. Brabanders produced the sketches and movies, the actors are from Brabant, and even the producer, Reinout Oerlemans, though hardly associated with it, was born in Brabant. If looking solely at who made this series, *New Kids* could be characterized as Brabantish popular culture. This production aspect is, however, only one way of looking at a concept such as national, or in this case regional, movies (cf. Van Gorp, 2010). A different way is how the product enacts the local colour of regional identities.

New Kids has frequently been characterized as Brabantish. For instance, Rooijakkers (2014, p. 402) argues that *New Kids* represents 'the real Brabant that is tired of the disdain and condescending attitudes.' In contrast to some identity constructions by policy makers, *New Kids* gives an impression of Brabant around the globe (Rooijakkers, 2014). A similar thought is expressed by Spapens (2010) in the newspaper *Brabants Dagblad* when he speaks about the anarchy of the soft *g*. He argues that *New Kids* became popular because of the 'exaggeration of what is, consciously or not, felt about the condescension towards provincials, the dialect, the soft *g*.'

These remarks are embedded in a more widespread idea in which Brabant and *New Kids* are frequently connected. The boorish, anti-social characters of *New Kids* are linked to stereotypical notions about rural, uncivilized Brabant. Within the Netherlands, *New Kids* does present an impression of Brabant to some people. Both the setting in Maaskantje and use of local dialect situates *New Kids* in a Brabantish context. Similar to what occurs concerning other media productions (see Chapter 5), people recognize familiar locations. For those from (North-east) Brabant, the language use and recognition of locations can be an additional appreciation. Some references to Brabant are made, particularly the *Carnaval* song from 2010. Because of this, some people take it as exemplary of Brabant as a whole. What is notable here is how different scales intertwine. The local dialect, that does not reflect the entire Brabant, and the location of Maaskantje, are taken to be exemplary of Brabant in its entirety.

We also see however, that the popularity of *New Kids* illustrates the power of the broader stereotypes used in the series. Appreciation for the sketches comes not (only) because *New Kids* originates from Brabant, but because of the boorish, rude, and violent characters and the incorporated humour. If the popularity of the sketches derived *only* from ridiculing Brabant, a foreign success would have been highly unlikely as people outside of the Netherlands are hardly familiar with these regional differences. However, the sketches transcended Dutch borders easily. On YouTube, many English and German comments can be found in response to some

of the *New Kids* clips. The comments highlight that people from both the Netherlands and abroad appreciate this boorish, rude, and offensive humour:

> I have no fucking idea what they're saying but hilarious movie.
> This deserve to be translated in more languages it would be so fucking famous!
> (Two English responses on YouTube to 'new kids on the block sketch 3', 2013)

> It is now at least so boorish [Dutch: *lomp*] that it becomes funny. Before was just shitty [Dutch: *kut*].
> Hope that the rest will be as boorish then it will be nice :P
> (Dutch response on Flabber to Sketch too hot for TV-wout, September 2009)

The type of characters in *New Kids* may also be called chavs, white trash, or trailer park trash. Such persons are contrasted against the 'proper' white middle-class individual. Chavs are regarded as aesthetically and morally inferior and they trigger reactions of disgust. They are not only poor in terms of money, but, more importantly, their taste is looked down upon as they wear sports clothes and binge drink on cheap lager from cans. Chavs are perceived as ignorant, aggressive, and violent (Hollingworth & Williams, 2009; Lockyer, 2010; Tyler, 2008).

These characters opposing to 'middle-class' norms, whether you call them chavs, white trash, or something else, are also featured in other television shows. While people may have various reasons to view such programmes, watching this type of person on television could give people a morally superior view. One can watch the reality series *Jersey Shore* ironically, thinking that one is at least better than these characters, while laughing at the stupidity of these individuals. Vicky Pollard, a character representing a female chav in the British sketch show *Little Britain*, also displays this stereotype. Simultaneously, particularly because it is through the medium of comedy, Vicky Pollard can oppose middle-class standards and power regimes. Vicky does not show any sign of wanting to change herself to fit middle-class ideals: 'In this sense, Vicky Pollard can be viewed as a character of rebellion, resistance, and defiance to social control and hegemonic ideologies that are repeated and reinforced elsewhere in British contemporary popular culture' (Lockyer, 2010, p. 131). Similarly, *Shameless*, a television series centring on the chaotic lives of a working poor family with an unemployed alcoholic father, contradicts the morality of reality television, specifically makeover television, in which such subjects need to be 'fixed'. Instead of having to change these people, the series may encourage people to feel empathy for these kind of problems and the social structures which cause these problems to occur (Creeber, 2009; Morley, 2009). Moreover 'particularly in the first series (...), *Shameless* was this straight-faced "normalization" of what, to outsiders, might seem extraordinary (and indeed truly shocking) about life on such an estate' (Morley, 2009, p. 502).

Rooijakkers (2014) argues that *New Kids* successfully manages to capture an anti-culture. However, while Rooijakkers explicitly connects this disdain to Brabant, it is perhaps not so much the Brabantish society but a more general 'correct' society *New Kids* is rebelling against. In a way, the characters in *New Kids* are similar to Vicky Pollard from *Little Britain* and those from *Shameless*, who with their dual role do not only serve for the middle-class to look down upon, but also as an act of rebellion against the 'correct' society. People understand that *New Kids* is fiction. Indeed, the show is funny because of the exaggeration of reality. Similar to *Flodder*, a television and movie series about lower class people from Amsterdam moving into a rich neighbourhood, *New Kids* does not just aim to mock Brabantish identity, it pokes fun at and rebels against a correct society. The Brabantish dialect is deliberately used to situate them low on the social ladder, as speaking in dialect, rather than 'proper' Dutch, is associated with low culture. However, whether an accent is used from Brabant, The Hague (such as in the reality show *Oh Oh Cherso*, the Dutch equivalent of *Jersey Shore*) or Amsterdam (*Flodder*) appears to be relatively unimportant for the appreciation of these shows. Additionally, words derived from such shows can come to signify lower class families without being bound by one place in particular. For example, '*Family Flodder*' was used as a nickname for a lower-class anti-social family (Den Boon, 2004) as well as '*Tokkies*'[47] and '*Sjonnies (& Anita's)*'.[48]

I am not the only one who perceives *New Kids* as not solely confined to the Brabantish sphere. In fact, when thinking about it, people may consider *New Kids* Brabantish, but not *typically* Brabantish.

> Timor: I am actually more likely to think about people from a trailer park than about Brabanders with *New Kids*.
> (Focus group, Vlijmen, April 2014)

> Sandra: So do you also consider this [*New Kids*] typically Brabantish?
> Jada: No.
> Alex: No, not that.
> Sandra: Why not?
> Alex: Because Rotterdammers can also speak that anti-social and such, it is not just that Brabanders do that.
> (Focus Group, Tilburg, February 2014)

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[47] *Tokkie* is a word used for anti-social people after, in 2004, an Amsterdam family named Tokkie rose to fame, as they were involved in a neighbour fight. Their lives were subsequently documented into their own docusoap, and the word *Tokkie* (the last name of the mother of the family) became associated with 'anti-social behaviour'.

[48] *Sjonnie* (male form) and *Anita* (female form) are names based on youth culture from the eighties for common vulgar people from a lower class.

The comments on *Flabber* also highlight a sense of recognition of the characters. While the characters in *New Kids* are over the top, they are still familiar. This recognition is from both inside and outside of Brabant and corresponds with this white trash culture I just spoke about, combined with its nineties reference and youth nostalgia. The following quote is exemplary for this:

> I encountered countless of situations in my neighbourhood the forgotten village [possibly refers to a neighbourhood in The Hague] we did the same shit hahahahaah those were the days.
> Greetings Turbo
> (Responses on Flabber to Season 3, Episode 6, December 2009)

Thus, *New Kids* appears to be mostly appreciated for its offensive and violent clips, while recognizing the anti-social white trash stereotype parody. Simultaneously, it is embedded within Brabant because of the locations, language use, and the accompanied pride felt because of this. Both through more subtle and banal elements, only recognisably to people familiar with the local context, and explicit references to Brabant, *New Kids* is appropriated as Brabantish. Consequently, and because of the already existing stereotypes about Brabant, Brabant and the white trash repertoire are linked. This illustrates that while localness is of central concern, most of these 'local' aspects actually coincide with more general notions of white trash behaviour. A seemingly local repertoire is entrenched within elements of a general white trash subculture. However, I do not want to claim that *New Kids* is *only* portraying a white trash stereotype. The specific location choice does have value to those inhabiting these places, and while *New Kids* is able to travel because of its general scripts, its local features should not be forgotten either.

WC Experience: Brabantish Farmers[49]

The band *WC Experience* offers another example of the mixing of different identity repertoires. I already mentioned *WC Experience* when talking about one specific parody they made earlier in this chapter, but the Brabantish music band in itself is also interesting. While I earlier mentioned only part of Brabant would consider them really Brabantish, I will now highlight how even these Brabantish aspects are entangled with other notions such as ideas about a rural Brabant. As mentioned in the second chapter, Brabant is commonly associated with the periphery and *WC Experience* uses these sentiments in their articulation of who they are. This party band adopts an anti-elitist attitude in their celebration of country life and connects this to Brabant. *WC Experience* explicitly uses Brabantish elements, such as dialect and symbolic references to Brabant. The band fits within the genre of Farmers'

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[49] This section is partly based on the research conducted by Aafke Lettinga in cooperation with Jos Swanenberg and myself (Lettinga et al., 2015).

Rock (*Boerenrock*) in which celebrating life in the countryside plays a significant role (Klumpenhouwer, 2002). Leersen (1996) uses the term *anderstijdig* which encompasses both a positive and negative connotation of 'nostalgic' and 'out of date'. In a denigrating way, people may see such band as boorish, out-of-date and naive. In a more positive manner, *WC Experience* may be perceived as authentic and a band that values traditions. *WC Experience* is not the only band that plays with this sentiment by employing self-deprecating humour. In fact, such bands may be found throughout the Netherlands. Although *WC Experience* performs more frequently in (the west and centre of) Brabant, fans also come from other provinces in the Netherlands. These Farmers' Rock sentiments are part of a certain subculture, rather than a regional mainstream culture.

Similarly, the Limburgish band, *Rowwen Hèze,* evidently connects to (North) Limburg. While they are appreciated throughout the Netherlands, they may be experienced in different ways in these various places. While for people outside Limburg, the Limburgian aspect of the band lies in stereotypical elements such as beer drinking (or throwing), and the use of dialect, for Limburgers these sentiments are also anchored in personal, shared experiences that evoke this Limburgian feeling (Jansen-Rompen, 2015; Pollux, 2015). Similarly, *WC Experience* appeals to both Brabantish and subcultural sentiments. The t-shirt of *WC Experience* that states: '*Liever onder de stront dan tussen de kak*', is a wonderful example of this. Through humour, *WC Experience* distances itself from the elite, both from higher educated backgrounds and from the city and/or centre of the Netherlands. While *'stront'* and *'kak'* both literally refer to excrement, they index different meanings. '*Stront*', or shit, indexes a peripheral farmer's life whereas *'kak'*, also meaning shit but with the auxiliary meaning of preppy, is a word mocking the elite. Thus, this sentence 'Rather among (animal) shit than among (shitty) preppies', corresponds with an anti-elite attitude. Moreover, the small Brabantish flag on the turd on the front of the t-shirt highlight its Brabantish relationship. It is telling that *Mooi Wark*, a band from a region in the north of the Netherlands, has a song with a similar title (*Liever in de stront dan tussen de kak*). This shows that the sentiment *WC Experience* conveys is not just expressed (by a band) in Brabant, but elsewhere as well. For audiences of *WC Experience*, anti-establishment and Brabantish sentiments are entangled with each other and are impossible to disconnect, but when observed from a distance, they are strikingly similar to expressions in other regions.

Conclusions

People constantly move across scales from local to transnational and global, even simultaneously and most often unconsciously. In this chapter with regard to proximity, we observed how people think they are acting on one scale (the region Brabant), but may in reality, act on another scale (a more localized version) or both

of these scales. People's sense of Brabant is entangled with their proximate locality. Brabant is that which is proximate and familiar. In the previous chapter, I observed that there was no increase or decrease of people attaching themselves to their region. This chapter has shown that this makes sense because the region is the close, familiar, proximate surroundings. While the 'content' of this proximity might have changed, as Brabant has incorporated elements from global scales, it still remains the familiar proximate surroundings.

Moreover, some processes that are characterized as local (e.g. *New Kids*) are entangled with more general global scripts (e.g. of anti-social individuals, similar to white trash or chavs). Identification thus draws on local features and features occurring at higher, regional, national, and global scales, even simultaneously. Even when explicitly talking about a different scale, people's ideas are still informed by the other scales. Indeed, 'there are multiple, overlapping networks of experience that locate the nation at domestic, local, regional and national scales within a dense matrix of interspatiality' (Edensor, 2006, p. 537). This is similar to how the region is located at different scales. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that when asking what people consider 'their region', they may give diverse responses as to one it may constitute West Brabant and to another their municipality. This diversity of interpretation also applies when a more specific geographical concept such as Brabant is used. Brabant may be 'bordered' when explicitly asking and thinking about it, but when discussing Brabant, people may refer to what is familiar and proximate to them. The focus groups, the examination of *New Kids,* and the song from *WC Experience* all illustrate the different aspects that come together when communicating about Brabant. They may communicate 'Brabant' but actually base themselves on more local repertoires, and as a result, do not resonate among the entire province as Brabantish. *New Kids* and *WC Experience* are considered Brabantish by some, for various reasons that are more related to the specific locality, than for Brabant in its entirety. Dialect, for instance, is more specific, and so are the locations that are used. In a similar way, we will see in the sixth chapter on *Consuming Brabant through Smeris* that the city of Tilburg and the province of Brabant are often interchangeably used by both my respondents and within the series *Smeris*.

New Kids and *WC Experience* are often connected to Brabant despite the fact that these Brabantish aspects are highly entangled with trailer trash repertoires and rural farmers' sentiments. Part of this might be because Brabant is already associated with those kind of repertoires and stereotypes, as can be noted from my elaboration on Brabant's rural connotation in the second chapter. Often, people attribute differences to locality, to where people are from, when it might actually be something other than locality. It could be something specific (e.g. a family's tradition), something larger (e.g. Western European), or something cultural (e.g. a different subculture). This can occur for traditions, customs, behaviour, as well as linguistic aspects. Linguistically, people may think that words that have been made

up in a family are part of a (different) dialect. This is not to say that place does not play a role at all, but it may at times be overestimated in everyday speech.

Identities are chronotopically organized as how exactly they are enacted depends on the specific context – time and space – in which they are articulated (Blommaert, 2015a, 2015b; Blommaert & De Fina, in press). Together, different identity repertoires communicate who one is. When speaking about identities connected to places, such as identification with Brabant, it is proximity that plays a greater role. In people's symbolic and mental map of Brabant, their own location forms the centre, regardless of whether this is geographically located in the east, middle, or west of Brabant. People use their own proximate surroundings to define what Brabantish identities are to them. While speaking explicitly about Brabant, people may still be informed by their local understandings. In this discussion on proximity, we have seen that Brabant becomes what is proximate, what is close. The term 'Brabant' may be attributed to that which may in fact be more local proximate surroundings. This shows that such scales are not as evidently separated and clearly defined as these terms might suggest. While speaking about 'scales' might suggest an ability to disentangle different scales, they should be seen within their context.

This synthesis of various scales does not only apply to regional identities, but also to identification at other scales. I would even suggest that all identities are determined by the proximate elements as identities are created in interaction and are based on personal experiences. As experiences are local, identities also become locally based, on proximate elements. In my case of Brabant, proximity becomes clear in the physically close encounters, but for other types of identities, such aspects may be found in what is mentally or symbolically proximate. Even among those distancing themselves from being Brabantish themselves, their proximate surroundings partly defined what Brabantishness means. Locality is the context in which the process of identification occurs. In the case of geographically based identities, proximity may be more important, and perhaps more explicit, than in other types of social and cultural identities, because regional identities are about one's residence in an area. Scholars have stressed that context is important for the way in which identities are understood. My research illustrates how proximity, physical but perhaps also symbolic proximity, plays a role in people's identification with a region, and the labelling of a region, even when explicitly talking about a larger region (Brabant). Thus, in terms of how identities are negotiated in everyday life, we see that when people refer to Brabant, they often do so through (unconsciously) referring to what is proximate to them as what is proximate is what is Brabantish.

Chapter 5

Constructing Brabant on Facebook

pictures: posts on the Facebook pages *Brabanders be like*,
Tilburgers be like and *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants*

Constructing Brabant on Facebook

In my previous chapters, I observed how attachment to one's region in Brabant has not changed much over the past decades. I described how proximity is an integral part of identification. I will now continue by elaborating on how regional identities are enacted. More specifically, I will look at this online. Many different ways of expressing oneself with a regional accent are enacted online too. In this chapter, I will be analysing posts distributed on several Facebook pages from Brabant, in order to examine how individuals have created a sense of the local, online. This chapter does not focus on whether or not local expressions are expressed online, but rather, how people communicate about locally rooted topics on the Facebook pages. Specifically, I will demonstrate how inhabitants' knowledge of these local elements contributes to their identification with their locality. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this knowledge is crucial in the construction of identity. It can equally help define and demonstrate an inhabitant's perception of regional or local belonging. The source for this knowledge comes from people's everyday life, but is visualized in the posts on these Facebook pages. Consequently, these posts are used to assert boundaries between local identities by including and excluding people. However, before exploring these Facebook pages in detail, I will elaborate on the existing literature on memes, humour, and localization of jokes.

Internet Jokes and Group Boundaries

While Internet memes may seem a new thing, 'many of the performative and communicative practices that spread via viral video "crazes" are not at all new, but are deeply situated in everyday, even mundane creative traditions' (Burgess, 2008, p. 108). The concept of a meme originated with Dawkins in 1976, when he compared cultural transmission to its biological counterpart. Here, meme refers to ideas or other small cultural units that spread through imitations from person to person, for instance melodies or catchphrases (Dawkins, 2006). In my case, I talk about Internet memes, and therefore not their offline equivalents. Shifman (2014, pp. 7-8), suggests to define Internet memes as:

(a) *a group of digital items sharing common characteristics* of content, form, and/or stance (b) that were created *with awareness of each other*; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed *via the Internet by many users*. (Italics in original)

This definition reveals that a meme is not a single image or item, but a collection of different items that share common characteristics. Moreover, this definition suggests that meme items are being remixed; in other words, an adapted version of a similar image is shared. This in contrast to 'virals', which are shared without being altered. A viral video, though, may inspire imitation and become part of a meme as well (e.g. *Gangnam style*) (Shifman, 2014).

Internet memes differ from traditional forms in their immediacy as someone else, far away, may be instantly confronted with a meme (Danung & Holloway-Attaway, 2008). Moreover, while with traditional memes, one may encounter a couple of items, it is easy to come across hundreds of digital items belonging to one meme (Shifman, 2014). A simple search on the Internet, which may be facilitated through a particular hashtag accompanied with a meme, gives you an overview of hundreds of items belonging to one meme. Moreover, for Internet memes, the creator of the meme seems to gain a role as the performative self becomes important. Creating and sharing an item can be a means both to express your uniqueness and to connect with others (Shifman, 2014). However, while this may apply to some memes, on several online platforms, such as 4chan,[50] it is unclear who creates a particular meme, or (as is the case with *Confession Bear*[51]) anonymity can contribute to a meme (Vickery, 2014). Though the author of a meme may be anonymous, sharing a meme through other means (e.g. on Facebook) may still be a way to express oneself. The performative self may play a role, particularly in the creation of memes that revolve around 'real-life' moments (e.g. planking).

Humour is central to memes (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Miltner, 2014; Shifman, 2014). Shifman (2014) distinguishes three dimensions which are useful to analyse within a specific meme: its content, form, and stance. Memes are frequently simple and of low quality, and do not aim to convey a realistic or beautiful picture. Instead, the focus is on the message, which is emphasized through this simplistic style (Börzsei, 2013). Not only are they frequently simple in form, but they may also be simple in content, as it may be easier to spread and take up simple messages (Shifman, 2014). Besides the content of the meme, the form of a meme may contribute to its humorous intent. For example, LOLCats[52] are per-

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[50] 4chan is, according to its website, 'a simple image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images anonymously'.

[51] *Confession Bear* is an advice animal. It is an image of a bear that is accompanied with confessions, often about taboos or controversial topics.

[52] LOLCats is a type of meme. It contains a photo of a cat with text on it in broken English known as lolspeak (e.g. I can has cheezburger).

ceived as funny because cats are attributed with humanlike characteristics. Not conforming to the style of the genre may, in itself, ruin it for some people as the generic stylizations are an integral part of the humour (Miltner, 2014). Unlike traditional jokes, memes may use multiple forms of media (text, images, sound, and movement) to construct humour (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2015). Not only are they frequently multimodal, successful memes often have a rich intertextuality, with references to other aspects of popular culture or other memes.

While aspects such as humour and simplicity seem to contribute to a meme's success (Shifman, 2014), the success of particular memes lies not in content alone; the social world in which they operate also matters (Varis & Blommaert, 2015). Memes can tell us something about the (sub)culture in which they are spread as 'memes diffuse from person to person, but shape and reflect general social mindsets' (Shifman, 2014, p. 4). Miltner's (2014) research on LOLCats illustrates how the meaning of a meme may change as different people start to use it. At first, LOLCats were created by MemeGeeks, who are nerds interested in the broader meme and Internet culture. For them, LOLCats was originally governed by the 'logic of lulz', meaning a collective mocking on expressions of emotions and seriousness. They were an in-joke for aspects related to Internet culture that only technologically savvy people could understand. In contrast, when LOLCats became more popular, it was adopted by a new type of user, the CheezFrenz, who are typically ageing women whose interest for LOLCats mainly stems from their affinity with cats. They created a community of earnest people who were often technologically incompetent. As such, it illustrates how memes' cultural meaning may change over time (Miltner, 2014). The images themselves are important, but the meaning of these images may change as different people use it. Memes about localities may generate quite different meanings depending on the users (e.g. inhabitants or outsiders). Even though the form of the meme may remain the same, and thus they seem similar, the meaning may be quite different (e.g. derogatory or celebratory).

Humour and Community

As I have said, an important part of memes is humour. This can be a way to emphasise and maintain identities (Jenkins, 2011; Kuipers, 2001; Vucetic, 2004). However, jokes 'may *reflect* and *reproduce* existing local identifications – they may even contribute to their *redefinition* – but it is implausible that they *create* them' (Jenkins, 2011, p. 67, emphasis in original). Two types of jokes are illustrative of this. First, jokes that require specific knowledge can foster communal ties, as outsiders do not understand them (Kuipers, 2009; Miltner, 2014). Indeed, this also works outside of humour, as group markers that are only understood by an in-group can strengthen boundaries. Bonding may be facilitated through a specific language (e.g. Lolspeak, Tilburgian) or other types of shared knowledge neces-

sary to encode a message (cf. ethnic humour, Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2015). Bonding occurs, not only through the shared knowledge needed to understand the message, but also through the shared experience of having something in common (Kuipers, 2009). For instance, Lolspeak as a shared practice created and enforced group boundaries. More specifically, for CheezFrenz, using Lolspeak properly is a way to demonstrate and observe investment in the community; thereby it enables people to observe who belongs to the community and who does not. For MemeGeeks, the use of Lolspeak created and demonstrated belonging to Internet culture (Miltner, 2014). In this case, it is a specific language, Lolspeak, that is shared by a community, but it can also be other forms of shared practices or other specific knowledge required to encode these message that can facilitate bonding between users (cf. ethnic humour, Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2015).

Second, jokes with stereotypes can reinforce particular boundaries and social identities. However, stating that stereotypes in humour necessarily enforce these stereotypes undermines the ambiguity of jokes and their multiple interpretations (Kuipers, 2001). Jokes can function as both sword, stabbing another with jokes in a more aggressive way, or as a shield, protecting and expressing pride. The stance can change depending on the identity of the joke-teller. Instead of reinforcing and ridiculing identities, a self-deprecating joke may be told to convey pride. A seemingly negative trait may be interpreted as a positive one (Davies, 1991; Rappoport, 2005). A pun about drunken Brabantish bastards may also be interpreted as a joke about cheerful outgoing Brabanders. Humour can become a tool against prejudice. Thus, a joke's interpretation depends on the context. By using jokes as a shield, through irony, through pride, or in a context without a serious threat, humour may supersede the potential negative connotations (Rappoport, 2005).

Making Jokes Specific to a Local Context

Universal jokes are often adjusted to particular contexts to make them resonate among the people consuming the jokes. Some aspects, such as names, may be adapted to reflect a culture better. For instance, a joke about dumb soccer players in the Netherlands may translate in the U.S. to American football players (Jenkins, 2011; Kuipers, 2001). Online, translations of jokes reflect a similar pattern, as the general content of the joke was similar while concepts or names may differ. Jokes may be adjusted to the local sphere through replacing items with their local equivalents where appropriate, adding cultural unique elements, or removing parts that do not resonate in the culture in which the joke is translated too (Shifman, Levy, & Thelwall, 2014).

Localization can also be featured in multi-media adaptations. For instance, the music video, *Gangnam style* has been adapted to many different contexts, and

therefore loaded with new culture-specific meanings (Kustritz, 2015; Shifman, 2014). In the previous chapter, I elaborated on *Lul Brabants mee main*, which was one of the many parodies of a popular Dutch song. Such adaptations do not necessarily mimic the same meaning as the original. The parodies of *Gangnam Style* did not share the mockery of rich Koreans. Whereas verbal jokes frequently lack references to the global variants, with multi-media adaptions this is often different. As memes, they belong to a larger collection that is created in aware-ness of each other. Part of its success is derived from the embeddedness within this collection. Most people recognize that a local cover of *Gangnam style* is a remake, and as a result, it preserves ties with the original (Shifman, 2014). Similarly, people recognise that *Lul Brabants mee main* from the previous chapter was part of a larger collection as this comment illustrates: 'Hahaha, I was already looking forward to this version :p.'

In a recent article, Boxman-Shabtai and Shifman (2016) examined the articula-tion of locality in visual-digital humour in Israel. Most of the content of the hu-morous items were not specific to Israel, but related to general subjects such as humour involving sex differences and cats. Still though, the majority was articu-lated in Hebrew giving it some nationalistic flavour. In analysing how the national was incorporated in the produced content, they characterized five forms of local affinity. Two differences are most notable, between local (produced in Israel or by Israeli) and localized text (adjusted from non-Israeli texts) and between overt and covert forms of incorporating the nation. First, *presumed locality* incorporated the nation implicitly through banal elements in local text. The familiarity and identification makes it clearly Israeli, without explicitly refer-encing Israel. Second, *dramatized locality* includes jokes that explicitly marked and reflected upon the Israeli aspects. For instance, a list summing up what it means to be Israeli. While the content may seem specific to the locality, the form of such humour is far from unique. '[W]hile the content of this humor actively and explicitly delineates a sense of locality, the form in itself is far from unique to a specific locale' (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2016, p. 13). Indeed, the form of this joke can also be found about Brabant. For instance, one list recites '13 things that you should know if you are going to date a woman from Brabant.'[53] Third, *clandestine localization* refers to how texts are localized with minimum changes. Sometimes, the same pictures were used and only the caption alongside it was changed, thus framing it within an Israeli context. Fourth, with *conspicuous localization,* texts explicitly use foreign elements but attach local meaning to it. Intertextuality, mimesis, and parody play a large role here. Instead of hiding the foreignness, it is referenced and appears next to the local addition. For instance, the previously mentioned parodies of *Gangnam style* may have local meaning next to the clearly foreignness of the original. A new text may be dubbed on a

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[53] http://www.cosmopolitan.nl/liefde-en-sex/a151144/dingen-die-je-moet-weten-als-je-gaat-daten-met-een-vrouw-uit-brabant/

Disney movie, referencing both popular culture and, with the content of the new dubbed conversation, add local meaning to the situation. This, again, shows how different scales of identification may be communicated alongside each other. Finally, the category of *ex(im)ported localization* did not fit the two dimensions of local/localized and overt/covert as it suggested a circular cultural flow. It documented and celebrated the use of Israeli exports in the global sphere (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2016).

On the local Brabant Facebook pages, both of these local and localized topics may be used. Jokes may be adjusted to fit the local aspects or local or regional stereotypes may be incorporated. In general, memes may use stereotypes and ridicule different types of identities such as social class (e.g. *Sheltering Suburban Mom*), subcultures (e.g. *Hipster Barista*, *Emo Dad*), and nations/regions (e.g. *High Expectations Asian Father, Merry Mexican*). Moreover, some more general templates work with the idea of stereotypes such as 'Shit X Say' (e.g. *Shit Academics Say, Shit White Girls Say*), 'How people view me after I say I'm X' (e.g. *How people view me after I say I'm Russian, How people view me after I say I play WOW*[54]), and 'X Be Like' (e.g. *Bitches Be Like*). I specifically focus on derivatives of *X Be Like*. According to KnowYourMeme,[55] this formula 'is an expression that is typically used as a preface to describe various cliché behaviors [sic] and catchphrases associated with a specific group of people' (KnowYourMeme, 2013). This *Be Like* meme mocks specific identities (e.g. 'bitches', 'students', 'Brabanders') by using characteristics of that group, including (but not limited to) stereotypes. Some memes may be created by outsiders, who ridicule specific identities. These, often negative portrayals, may create a common disaffiliation for this particular group and people may position themselves as outsiders of that group. However, these memes can also be created by and for the in-groups themselves, which is the case for the *'Inhabitants' Be Like* pages.

While the *'Inhabitants' Be Like* pages focus mostly on one meme, the *Be Like* meme, which is reiterated in different derivatives, and thus constantly remixed most notably by the administrators, the Facebook page *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* (9GAG Brabantish Style) shares different memes and other jokes. Accordingly, the presence of such meme pages on Facebook is quite different from the hierarchy and structure on platforms such as reddit,[56] 4chan, or 9GAG.[57] These pages thrived on Facebook, rather than elsewhere on the Internet, which may be due to the specific, rather small audience targeted by these particular memes: a specific city or village, or at most an entire province. As a result, people

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[54] WOW is the massive multiplayer online role-playing-game 'World of Warcraft'.

[55] According to its website, 'Know Your Meme is a website dedicated to documenting Internet phenomena: viral videos, image macros, catchphrases, web celebs and more.'

[56] Reddit is a social news website, where registered users can post in different bulletin boards.

[57] 9Gag is a popular online platform, where many memes are shared. People can upload and upvote content they like.

share memes with their own Facebook friends, rather than with another community. Administrators also play an important role because of Facebook's affordances; posts by the administrators will be more prominent than posts from people posting messages to the page. Consequently, administrators are quite powerful in their conceptualizations. People can send in their own posts as well, and the administrator of the page may repost these, possibly with an acknowledgement to the creator.

Method

To analyse these Facebook posts I combined qualitative and quantitative analyses. The qualitative part focuses on understanding the images and the context in which they are created and consumed, whereas the quantitative analysis focuses more on the effect of these themes and the differences between the pages. I collected messages posted on *Bosschenaren Be Like, Haarenaren Be Like, Tilburgers Be Like, Brabanders Be Like,* and *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants*. These different pages give a variety of expressions, as two big cities ('s-Hertogenbosch and its inhabitants Bosschenaren, and Tilburg/Tilburgers), a small village (Haaren/Haarenaren), and the region (Brabant/Brabanders) are included. I collected data through the application *Netvizz* (Rieder, 2013) from the rise of the page until 20 October 2014.[58] Additionally, I have used information from other Brabantish *Be Like* Facebook pages including *Bredanaars Be Like*, *Eindhovenaren Be Like,* and *Zevenbergen Be Like*, and also pages from places outside of Brabant such as *Rotterdammerts Be Like*[59] and *Emmenaren Be Like.* A codebook that was data-driven was created to make a systematic analysis of the posts. All posts posted by *Be Like* pages were coded, amounting to 424 posts. Only the posts created by the page with type 'photo' were taken from *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants*. Subsequently, from the 720 posts, a random sample of 300 was drawn (through SPSS) and coded.

Besides myself, Visser (2014) first categorized different *Be Like* messages on particular themes. Subsequently, these categorizations were compared and formed the basis of a list with codes. After refining these codes through discussion with colleagues and affirming they were understood in the same way, a research assistant (Aafke Lettinga) and I coded 40 posts. Besides being coded on these themes, the number of words and the number of non-standard Dutch words in the caption and as added text on the image were counted. After this test, the codes were further refined and discussed to improve reliability.

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[58] This is from the beginning of January/February 2014 for the *Be Like* pages and 12 December 2012 for *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants*.

[59] This refers to the city of Rotterdam. When speaking in Rotterdams, many 't's are added at the end of a word, including the word Rotterdam.

The research assistant coded 107 and I coded 677 posts. The previously coded posts for the initial reliability test were also included and were thus coded for a second time. To determine the intercoder reliability, a random sample of 60 posts (15 from each *Be Like* page) were coded by both of us. To calculate the intercoder reliability a macro was used in SPSS (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Based on these codes, I constructed several variables. I created the variable 'local topic' combining several local topics and the variable 'exuberant' as a combination of the codes alcohol, smoking and drugs, and food. Table 5.1 reports the intercoder reliability of the codes and the constructed variables. The Krippendorf's alpha of the separate codes of 'local topics' ranged from 0.6610 to 1.[60]

Table 5.1 Intercoder reliability in the sample (N=60)

Code/variable	Krippendorff's alpha	Percent agreement
Number of words in caption	0.9950	0.933
Number of non-standard Dutch words in caption	0.9275	0.950
Number of words in image	0.9859	0.933
Number of non-standard Dutch words in image	0.9321	0.833
Does the joke, when translated to standard-Dutch, still make sense?	0.8001	0.900
Word joke	0.7620	0.933
Expression / Saying	0.7769	0.900
Local topic *(constructed)*	0.9332	0.967
'Exuberant' *(constructed)*	0.9476	0.983
Do only locals recognize the place, person, custom, etc.?	0.5179	0.767

The disagreements in coding were examined, discussed, and corrected where I had the ultimate decision. Additionally, since some codes did not occur in the sample for the intercoder reliability, all posts in the data with these codes were reaffirmed. No corrections were made with regard to these codes. Moreover, because of the low reliability of the 'Do only locals recognize the place, person, custom, etc.', I checked all instances by the second coder (two were changed).

For the effects of the codes on engagements, I have only taken into account the images and jokes posted, excluding other types of posts such as videos, statuses about achieving a number of likes, and the sharing of an event. The analysis includes two jokes posted without an image and cover photo updates. The codes were combined with the number of likes, comments, and shares collected via *Netvizz*. A variable for engagement was created which sums the

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[60] The Krippendorff's alpha of 0.6610 was on 'language as topic' where the coders disagreed only once. As the code rarely occurs this harms the reliability more drastically. If desired, I will gladly supply the other intercoder reliability statistics.

number of likes the post received, the number of comments, and the number of shares. As the regression standardized residual of engagement is skewed to the left, a natural logarithm (ln) transformation was computed from the engagement variable after adding 'one' to it.

Furthermore, I analysed the Facebook posts and comments in a qualitative way interpreting the posts beyond the strict categories developed for the quantitative analysis. This allowed me to bridge several themes and elements and to elaborate on the context in which they are created, posted, liked, and shared. In this more qualitative analysis, I have used Shifman's (2014) differentiation of content, form, and stance to enhance my understanding of these posts.

Local Topics: Insider's Knowledge and Localebrities

The stance of the posts on the *Be Like* Facebook pages is generally not derogatory, but instead seem to celebrate one's city or region. Few stereotypes are reproduced and when they occur, they often coincide with other localized elements, such as *Carnaval*, a specific brand, or particular expressions in dialect. For example, the saying: '*Wannu boer niej kent da vreêttie nie*' (What a farmer does not know, he does not eat) from *Brabanders Be Like* contains many dialect words. The most frequently used stereotype is related to alcohol use (approximately 8%, no significant differences between the pages). However, while this could be related to Brabant, it can also reflect Facebook use (Kolek & Saunders, 2008) and meme culture. These posts may be simultaneously part of other memes (e.g. *Drunk Baby*) or incorporate humorous personifications of animals (e.g. a bear leaning on a table). However, though few stereotypes are incorporated, the *Be Like* pages use local topics extensively.

Negen-gag op z'n Brabants, however, often lacks a Brabantish link. This page contains more sexual/toilet humour, and is often derogatory to women, which is sometimes, stereotypically, but indirectly linked to Brabant. The less intense relationship with Brabantish topics may explain its popularity as Dutch people outside the province also share their posts. In October 2015, the owner of the *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* page transferred the administrator roles to someone else. Consequently, the tone of the page changed including more clickbait and less focus on Brabant. However, followers expressed their dissatisfaction and questioned the relationship to Brabant. This may also relate to the type of posts, as more clickbait was featured: catchy stories with 'surprising' endings. Whereas the previous posts, unrelated to Brabant, hardly generated questions on the relation to Brabant, people started to write comments such as: 'Where is the Brabantish humour? I'm a bit done with it. Or am I the only one?' and: 'What the fuck is the relation to Brabant?????' This suggests the type of humour (i.e. not clickbait) combined with its Brabantish element is key to the popularity of the page.

In contrast to *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants*, posts on the *Be Like* pages frequently include specific elements related to the province of Brabant or the town. For instance, Figure 5.1a features a post from *Bosschenaren Be Like* of a *Bossche Bol* stating '*Bosschenaren Be Like* ... having a nice taste of culture.' 's-Hertogenbosch is known nation-wide for this large chocolate profiterole filled with whipped cream. The text plays with the idea that you can experience 's-Hertogenbosch by tasting its chocolate pastry. Figure 5.1b is another example of a local subject featuring Frans Bauer, a nationally renowned singer from Brabant, on a small odd bike. The text on the image states '*Brabanders Be Like* ... Tour de Frans' a play on the words *France,* from the annual biking race, *Tour de France* and the name of the singer, *Frans*. This same joke appeared on Dumpert, a popular Dutch website, where users can upload their own (funny) videos and images, and the joke is used more often in national contexts. Both examples thus resonate among a national audience. While Figure 5.1a with the chocolate pastry is still anchored within a Bossche culture, the Frans Bauer example can be consumed outside of this context. People outside of Brabant may be equally likely to enjoy it. Humour seems to justify its weak tie to Brabant.

Figure 5.1a *Bosschenaren be like:*
Having a nice taste of culture

Figure 5.1b *Brabanders be like*:
Tour de Frans

In-jokes and Insider's Knowledge

For other jokes, outside recognition is less evident. One post contains a specific cafe terrace in Haaren accompanied by the text: '*Haarenaren Be Like* ... what is this? The basement closed?' An inhabitant explained to me that it is unusual for this basement café to be closed on Sundays and thus many inhabitants are

astonished when this happens. While as an outsider, I could guess its meaning, this image did not appeal to me since I lacked the necessary familiarity with the scene and location to enjoy the image. Recognition seems key. This recognition is also visible within the responses to such posts. People sometimes elaborated with some extra information, but mostly this recognition was expressed in just a few words (e.g. 'but it is like that haha', 'remember this?').

A different example from *Tilburgers Be Like* is an image of some people together somewhere in a lower-class neighbourhood of Tilburg, standing in front of an excavator. The text on the image stated: 'What money? … I don't know anything, pal, we're just enjoying the weather here.' This image refers to a specific moment during the demolishing of building in this neighbourhood, when thousands of American dollars were dug up from the ground. Consequently, dollar bills flew through the streets. Many people came to watch and grab some of it (Omroep Brabant, 2013).

Understanding and appreciating these two images requires some sort of inside knowledge. As such, the posts on these pages can create and foster this common feeling and embrace recognisability. Celebrating 'Oude Sunderklaas' on Texel implicitly indicated 'We are Texelians and we know what is going on here' (Van Ginkel, 2007, p. 52), and engaging with these Facebook posts invokes a similar sentiment. Most of these relate to the *presumed locality* as 'their local appeal was built … on readers' intimate acquaintance with the topics presented' (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2016, p. 11). Although the *Bossche Bol* can also create some common feeling for this typical dish and 's-Hertogenbosch in general, these types of in-jokes can enhance the shared feeling for a place even further by sharing similar experiences and excluding others from enjoying these posts. More specifically, this latter image of the money floating around may be unfamiliar not only to those outside Tilburg, but perhaps also to many inhabitants of Tilburg as it requires knowledge of a specific event. As such, it embraces perhaps an even smaller community of a neighbourhood in Tilburg. While many of these local knowledge elements contain covert forms of the locality, simultaneously they often explicitly reflect upon the city, village, or province. Particularly on the *Be Like* pages where this is an integral part of their existence.

Table 5.2 indicates the use of local topics by the different pages. *Tilburgers Be Like, Brabanders Be Like,* and *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* use fewer local topics that are only recognizable to Tilburgers or Brabanders. This could be partly due to the fact that fewer elements exist that both resonate among most Brabanders and are exclusive to Brabanders. Additionally, instead of using local topics, *Tilburgers Be Like* contains a large percentage of dialect, which I will come back to later. In line with this use of dialect, posts on both *Brabanders Be Like* and *Tilburgers Be Like* more frequently contain an expression or puns. In my analysis, I separated language use from the content itself, but indeed expressions and puns can be, but are not necessarily, a different type of local topic.

On *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants,* a change over time can be observed. While in the beginning, the administrators of *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* posted mostly images that contained Brabantish language, puns, and expressions (which often, though not always would still make sense when translated to standard Dutch), they expanded to a broader terrain. This may be because after a couple of months, they 'ran out' of specifically Brabantish topics, and had to resort to more general humour. Even later, as explained earlier, a new administrator was installed and the posts took an even different direction. This broader scope may also contribute to the fact they are by far the largest page of the five. They have a larger reach because the images they post require no specific knowledge, or do not even specifically refer to anything from Brabant, and therefore can (and will be) be shared by people outside of Brabant.

Table 5.2 Use of local elements by the different Facebook pages

	Brabanders	Haarenaren	Bosschenaren	Tilburgers	*Negen-gag*
Local elements	24 (39%)	25 (96%)***	48 (60%)*	74 (36%)	55 (20%)***
Only locals are familiar with it	1 (1.6%)	17 (65%)***	34 (43%)***	43 (21%)***	4 (1.4%)
Expression and/or pun	36 (59%)	1 (3.8%)***	19 (24%)***	83 (41%)*	101 (36%)***
Only locals understand this un-translatable pun or expression	10 (16%)	0 (0%)*	3 (3.8%)*	13 (6.4%)*	9 (3.2%)***
Known nationwide, not local topic, not expression or pun	9 (15%)	0 (0%)*	16 (20%)	62 (30%)*	140 (50%)***
Total number of posts	61 (100%)	26 (100%)	80 (100%)	204 (100%)	282 (100%)

Significantly different from 'Brabanders Be Like' at *≤0.05 **≤0.01 ***≤0.001 using Fisher's Exact Test

Even in such explicit expressions on the locations, 'the expressive dramatization of the local is underscored by cross-cultural similarity' (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2016, p. 12). Similar to what I discussed in the previous chapter on *New Kids*, posts with local topics may refer to a specific local custom, they may be based on more general aspects; universal jokes localized to a specific context. The locality is central, and the post is probably created in an effort to be local. Such images are not minimal alterations to existing posts and images, but do resemble existing jokes (whether online or offline) or discourses around jokes. For instance, *Bosschenaren Be Like* posted a picture with a specific bridge in 's-Hertogenbosch accompanied with text about being late. While this corresponds with a more general theme, the particularity of the image, the specific bridge used and the frequency with which one has to wait in front of a bridge in 's-Hertogenbosch, is what seems to make the item interesting to Bosschenaren. Many of the *Be Like* pages contain a post of a local fast food place with the accompanied text of 'dining out'. While the theme is more general, it appeals to a specific locality through using a particular local snack bar that people recognize. For locals, the

posts seem to contain multiple layers of meaning, one of which involves knowledge of the locality.

Moreover, while these posts are shared online, they are heavily entangled within the offline context. Indeed, online and offline are always intertwined, but this is very explicit here as often the offline context provides the insider's knowledge that is used by the individuals online. Without knowing the physical characteristics of this place or without having the experience of the content in everyday life, many of the local jokes are lost. The success of such jokes might lie in the fact that they are encountered on a frequent basis within the realm of everyday life. The recognition of the image is not because someone has encountered this once, but experienced this regularly, either in the present or in the past. The posts invoke memories. One local element in which this integration with daily (offline) life and recalling of memories becomes especially clear is through (famous) local inhabitants.

Local Characters

A popular type of local topic includes local famous persons, a type of 'localebrity' as McElroy and Williams (2011) call them. Rather than depending on media presence, such local figures are famous because of their street presence. They are often unknown outside of the area where they are from, and thus are excellent examples of topics concerning knowledge of the locality: 'Such characters can come to be viewed with affection or even pride, offering local colour and character and coming to symbolize or stand in for local identities and traits more broadly' (Williams, 2015, p. 12). The most popular images of *Tilburgers Be Like* and *Brabanders Be Like* focus on a local famous person. *Brabanders Be Like* shared a post on a well-known person who rides on his mobility scooter through the inner city of Eindhoven loudly proclaiming his affection for Jesus. Hence the text on the image states: '*Brabanders Be Like* ... we also have our own prophet!' *Tilburgers Be Like* claims 'our own 50 cent' a word play on the famous hip hop artist 50 Cent and this homeless man, who is known as 'half a euro' because that is what he often said while begging for money. Note also, how these images seem to be connected to each other as they both appropriate a celebrity. Brabanders' 'prophet' was posted on the 15th of January 2014, the homeless '50 cent', a day later, on the 16th of January. Both claimed to have their own (*onze eigen – onze èège*) version of a local hero. It would be no surprise if the image on '*Brabanders Be Like* inspired *Tilburgers Be Like* to include their local homeless person as meme items are by definition created in awareness of others, though of course people are rarely aware of *all* other items.

These posts on local characters are not intended to be derogatory, though some take them this way. Local characters are not necessarily seen as failures, especially when it is a (somewhat) self-chosen lifestyle such as the prophet of Brabant (cf. Blanket Man in Wellington, New Zealand Lloyd & McGovern, 2007).

Instead, recognition and familiarity play a key role. People recall moments in which they engaged with him or her. Especially concerning the prophet of *Brabanders Be Like*, numerous stories were told, not only regarding personal experiences, but also explaining who this man is and why he became this way. Recalling the memories seems, in itself, part of the appreciation of the post. In sum, people share their common experiences and give background details to people less familiar with this local character. Because of this display, they emphasize their status of being an inhabitant in the know.

Language Use as Insider's Knowledge

As can already be distilled from the preceding sections, these posts also include local language use. This use can be regarded as another type of insider's knowledge, as without this specific language knowledge some of the images are uninteresting and/or unintelligible. Around half of the words on the *Be Like* images are in standard Dutch. However, language use differs per page as can be observed in Table 5.3. *Tilburgers Be Like* uses significantly less standard Dutch than the other pages. For the *Tilburgers Be Like* page, only around five percent of the images containing text used no dialect. *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* had fewer dialect words than most *Be Like* pages. Three quarters of the words on the images from *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* were in standard Dutch.

Table 5.3 The use of dialect in the text on the images on the different pages

Percentage non-standard Dutch in image	Brabanders	Haarenaren	Bosschenaren	Tilburgers	*Negen-gag*
No text on image / no image	2 (3.3%)	1 (4%)	4 (5.0%)	10 (5.0%)	70 (25%)
0 – 20%	17 (28%)	13 (50%)	30 (38%)	11 (5.4%)	98 (35%)
20.01 – 40%	12 (23%)	5 (19%)	9 (11%)	29 (14%)	52 (18%)
40.01% – 80%	9 (15%)	2 (7.7%)	16 (20%)	51 (25%)	42 (15%)
60.01% – 80%	8 (13%)	5 (15%)	13 (16%)	51 (25%)	15 (5%)
80.01 – 100%	11 (18%)	1 (3.8%)	8 (10%)	50 (25%)	5 (1.8%)
Linear-by-linear association (including those with no text)		3.508 p=0.061	1.019 p=0.339	9.946 **p=0.002**	33.299 **p<0.001**
Kruskal-Wallis test on the exact percentage (excluding those with no text)		79.986 p=0.383	26.729 p=1.000	-97.719 **p<0.001**	88.018 **p=0.002**
Total (N)	61	26	80	202	282

Visser, Nortier, and Swanenberg (2015) have elaborated on the language use on a smaller sample of the different *Be Like* pages. Their analysis illustrates that the texts contain many different dialect markers. Most of these markers illustrate the pronunciation or are creative alternatives (e.g. *q* instead of *k*), although other

types of dialect markers were also identified. Additionally, the dialect use regularly drifted from the official traditional dialect grammar. The perception of using dialect, rather than using the correct dialect, is more important to the people. Such instances of exaggerated use of dialect may also be called hyperdialect (Visser et al., 2015). This is not only displayed on these Facebook pages, but also used by others, such as the comedian Braboneger who is an inhabitant of Tilburg with Surinamese origin (Swanenberg, forthcoming). People do not comment on these mistakes often, perhaps because they do not recognize these mistakes or because they do not mind this 'inauthentic' use of dialect.

The Popularity of Posts

The success of posts on these pages is probably largely due to the humorous pictures. The importance of humour of the shared images is also underscored in the comments as people frequently laugh ('haha') in the comments. Theoretically, its success can be explained in two opposite movements: on the one hand, locals may be more likely to share an image with insider's knowledge, on the other hand, non-locals may engage with an image that transcends Brabant's borders. However, since most images on *Brabanders Be Like, Bosschenaren Be Like,* and *Haarenaren Be Like* contain a literal reference to the location with the phrase, *'Inhabitants' Be Like*, the sharing of such an image by outsiders seems less likely. This differs from images on *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* as this phrase is not present on their images. Without literal references to Brabant in the image, a story that can be understood on a larger scale is consequently more easily shared, and its potential audience larger.

My regression analysis, reported in Table 5.4, illustrates that insider's knowledge on *Be Like* pages contributes to the success of a particular post. This success is expressed as the number of likes, comments, and shares, and suggests that people appreciate these communal understandings. Furthermore, the regression analysis indicates that the other type of insider's knowledge – language use – also contributes positively to engagement on the *Be Like* pages. Thus, this indicates that insider's knowledge is an appreciated asset to the posts. However, for *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* no effect of local knowledge is indicated, and language use has a reversed effect: more dialect corresponds with less engagement. This may be because people outside of Brabant may share these images too and because of the few posts with insider's knowledge. However, local topics are more popular on *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* suggesting some appreciation for Brabantish elements.

Table 5.4 Regression analysis on the natural logarithm of engagement with the Facebook posts (standardized coefficients)

		Be Like pages combined	*Tilburgers Be Like*	*Negen-gag*
Facebook page (Brabanders)	Haarenaren	**-0.399*****		
	Bosschenaren	0.065		
	Tilburgers	**-0.181***		
Joke works when translated to standard Dutch		**0.124***	0.138	0.064
No text on image		**-0.203*****	-0.096	**-0.142***
Percent dialect (in percentage)		**0.144****	**0.145***	**-0.238*****
Word joke		0.050	0.071	-0.414
Expression		-0.022	-0.118	-0.112
Local subject		0.036	0.007	**0.148***
'Exuberant' (alcohol, smoking and drugs, and food)		-0.026	0.006	-0.034
Only locals understand it		**0.156***	**0.213***	-0.039
Adjusted R Square		0.228	0.072	0.083
N		371	204	282

*Significant at *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001*

Contesting Local Topics: Applying Insider's Knowledge

While some form of localness seems to contribute to the success of the posts, images are not always passively consumed as people sometimes contest the content. As mentioned earlier, the norms of correct language use are rarely called upon. Yet, occasionally, a commenter may engage with the chosen language use. For instance, *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* posted a picture of a cartoon and wrote along in the caption: 'The Tour de France becomes more and more international' ('*Dn tour de frans word stids internassionoaler!*'). Someone responded to this with: 'You try too hard to make every word Brabantish… You can leave a word in *ABN* [standard Dutch] occasionally because "stids" does not exist.' This resulted in the following comment: 'It is about reading how you pronounce it… Nitpickers.' This last comment illustrates indeed that most of these posts are not about writing in 'correct' written dialect, but writing speech phonetically.

Another example is from *Tilburgers Be Like* on which someone commented: 'They have a real Tilburgian dictionary with the correct spelling. Maybe you should check it?' *Tilburgers Be Like* responded with: 'I know the marks [diacritics] have to be different but honestly, I don't feel like doing it and most people don't lie awake at night worrying about it.' Two other commenters agreed with the administrator of *Tilburgers Be Like*. The original commenter, however, still condemned the administrator: 'Nobody lies awake at night worrying about people starving in Africa either, but that doesn't make it less bad!' The administrator's response on *Tilburgers Be Like* is telling. The technical difference between creat-

ing an acute accent and grave accent is negligible; effort only plays a role when you have to look up the correct use. Accordingly, the comments illustrate that the administrator did not want to admit his fault and made up an excuse and/or he does not care about the mistake because it is beyond the point of the message. The form of the language markers is inferior to the stance it conveys: it is Tilburgian. The reply of *Tilburgers Be Like* supports the idea that, to the administrator and the people who agreed with him, the impression of dialect use seems more important than the authentic traditional use of dialect.

While some comments on mistakes are relatively innocent, people object more intensely when a mistake leads to associations with other locations. For example, a post from *Bredanaars Be Like* used the Tilburgian rather than Bredase way of saying 'this' (*Dè ga nie* instead of *Da ga nie*). Because of the rivalry between Breda and Tilburg, this was more problematic than other types of mistakes. Similarly, a post of a flower curtain with *Carnaval* posted on *Bosschenaren Be Like* was contested because some argued the photo was taken in Bergen op Zoom. Likewise, people objected a localebrity used on *Zevenbergen Be Like*. *Zevenbergen Be Like* shared an image of a born Zevenberger. The administrator, however, posted a photo of this person in Breda. Consequently, around 27 (out of the 111) comments responded how the photo was not in Zevenbergen but Breda and another 6 mentioned that he can be also be spotted in their city or village, that is neither Zevenbergen or Breda. Most of the comments mentioning Breda speak in a condescending way about using Breda. In effect, the rivalry between a village and its close bigger city was reproduced. This displays the insider's knowledge in a different way, as it is used after receiving incongruent information. Though, as some people, including the administrator of the page argue, the photo is about the person and people should stop whining about it being taken in Breda, the reactions clearly show that the image was not merely a picture of the person. It is both the person and the locality that are of importance here. These comments illustrate not only the disaffiliation with Tilburg, Bergen op Zoom, and Breda but people also display the use of insider's knowledge after receiving incongruent information.

Although some people comment on the language use on these Facebook pages, particularly with rivalry 'wrongs', these types of comments are not widespread. Indeed, the sentiment of the message is often more important than the form or whether this form is correct according to the traditional rules. However, when the function of the language or the image reflects another locality, the message communicates two conflicting messages. People then experience a disaffiliation with the other, undesirable locality. The posts function to reinforce and display local identities, and when the image or text is incongruent with that local identity, this is articulated to prevent a wrong association. Through that means, the image becomes not only a confirmation of insider's knowledge, but also a reproduction of it. In a sense, people display what it means to be a 'good' Tilbur-

ger, Brabander, etc. By doing so, one also displays a type of insider's knowledge, the knowledge of the discrepancy. By actively acting upon this knowledge, local belonging is displayed even more explicitly.

Such observations are not only found on these Facebook pages, where mainly local audiences are addressed, but can also be found elsewhere. I already mentioned that Braboneger's street Brabantish language, writing how he speaks, on Twitter does not resemble the traditional way of writing in dialect. However, this is not contested but functions more as indexical to his Brabantish identity (Swanenberg, forthcoming). Furthermore, in my examination of online response to *New Kids,* discussed in Chapter 4, I noticed how people sometimes did comment on the wrong spellings. Some of the responders on Flabber attempted to reconstruct some of the sentences used in the *New Kids* sketches. This led to some commentary. For instance, people commented on the use of '*houwdoe'* as a wrong misspelling of '*houdoe'* or the use of non-Brabantish words. The following response is on the sketch, entitled *Bus Station.* A couple is waiting for the bus and just before the bus arrives, the *New Kids* arrive and beat up this couple. Consequently, the couple misses the bus:

> No man, dumbass he says:
> "You missed your bus, darn muddler!"
> There is no 'thou' and especially no 'thee'. And in Brabantish you say "ye have" instead of "you have".
> Difficult right, that Dutch dialect?
> But for some reasons everyone understand it when a farmer mumbles something like "iet giet aon"… [a Friesian saying when the famous speed skating tour Elfstedentocht can start, wrongly spelled here as it is "it giet oan"]
> "and now back to your own country! Go!"
> (Response on Flabber to Season 3, Episode 13, December 2009)[61]

These responses invoke a pride in Brabant and seem to indicate a sentiment of: 'This is my Brabantish and you are using it wrongly.' A large part of the comments is full of spelling and grammar mistakes. If, with that many mistakes, people still comment on the inaccurate dialect use, it shows how important it is to those people. It illustrates that some users from Brabant think their Brabantish is authentic and others, who do not possess these skills, have no rights to write in

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[61] Original Dutch text:

Nee man, dufkop, hij zegt:
"Ge het oe bus gemist, verrekte koekwaus!"
er komt geen "gij" in voor, en al zeker geen "uw". En in Brabants zeg je "ge het" ipv "je hebt".
Lastig he, dat Nederlands dialect?
Maar om een of andere reden verstaat iedereen het wel als een boer met kiespijn mompelt "iet giet aon"…
"en nou terug naar oe eige land! Hup!"

Brabantish. More specifically, according to these posters, non-Brabanders cannot write in Brabantish.

What is different in these Facebook pages is *who* is speaking here. On Facebook, the local community is addressed. These Facebook images are mainly shared within a local or regional community and it can be thus assumed that the maker of the post is also from that local area. Through other means, the author of the posts also indicates his or her localness and understanding of the local, for instance, because the topic is local or localized. This is not the case in the comments of *New Kids* where people do not articulate their authority on a Brabantish subject through other means. People dismiss the attempts of non-locals to write in dialect. Similarly, in the previous chapter we saw that *WC Experience*'s use of Brabantish in the song *Lul Brabants mee main* was not recognized as genuine by those unaware of the Brabantishness of *WC Experience* was. It is okay for Brabanders to make mistakes, at least to some, but not for non-Brabanders to attempt to speak in dialect.

Sharing My 'Town', Sharing It with You

So far, I have elaborated on the images that are posted on these pages, and some of the responses towards these images. Nevertheless, what is also important to think about is the way in which people share these images. Therefore, I want to elaborate on the interaction occurring on these pages.

In the comments, people frequently refer to recognizing the situation that the post reveals. While some elaborated on the image and provided some extra information, this recognition was fundamentally expressed in just a few words: 90% of the comments were 12 words or shorter. More specifically, people frequently 'tagged' other Facebook users in the comments. In fact, in my sample of the comments I analysed, around two-third of the *Be Like* pages contained the name of another person (For *Haarenearen Be Like* this is only half). The grant majority of these comments with tags only contains one or multiple names without any further text. *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* contained fewer posts that tagged another person, but this could be because of the time span. When only considering comments in 2014, there is no significant difference in the use of tags on *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* compared to *Brabanders Be Like, Tilburgers Be Like,* and *Bosschenaren Be Like*. This may suggest that the practice of tagging was more popular in 2014 than in 2013.[62]

In line with what Miltner (2014) found in her research about LOLCats, people who tag someone else may do this for the pleasure of the person tagged because they think the other will laugh at it, recognize it, or appreciate it in some other

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[62] This is perhaps because of some changes on Facebook itself, making it easier, or more apparent, to tag others in comments.

way. An experiment suggested that tagging a friend in when sharing news content was associated with a higher sense of community (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015). While many of the tags simply tag someone else with no additional comment, some of them include a short sentence or some words: 'Seems recognizable to me', 'remember this?', 'see this', 'look', 'hahaha'. As mentioned before, the image can be a way of sharing and recalling specific memories. Moreover, in this case, people may tag, and thus share, with someone else because they feel that the aspect of the (local) culture reflects that person. This is not necessarily one's regional identity in its entirety, but may refer to this situation explicitly. Instead of sharing this image to display and reinforce one's own identity, it may also be explicitly someone else's identity, or the identity of the tagger and tagged: 'could have easily been [name] xd', '[name], this one fits you well. Always late!' and, '[name], this seems a bit like what [name] always does… haha.' Here, the particular topic of the post is connected to a person, and, (implicitly) accompanied with this, are the identities of that locality or region.

While tagging one person indicates that someone shares a post with one or multiple persons in particular, these posts are also frequently liked and shared suggesting people confront more friends with it. While people may like and engage with it because they think it is humorous and/or recognize the situation or topic, as a side effect they display their own local or regional identity and affinity towards it. Indeed, this can also be the intention of sharing the post, rather than a side effect.

Conclusions: Laughing with the Locals

In my analysis of the localized Facebook posts, I highlighted several points. Namely that, although the *form* of the *Be Like* meme may be similar, the *stance* seems quite different from other *Be Like* memes such as *Bitches Be Like,* which is used mainly as a tool for mockery by outsiders. At first, one may think that the stereotypes on such local pages foster communal feelings. However, it seems that not so much the stereotypes about Brabant and the locality are posted; rather, posts containing implicit shared knowledge are spread and may contribute to a communal feeling. The analysis indicated that, in line with existing research (Kuipers, 2009; Miltner, 2014), communal ties may be strengthened through sharing recognisable situations online. A familiarity with the locality and shared symbols foster a local affinity. Simultaneously, this implicit knowledge is, from time to time, explicitly connected to the locality by addressing the place overtly. Sharing recognisable funny situations is one of the key elements of these pages, whether this is recognizing a local place, a local custom or party (e.g. *Carnaval*), a situation (e.g. a cafe being closed), or a person (e.g. a local character). Specifically, insider's knowledge can contribute to this local identity, as outsiders may not be aware of these existing local practices and places. These (online) shared posts

are rooted in everyday experience as people recognize the content. People often have not experienced the shared posts once, but repeatedly. Accordingly, by sharing with others these recognisable spaces or experiences, we can see processes of exclusion and inclusion at work. People may feel excluded, as they do not get it, as they do not possess the knowledge of the group markers. Simultaneously, exclusion also implies inclusion. Those in-the-know people may elaborate upon and demonstrate their local knowledge (e.g. by providing details on a local character), and by this means emphasize that they are 'good' inhabitants: they know what is going on in their surroundings. By sharing posts, people's friends may respond to the images with recognition and then start sharing their own stories as well; as a result, people recall memories and create a common feeling among the group. This group may be one's group of friends, or a broader sense of community within their locality.

Using local knowledge illustrates how the Facebook pages are entangled within the everyday reality of the people living in those areas. The content of the online photos may be encountered in the physical realm (daily). This is especially true for the popular posts of local characters but also other elements (e.g. a bridge, a roundabout) may be encountered outside of these social media in the immediate surroundings of the inhabitants. It may be the recognition of seeing it not once or twice, but repeatedly, that makes the images more fun. The images are embedded within people's own proximate familiar surroundings.

Posts are indeed not only embedded within people's surroundings through the familiarity of the images posted, but these jokes, and sharing recognisable or funny situations, can also often be found offline. In essence, these online posts do not differ so much from offline counterparts. For instance, local jokes were not new, but were often already told in a form of a verbal joke. For instance, the pun of *witte geit* is an long-standing joke, even a Brabantish board game is named after it. Simultaneously, I observed that many of the features resemble other online forms of humour. For instance, they may incorporate image macros from other memes (e.g. pictures of drunken people). Moreover, this shared knowledge is also iterated in other situations, in everyday life, but also in an organized fashion. The practice of *Tonpraten* or *Buutreednen,* associated with *Carnaval,* is a comedy act in which someone plays a larger-than-life character, who, in a humorous way, speaks about things happening in society. They are mostly performed in local dialect and the occurrences they speak about are often connected to local people, local events, and local politics. Also in this case, the knowledge and familiarity of the locality is often important to understand the jokes, and, to feel part of the in-crowd. Yet, similar to what occurs on these pages, often not every single pun iterated by a character may require a local insight to understand it. In this sense, the online posts on these Facebook pages resemble this offline counterpart.

Besides the content of such messages, another way of localizing an image may be through the added text written in dialect. Especially the administrators of *Tilburgers Be Like* seem to use this way of making the topics relevant to the local audience. Some of these include typical sayings that Tilburgers may use, while at other times it is just a translation. Similar to what occurs on other places (Swanenberg, forthcoming), the used dialect does not always follow the dialect norms. The impression of speaking dialect, in other words the impression of being local, is often more important than the correct ways of saying it. However, sometimes people do respond with normative rules of what is correct. These normative rules especially play a role when it is not just the impression of local dialect that is of concern, but when other competing local identities are involved. When the dialect or image of a rivalling city or village is used, the consequences of making a mistake in dialect are more severe. People want to justify, and emphasize, what they are not. They are *not* the other city or village, and in their articulation of this, they emphasize their own local identities and stress the local knowledge they possess.

However, we have also seen that, although the use of insider's knowledge contributes to the success of posts on the *Be Like* pages, many images are shared that have little or no link to Brabant. The importance of humour overshadows the necessity to be connected to Brabant. This also shows how *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* and the *Be Like* pages position themselves differently. The *Be Like* pages are clearly about the specific locality, although also referring to elements larger than their region. The *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* page, however, is in a similar style to 9GAG and uses images and videos that anyone may find interesting. Yet, my regression analysis illustrated that local topics, not requiring local insight, still gain more popularity than other topics on *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants*. Whereas a link with Brabant is sometimes made, it is more trivial than on the *Be Like* pages. *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* has a broader audience reach, which is made explicit in their biographical note on their Facebook page: 'The 9GAG Brabantish style, with Brabantish memes for the entire Brabant and people who also like us'. While the *Be Like* pages specifically target recognizable situations for the inhabitants, *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* aims to make people laugh and is not only aimed at Brabanders, but also people who are also fond of them. A link with Brabant is still important of course. Sometimes the legitimacy of that link depends on the type of humour used. Catchy and often misleading descriptions to videos do not legitimate identity links to Brabant, yet sex-related humour and silly dry humour does seem to fit the idea of Brabantish humour. Accordingly, it is a specific type of humour that for the original likers of *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* justifies a post's place, though unrelated to Brabant, on the Brabantish Facebook page.

Chapter 6

Consuming Brabant through Smeris

picture: still image from *Smeris*, Pupkin

CHAPTER 6

Consuming Brabant through Smeris

In the previous chapter, I elaborated on how inhabitants constructed their image of Brabant and of several cities or villages on a Facebook page and how the knowledge of these localities contributes to a sense of identification. Online, the local was given shape, but what happens when the traditional media feature one's locality? What happens if the periphery becomes the centre of attention on television? What happens when the places you know are broadcasted on national television?[63] Places in films and television series can have an important function. Like music, they can serve to underline and stress particular emotions of characters. Moreover, a location can be used as an extra-diegetic layer in which the beautiful and noteworthy places and images are captured on the screen (Waade, 2011b, p. 14). While some series incorporate a location merely as a backdrop, a place that could be set anywhere, other television series emphasize their landscape; the setting can also be a character. In the crime series genre, place often plays a significant role, as characters are moving through the city to fight the crime. The locations may be emphasized because of the necessity to describe the crime scenes, or an idyllic city may be contrasted against brutal violence of the crimes (Bollhöfer, 2007; Waade, 2011a, 2011b).

Television producers seem to have a clear preference for filming in a centre rather than the periphery. Indeed, part of this preference can be attributed to cost-efficiency, convenience, and the cooperation of municipalities. Castelló (2007), for instance, shows that in Catalan fiction, the centre of Barcelona is over-represented. However, sometimes series are situated in the periphery. After the remake of *Doctor Who* (2005–present) and *Torchwood* (2006–2011) the media landscape of the BBC seemed to change slightly in favour of the periphery of Wales (Blandford & Lacey, 2011). Local audiences thought that these series (*Torchwood* and *Doctor Who)* put their town of Cardiff on the map globally (Blandford & Lacey, 2011) and allowed them 'to play with the big boys of London' (Mills, 2008, p. 391). In the Dutch case, several series set in the periphery (albeit some still in an urban setting) have gained national success, such as the crime

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[63] A different version of this chapter is accepted for publication in a special issue on 'Locations in Television Series' in the journal *SERIES*.

series *Flikken Maastricht* (2007–present), *Hollands Hoop* (2014–present) and *Smeris* (2014–present).

While most Dutch television series take place in Amsterdam, the crime drama series *Smeris*, placed the town of Tilburg on the centre stage in its first season. *Smeris's* local audiences celebrated the use of Tilburg. Disappointment was high, however, when the second season moved to Amsterdam, the most common setting for Dutch television series. The second season, nevertheless, continued to refer to Tilburg and contrasted this 'peripheral' region against the 'centre', exemplified by Amsterdam. This dichotomy is presented not only as a physical move from the south of the Netherlands to the centre, but as a cultural difference as well. This move to Amsterdam makes this series particularly interesting as it contrasts two cities within one television series.

Through analysing the series itself and examining audience responses through Tweets and interviews, I aim to understand how audiences interpret a national series that takes place regionally. In this chapter, I examine how the city and region are given shape on television, but more specifically how people interpret these places in various ways, entangling aspects of real-life with their imagination. However, before going into those aspects, let me first introduce the television series.

The Case of Smeris and Tilburg

Smeris is a Dutch television series from *BNN* and produced by Pupkin. So far, the series has aired three seasons, in spring 2014 and 2015, and in the beginning of 2017.[64] The series revolves around two police officers, Theo Kamp and Willem Niessen, who initially play the typical good cop/bad cop routine. They get involved in the cannabis drugs scene in the first season, which eventually leads to a criminal network involved in hard drugs, women trafficking, and prostitution in the second season. The humorous dialogue between the two characters sets it apart and is an important component of this drama crime series. The two main actors are known in the Netherlands as the comedy and music duo *JURK!* and they also play many characters in the satirical programme, *Draadstaal*. *Smeris* makes references to these joint projects, often in subtle intertextual ways, as for instance, a popular character from a *Draadstaal* sketch is mentioned, or a sketch from *Draadstaal* is reworked as a joke told by one of the characters in *Smeris*.

The series *Smeris* surprised many with its high viewing ratings for a Dutch series on a public broadcasting network (around 1 million viewers) but this diminished after the first couple of episodes to around 700,000 viewers.[65]

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[64] The third season is not considered because it was not aired when I was conducting this research.

[65] These numbers include both viewers on the day itself and delayed views. *Smeris* has an above average share of delayed views. On average, 6% of the television watching in 2015 in the Netherlands was delayed viewing (Stichting KijkOnderzoek, 2016), whereas episodes in *Smeris* were viewed

The *Smeris* series actively plays with location. While the first season was mainly filmed in Tilburg and surroundings, the second season largely moved to Amsterdam; the third season moves partly back to Tilburg, largely filmed in Hilversum.[66] In the second season, and also the third season, some scenes still take place in Tilburg. As director and producer Pieter Kuijpers has said in an interview about a potential city for the third season: 'It also depends on which city we can visualize in a beautiful, original way. We intentionally tried to do that with Tilburg and Amsterdam as well' (Boulevard/ANP, 2015). In the first season, Tilburg formed the central place of action for the series. As such, *Smeris* purposely moved from the centre to the periphery. Producer Pieter Kuijpers (2014) explains that he wanted to produce a crime series in a 'normal' environment of everyday life, so that the series is about ourselves. Here, Kuijpers juxtaposes Amsterdam, particularly the canal district, as an area of high-class snobbery against the periphery, particularly Tilburg, as a blue-collar region inhabited by what he calls ordinary people (Kuijpers, 2014).

As mentioned earlier, Tilburg is the sixth largest city of the Netherlands. Tilburg itself is not a tourist destination and the city is often denigrated by both inhabitants and outsiders. This is important to note because it affects how (local) people perceive Tilburg within this series. The series is set within Tilburg, but seems to reflect the broader region of Brabant simultaneously. This interconnectedness between city and region expressed in the series was also seen in my interviews. This reflects the tendency of scales of identification to intertwine, as people may use Tilburg and Brabant interchangeably to refer to somewhat the same place.

Through several complementary methods, I set out to get a grasp of the local significance of this television series. My research consists of a combination of analysing the series and audience research. I conducted interviews with people who watched *Smeris* partly or completely. I was particularly interested in background actors and people whose house was featured on screen. To gather respondents I posted a message in a Facebook group for *Smeris* background actors and sent letters to people whose houses were used. In total, I conducted nine interviews with twelve people (in three cases two people were present). The interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour and forty-five minutes. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 67. Five of them were women and seven men. Seven of them live in Tilburg, three in the immediate surroundings of Tilburg, and two in another city in Brabant.

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delayed on average 37% of the time in the first season and 33% in the second season (Stichting KijkOnderzoek, 2015). This makes sense, as among younger viewers and television fiction delayed viewing is more common (Stichting KijkOnderzoek, 2016).

[66] Hilversum is a city in North Holland where most national radio and television broadcasting agencies are hosted.

Furthermore, I collected all tweets containing the word 'Smeris' from 12 March 2014 till 24 August 2016 using TAGS (Hawksey, 2013, 2014). I used Twitter messages to grasp people's immediate responses and to analyse how people make sense of this television series on a public media site (cf. Harrington, Highfield, & Bruns, 2013). On Twitter, the crime series *Tatort* mainly generated a debate about the content of the episodes: 'Users typically discuss the story, cast, and production value of the current episode' (Buschow, Schneider, & Ueberheide, 2014, p. 144). This indicated that Twitter might be a good place to capture such immediate responses to particular events happening in the episodes. Therefore, I was particularly interested in the period *Smeris* aired on television for the first time in March-May 2014 (Season 1) and March-June 2015 (Season 2). In total, I collected 38,568 tweets of which 15,587 started with 'RT' and hence are retweets. The tweets included both the use of #smeris and using 'Smeris' within a tweet. Most of the tweets relate to the television series, but in some occasions the word 'Smeris' is used to refer to cops in general. I analysed these tweets qualitatively by reading all the original tweets (not the retweets) and marked tweets that related to place in a broad sense.

Additionally, I looked for online discussions on *Smeris* and found discussions on two different forums. Moreover, I requested the audience measurement for each *Smeris* episode from the television audience measurement service called *Stichting KijkOnderzoek* for the Netherlands in total and Brabant, the region in which Tilburg is located, separately.

Production

Having a production team that originated from this region may have enhanced the credibility of the local colour that was portrayed in the series. Most actors in the first season were from the province of Brabant. This says something about the intentionality of incorporating the locality that goes beyond showing the setting:

> Never seen one Limburgian actor in Flikken Maastricht. Too bad. In that sense, I thought Smeris was better with those drawling Tilburgers :) [*Flikken Maastricht* is a police series set in Maastricht in the Dutch province Limburg]
> (Twitter, October 2014)

> Watching Smeris, wooh, a series full of Brabanders
> (Twitter, May 2014)

Jeroen van Koningsbrugge, who grew up in Brabant but now lives in Amsterdam, plays one of the main roles in *Smeris*. He sometimes still engages with his Brabantish background. For instance, he plays a character in the satirical sketch entitled, 'Brabantish Language Course' as featured in the programme *Draadstaal*. Jeroen's 'buddy', Dennis van de Ven, who plays the other main role in *Smeris*, is

not from Brabant, but from Limburg, another province in the southern periphery. Besides these two main actors, ten out of the eleven male supporting roles are from Brabant. Only two out of the seven actresses, however, come from Brabant. Having actors from Brabant is one way of engaging with the localness of the series in a credible way. However, there is more to representing the local. I will now elaborate on what local colour is and how the local colour of Tilburg in *Smeris* is presented and perceived.

Local Colour

Series incorporating local colour do more than featuring that locality. Being set in a specific place (a setting) differs from merely incorporating that place within the series (Eichner & Waade, 2015):

> Local colour in a film or television drama series includes elements of representing place [...], language [...], cultural practices with a cultural proximity [...], social discourses and the "spill-over" of narrative meaning into the real world. (Eichner & Waade, 2015, p. 4)

Television series may incorporate the place where they are located in implicit and explicit ways. Similarly, national identity is largely embedded in elements of everyday life and it is also reflected on television. While many international series are aired on (Dutch) television, simultaneously many national adaptations of (global) formats illustrate how national identities are incorporated within these adaptations. Programmes are modified to fit the localized customs and ideas, thereby creating cultural proximity (Adriaens & Biltereyst, 2012; Beeden & De Bruin, 2010). A nation or region can use cultural symbols and representations to depict the 'imagined community' (cf. Anderson, 2006). Language is a powerful means that binds different people in a community together, but also other aspects can serve as symbols for this imagined community. Quotidian practices of everyday life are so natural that they may not be consciously registered as part of one's national identity (Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2002). Television series build from and on 'pre-existing discursive repertoires and patterns' (Dhoest, 2007b, p. 6). To make this idea of an incorporated banal nationalism more concrete, I elaborate on four main elements Castelló (2009) specifies as aspects of nation building within television fiction. While he speaks about (stateless) nations, these four aspects also reflect how a region can be incorporated in a series, and I will therefore use them in my analysis of *Smeris*.

First, territorial representations may transmit an idea of the nation. Even when 'imagined villages' are used, they often reflect a national impression; the scenery looks familiar and architecture matches the style of the nation. Second, language use is an important way to build a nation, as language and dialect are

important aspects of national and regional identities. A standardized form may be used that reflects the entire nation. Dialects may be used to define class or downgrade people. Audiences recognize soaps as 'Scottish' or 'Catalan' mainly because of the used language and accents (Castelló, Dobson, & O'Donnell, 2009, p. 481). Third, cultural representations can be used in fiction to emphasize the nation. Such elements may include history, traditions, festivities, cuisine, etc. Sometimes 'stereotypical' elements of a nation are used, particularly in stateless nations such as Flanders, Catalonia, and Wales. While people happily accepted series as Catalan or Scottish, they did not perceive these series as represented reality. Rather, 'they engaged with them as sites of discursive struggle over the definition of reality' (Castelló et al., 2009, p. 481). The featured representations relied heavily on stereotypes and did not reflect audiences' everyday experiences. This cultural representation encompasses more than these stereotypes, but also incorporates the local style and banal elements. Dhoest (2007b) shows that the (sub)nation is reproduced through everyday common elements in Flemish fiction. Because viewers recognize the situations and locations the characters are in, not even thinking about it as specifically Flemish, they are recognized as part of an ordinary and normal everyday life: 'As elsewhere, the settings signal taste, wealth and class, but always within the "local" style' (Dhoest, 2007b, p. 69). For instance, the familiar national brands of beer may be on the tap in the local pub. These familiar settings contribute to a sense of realism and thereby a sense of, in his case, Flemishness, but what in our case may be Dutchness or Brabantishness (Dhoest, 2007a). Fourth, social discourses of a society may be used within fiction. For instance, fiction may deal with issues that are relevant to the nation (e.g. economic crisis) and reflect the ideological frame of that society (e.g. tolerance) (Castelló, 2009).

The use of these four elements within a fictional television series is telling for how a place is represented. The extent to which and how these elements are used with regard to a locality reflects the local colour. When using one of these features alone, this does not necessarily mean local colour is represented. It may be set within a locality, and reflect this location, but does not necessarily engage with this place. Even when iconic buildings may be used, this does not necessarily result in a 'deeper sense of place or contribute significantly to the narrative' (Murphy, 2014, p. 39). *Smeris*, however, uses all of these elements to represent and visualize Tilburg and the Netherlands. This also becomes apparent in people's interpretation, as I will now illustrate how *Smeris* has incorporated these four elements of nation building discussed by Castelló (2009) in the following sub-sections.

Territory: Visualizing Tilburg and Amsterdam

In the series, Tilburg is both visually and verbally emphasized. The opening sequence of the first episodes sets the tone of Tilburg by showing various images of

Tilburg alongside the actors. Following Lefebvre (2006), this is a form of intentional landscape, as the landscape is encouraged to be viewed in a particular way by the producers through the series. Many people also comment on the beauty of this:

> #Smeris starts with beautiful images setting the tone of #Tilburg. Beautiful start!
> (Twitter, March 2014)

In the first couple of episodes in Tilburg, at several moments in the story, criminals talked over the phone while seeing time-lapses of the city in the dark (Figure 6.1). The length of these shots and the voices of the criminals put more emphasis on the scenery and the viewer is invited to gaze at Tilburg:

> Sven: What I think is beautiful from Season 1, is that you hear phone conversations with the criminals. You don't really know who is talking to whom, but you're only supposed to know later on in the series, and then during those phone conversations they do a time-lapse of Tilburg by night. I think that is really cool.
>
> (Interview with an extra from *Smeris*, living in Tilburg, June 2016)
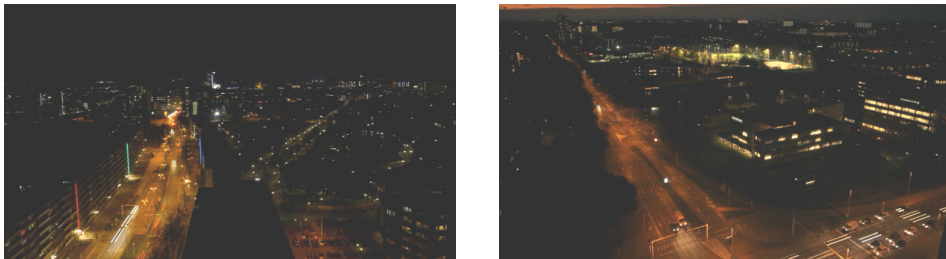
Figure 6.1 Stills from the time-lapse footage of Tilburg by night (left: *Smeris* Season 1, Episode 2; right: *Smeris* Season 1, Episode 3, BNN/Pupkin)

Similar to Cardiff in *Torchwood*, such images present Tilburg as a general modern city, it spectacularizes Tilburg, but simultaneously the specific local aspects index it as Tilburg: 'There is a pleasure in seeing a familiar place rendered, spectacularly, in an unfamiliar way' (Lacey, 2013, p. 142). However, while enjoying such views of Tilburg, the irony of Tilburg's picturesque portrayal is also articulated as this contrasts with people's common assumptions. Instead of a small place, Tilburg is presented as a modern big city:

> I am really rolling off the couch laughing, the Hart van Brabantlaan [a street in Tilburg] as so-called 'skyline' 😊 #Smeris
> (Twitter, March 2014)

Humberto: And those night shots, they were also really, with the introduction, they were really beautiful I think.

Yvonne: Yes

Humberto: Yeah and then I thought, well, Tilburg seems like a real city *laughs*

(Interview with couple whose house is used in *Smeris,* September 2016)

A similar ambience is used in the second season. Time-lapse footage of Amsterdam is used, although the presence of Amsterdam seems less prominent and intentional. The images appear shorter and are more familiar because of the normalcy of viewing Amsterdam on screen.

Rather than just being a setting, the series constantly emphasizes the fact that it takes place in Tilburg in the first season. Tilburg is frequently referenced and audiences noticed such remarks. While some of such messages are quite obvious, others are subtler:

Willem: A construction project in China, do you think that's credible?

Theo: Yeah the Chinese can't build; you really need Tilburgers for that.

Harold: What about the Great Wall of China?

Theo: Rumour has it, it was built by Tilburgers.

(*Smeris,* Season 1, Episode 7)

Yeah right, the Great Wall of China built by Tilburgers ;o #smeris

(Twitter, April 2014)

Sam enters her home stumbling after she returned from Tilburg where she was drinking with Theo.

Esther: It looks like you had a lot of fun.

Sam: Tilburg, top city!

(*Smeris,* Season 2, Episode 9)

#smeris Tilburg top city! Now we are talking!

(Twitter, May 2014)

In contrast to some other regionally located series, only a few locations in the first season are, as far as I know, outside of Tilburg and most of these are still within a close range and therefore can still be justified in the story. Of course, characters may still take illogical routes or break some rules (e.g. drive in the wrong direction) to enhance the aesthetics of the series.

In the second season, the first episode still largely takes place in Tilburg, but towards the end of the episode, Theo gets in a car to drive to Amsterdam. He drives around the roundabout in Tilburg with its famous turning house, and past a sign with Tilburg with a red diagonal stripe throughout, the Dutch sign one

sees when leaving a town. After another scene with another character, around thirty seconds are spent on visualizing this transition: the highway, the signs passing by, and Theo in a car moving to Amsterdam. This highlights the journey the characters and the series make. Except for the scene following this one with another character, the next (brief) return to Tilburg is in the fourth episode:

Where does it lead? [The title of the episode and part of a famous song]... past the turning house. #smeris

"@[name] Where does it lead?... past the turning house. #smeris" and out of Tilburg! Thought it was awesome that Season 1 took place IMBY [in my backyard] (Twitter, March 2015)

Figure 6.2 Theo driving out of Tilburg past the turning house (*Smeris*, Season 2, Episode 1, BNN/Pupkin)

On several more occasions, the characters move from Tilburg to Amsterdam,[67] or reversed, or cross other distances within the Netherlands. In *Smeris*, these journeys are visualized by fast-forward images of the highway. These images also invoke a sense of familiarity, as these are the highways that Dutch people use. The blue signs and matrix signal indicators register the place as the Netherlands. While in the first season, Theo and Willem were frequently seen in a car, they often remained within the realms of Tilburg and its surroundings. In the second season, they move much farther. The bridge and tunnel in television series *Bron|Broen* (Danish/Swedish), *The Bridge* (American) and *The Tunnel* (British/ French) function as a metaphor for collaboration, building bridges, and yet distance between the two respective countries and cultures (Agger, 2016; García Avis, 2015). In a similar way, the move by car from Amsterdam to Tilburg shows its distance and closeness at the same time. As the shots are speeded up, the characters quickly move from one place to another. However, the need to move highlights the distance as well:

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[67] The distance from Amsterdam to Tilburg is around 110 km and while this may be considered relatively small, within the Netherlands this distance of one and a half hour is not considered short.

Willem drives up and down from Amsterdam to Tilburg like it's nothing #smeris
#backandforth
(Twitter, May 2015)

Figure 6.3 Theo driving from Tilburg to Amsterdam for the first time (*Smeris*, Season 2, Episode 1, BNN/Pupkin)

Language: Talking Tilburgian and Other Languages

The series is called *Smeris*, a Dutch variant for the term 'cops'. This is a little ironic as the Tilburgian criminals in Season 1 of *Smeris* use the term *'wouten'* to refer to the police while the Belgian criminals use *'flikken'*. It is only in Season 2, in Amsterdam, when someone uses the term *'smeris'* for the first time. These three different words (*smeris, wout, flik*) index three different linguistic or geographical areas. In Tilburg, and several other regions both in and outside of Brabant, people often use the term *wouten* to refer to the police:

Why is #smeris not just called *Wouten*? #Tilburg
@[name] @[name] exactly my point, I said it this afternoon.
@[name] I honestly also thought that... would have been more Tilburgian... but for the rest, great episode..
(Twitter, March 2014)

Most of the language use is standard Dutch and some characters in the first season have a soft *g*, a language feature characteristic of the south of the Netherlands. Some Brabantish words such as *'houdoe'* ('bye') and *'ons* Gaby' ('our' Gaby)

are used by several characters. This type of language use is easily understood by the wider Dutch audience, but still indexes Brabant. While the main supporting characters do not speak Tilburgian, some of the guest roles use a distinguishing Tilburg accent. Some television viewers appreciate the Brabantish language use, though other people also judged some attempts to speak Brabantish as sounding 'fake' and missed the typical Tilburgian dialect. The use of Tilburgian, or the use of an accent from this region, made the series more authentic to some:

> #Smeris takes place in Tilburg and I actually hear soft *g*s. This is in contrast to other series that are set 'regionally'.
> (Twitter, March 2014)

> Speaking Brabantish remains difficult! #smeris
> (Twitter, March 2014, Tweeted from Tilburg)

> Humberto: But uh.. yeah that makes it extra nice, uhm.. that you hear dialect some-
>   times. From that police officer, but that makes it also
> Yvonne: [interrupts] I actually really liked that. That is was at least really in
>   Tilburg.
> (Interview with couple whose house is used in *Smeris*, September 2016)

> Janus: Uhm... sometimes they use a bit too much 'constructed' dialect. uhm... but
>   if you look at uh. uh. It is contemporary language use, shall we say. But it's
>   nice if something which is set locally in Tilburg, to also incorporate the
>   dialect. But then they should do it well, sound good and that there's
>   something to it. And sometimes that went well, but there were also scenes
>   in which I thought, Jesus man that's really not how it, that's not how it's
>   said. And I understand that because I think that Jeroen van
>   Koningsbrugge is from the south somewhere but that Dennis van de Ven,
>   I don't know. But they kind of need to have the same language use and
>   then you get a bit of a bastardization so to say.
> (Interview with extra from *Smeris*, living in a city in Brabant, July 2016)

In one instance, the use of a Brabantish accent becomes clear in a mistake in the subtitles (Figure 6.4). A Tilburgian cop asks Theo: 'How is it at that clearing team?' referring to the narcotics team Theo is demoted to. However, the way you pronounce this sentence sounds like pronouncing the (standard) Dutch word for 'red' with a Brabantish accent. The subtitles translate the sentence as such: 'How is it at that red team?' rather than 'How is it at that clearing team?'

Additionally, some English is incorporated, particularly by some criminals. In the first season, this sometimes concerns sentences that are used in passing. Both the use of Tilburgian and some inserted English phrases are considered ordinary

in the first season as the lack of subtitles emphasizes. The subtitled use of English and German, mainly in the second season, highlights the international scope of the story. Belgian criminals also play an important role, particularly in the second season. Besides the occasional subtitled French when talking to each other ('Also only in Dutch series that Flemish people speak French to each other #smeris', Twitter, 2 August 2016), the Flemish criminals' Belgian Standard Dutch is subtitled. When Flemish people speak to Dutch characters, the Belgian Dutch of the criminals is subtitled but the Netherlandic Dutch of the other character is not.[68]

Figure 6.4 'How is it at that clearing team?' (*rooiteam*) becomes 'How is it at that red team?' (*rode team*) in the subtitles (*Smeris*, Season 1, Episode 3, BNN/Pupkin)

Flemish programmes in the Netherlands and fiction from the Netherlands in Belgium often have subtitles. In Belgium, fiction programmes from the Netherlands have subtitles, whereas non-fiction including Netherlandic Dutch mostly is not subtitled (Vandekerckhove, De Houwer, & Remael, 2009). Research from Vandekerckhove et al. (2009) shows that a majority of their Belgian respondents wanted subtitles with Netherlandic Dutch clips, considerably more than for Belgian standard Dutch. For regional variants of Dutch in Belgium, responses were very mixed with regard to the desire for subtitles:

> Anyone who doesn't understand it without subtitles? Annoying! #smeris
> (Twitter, April 2015)

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[68] The subtitling practices are somewhat different on the DVD from the episodes as featured on television.

While these subtitles are included for comprehension, it also distances the Flemish people from the Dutch. While (most of) the audience understands them, the inclusion of subtitles suggests otherwise. In contrast, Brabantish people are not subtitled. This creates a sense of similarity for the Brabantish with other Dutch people while the Flemish are represented as culturally more distinct.

Cultural Proximity

Culturally, Brabant and Tilburg are emphasized through (stereotypical) Brabantish jokes or use of Brabantish elements. For instance, the Brabantish sausage roll, a type of food acknowledged as intangible Brabantish cultural heritage by the *Dutch Centre for Intangible Heritage*, is incorporated multiple times:

> Nice as well that the chief walked around with a sausage roll in his hand. I have family in the north [of the Netherlands] that considers that typically Brabantish. I never noticed that, everyone eats them, right! ;-)
> (Forum, April 2014)

In this above example, it becomes clear that the reference used in the television series is normal to the inhabitant of Brabant, where it is common to eat this food. Moreover, songs by Brabantish artists, possibly with a clear reference to Brabant, are used in pub settings. Within the first two minutes of the first episode when Theo enters a pub, we hear a folk song – *D'n Egelantier* – by a band from Hilvarenbeek, a village close to Tilburg. Another time, the tune *Brabantse Nachten zijn Lang (*Brabantish Nights are Long) is played in a bar and another time several songs by Guus Meeuwis, a singer who lives in Tilburg and is by many considered to be emblematic of Brabant, are played consecutively. Some ironic responses on Twitter criticized the production for going overboard with Brabantish references. For others, however, such references went unnoticed or were appreciated:

> The series Smeris is located in Tilburg... Because here we only play Guus Meeuwis in the pub...
> (Twitter, March 2014)

> OMG! Brabantish nights are long... ♪♪♪ #smeris
>> @[name] ;) they constantly play this in all the pubs here ... #brabantishnights #smeris
> (Twitter, March 2014)

In this way, *Smeris* incorporates popular culture in order to situate it within the local context. In the second season, such references to Tilburg and Brabant remain. The centre, Amsterdam, is culturally opposed against the 'provincial' city of Tilburg. When announcing that the second season would take place in

Amsterdam, a representative of Pupkin said that 'a big part of the fun of Season 2 originates from the clash between the down-to-earth Brabantish mentality and the arrogance of the *Randstad*' *(Brabants Dagblad*, 2014a). In Season 2, we see that one of the Amsterdam police officers often degrades Willem's character for being provincial:

> Arthur: Well done, Niessen. Not bad for a provincial.
> (*Smeris,* Season 2, Episode 8)

> Arthur: A drugged girl in the back of a van might be women trafficking in Brabant, but here we just call it Wednesday afternoon.
> (*Smeris,* Season 2, Episode 3)

In one episode, the Tilburg football team, Willem II, celebrates its victory over Amsterdam's Ajax in an Amsterdam pub. Many Tweeters considered this some-what humorous play an unrealistic situation, as Willem II had never beaten Ajax while playing in Amsterdam.[69] Only recently had they been promoted back to the highest league of the Netherlands:

> That Smeris is implausible compared to reality is clear, but this tops it all. As if Willem II would ever win a match. @[name]
> (Twitter, April 2015)

Moreover, the characters in the series regularly joke about Brabant/Tilburg op-posed to Amsterdam. For instance, they discuss how the food is different. In the excerpt below, Theo and Willem are sitting in a car in Amsterdam eating a sand-wich for lunch:

> Theo: I ordered a sandwich with ham, didn't I? Half a vegetable garden is in here, what is this?
> Theo throws his vegetables out of the car window.
> Theo: For the rabbits.
> Theo: I miss Brabant already.
> (*Smeris,* Season 2, Episode 2)

> Croquette on bread in the @rijksmuseum. So that's how @Theo_Kamp felt in episode 2 of #smeris with his ham sandwich. [A picture is attached of an almost invisible slice of bread with a croquette and a generous amount of salad]
> (Twitter, April 2015)

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[69] On 20 August 2016, much later than that the episodes were filmed and broadcasted, Willem II won for the first time *ever* an away-game from Ajax in Amsterdam (Voetbal International, 2016).

Looking more at the subtle banal elements of everyday life within *Smeris*, we can observe the national discourse (e.g. number plates, road signs, police officers). Simultaneously, the buses and trams subtly reflect the local sphere, as transportation companies in the Netherlands are also region-specific. Such subtle elements of everyday life indicate and register the places as familiar from one's everyday life.

Social Discourse

As the last of the four features of nation building that I have now applied to the region Brabant, I look at how social discourse concerning Tilburg and the Netherlands is incorporated within *Smeris*. The first season revolves around drugs, specifically cannabis, and Tilburg has a reputation of having a substantive cannabis scene (e.g. Haenen, 2014). Regardless of the accuracy of this claim, it has been argued that Tilburg was chosen for this reason, alongside the 'rough' feeling Tilburg can produce because of its architecture (Kuijpers, 2014; Willems, 2014). Respondents often emphasize the relevance of this societal issue when I asked about the role of Tilburg in the series:

> Interviewer: How do you think Tilburg is represented in the series?
>
> Suzanne: Pretty recognizable. A lot-, it is of course a city where many dealers, where uhm… yeah, they often find ecstasy labs, so yeah, it is not strange that they do it here.
>
> (Interview with extra from *Smeris*, living in Tilburg, July 2016)

The specific locations strengthen this link to social discourse. One respondent told me that one of the used locations had actually been a grow house, and in another case, people had grown cannabis in one of the streets displayed on TV.

In the second season, the crime scene is extended beyond soft drugs to hard drugs and women trafficking. Prostitution is an issue often associated with Amsterdam in popular discourse and this thus arguably also reflects the social discourse surrounding the capital of the Netherlands.

Smeris actively engages with Tilburg by incorporating these four elements of nation building or local colour: territory, language, cultural proximity and social discourse. The combination of these elements in the creation of a regional identity, as we will see, is what attracts viewers to the series, as it enables and activates knowledge, participation and community in the audience. In the following discussion, I elaborate more on audiences' interpretations of Tilburg in as visualized by *Smeris*.

Local Audiences

Local Reasons to Watch

> Normally I wouldn't have even watched it, but since I live in Tilburg, I started
> following it anyway. Never expected it to be THIS bad.
> (Forum, May 2014)

Audiences may watch programmes for reasons related to the locality. Local reasons may constitute the main motivation to view a local film or series as the quote above also illustrates. For instance, among local viewers of *The Edge of Love,* the inclusion of the town and local people was one of the main reasons to watch the movie. And while most local viewers were generally positive about the movie, some inhabitants of the featured town thought not enough locals featured in the final product. The production had involved the active participation of many locals and a disruption of the everyday life, but not all local elements made it to the final cut. Consequently, some people were dissatisfied when they realized that many local roles were cut out (Griffiths, 2009).

Tilburgians reported that the fact that the series was set in their home town was (one of) the reasons to start viewing *Smeris*. Some people reported that they stopped viewing *Smeris* when the series moved its location to Amsterdam. One respondent formulated this quite boldly:

Sofie: Yeah yeah, and there were a lot of friends of mine, who followed the series and said we finally have a good series from a good province and they they uh... leave. I think a lot of people from my surroundings didn't even watch the second season because they said 'not in Brabant then we don't watch it' *laughs*

Sandra: Yeah and you of course also didn't watch it anymore.

Sofie: Yes yes.

Sandra: But then the series wasn't good enough to keep watching?

Sofie   Well it was more like, yeah, of course you're curious but yeah you miss the part of Brabant and then it becomes an ordinary series like *Baantjer* and *Van Speijk* and so on. I think that's too bad and then, and then I think I've seen that [kind of series] so many times, that I don't think it's uh... worth watching anymore. That sounds stupid, but yeah I follow a lot of crime series and then at some point the newness, the specialness, is lost when you move [the location of the series] to Amsterdam.

(Interview with extra from *Smeris,* living in Tilburg, June 2016)

Sofie mentions that many of her friends living close to, or in, Tilburg stopped watching *Smeris* once it moved to Amsterdam. This tendency is also confirmed when looking at the data on audience measurement. In the graph (Figure 6.5), the percentage of viewers from Brabant is visualized. This audience measurement concerns the number of viewers on the day the episode is aired combined with delayed viewing within a week of the airing. At the beginning of the first season, more Brabanders watched than expected based on the percentage of the population. While this percentage diminished towards the end of the season, Brabantish viewers returned for the beginning of the second season. People may have been curious how the first season's cliff-hanger ended and people may have hoped to see more of Tilburg. From 5the fifth episode in the second season onwards, neither more, nor less, Brabantish people were watching *Smeris* than expected based on the percentage of Brabanders in the Dutch population.
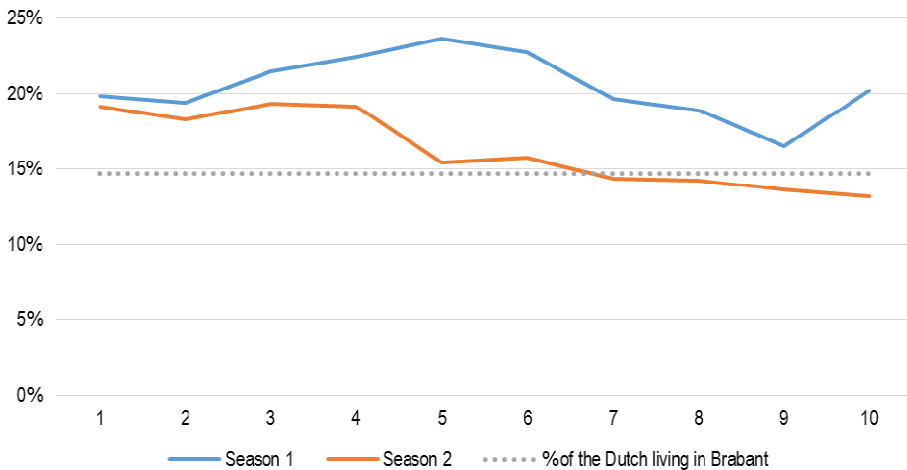

Figure 6.5 Percentage of viewers from Brabant per episode (Data from Stichting KijkOnderzoek, 2015)

Watching *Smeris* may also be about watching oneself. Since many extras came from Brabant, they might have been curious to see themselves, or people they know, on television. In the fifth episode of the first season, many background actors were needed. This is also the episode with one of the largest shares of viewers from Brabant:

> Curious about the viewing numbers of #smeris. I think half of them are on the Heuvel right now! #togethertotheheuvel [the Heuvel is the square where the official celebration of Willem II as champion of their league takes place]
> (Twitter, April 2014)

Because the football club Willem II won their league and was promoted again to the highest national league, several people mentioned on Twitter that fewer people were probably watching the sixth episode of *Smeris* live on television. The promotion of the football club was officially celebrated that evening in the city centre of Tilburg. However, as can be noted from the graph, the sixth episode actually had quite a number of Brabantish viewers. Of course, Brabant is bigger than Tilburg alone. The share of delayed views for that particular episode is actually higher for the Netherlands in its entirety (46%) than for Brabant specific (30%). These numbers may also relate to celebrating Easter, as the episode was aired on this holiday, and the well-watched movie, *Intouchables,* which was broadcasted at the same time. This suggests that while both the football club and *Smeris* are connected to Tilburg, apparently fervent Willem II supporters are not necessarily *Smeris* viewers.

Location Spotting

So, people may view a series because it takes place in their city. Connected to that, local viewers search for locations in *Smeris*. Because of this, some people watch an episode multiple times, as they had not paid attention to the story sufficiently the first time they watched it or because they would like to explore the locations further:

> Maria: So I am pretty glad that my daughter taped it, because you're not really watching the story consciously, but only watch the locations and whether you can recognize them.
> (Interview with couple whose house is used in *Smeris*, September 2016)

> The series #smeris is so good and suspenseful that I am not paying attention anymore to where in Tilburg they filmed it 😊 #awesomesauce [Dutch: #keigaaf]
> (Twitter, April 2014)

Audiences enjoy seeing familiar places on the screen and are actively involved in spotting locations. Blandford, Lacey, McElroy, and Williams (2010) report that around 60% of their respondents indicated that spotting recognizable locations added to the enjoyment of *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*. Audiences may spot two different types of locations. First, typical recognisable landmarks are spotted (e.g. the London Eye in London, the bridges over the Rhine in Cologne, Westpoint in Tilburg). Second, people may search for places to which they connect personally (e.g. 'their' street, the park in which they always sit) (Bollhöfer, 2007):

> Just saw a shot where they drive by here in front of the door. Funny. #smeris
> (Twitter, May 2014)

> Always fun seeing Jeroen van Koningsbrugge on TV passing your own home #smeris #Tilburg
> (Twitter, March 2014)

Looking for these locations continues after watching the episodes. Many respondents discussed *Smeris* with others and in particular the locations that were used in the series. The newspaper *Brabants Dagblad* (2014b) also constructed a map of locations together with their readers. People have sometimes gone at great lengths trying to find some locations, sometimes even without success:

> Sven: The house from the Faassen family. For a long time I didn't know where such a house could possibly be in Tilburg
> Sandra: Did you figure it out?
> Sven: Yeah, since the end of August, I travel a lot by train and the train line goes through a villa neighbourhood, where I think a house like that could be. I tried to search for it but uh... [In fact, this particular house was in another location]
> (Interview with extra from *Smeris*, living in Tilburg, June 2016)

Whereas media tourists may search for inconsistencies on location (cf. Reijnders, 2011), locals may spot these discrepancies while watching. While some dislike this inaccuracy, others take pleasure in this, and for them it adds to the enjoyment of the show:

> I am very curious about where the Smeris actors will get out of the teleportation machine this time! #smeris #nederland3 [the television channel on which it is aired] #tilburg
> (Twitter, March 2014)

> Hans: It was also nice because then you start watching and then they drive on the Hart van Brabantlaan [a street in Tilburg] and then uh. Then the one says something to the other and then the camera position is changed and suddenly they're driving down the Schouwburgring [a different street in Tilburg] *laughs* that are nice things that you notice then. *laughs*
> (Interview with extra from *Smeris*, living in surroundings of Tilburg, June 2016)

The teleportation machine refers to the ability of characters to, for instance, be inside a building in one place in Tilburg, but when leaving this place, exit in a different street in another part of Tilburg. Hans elaborates on how he recognized that the characters were in a different street when they switched camera viewpoints. The knowledge of these production (continuity) 'faults' provides people

with a privileged position of being in the know. Beeton speaks in the following quote about film-induced tourism, but it holds for inhabitants as well:

> For some, the dissonance between reality and fiction may detract from the viewing experience, but for many it appears that having knowledge of the process imbues that person with some cultural cachet. Through knowing the inconsistencies between reality and fiction, the person becomes an 'insider' to certain knowledge that was, in the past, the reserve of those in the industry. (Beeton, 2005, p. 235)

Thus, regional viewers enjoy *Smeris* because it incorporated a familiar setting that is not usually featured; moreover, the setting retained its essential character throughout the series. Especially the extras and home-owners I interviewed had gained knowledge about how a series is produced, and thus could claim Beeton's 'cultural cachet'. Also those who were not involved in its production still had an insider's perspective other regular viewers did not possess while watching this television series in a familiar setting. Messages reflecting this insight are not only posted about Tilburg in *Smeris*. A few tweets are posted about other locations, including Putten and Purmerend, both places where not many series take place. Moreover, not only people who know Tilburg and its surroundings appreciate the use of a non-traditional location. People from other regions in the Netherlands also like the change of scenery:

> Nice, finally a good Dutch series that is set outside of Amsterdam and without all the famous Dutch actors! #smeris
> (Twitter, March 2014)

While such messages are more common for the episodes in Tilburg or other places out of the ordinary, recognizing locations also occurs in Amsterdam. However, the relative scarcity of such messages suggests that even if people in Amsterdam recognize locations, they hardly talk about it on Twitter. In fact, some tweets are from people outside of Amsterdam who recognize a location. Moreover, such messages are not inflected with pride to the same extent that those from Tilburg are. People in Amsterdam are more used to seeing their city on the screen, and the speciality of recognizing one's own location is not publically celebrated as it is the default situation.

Smeris Locations and their Meaning

> TOO funny to see the lights of #Westpoint #Tilburg from my bedroom while simultaneously being the scenery on TV in #smeris
> (Twitter, April 2014)

By being featured in a series, places can gain additional meaning (Bollhöfer, 2007). Whereas with media tourism, people explore the places they know from the media, often previously unaware to them, residents may attribute places they were already familiar with, with additional meaning after watching a television series. People may remember the scenes of a series or movie when they are at the actual sites (Blandford & Lacey, 2011; Blandford et al., 2010). Mills (2008) speaks of additional place making as the location gains additional meaning due to the representation on screen. Moreover, fans 'seem to appropriate typical sites from the series and integrate them in their everyday life' (Bollhöfer, 2007, p. 173). For instance, fans of a German series started to have breakfast together in one of the locations used in the programme (Bollhöfer, 2007). This is similar to media tourists who visit places from the screen (Reijnders, 2011). The *JURK!* fan club held a private location tour through Tilburg and played miniature golf in the glow in the dark golf course used in the eighth episode of the first season. Others also commented on encountering a location used within the series:

> Yvonne: You also sometimes had sightseers, who passed by and said like oh, did the filming take place here? Oh how nice! And how was it? And people who walk pass by, you know...
>
> Humberto: And also sometimes people from the neighbourhood, right? I was working in the garden and then people from the neighbourhood passed by with family acting as some kind of guide: 'and here they have filmed' *laughs* they were saying.
>
> (Interview with couple whose house is used in *Smeris*, September 2016)

> Special place for a meeting: the 'police station' #smeris #tilburg – unfortunately without officers! [Includes a picture from inside of the building used as police station in *Smeris*]
> (Twitter, May 2014)

In his examination of media tourism, Reijnders (2011) indicated two main modes to make a piece of imagination tangible. The first mode is a rational mode in which media tourists are trying to compare reality with how they imagined the place from a movie or series. People use an emic differentiation of imagination and reality to categorize their experiences (Reijnders, 2011). This corresponds with the earlier discussion on spotting locations and inaccuracies within television series. When spotting locations, people may compare their own experiences with those from the characters. This comparison of Tilburg on screen with the physical Tilburg helps to disentangle both of them. The Tilburg from the screen is separated from and compared with the physical place. In contrast, how most viewers from Brabant imagine Amsterdam is highly entangled with its media portrayal, but hardly with the physical place. People are less able to distinguish

between the physical place and the Amsterdam they have imagined through the media.

A second mode is an emotional-intuitive mode in which people search for bodily proximity. They want to be part of their imaginative world, and thereby experience these places themselves. Indeed, these modes are not clearly separated but are entangled and can be enacted subsequently (Reijnders, 2011):

> Haha and that that woman then says: 'The neighbourhood is going down' about the street where I have already lived for 13 years. #smeris
> (Twitter, March 2014)

As shown in the above tweet, residents not only spot locations they know, but they relate these featured locations to their own experiences. The quote mentioned by the tweeter illustrates how a fictional situation on television is integrated within their own lives, yet a distinction is continued between fiction and reality. The tweeter laughs about how her neighbourhood is considered 'bad' in the fictional series. Had it been non-fiction, she might not have laughed because it would have reflected her actual street. The same person continues with another tweet a couple of minutes later, in which she continues with the character Loes who lives in that street:

> It all worked out for Loes, we as neighbours got her through this all, shhh. #smeris
> (Twitter, March 2014)

Regardless of whether (in the series) neighbours actually helped Loes handle the bad situations, it is interesting how this person integrated her media consumption within their own frame of reference. People pretend, for a moment, they are part of the series, regardless of the fact that they are perfectly aware of the distinction between fiction and reality.

Fans often engage with television characters online, for instance by making fan Twitter accounts for the characters. With *Smeris*, people (ironically) integrate real news with the fiction of *Smeris*. People respond to posts about news concerning drugs in Tilburg/Brabant with #smeris, playing with television meeting reality:

> 'Brabantish criminals driven up the wall' says field officer Bart Nieuwenhuizen
> brabantn.ws/FQu [link to news article]
> > @omroepbrabant @Politie_Tilburg and that all because of Theo Kamp and Willem Niessen! #smeris :)
> (Twitter, April 2015)

> Theo Kamp and Willem Niessen intercept another big drug shipment in Tilburg
> http://t.co/LB5mFoyIA9 [link to news article] #Smeris
> (Twitter, June 2014)

This mixing of screen and street perfectly reflects the 'spill-over of narrative meaning into the real world' that is also a component of local colour (Eichner & Waade, 2015, p. 4). The series integrates Tilburg's 'problems' into their series and subsequently the series is incorporated back into the problems. Relating news to the series *Smeris* hardly happens for Amsterdam. While this may be due to the different social discourse addressed in Amsterdam (prostitution, hard drugs), it could also be because Tilburg is rarely featured on TV. People connect real-life scenarios to those happening within fictional television series due to the novelty of seeing Tilburg on screen. Since a place that is usually in the shadow becomes now the centre of attention, people are speaking about it. In contrast, because of the abundance of Amsterdam, such references are endless and less interesting.

While, on the one hand, people seem to be more aware of the differences between screen and reality, they also feel a greater need to integrate the two because of the familiarity with the scenes. People start to imagine they are in the series, as they know the surroundings, or reversed, start to imagine the fictional characters acting in their everyday surroundings. Precisely because Tilburg is not a place they know mostly from television (as Amsterdam may be to many Tilburgers), but because of their intense familiarity with the physical place, the integration of the two becomes more interesting. Nevertheless, such symbolic layers should not be exaggerated. While for fans, visiting a media location might be special and may involve enactment of the series, after seeing such places on a more regular basis, these locations are normal again, especially for ordinary viewers. Memories may be attached to this, but they may easily be different memories.

This is different from Mills (2008) who has reflected academically on his own relation to *Torchwood* in which his house was also featured in a passing-by shot. He, however, no longer lives in this house, and not even the town where *Torchwood* is filmed. I would say that for Mills, *Torchwood* became a sort of souvenir for this place, a means of revisiting without actually going. The inability of seeing it daily makes the place on television even more special as it gives access to one's memories of that place. It may be similar to how watching a tourist destination on television after one's visit might revive memories of one's trip. Inhabitants who still live in these places encounter these locations more frequently. While in the beginning, people may think about *Smeris*, this quickly wears off. The additional meaning attributed is only temporary and may only be evoked again in specific contexts.

No Longer 'Ours'

Finally, the idea that the periphery becomes the centre is also one of ownership. Not only are local viewers watching the series differently, some claim it as theirs. In a similar vein, people from Wales may take ownership over *Torchwood*:

> Identifying places as familiar becomes a way of taking ownership of the programme, of staking a claim to be at the centre of things for once, reversing the position of marginality that normally pertains for small nations invisible amongst larger ones. (Blandford & Lacey, 2011, p. 7)

When the periphery becomes the centre, a re-positioning of Tilburg occurs, even if this is only temporarily. Some respondents spoke of 'we' and 'us' being featured in the series. Not only are 'we' featured, but 'we' also produce the series. Respondents take some ownership of programme, simply because it is within their proximate surroundings:

> Sofie: The series was really Brabantish. I hope really that it will return to uh.. Tilburg, or at least somewhere in Brabant. So that we Brabanders can also show that we can make a series.
> Sandra: Even though the producers remained the same.
> Sofie: I mean more that we can represent Brabant, that's more how I mean it.
> (Interview with extra from *Smeris,* living in Tilburg, June 2016)

This ownership is particularly evident when *Smeris* moved from Tilburg to Amsterdam. People particularly dismissed the (boring) standard choice of Amsterdam, rather than another atypical city:

> Sofie: Yeah there were also a lot of background actors who were like dammit, you are in Brabant and then you're going to leave us.
> (Interview with extra from *Smeris,* living in Tilburg, June 2016)

Some locals feel that, because it is set in Tilburg and uses local features, it is a series about themselves. Both the setting and local colour provide handles for identification. Literature on domestic adaptations of productions suggest that series are often modified to fit the localized customs and ideas, thereby creating cultural proximity (Beeden & De Bruin, 2010). Such adaptations may facilitate recognition, identification and credibility among viewers through the use of banal elements (Adriaens & Biltereyst, 2012). Straubhaar (1991) argues that audiences crave cultural proximity, for media products from their own (local) culture. Indeed, such cultural proximity does not necessarily have to relate to the locality, as people may share cultural and moral values from other parts of the world (La

Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005). The responses to *Smeris* suggest that in the case of a Dutch series, which uses the four elements of nation building aforementioned (Castelló, 2009), this recognition and identification is strong among local viewers. Series may resonate among these local audiences for a recognition that is hardly found elsewhere in popular culture. This is not to say that other television series do not involve any familiarity, as national discourse is still recognizable and viewers may involve and identify with the series in different ways such as through relating to the stories personally (cf. Castelló, 2010). This change of scenery, nevertheless, gives some people an appreciated recognition of the local colour that goes beyond merely recognizing the locations:

> Sven: I think recognition, maybe very stupid, but just the accent is understandable but might need to be subtitled for some people.
> (Interview with extra from *Smeris,* living in Tilburg, June 2016)

> Janus: It is nice when you see an episode with a bit of the language that we, as Brabanders so to say, know more easily.
> (Interview with extra from *Smeris,* living in Den Bosch, July 2016)

Both these quotes thus illustrate that respondents enjoy this recognition, and the familiarity of the language, that is part of the local colour of *Smeris*. Sven notes how he enjoys the recognition and familiarity of watching *Smeris*. Both Sven and Janus emphasize the fact that the language they are familiar with is now on television. While for those living in other places in the Netherlands, the language might need to be subtitled, the language spoken in *Smeris* is understandable and familiar to *them*.

However, not all respondents feel as strongly about it. Some consider it a shame that *Smeris* moved away, but take no ownership over the programme. They argue it is merely fun to see Tilburg on screen, but no more than that. Moreover, some of them are extras and it is easier to participate in a series when the set is close by. For others who feel more strongly about it, *Smeris* may be a feature of one's identity as a Tilburger or Brabander, something one can identify with and be proud of. While a clear production team exists that creates this series, it is extended as a part of the self. Yet, it is something one has little control over, as 'they' move *Smeris* away from Tilburg.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I explored people's responses to *Smeris* and its local colour through examining the episodes in combination with interviews and Twitter analysis. In its first season, this Dutch television series put the atypical city of Tilburg at the centre of attention. The series visualizes Tilburg, incorporates re-

gional accents, jokes, and cultural references, and integrates the social problems of the city in the series. The news reporter in *Smeris* states about a crime scene: 'It really is an American big situation, here in trusted familiar Tilburg' (Season 1, Episode 6). This sentence summarizes how Tilburg is represented within this television series: while the visualization of Tilburg, particularly the time-lapses, imply Tilburg's spectacular (American) scope, the playfulness of a familiar Tilburg is created through the recognizable locations and the extensive use of jokes, both about Brabant and about other subjects. This portrayal of Tilburg in *Smeris*, both grand and 'rough' and cosy and fun, is how the identity of Tilburg and Brabant is presented, but what does this mean for regional identification?

Locals express their pride on Tilburg being featured in *Smeris*. Why would one be proud of a city being featured, if one is not attached to this city in any way? Indeed, not all Tilburgers felt proud. Some people may spot locations, and may even enjoy seeing the familiar on television without feeling proud. However, among a number of Tilburgers this appreciation expanded beyond this. They integrated their daily lives with the series, identified and personalized locations; even going so far as blurring the lines between fact and fiction at times in order to consolidate these connections and meanings. This is also illustrated by the intense disappointment when moving away from Tilburg to Amsterdam in the second season. Locals appreciate the use of Tilburg as, for once, 'they' also are featured on the national screen. This is strengthened by the fact that Tilburg is not only featured as itself, but through the local colour it is constantly emphasized *Smeris* takes place in Tilburg. Locals spot locations and discuss this. For once, they are insiders in a television series because they know the ins and outs of the city and the inconsistencies the series may have with regard to location. While some locals simply watch and enjoy Tilburg on screen, others display their Tilburg pride through this behind-the-scenes knowledge of faults and inconsistencies, and thereby display their own Tilburgianness as 'their' city finally features in a nation-wide broadcast.

In the previous chapter, I had observed that having a shared background that is more difficult to access for outsiders contributed to a greater engagement with the Facebook posts that I analysed. Moreover, when inconsistencies related to other localities were visualized in the Facebook posts, people responded negatively to it. People voiced 'insider' references to these Facebook posts to illustrate their own local knowledge. In a similar way, people from around Tilburg may display their pride through the social discourse surrounding *Smeris*. By speaking about inconsistencies, or social discourse related to the series and Tilburg, they display their own 'Tilburgianness'. Particularly because this setting is so rare in fictional television and it is distributed nation-wide, people voiced their pride.

The pride of seeing 'your own' place on television, next to voicing insights into the locations, may also be expressed by relating the series to actual incidents. People start integrating *Smeris* in the social discourse, as they mix the series with

news articles. People take the 'screen' to their 'neighbourhood' as they appropriate the places visualized on screen to their own situations. It goes beyond a mere representation of place, beyond a mere mediation, but involves the ability to be submerged within a familiar imagined world. Tilburg is not simply featured on television as it is, but people can engage with Tilburg as an imagined place. An activity one is normally not able to participate in, but is now made possible because of the repositioning of marginality. Precisely because Tilburg is not a place they mostly know from television, but rather as a result of their intense familiarity with the physical place, the integration of the physical place and the one featured on television becomes appealing. The repositioning of this media series forms a central part of this.

In this sense, people use *Smeris* to display and voice their identification with Tilburg (and Brabant). It can function as a symbol of identification and when people speak about it, they may display a sense of pride for Tilburg, and is thereby telling for themselves as Tilburgers. Moreover, engagement with *Smeris* on screen and in their everyday lives is about engaging with their environment in a new way: through fiction. Just like fans may engage with the media they adore (e.g. media tourism, fan fiction), people who are (strongly) attached to Tilburg may more eagerly engage with integrations of reality and fiction. If neither the place, nor the series means anything to someone, he or she may not be tempted to engage with the series in a more intense way. Nonetheless, such integrations of fiction and reality are only temporary. While additional layers of meaning may be added to locations, this quickly submerges again as people continue to live in this physical Tilburg, part of their everyday life.

Chapter 7
Understanding
Brabant

pictures: Sandra Wagemakers

Understanding Brabant

In this dissertation, I analysed how a Brabantish feeling is shaped and negotiated in everyday life by Brabant's inhabitants; from television series and Facebook, to interviews, focus groups, and large data sets. By taking a data driven approach, I tried to make sense of regional identification in Brabant In this final chapter, I would like to draw all these threads together in order to understand what regional identification in Brabant really means. In examining the diverse case studies that I have described in the previous chapters, I identified some underlying processes that continue to play a role in regional identification. While each of the case studies have provided their own insight, together, they have given us an idea of how regional identification is experienced within contemporary society. In this last chapter, I will focus on the processes of regional identification; how did I make sense of regional identification in Brabant? In order to do so, I will first elaborate on the discourses of Brabant and how Brabantishness is characterized by people. Following Paasi (2003, 2009), I will then differentiate these 'identities of the region' from 'regional identification'. This brings me to different processes involved in regional identification that I will discuss: unreflexivity, familiarity, and proximity. Then I will integrate this further again into how (symbols of) Brabant are claimed to make these abstract feelings more concrete. Finally, I will discuss what this all means for identity beyond Brabant.

So, What is Brabantishness?

A straightforward definition of Brabantishness cannot be given. As already mentioned in the introduction, Brabantishness is an ongoing feeling, the outcome of which varies through space and time. Nevertheless, many Brabanders identify with their region and articulate an idea of a uniform Brabant. What Brabant means to many people is a sense of 'home', of belonging, of a certain space one identifies with. To many, Brabant is a place injected with significance. Though these meanings may not be exactly the same for different people, they do have some coherence.

Such meanings may linger on stereotypical notions of what Brabant may entail. As it is hard to pinpoint this everyday habitual feeling of being a Brabander, people may refer to stereotypical ideas that exist about Brabant. They may note down 'sausage rolls' and 'beer' when asked about it explicitly. People may speak about a Brabantish mentality based on familiar discourses as this excerpt of an interview illustrates:

> Ariënne: I think the Brabantish mentality is very pleasant.
> Sandra: So what do you consider Brabantish mentality?
> Ariënne: Uhm… well just. Easy-going. Shouting '*Houdoe*' when you leave a store. Yeah. Maybe greeting each other in the street. Even though I also don't see people doing that anymore in Brabant. Uhmm… Eating sausage rolls and baking them. That sounds quite odd.
>
> (Interview JURK-fan living in a city in Brabant, June 2016)

To borrow Paasi's terms (2003, 2009), there is a difference between 'regional identity' and 'identity of a region'. People may feel attached to their locality, which he calls regional identity or regional consciousness. The identity of the region is articulated in discourses on the region. Such discourses are not only articulated from 'above', but also constantly emphasized and reiterated from 'below', by the inhabitants themselves. In indicating what Brabant is, people essentialize it. While in people's everyday experience, Brabant may be multiple and fragmented, in their articulation of what Brabant is, people often resort to (stereotypical) discourses concerning ideas of Brabant. Regardless of whether such stereotypical notions are true or not, they are perceived as such.

Additionally, these ideas do not stand alone, but are entangled with other types of identity repertoires. People communicate multiple repertoires simultaneously, whereby for instance, something may convey class connotations next to local repertoires. The Brabantish band, *WC Experience*, communicates a rural farmer's style and connects this style to Brabant. While fans from outside Brabant still experience a recognition and familiarity beyond that of Brabant, for many Branders these two are intrinsically connected. It seems precisely the combination of rural ideas and Brabant that appeals to people. On Facebook, working class notions are connected to people's localities. Specifically in *Tilburgers Be Like*, many elements of common working class people are featured in the images. For instance, a picture of the mayor of Tilburg is accompanied with a text in dialect using figurative speech to indicate that this man speaks in a posh way. Another image with: 'Hey you, with that greasy hair! … Dirty snob!' has a similar connotation of distancing oneself from the higher-class individuals in society. This explicitly illustrates how the *Tilburgers Be Like* page contains lower class connotations alongside local ones, where more general and geographically widespread repertoire, associated with lower class, is attributed to Tilburg. It shows how a specific image may

trigger multiple identification repertoires for people, who perhaps do not always realize it. Such pictures draw from local aspects, class repertoires, and other elements (e.g. specific meme characteristics, popular culture references).

Brabantish identities are often combined with an exuberant lifestyle. As a part of that, I examined how people's alcohol use in Brabant differed from people's alcohol consumption in other regions in the Netherlands. While the data I examined does not allow us to draw a uniform conclusion, it was suggested that people in Brabant are neither necessarily more likely to drink alcohol, nor do they necessarily drink more on one occasion, but they are more likely to binge-drink more regularly. This is particularly the case for people in the southeast of Brabant. People believe in this image of an exuberant Brabant and people recognize cultural differences between Brabanders and other people. People use their own experiences to underscore the differences between Brabant and other provinces:

> Sandra: And uh… you already said you felt very attached to Tilburg and to Brabant, and also with the Netherlands… or less?
> Sofie: Really more with Tilburg. We are the hospitable south.
> Sandra: How do you know that?
> Sofie: Well, just compare a job interview in Brabant with one in the west of the country. In Brabant you get a cup of coffee with it, and uh uh… it is a lot less formal than uh… in the west of the country. It seems like they are looking for all of the smallest errors to comment on.
>
> (Interview with an extra from *Smeris,* living in Tilburg, June 2016)

Such experiences may not reflect reality. As I mentioned earlier, people regularly interpret the given information around them so as to confirm their existing assumptions (Tajfel & Forgas, 1981). When they have experiences that confirm their biases, they rearticulate the discourses regarding Brabant. In doing so, they keep the image of an exuberant Brabant alive.

In interpreting the information around them, people may attribute differences in behaviour to being from another locality; while after a closer examination such distinctions are actually due to other (subcultural) differences (e.g. different level of education). The *New Kids* case is a good illustration of how people associate something with place, as *New Kids* was often characterized as Brabantish, while it depends for a large extent on elements of a different repertoire, that of an anti-social, violent, poor individual. What we mistakenly take for 'one' thing is actually a combination of many, of which people often only highlight one. Regardless of how much I argue that *New Kids*' Brabantishness is in fact not *just* Brabantish, people may still equate the characters of *New Kids* with Brabant. Writing about the mixing of different identity repertoires suggests that we can disentangle them; as if we can say it is a, b, and c. The separation of such aspects would mean that we would take identities outside of the context in which they are produced. It means

that we take out the aspects that have shaped these particular identities, but identities work and function within a specific time and space (chronotopes, cf. Blommaert, 2015a, 2015b). If identities are taken out of their context and placed within a new time and/or space, the identities will change. Even when people speak about *WC Experience* as really Brabantish, their ideas and notions of what Brabantishness is, are entangled with ideas about people living in the countryside.

Regardless of whether differences between Brabant and other provinces, or between cities or villages are only based on minor, perhaps even insignificant, differences, or based on changes in other identity repertoires, they are experienced as real. This is illustrated by the way people speak and think about Brabant, as became clear during my interviews, and the way in which people communicate about their village on the Facebook pages I analysed. I would not argue that minor differences are necessarily more important than major ones (cf. Kolstø, 2007). Rather, similar to Rooijakkers (1996), I would argue that precisely because these places have so much in common, minor differences are exaggerated and made salient to create a feeling of uniqueness. Minor differences are only important because a distinction is already made between Brabanders and others (Hollanders, Limburgers) or between Brabanders from the east and west. The already established structures of different provinces and regions facilitate the experienced and imagined differences. It is not so much about the objective differences between groups, but about the perceived ones (as co-constructed in public), regardless of whether they may be major or minor.

Young individuals realize that this positive construction may not necessarily be based on factual truths. Participants of my focus groups were somewhat aware that they engaged with an overly positive construction of Brabant. In the excerpt from Ariënne in the beginning of this chapter, we saw how her articulation of a Brabantish mentality made her realize how strange her description was. The outcome of an exercise in the focus groups in Vlijmen and Tilburg suggests that some adolescents are aware that the image of Brabant is a constructed one. In one of these exercises, the respondents connected words to Brabant, *Randstad*, and the Netherlands. The respondents recognized that these associations did not necessarily reflect reality but a (self-)constructed image:

Timor:	We just gave all negative words to the *Randstad*.
	(laughing)
Tim:	That's how they probably think about us too.
Joep:	Yeah probably yeah.
(Focus Group, Vlijmen, April 2014)	

Respondents are aware that they construct a positive image of themselves, as they believe that *others* think of themselves as fun, honest, humorous, etc., too. The

group in Vlijmen argued that, should people in the *Randstad* to do this same exercise, the (positive) words that they had connected to Brabant would now be attributed to the *Randstad*. Similarly, in Tilburg, one respondent mentioned that they (living in Tilburg) ridiculed people from the *Randstad* and conversely, portrayed an extremely positive image of Brabant. Regardless of the realization that it is an excessively positive construction of their own region, this view of their region is not dismissed. People still continue to reiterate discourses on Brabant and thereby essentialize their place. People use such essentialist scripts, and thereby make the specific, generic (cf. Koven, 2016). Areas and their borders are social constructs but they are experienced as facts.

Thus, what Brabantishness is to those inhabiting this province relies on discourses of a hospitable, friendly, and rural province filled with humorous, alcohol-consuming, social, partying people speaking with a soft *g*. Yet despite the fact that people do not necessarily apply these notions to themselves, they may still express and believe in these stereotypes as though they exist. Indeed, what Brabantishness exactly signifies differs from person to person. But, most importantly, many Brabanders *feel* as if they are different from Hollanders[70] and other Dutch people. People from other parts of the Netherlands emphasize Brabanders as different as well. This difference is expressed by Brabanders because they are proud of their province and who they are. In expressing who they are, they essentialize Brabant and continue to reinforce such discourses about the identity of Brabant.

From Identities of a Region to Regional Identification

Coming back to the distinction that Paasi (2003, 2009) makes between regional identity and identity of a region, we see that the above descriptions rely largely on identities of a region. They are based on discourses of Brabant and may be articulated by the province, the King's Commissioner (cf. Van Drunen, 2016), news broadcasters (e.g. *Omroep Brabant*), organizations (e.g. tourist agents, festivals), media productions (e.g. *Smeris*), and inhabitants themselves (on Facebook, in everyday life). People articulate distinctions between different localities and, regardless of their factual truth, may truly believe in them. They use descriptions they believe in and thereby essentialize their region to differentiate themselves from other people within the Netherlands.

The section of *Considering Oneself a 'Real Brabander': An Analysis* in Chapter 2, showed that people who considered themselves more fitting with some of these Brabantish characteristics (e.g. being an exuberant people-person) also considered themselves more Brabantish. Though this does not mean people who do not identify themselves with the discourses they articulate about Brabant, do not identify

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[70] As elsewhere, Holland refers to the symbolic 'centre' of the Netherlands, located in the west of the Netherlands.

with Brabant at all. For instance, some inhabitants felt 100% Brabander while not engaging in the Brabantish celebration of *Carnaval*, while another felt himself a Bosschenaar, despite his disaffiliation with the white-collar worker discourse he associated with Den Bosch. A disaffiliation with the discourses about one's city or region, even when someone believes in these discourses him- or herself, does not exclude an identification with this place.

People largely believed in the discourses they articulated about their region. However, sometimes they also showed more reflexive attitudes: 'When confronted by difference or challenge to this taken-for-granted framework (including a researcher asking questions) then a more reflexive engagement may follow' (Skey, 2011, p. 63). In the focus groups, respondents sometimes displayed an awareness of the construction of these identities. They challenged each other in discussing whether particular characteristics were Brabantish or belonged to another group.

Moments in which one's regional identity becomes salient, because of a trigger in one way or another (e.g. an outsider noticing something, being outside of Brabant, or watching one's own surroundings on TV) may give people a more re-flexive attitude, but this is not necessarily the case or may only be temporarily. Such moments may offer reflexive engagement with the construct of Brabant, and may even provide change among people who believed in these discourses, but often enough people continue to be entrenched in their already existing life-structures.

While using notions of identities of a nation/region without thinking thoroughly about these within one situation, in another context, people may dis-play a more reflexive attitude, switching between more open and closed categori-sations (Condor, 2006; Skey, 2010, 2011). Using notions and ideas about the 'identity of a region' in one context does not exclude a more inclusive form of Brabant in another. So far, this final chapter has mainly focused on how people make sense of discourses about Brabant: the identity of a region. Underneath these discourses about regional identities is regional identification. These feelings of (not) be-longing to the region are part of the reason why people may articulate these differences. As my dissertation focuses on understanding regional identification, rather than the identity of the region, I now continue by disentangling regional identification. I view this separate from identity of a region, as discourses about Brabantishness are different from feelings of belonging to the region. Within my research I paid attention to the places, where people spoke about Brabant or their region, but did not explicitly name it identity. People often engage in activities that contribute to their regional identification, albeit not explicitly perceiving it as such. So in order to elaborate further on the processes that still play a role in making people feel at home, or feel connected and attached to their region, I focus on some key concepts that arose from my data in combination with the literature: unreflexivity, familiarity, and proximity. Nevertheless, these processes may involve the identity of a region as people often use these artefacts when thinking about

their feelings of belonging. Specifically, as I discuss unreflexivity, it is particularly the identity of a region that often goes unnoticed, but thereby creates some affiliation with Brabant.

Unreflexivity: Brabant is 'Just There'

In my elaboration of identities earlier in my dissertation I stressed that unconscious and unreflexive processes are an important part of the way I perceive identities. Identification with a region is not necessarily a rational act, but is unreflexively accepted. Building on Billig's (1995) banal nationalism, I argued in the second chapter that the province is also unconsciously present in mundane and everyday practices. Once you start paying attention, the background words and actions, the flagging of Brabant, all become apparent. These quotidian aspects became visible to me once I started paying attention to Brabant: 'Habitual performances which have been performed unreflexively for a lifetime may suddenly be revealed to those performing them as social constructions' (Edensor, 2002, p. 89).

Although my data collection and method did not fully attend to this, it does provide some suggestions. The Facebook pages illustrated how these ideas as envisioned online were part of people's routines and embedded within their everyday lives. As described in the sixth chapter *Constructing Brabant on Facebook,* especially on *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants,* there was a clear lack of Brabantish topics for what was presumably a Brabantish web page. More general images and related humorous topics were accepted within a Brabantish framework. Despite this lack of Brabantish connection, people only became annoyed when the content of the images changed towards click-bait. Moreover, I am continuing research in which I mark on a map where I (or others) notice Brabantish symbols. This map exemplifies that flags and linguistic markers may be experienced mindlessly. Flags and signs may be used unconsciously or purposively by the owner, passers-by may thoughtlessly walk by. My ethnographic observations illustrated how many people referred to Brabant in passing. In the crime series, *Smeris*, I observed an unreflexive, unconscious understanding with the scenes beyond that of a simple recognition of locations. Even though this taken-for-granted framework may be countered at times by a more reflexive attitude, often people draw unconsciously on national (or in my case regional) discourses (Skey, 2011). Skey's discussion on national frameworks, may also apply on the regional level: 'At the micro-level, the consistent use of a range of linguistic feature, such as deixis, metonymy and location markers […] contribute to the unimaginative representation of nations as concrete, unified entities and define place, self and other in national terms' (Skey, 2011, p. 64). Similarly Felgenhauer (2010) discusses how implicit and constant references to the territory created, or at least accelerated, the speed with which a region came to be accepted within the minds of people. Remarks about Brabant are also plentiful; people mention Brabant without even thinking about it.

Furthermore, respondents often did not reflect on why someone was considered a Brabander. While at times, respondents referred to particular characteristics of someone – such as being born and having lived in Brabant or using Brabantish linguistic resources – at other times, they had more trouble indicating *why* someone was more Brabantish than others. It just 'felt' this way. In respondents' attempts to characterize what Brabant is, they often resorted to existing discourses because they had no other way of framing this habitual knowledge: 'Sometimes people find it very difficult to articulate why they do the things they do. That is, much of our lives are informed by routine, habit and "common sense" knowledge, rather than acts of individual agency' (Skey, 2011, p. 151).

Some examples have shown how people use characteristics in their daily life and practices to characterize people as Brabantish. For instance, when hearing someone speak in a particular way on a campground abroad, one may articulate that person is a Brabander. At other times, people experience a more unreflexive feeling. Often, for someone with whom one is more familiar with, these basic characterizations are not as important. For example, one girl's self-identified stance of feeling Brabantish and the familiarity (and recognition) of the others with this girl seemed more important than her lack of the soft *g*. Thus while these Brabantish characteristics are partly used to ascribe regional identities to people, they are perhaps sometimes also retrospectively applied after having intuitively defined who is a Brabander. With this, I mean that people may consider someone a Brabander, because of a more unreflexive intuitive feeling, and then use this person as a prototype to think of elements that make up this Brabander as *Brabander*. Together with other discourses of Brabant, these features are used to discuss how Brabantish someone is.

Thus, besides more overt explicit awareness of Brabant as expressed in the discourses about Brabant, regional identities are also experienced on a more implicit level: 'If the homeland is being rhetorically represented, then, as such, it is literally being presented again (or re-presented). The familiar patterns of the patriotic flag are waved. Flagging, in this respect, is always a reminding, a re-presenting and, thus a constricting of the imagination' (Billig, 1995, p. 103). In this sense, using the word Brabant (even the fact that I write an entire dissertation about it!) is unreflexively reproducing the existence of this regional identity, and thereby of a potential regional identification. The extensive use of thick identity repertoires by the speeches of the King's Commissioner, who is as a governor the head and the face of the province (Van Drunen, 2016), legitimizes the idea of Brabant. Without such banal references, people may still identify with and attach themselves to their region, but do not call it Brabant anymore. Because of these unreflexive banal references to Brabant, the 'minor' differences with other provinces are able to exist in the minds of the people.

The way respondents spoke about attaching themselves to their locality and region often illustrated how people do not think about such processes very

reflexively. It is simply there. This unreflexivity relates also to the next point I wish to stress on identities. Namely, the things we do unconsciously, the habits that we have, are familiar, they are part of habitual routine ways of thinking and living. Or as Billig already said with regard to these banal references to the nation: 'Their unobtrusiveness arises, in part, from their very familiarity' (Billig, 1995, p. 174).

Familiarity: Brabant is What I Know and Recognize

In several chapters of my dissertation, the topic of knowledge and familiarity came up. In *Smeris,* it was seeing one's familiar surroundings and having insider's knowledge of a national media production. For *Facebook* it was particularly the ability to understand the local jokes and the knowledge that was displayed when spotting 'mistakes'. In the focus groups, people's detailed knowledge about local celebrities contributed to categorization of these celebrities. In interviews, people's explanation of why they felt attached to Brabant or their region often related to recognizing it and being familiar with it. As has become clear, knowing and recognizing your own surroundings, is a key element of identification with one's 'place'.

I express here two related but different types of knowledge. On the one hand, there is a tangible knowledge: knowing about particular facts, historical circumstances, linguistic styles, and ideas. For instance, knowing how specific words in dialect are written (see the examples in of using '*Dè/Da ga nie'* on *Bredenaars Be Like* in Chapter 5 *Constructing Brabant on Facebook*), or knowing that when exiting a university building in the western part of Tilburg you will not end up in the centre of Tilburg (as some characters in *Smeris* manage to do). It is this knowledge of the locality, and the intrinsic connection between people's physical environment with media productions (e.g. Facebook, *Smeris*) that make such media expressions effective for people's identification. Such media products found online or on (national) television evoke memories of one's own. On the Facebook pages, people start to share their own experiences with a localebrity and recall the moments they were in the places as pictured online. When watching *Smeris*, people may recall the moments they were themselves in that very place that is featured on television.

On the other hand, there is a more tacit knowledge of knowing your way around, a form of embodied knowledge, 'bodily know-how' or 'knowing without knowing' (Moores, 2012). It is not a cognitive consciousness of where things are located in a mental map, but a more implicit way of knowing your way around. This relates to the previous discussed point of how unreflexive habitual processes form a large part of our identities. In the large-scale surveys I used in the third chapter *Tracing Brabant over Time*, I examined whether people's attachment to their region has changed over the last decades. While the surveys indicated the difference between feeling attached (*gehecht*) and feeling connected (*verbonden*), my interviews illustrated that both measures were not well suited to capture *identification*. That is, when one asks people whether they are attached to their region,

they often say they are attached or they feel connected simply because they live there, their friends live there, and they know their way around. This further exemplifies the point of unreflexivity as they do not necessarily consciously reflect on their identification with their region. Moreover, inhabitants have this 'implicit' knowledge of finding their way that connects them to their localities. However, while knowing a place to a certain extent may involve some aspects of attachment, attachment is not necessarily identification. One woman clearly indicated this attachment to Tilburg in having her 'things' there. Yet, emotionally she was not restricted by it. She would be happy to live elsewhere, if life would take her there, and she felt as much citizen of the world as of Tilburg. Yet, knowledge may precede identification in various ways.

In my sixth chapter, *Consuming Brabant through Smeris*, I noted it is not only seeing and recognizing Tilburg on a conscious level, but also the more unreflexive familiarity that contributes to a sense of identification. Particularly concerning national identities, the familiarity of one's own surrounding anchors identification. The domestic architecture and roads with signs may differ slightly throughout the nation but are still within a recognizable range (Edensor, 2002). Series are rendered as recognizable and identifiable because of its cultural resonance (Castelló, 2010; La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005; Straubhaar, 1991). Stereotypes are present in the series *Smeris* and they may contribute to an appreciation of the locality within the series. More importantly, subtle everyday quintessential references render the place as Tilburgian (for a similar argument on the Flemish case, cf. Dhoest, 2007b). While many of these everyday references indicate the Netherlands (e.g. road signs, police logos, and number plates), others may also indicate the setting as Tilburg (local buses, familiar accent). More specifically, the inhabitants of Tilburg experienced a hitherto unknown familiarity with the scenes when watching *Smeris* that is hardly found elsewhere in national popular culture. In this sense, the implicit knowledge and familiarity with Tilburg contributed to an almost indescribable feeling of familiarity and identification with the television series for the local viewers.

Although familiarity does not necessarily lead to identification, the consistent habitual practices and experiencing things 'again and again' may be an integral part of this identification for many; repetition and return are key elements for identification with a place (Moores, 2012, pp. 29-32). In the words of Edensor: 'As an immersed practice, the accumulation of repetitive events becomes sedimented in the body to condense an unreflexive sense of being in place' (Edensor, 2002, p. 56).

Knowledge about a place does not necessarily mean one knows and is familiar with the entire place. We can relate this to what has been written about linguistic repertoires: 'We never know 'all' of a language, we always know specific bits and pieces of it.' (Blommaert, 2010, p. 23). While we may not 'know' an entire language, we can still use it. People may not know their entire city or village, but they can still use knowledge of it, navigate themselves through it, and feel connected with

it on an emotional level. In fact, people may still get lost within a different neighbourhood of their village, while still feeling attached to their locality as a whole. They may not identify with this specific part of their village or region as itself, yet identify with the larger image. As Anderson (2006) argues, a community is imagined, as people do not know all of its members, and never will, yet people experience a common feeling for belonging together to this imagined community. In a similar way, people will not know all of the place they inhabit yet identify with this imagined, but also experienced, place. This brings me to my next point, *what* is this familiar place called Brabant?

Proximity: Brabant is What is Close

Moving across geographical scales is what we often do, often unreflexive and unconscious of what we are doing. Within one nation, local patterns may be organized synchronically as people participate in the same events in their own domestic spaces (e.g. watch the eight o'clock news). National organisations infiltrate local spaces and occurrences within localities constitute the news that is broadcasted to the nation (Edensor, 2002, p. 21). In domestic spaces, Brabant may be evoked through drinking a local beer. Some people may attribute the pleasant homely atmosphere of a village where people know each other to it being located in Brabant. Seeing the forest from a bird's eye view from a tall building may call to mind a feeling of Brabantishness. A matrix of interspatiality emerges in which different geographical scales intertwine: 'The connections between these differently symbolic, differently scaled spaces testify to the scaling of national identity. National identity is enacted in homely settings as well as at ceremonial sites and memoryscapes' (Edensor, 2002, p. 186).

In this dissertation, we have seen countless examples of scaling as people negotiate themselves through different geographical scales of identification. One's city, the region Brabant, and sometimes even the entire south, are frequently used interchangeably. Sofie, my interviewee quoted at the beginning of this chapter, uses Tilburg, Brabant, and the south, within the course of a minute to refer to the same place. When discussing the focus groups, I noted how people were more likely to ascribe Brabantish identities to local celebrities from their own area, even among respondents who did not feel very attached to Brabant themselves. The quantitative data of the PON (2005) underpin this argument further, which revealed that people were more likely to choose an athlete or musician/band from their own sub-region as the most Brabantish.

In line with existing research, this dissertation highlighted these elements of scaling as different scales of identification intertwine and work together. I observed that people thought they were operating on one scale of identification (the region Brabant), but that their actions actually worked on another scale (a more localized idea of a region) or on both these scales. People's sense of Brabant is entangled

with their proximate locality. Indeed, identities are always depending on the specific context of the time and place (i.e. chronotope, cf. Blommaert, 2015a, 2015b) in which someone is acting. Locality is the context in which the process of identification occurs. The idea of proximity relates to this in a more specific way. In the case of identifying with places, proximity may be more important, and perhaps more explicit, than in other types of social and cultural identities, because such identities are about one's residence in an area and refer to how geographical identities depend on what is close to someone. The space that is thoroughly familiar (cf. Moores, 2012; Tuan, 1979), that is considered as one's own Brabant, is not that of the entire province. It is that of one's own local surroundings. People use the word 'Brabant' when actually indicating their own surroundings, a less concretely delineated bordered familiar space, that is usually smaller in scale than the province of Brabant. Depending on the person, these surroundings may cover a different area. For a respondent who used to work in Tilburg but lives in Den Bosch, the mental image of Brabant may encompass a larger geographical space than for the Tilburgian girl who works and lives in (the close proximities of) this city. In the example of *Lul Brabants mee main* I noted how a mismatch between different views of Brabant played out. While some people (from the west of Brabant) may argue that 'it does not get more Brabantish than this', others may (light-heartedly) claim, 'you should have let a Helmonder sing it… that's really Brabant! 😂😂.'

I illustrated that Brabant does not only differ internally as people think about themselves as coming from different places. Also when explicitly talking about Brabant in its entirety, people conceptualize Brabant differently because of their locality. This is in line with Antonsich (2010a) and Vainikka (2012) who have examined regions in Western Europe and Finland respectively and have illustrated how spatial attachment is attached to personal stories of which specific territorial regions may be, but are not necessarily part. People's spatial identification is often attached to more local forms such as municipalities (Vainikka, 2012). Moreover, sometimes people may be highly aware of such unconscious processes. Immigrants' feeling of belonging to Britain was fuelled by their multicultural London experiences despite knowing of a more homogeneous and white North (Ghorashi & Vieten, 2012). In essence, their national sense of belonging is highly local and these people even appear to notice that their sense of belonging to Britain is a localized one.

Of course, this is also the difficulty of naming one's own surroundings and putting a label on it. While in the Dutch province of Gelderland people may not attach themselves as much to an overarching provincial identity, they do feel attached to their region and localities (Verhoeven, 2015). Although people in Gelderland may not pin down their feelings of belonging to being Gelders and because of that feel less connected to other people within their province than people in Brabant feel with their fellow-inhabitants, in practice, their feelings of belonging may not be so

different. It is because the thick identity discourses on Brabant exist, that we identify with it. As Bijsterveld (2014a) has also observed, differences in language and dialect, which people may consider an essential part of their culture, do not determine institutional boundaries, but rather, follow them. How we call our identity, what region we say we belong to, is based on existing geographical and administrative borders. The articulation of Brabantish identities, the constant reminders of this province, the discourses and artefacts about Brabant remind people of its existence. Because of the constant reminders of this name, people use this name themselves as well in articulating their identification. While a local region may capture the actual surroundings people identify with better, because it fits their proximate surroundings better, people use Brabant because of its resonating name.

While my research shows that people feel attached to their place, it is not so important what the name of this place is, I would argue. In this case, it happens to be Brabant, but that does not mean that the administrative shape of Brabant is to what people attach themselves. The understanding of space one inhabits through mundane everyday practices is the one that is close by. The 'we' that is spoken about is often not the entire province but of one's local everyday surroundings. Yet the resonating phrase of 'we Brabanders' anchors many of these everyday practices within Brabant, and makes it important as a province.

Identification: Brabant is 'Ours'

Finally, I would like to integrate some of the previous discussed notions and elaborate on how people give meaning to elements and claim these elements as 'ours' and thereby make them Brabantish. I already identified a discrepancy between the place people call Brabant and the place they identify with. People often speak about Brabant with a more one-dimensional essentialist approach, and in this process exclude people who may not fit in with particular criteria of being Brabantish. Yet, in the way people identify with their region, and in the way in which people express their regional identification in a more unreflexive way, people use a more ambiguous construction of what Brabant is that is anchored in familiar and proximate practices. Similarly, Thissen (2013) illustrates that people's everyday practices of belonging in Limburg deviate from the way in which they spoke about their own identifications with Limburg. While their practices suggested they were well integrated in their locality, even picking the side of Limburg in a conflict, they argued themselves they were not real Limburgers. The way they spoke about Limburg seemed more distant, talking about the identity of the region, rather than about their – clearly existing – regional identifications.

Thus, such discrepancies become visible when examining people's regional identifications compared to the identities they associate with their region. Of course, there still is a relation between these regional identifications and the identity of the region, particularly because so many people believe in (essentialist)

notions of what Brabant is. Identification lies underneath the symbols, artefact, and stories people tell about their region. Yet, such symbols may have important functions for people as a way of expressing their identification. I write here of an active process of giving things symbolic meaning (Frijhoff, 1997, 2003). People give meaning to something, which may be a concrete object, a person – but may also be an idea – by considering it as one's own. This may be done in a very subtle manner through deixis (e.g. 'our' athletes) or more explicitly (e.g. saying it is part of your culture).

On the one hand, this relates to the previously made points of more unreflexive unconscious processes. Descriptions such as 'our' athletes and 'our' habits are used. People may attribute people or things with 'collective positioning relayed through a metaphor of shared ownership' (Condor, 2006, p. 664). These often more unconscious actions of identification are not even noticed. The regional broadcaster *Omroep Brabant* often writes about news related to Brabant and is perfectly able to do that, most of the time. Such well-established acts of Brabantishness are not even noticed by the ordinary person in everyday life. On the other hand, people may be more actively involved in acts of making things their own. Frijhoff (1997, 2003) for instance, argues that people may use forms of appropriation to correct a one-way flow of history writing. He argues that appropriation is a way for ordinary people to be involved in history making, often after feelings of estrangement or threats. Frijhoff also stresses that processes of appropriation are not simply top-down, but may also work as a counterforce against 'official' representations. In this case, people may give meaning to symbols of Brabant. They may have created these symbols themselves, or give a Brabantish meaning to already existing artefacts. Such elements may include cultural heritage or more light-hearted forms of identification. Symbols may function as temporary handles for identification and a way to express pride for one's region.

People often domesticate elements as Brabantish. Swanenberg (forthcoming) notes how Braboneger himself considers his linguistic style as really Brabantish because he speaks it. Regardless of whether it matches the official linguistic grammar and style, it is appropriated as Brabantish by Braboneger because it is 'our' way of speaking. While the expressions of regional identification and attachment to Brabant may have changed, the sentiment of wanting to claim elements is not new at all. *Brabantia Nostra*, the organization and magazine from the thirties and the forties I referred to in the second chapter, held nostalgic conservative feelings for Brabant and means 'Brabant for us' rather than 'our Brabant' (Van Oudheusden, 1996b). The magazine tried to appropriate Brabant in very explicit and overt ways, and to some, were dismissed for this very same reason. As mentioned earlier, discourses about regional identities may be ways to make these abstract feelings more concrete. Identification with one's region may lie underneath such symbols.

Processes of claiming ownership are rarely uniform. When the regional broadcaster *Omroep Brabant* is not so successful in its appropriation of Brabantish elements, it seems to be because people perceive it as forced connection to Brabant. What may seem forced to me, may be accepted by others. When I saw the news item of Brabant winning more medals than Brazil and Spain on the Olympic Games in 2012, I disentangled this message. Some commenters did as well, arguing that many of the medals that were attributed to Brabant were actually efforts of an entire Dutch team or of people who were not born in Brabant. However, others mindlessly accepted this idea, as I saw its return on several places. For instance, a fun online multiple choice quiz on Brabant included a question on which countries had Brabant beaten in terms of number of medals on the Olympics 2012.

However, not everybody is equally able to make such claims of identities (Skey, 2011). Braboneger's use of hyperdialect is generally accepted (Swanenberg, forthcoming) and so was most of the language use on Facebook. However, when the language use on Facebook came to reflect another region or when used by someone who was not *a priori* regarded as a Brabander (e.g. Frisian respondents on *New Kids*, *WC Experience*'s song *Lul Brabants mee main*) they are dismissed as non-Brabanders. In other words, hyperdialect is fine when expressed by someone from the in-group, but when it is perceived as a threat to one's own identity, it became important to articulate its inaccuracy. In many observations that I made, I saw this claiming of something as part of one's identification at work. It is a way of taking ownership or distancing oneself from these elements. It is a way of giving meaning to the occurrences and attaching pride to it. It is not merely claiming something as theirs, but a positive claiming in which one expresses pride through their identification.

Several processes go behind this claiming of something as one's own. First, there is the issue of production. It is made 'here' by people from 'here'. People may even be involved in the production themselves (e.g. as extras in a television series). *New Kids* was, in part, seen as Brabantish because it was produced by Brabanders. When referring to people, you might equate this with being born here. Celebrities or localebrities who are born here are Brabanders, and are therefore 'our' heroes and may be considered emblematic for Brabantish identities. Second, people may claim elements as their own because of being close and having an affinity with these elements. The local colour of the television series *Smeris* gives it a sense of familiarity and recognition. Celebrities may engage with the locality in intrinsic ways. For instance, Karin Bruers' local involvement with the community may ground her in the community. In that sense, being produced (or born) here is often not enough to be recognized as 'truly' Brabantish. Part of celebrities' Brabantishness may lie in the fact they are not only *from here* but they continue to *be here* (cf. Lettinga et al., 2015).

This is intertwined with a third aspect, that of the reversal of marginality: the idea of being in the centre for once. Precisely because it breaks the traditional ways

of filming, or because it is in some other way out of the ordinary, *New Kids* and *Smeris* may have been considered Brabantish by some and appropriated as our own in a more conscious way. In this case, this 'claiming' is a more active process because of this re-positioning. Although people may think these were not the best productions made, it was at least a Brabant production. Even symbols that are not necessarily uniformly positive may be embraced as being 'ours'.

Moreover, as Edensor (2002) also argues, features of identification are particularly effective because of their multiple interpretations: 'Condensation symbols are more effective than rigid emblems, for they can be interpreted and claimed by different groups, broadening their appeal and constituting a sharing, albeit one that might be contested' (Edensor, 2002, p. 189). Such symbols do not have a fixed meaning, but may be appropriated and contested differently. However, while in this case cultural products are claimed as being 'ours', whatever identities are meant by this, this does not mean they are exclusively taken as theirs. It is perfectly fine to consider Ireen Wüst a Goirlenaar (as she was born and used to live in Goirle), Brabander, and Dutch at the same time, because such identities do not exclude each other. Despite appropriating such celebrities or products, they are still open for interpretation by others. Simultaneously, what may be placeless to some may be meaningfully local for another. While *Smeris* is perfectly viewable by people from other places in the Netherlands, it is probably only considered 'ours' by local viewers.

In that sense, the cultural artefacts discussed in this dissertation are given meaning, actively worked on in the process of identifying with them. Thus, people use symbols to express and reshape their identification through it, but on their own these symbols do not create such identification. Such things may include 'old' 'traditional' forms such as sausage rolls, the idea of being exuberant, but may also involve new tokens of identity such as *Smeris*. These may only be temporarily and may be replaced by new ones later on. While some people still try to claim *Smeris* as Tilburgian, and hope, argue, and celebrate a return of the series to Tilburg, the temporality of the artefact as a symbol may also be accelerated through its move to Amsterdam. Future research could highlight further when, but more importantly why, particular symbols and social constructions do or do not work as symbols for identification. It will be a challenge to do so without falling into the trap of merely examining how the identity of a region is conceptualized by people and how this differs from top-down representations.

So What?

My aim, of course, has always been to say not only something about Brabant, but also about regional identification more generally. In that sense, I think one could think about the processes I describe in relation to other regions (whatever the size of this region), particularly those with a thick identity. While the exact discourses

surrounding such a place may differ, the processes I described may largely apply in a similar way. Indeed, this might also mean that the outcome might be different; people may come to identify with a region on another sublevel, for instance, because of the thick identity and strong label of that region. Yet, while the size of such a region may differ, the processes of identification may be largely the same. The feelings of belonging and the anchorage of these feelings of belonging in the more local, proximate, and familiar surroundings may still be present in these other regions. People may connect these feelings of belonging, of attachment, to a (thick) identity that they (unreflexively) encounter within their everyday surroundings. While this region may have a different size, be of a different scale of identification, the ways in which people identify with their surroundings may not be so different. Among others, Bijsterveld (2014a) observes that differences in language and dialect may follow institutional boundaries, rather than that they determine them. I took this a step further by arguing that the way in which we call the place with which we identify or to which we belong, may follow existing (institutional) boundaries as well. At times, this is a country (e.g. the Netherlands) or a region (e.g. Brabant), while at other times this is a city or village (e.g. Tilburg), but often this place encompasses a more local proximate surroundings than the label may suggest.

Furthermore, these claims expand on research from other scholars who have stressed the importance of these unreflexive practices with regard to identities in Britain and Wales (Edensor, 2002; Skey, 2011) and regional identities in Germany (Felgenhauer, 2010). People may identify with these places simply because they are named and they are there. Yet, this does not signify they identify with the same space. Within the Netherlands, for instance, it has also been noted that despite the fact that Limburg differs internally, a shared identification for Limburg is still upheld, particularly because Limburg needed to define itself on a national level (Knotter, 2008). The way in which people may identify with Limburg, as with Brabant, thus seems to follow existing territorial boundaries. I would argue it is probably also the case that, although these Limburgers identify themselves with different spaces, they may often call it Limburg, simply because it is there (as a thick identity) and they are constantly – often unconsciously – reminded of this. While it is widely recognized that regions differ internally, also depending on where people live, I have made this more concrete by using the term proximity.

The diversity of the case studies under scrutiny illustrates the variety of how people make sense of regional identification, but also the uniformity of it. While the cases might have been quite different, in how people demonstrated identification and in the way in which discourses on Brabant were expressed, the processes I have just elaborated on became apparent in multiple cases. While seeming to be diverse cases, striking similarities were observed. Talking about celebrities in focus groups was, in a way, making Brabantishness one's own (or distancing oneself from it); this was also true on the Facebook posts and with *Smeris*.

People continue to be attached to the local or regional level, as the large survey data suggest that neither more nor less people have come to attach themselves to their town, region, or province. People still feel attached to their locality, and Brabant is ingrained within their everyday life. This illustrates how change is slow and may occur for individuals or small parts of society, rather than uniformly for everyone. What I have noted is that identities do not just change quickly for an entire population, although some individuals may come to identify more (or less) with Brabant. One of the ways in which this can happen is by becoming more engaged with the particular community one lives in. More time invested within one's region, and an accompanied familiarity with one's surroundings, embeds a person further within his or her locality. This embedded-ness may also be found through family, both the immediate family and the larger network of extended family. People with the majority of their family residing in Brabant were more likely to consider themselves a real Brabander. This may be because of a more ancestrally based idea of what it means to be a real Brabander, but may also relate to how people are embedded in their society as more community ties relate to more place attachment (Lewicka, 2011).

All cases support the importance of scaling as also noted by other scholars (e.g. Edensor 2002). The analysed data from 1971 to 2015 illustrated how different scales of identification are interrelated. In comparing town with province and region, I observed that people attach themselves more to the vague notion of a region than to a town and more to a town than to a province. This does give some indication that the vague idea of region is more important than concrete administrative and/or geographic contours of a province. The analysis of the Facebook pages also illustrated these processes of scaling, as people communicated the locality within national and regional spaces. These posts were ingrained within the everyday worlds of people through the familiar places that were shared on the screen. Especially during the Football World Cup, the nation was localized by using specific words or local elements (e.g. local company, local football club). In *Smeris,* the familiar landscape of the Netherlands intertwined with the specific aspects of Tilburg and imbued the series with both Dutch and Tilburgian aspects. Moreover, in their references to Tilburg and Brabant, explicitly and implicitly, these terms entwined. Perhaps, it was most obvious in the focus groups I conducted where celebrities who are close by were considered more Brabantish. Even when using the term Brabant very explicitly, people may associate their own local surroundings with it.

People speak about regional identities through these different symbols and artefacts of this regional identity (e.g. people are exuberant, a sausage roll is really Brabantish), but this is quite different from the process of regional identification and how people identify with their region. The regional artefacts then come to represent these feelings of belonging in order to distinguish them from people in other regions and localities. It is a way of making an abstract feeling concrete. This

may be done on a small scale (e.g. rivalry with one's neighbouring village) or on a larger scale (e.g. Brabant as different from Holland). Underneath these symbols are processes of regional identification and belonging. These symbols and discourses can only exist because people feel as if they could belong to these groups.

These are omnipresent reminders of what Brabant is, and thus are reminders of what it means to live in Brabant. This reinforces the identification with Brabant. Brabant does not just matter on a political and economic scale, but also has cultural and historic resonance (Bijsterveld, 2014b). The surveys used in the third chapter *Tracing Brabant over Time* indicate a slight difference in identification with their region in different provinces within the Netherlands. With regard to town, not many differences were observed. Constant reminders of living in this province, whether this is online on Facebook or on the street, reinforce the idea of a resonating Brabant. This resonating idea of Brabant may foster identification with Brabant, simply because it is there. Of course, the presence of this name of Brabant *alone* does not create regional identification. If people did not experience any regional identification and did not embrace the discourses on this region, the inclusion of the term Brabant may be experienced as forced. The constant reminder of Brabant through bottom-up phrases is a constant vocalization of Brabant and re-confirmation of its existence.

Throughout this dissertation, and particularly in the fourth chapter *Interpreting Brabant,* I have shown how this idea of Brabant does not necessarily match the institutional Brabant. What people identify with is an idea of a home, of a home that is different from a home elsewhere. This is called Brabant, because it needs a name, and Brabant has a resonating power. It is expressed by the stranger at the bus stop, who speaks about a convivial Brabant, the import-Brabander who refers to herself as such, the pub that markets itself as a place where you can experience the real Brabant, and by myself through writing this dissertation on Brabant. This, however, does not mean that people in Brabant feel more at home than people in Holland. It only suggests that they express more attachment to their region, perhaps precisely because Brabant is often (unconsciously or not) reinforced.

Brabant is Here

Brabant is here because Brabant is everywhere around us, surrounding us without realizing it. Brabant is here because it consists of 'our' everyday surroundings. Brabant is here, because it is where the Brabander is located; it is that which is close to the Brabander's home. In the minds of people, Brabant is not bordered through the administrative boundaries of the province, but it has vague margins, which contain the idea of what is 'here'.

In the beginning of this dissertation, I reflected on myself and my development as a Brabander. I mentioned how I became more *familiar* with Brabant as I gained *knowledge.* In observing my surroundings as an ethnographer, I became aware of

how many *unconscious, unreflexive* actions now became *visible*. By writing this dissertation, I put Brabant in my and other people's minds. I mentioned how my *practices* of *engaging* with Hilvarenbeek and Brabant, *again and again*, embedded me further within my locality. I saw that 'Brabant is here' and I changed.

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Summary

Although people increasingly move across the world, physically, online, in their imagination, or through consumption patterns, they seldom lose sight of their homes completely. People continue to be attached to the places they live in or come from. This dissertation aims to understand how people identify with North Brabant, a province located in the south of the Netherlands, and how these identifications manifest in everyday life.

Regional identities are social constructs created in and through interaction. While identities are not always consciously experienced as such, people may talk about Brabant through a more one-dimensional essentialist approach. People may assume they have an inner core that determines who they are and that the Brabantish identity is based on certain (unchangeable) criteria. People may think they have to fulfil particular criteria to be a Brabander, for instance the ability to speak in dialect and to have been born in Brabant. If someone fulfils enough of these criteria, the person is seen as a Brabander. Even though people sometimes find it hard to define what is Brabantish, and they sometimes appeal to intuition, people regularly express such essentialist ideas about the Brabantish identity.

There is, however, a discrepancy between what people may discern as Brabant and how people actually experience Brabant. If people talk about Brabant, stereotypical elements and existing (traditional) discourses may play a role. However, if we look beyond this to the way in which people identify with Brabant, and how people experience Brabant, then the distinction between Brabanders and others becomes blurred. Unreflexive processes play a role for regional identification. The identity of the region is articulated in discourses on the region, but it may be even more important to examine how people identify with their region. While the identity of the region sometimes coincides with the way in which people identify with their region, this is not necessarily the case.

In this dissertation, I analyse several cases in order to understand regional identification within Brabant. Besides the role of unreflexive processes in regional identification, familiarity, knowledge of the locality, and proximity also play a role. Regional identification is embedded within the recognizable locality of everyday

life. For this research, I used several cases and methods to research these contemporary processes of identification. In doing so, I chose to analyse everyday elements, particularly in relation to media, both online and on television. Specifically, these everyday expressions and practices, in which people do not necessarily consciously appeal to their Brabantish identity, show how Brabant is experienced in contemporary society.

 Some scholars argue that as global items and ideas are disseminated, people begin to identify more as global citizens. Simultaneously, it has been argued, as more global options are available, people may turn to their local identities and to their local surroundings in order to protect them from erosion. My analyses of the datasets from Eurobarometer (1991–2015) and ISSP (1995–2014), described in Chapter 3, suggest that there is no clear trend in the change of people's attachment to Brabant since 1991. In line with existing research, other factors seem more important determinants, such as having lived in Brabant for a longer time, and/or during one's childhood.

These surveys, however, do not necessarily measure an (emotional) identification with one's region. People may feel attached to their city or region in a more practice-based way; they live there, their friends live there, and they engage in activities there. However, an (emotional) identification with one's region may still be associated with more attachment as measured by these surveys. In other words, people who feel more practice-based attachment with one's city or village may also feel more emotionally connected (identification) to their city or village.

This is further explained through the qualitative results described in Chapter 4, which I use to illuminate the importance of proximity. Often, Brabant is what is 'proximate', that which is close and is enacted in local everyday settings. People identify with their surroundings and the precise name given to this may not be as important. My focus groups illustrate that young people often base their ideas of what is Brabantish on their local and proximate experiences. This is confirmed by the quantitative data I analysed. Respondents are more likely to choose an athlete or musician from their own region as the most Brabantish athlete or musician. Thus, in terms of how identities are negotiated in everyday life, we see that when people refer to Brabant, they often do so through (unconsciously) referring to what is proximate to *them*, as what is proximate, is Brabantish.

Moreover, some processes that are characterized as local (e.g. *New Kids*) are entangled with more general global scripts (e.g. of anti-social individuals, similar to white trash or chavs). Identification thus draws on local features and features occurring at higher, regional, national, and global scales, even simultaneously. Even when explicitly talking about a different scale, people's ideas are still informed by the other scales. This is not to say that *New Kids* does not have any Brabantish connotations at all and that it is only a representation of a stereotype of white trash characters. Yet these more widely recognizable aspects allowed *New*

Kids to be accepted throughout the Netherlands and be exported to other countries.

Subsequently, I write about online practices in which regional identification plays a role in Chapter 5. On the Facebook pages of *'Inhabitants' Be like* (e.g. *Brabanders Be like, Tilburgers Be like)* and *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* implicit, shared knowledge about one's locality is of importance. The source for this knowledge comes from people's everyday life, but is visualized in the posts on these Facebook pages. A familiarity with the locality and shared symbols foster a local affinity. Accordingly, by sharing with others these recognisable spaces or experiences, we can see processes of exclusion and inclusion at work. While some words are not written according to traditional grammar rules on these Facebook pages, the impression of speaking dialect – in other words – the impression of being local, is often more important than the correct ways of writing. Most mistakes are not as severely judged as how the singer from *WC Experience* was dismissed as a real Brabander by many (as elaborated on in Chapter 4). However, sometimes people do respond with normative rules of what is correct. These normative rules especially play a role when it is not just the impression of local dialect that is of concern, but when other competing local identities are involved. When the dialect or image of a rivalling city or village is used, the consequences of making a mistake in dialect are more severe.

As a final case, in Chapter 6, I analyse the television series *Smeris*, which was set in Tilburg. Precisely because the series does not take place in or around Amsterdam and actively engages with local colour, the series can play a role for regional identification. While the visualization of Tilburg, particularly the time-lapses, imply Tilburg's spectacular scope, the playfulness of a familiar Tilburg is created through the recognizable locations and the extensive use of jokes, both about Brabant and about other subjects. Locals express their pride on Tilburg being featured in *Smeris*. They spot locations they recognize and have, for a change, insight into how a series is produced. Precisely because the characters of Theo and Willem are moving through the streets of Tilburg, the series calls to mind a feeling of recognition that other series can hardly bring forward. While some Tilburgers simply enjoy seeing Tilburg on the screen, others express their pride of and identification with Tilburg by talking about the inconsistencies of the series and their knowledge of the local city in public.

Finally, I reflect in the last chapter of my dissertation on what these cases tell us about regional identification. First, it is important to realize that people are often unreflexively concerned with regional identification, even when they do feel connected to their region. Brabant is not only anchored in everyday symbols, but people sometimes find it difficult to say what Brabant is. Secondly, recognizability and knowledge of the local seems to contribute to identification with a region. Both the more tangible knowledge (such as expressed in some Facebook posts) and more tacit intuitive knowledge (such as the recognisability of Tilburg in *Smeris*)

play a role. Third, people define what is Brabantish based on what is close. Identities should be perceived in the context in which they are produced. Proximity is more specific in this regard; it refers to the place that is thoroughly familiar, that is perceived as one's personal Brabant. This is not the entire province, but it is a Brabant that confirms with one's personal and nearby surroundings.

People relate the elements they consider as 'from here' to Brabant's thick identity. In that sense, identification with Brabant follows existing territorial boundaries. The process of identifying with one's surroundings is connected to an existing region: in this case, Brabant. While in this case it may be called Brabant, when talking about identification with one's surroundings it could have had a different name with a different size. My analyses show that while people may speak about Brabant, it does not mean they always refer to Brabant; they may also refer to their local surroundings or a larger space while calling *it* Brabant. Brabant has a strong name, and that's probably also why people identify with Brabant. This dissertation, thereby, shows that Brabant means in daily life mostly that which is 'here'.

Nederlandse samenvatting

Hoewel mensen zich in toenemende mate over de wereld bewegen, fysiek, online, in gedachten en door consumptiepatronen, verliezen mensen zelden hun connectie met een thuis. Mensen voelen zich nog steeds gehecht aan de plek waar ze wonen of vandaan komen. Dit proefschrift beoogt te begrijpen hoe mensen zich identificeren met Noord-Brabant en hoe deze identificatie zich manifesteert in hun dagelijkse leven.

Regionale identiteiten zijn sociale constructies aangezien identiteiten worden gevormd in en door interactie. Hoewel identiteiten niet constant bewust worden ervaren, praten mensen vaak op een essentialistische manier over Brabant. Mensen gaan er van uit dat zij een kern hebben die bepaalt wie ze zijn en dat de Brabantse identiteit gebaseerd is op bepaalde (onveranderlijke) criteria. Mensen denken dat aan bepaalde criteria moet worden voldaan om Brabants te zijn, zoals het kunnen praten in dialect en in Brabant geboren zijn. Als iemand aan genoeg van deze criteria voldoet, dan wordt deze persoon als Brabander gezien. Ook al weten mensen soms moeilijk te definiëren wat Brabants is en blijken ze daarbij soms te appelleren aan intuïtieve aspecten, toch uiten zij regelmatig essentialistische ideeën over de Brabantse identiteit.

Er is een discrepantie tussen wat mensen Brabant noemen en hoe ze Brabant ervaren. Als mensen het over Brabant hebben, spelen er vaak stereotypische elementen en terugkerende, al dan niet traditionele, discoursen een rol. Als we echter verder kijken naar de manier waarop mensen zich met Brabant identificeren, omgaan met hun identiteit ofwel hun regionale identificatie beleven, en hoe mensen Brabant ervaren, dan zien we dat zij minder rigide onderscheid maken tussen verschillende groepen dan wanneer zij over het begrip Brabant spreken. Onbewuste processen spelen kennelijk een grote rol bij regionale identificatie. De identiteit van de regio is een beeld dat gevormd en uitgedragen wordt aan de hand van allerlei discoursen. Hoewel deze identiteit van de regio belangrijk is en afzonderlijk bestudeerd kan worden, is het misschien nog wel noodzakelijker om te kijken hoe mensen zich identificeren met hun regio. De regionale identiteit valt soms samen met de manieren waarop mensen zich identificeren met hun omgeving, maar dat hoeft niet per se zo te zijn.

In dit proefschrift gebruik ik verschillende casussen om te onderzoeken hoe identificatie werkt. Behalve dat regionale identificatie vaak onbewust werkt, zijn herkenbaarheid, kennis van het lokale en nabijheid belangrijk. Regionale identificatie zit verankerd in de herkenbare vertrouwdheid van het dagelijkse leven. Voor dit onderzoek heb ik verschillende casussen en methodes gebruikt om deze hedendaagse processen van identificatie te onderzoeken. Hierbij heb ik gekozen voor alledaagse aspecten in de vorm van media, zowel online als op televisie. Juist deze alledaagse uitingen en gebruiken, waarbij mensen niet refereren naar hun Brabantse identiteit, laten zien hoe Brabant ervaren wordt in de hedendaagse samenleving.

Sommige wetenschappers beargumenteren dat mensen zich in de afgelopen decennia minder verbonden zijn gaan voelen met hun regio. Door de globalisering van onze samenleving zijn er meer mogelijkheden gekomen om te reizen en te communiceren met mensen over de hele wereld. Ook producten uit andere landen zijn ruimschoots beschikbaar geworden. Hierdoor, zo wordt beargumenteerd, zou men zich minder met het lokale en nationale gaan identificeren, maar juist meer met de wereld. Aan de andere kant zijn er ook wetenschappers die zeggen dat mensen, juist door deze globalisering, uitdrukking geven aan een tegenreactie door zich meer met hun lokale omgeving te identificeren. Juist doordat allerlei aspecten globaler worden, keert men terug naar de oorsprong.

Uit mijn analyse van datasets van Eurobarometer (1991–2015) en ISSP (1995–2014), beschreven in Hoofdstuk 3, blijkt dat er in de afgelopen jaren niet meer maar ook niet minder mensen in Brabant zich gehecht of verbonden voelen met hun regio dan in eerdere jaren. Hier zijn wel wat kanttekeningen bij te plaatsen, waar ik ook uitgebreid over rapporteer in dit hoofdstuk. In lijn met bestaand onderzoek blijkt dat er andere factoren zijn die een grotere rol spelen. Zo is het veel belangrijker voor iemands verbondenheid waar iemand is opgegroeid en hoe lang iemand al in zijn of haar dorp woont.

Een ander belangrijke nuance hierbij is dat 'zich verbonden voelen met' of 'gehecht zijn aan' een regio niet per definitie een emotionele identificatie impliceert. Mensen kunnen zich verbonden voelen met hun dorp of stad, simpelweg omdat zij daar veel tijd doorbrengen en er veel activiteiten ondernemen. Wel kan een meer functionele binding met een stad of dorp logischerwijs samenhangen met een meer emotionele band. Anders gezegd, mensen die zich functioneel verbonden voelen met hun stad of dorp, zijn waarschijnlijk ook meer geneigd een emotionele band (identificatie) met hun stad of dorp te hebben.

De kwalitatieve resultaten van de focusgroepen diepen deze ideeën verder uit. Zoals beschreven in Hoofdstuk 4, blijkt dat nabijheid een grote rol speelt bij wat Brabant voor mensen betekent. Mensen identificeren zich met wat nabij is en de precieze geografische naam of territoriale duiding die hieraan gegeven wordt, is vaak van ondergeschikt belang. Uit mijn focusgroepen blijkt dat jongeren hun mening over wat Brabants is vaak baseren op basis van hun lokale en nabije

ervaringen. Dit wordt verder gestaafd met data van het PON die ik heb geanaly-
seerd. Daaruit blijkt dat mensen in het westen van Brabant vaker voor een West-
Brabants persoon kiezen als meest Brabantse sporter en artiest dan mensen uit het
zuidoosten van Brabant. Men kiest dus vaker voor iemand uit de eigen omgeving.

In feite maakt het dus niet zo veel uit hoe deze lokale omgeving genoemd
wordt, maar omdat Brabant ervaren wordt als een stabiele, diepgewortelde regio
met een sterke naam – Brabant heeft een 'dikke' identiteit – gebruiken veel mensen
het woord Brabant in hun dagelijkse leven. Dit betekent echter niet dat mensen
het ook daadwerkelijk over Brabant, in de zin van 'de provincie Noord-Brabant',
hebben als ze hierover praten. Het gebruik van zulke woorden wordt met het
grootste gemak afgewisseld worden met 'het Zuiden' of een stad binnen Brabant,
terwijl nog steeds dezelfde (nabije) regio bedoeld wordt.

Ideeën over wat men lokaal vindt, zijn verweven met repertoires van andere
categorieën. Zo heb ik, tevens in Hoofdstuk 4, gekeken naar reacties op *New Kids*.
Deze vaak als grof ervaren sketchshow met asociale 'hangjongeren' wordt vaak
gekarakteriseerd als typisch Brabants. Maar als we nader kijken naar het soort
gedrag dat hierbij als Brabants wordt getypeerd, blijkt dit vooral aan te leunen
tegen het gedrag en de bijbehorende beeldvorming van, ook in andere landen voor-
komende, groepen als 'kampers', 'Sjonnies en Anita's' en de lagere (witte) onder-
klasse. Nu wil ik niet stellen dat *New Kids* alleen een uiting is van deze stereotiepe
categorieën van *white trash*, maar hun gedragsrepertoire vormt er wel een belang-
rijk onderdeel van. Juist door deze algemeen herkenbare aspecten kon *New Kids*
zich naar het buitenland verspreiden en herkennen ook mensen in andere delen
van Nederland elementen van deze karakters. De lokale aspecten mogen echter
ook niet vergeten worden, zeker omdat veel mensen dat benadrukken.

Als we vervolgens kijken naar de manier waarop lokale identificatie online geuit
wordt, zien we processen waarin kennis van het lokale een centrale rol speelt. In
mijn analyse van de Facebookpagina's *Be like* (bv. *Brabanders Be like, Tilburgers Be
like*) en *Negen-gag op z'n Brabants* in Hoofdstuk 5 lijkt het erop dat impliciete,
gedeelde kennis over het lokale belangrijk is. De herkenning van situaties, per-
sonen, plekken, enzovoort, is cruciaal om de humor die op deze pagina's centraal
staat te begrijpen. Buitenstaanders worden hier buitengesloten, omdat ze de
grappen minder gemakkelijk kunnen begrijpen. Uiteraard is het niet alleen maar
lachen geblazen om wat er op Facebook gebeurt. Soms wordt er wat feller gerea-
geerd op 'fouten' in tekst en beeld. Maar in tegenstelling tot het afkraken van de
zanger van *WC Experience* in *Lul Brabants mee main* om zijn niet-authentieke
Brabantsheid (besproken in Hoofdstuk 4), reageren de meeste mensen vaak
minder fel op deze fouten. Zeker op de *Be like* pagina's lijken de posters van deze
berichten al, a priori of door het lokale onderwerp, als lokaal persoon te zijn
erkend. Voor mensen uit de plaats zelf lijkt het minder erg om een fout te maken
dan voor iemand die een buitenstaander lijkt. Fouten waarbij gebruik gemaakt
wordt van het repertoire van een rivaal, leiden tot meer negatieve reacties.

Als laatste casus heb ik, in Hoofdstuk 6, onderzoek gedaan naar het televisie-programma *Smeris*, waarvan het eerste seizoen zich afspeelt in Tilburg. Juist doordat deze serie zich niet afspeelt in de buurt van Amsterdam en de serie ook actief gebruik maakt van couleur locale, kan deze serie een rol spelen voor regionale identificatie. De visualisatie van Tilburg als een grote stad valt samen met de (voor inwoners) herkenbare vertrouwdheid van Tilburg. Die zit zowel in de grapjes die gemaakt worden, al dan niet met een Brabantse ondertoon, als in de herkenbaarheid van onder meer de locaties en het accent. De serie zet Tilburg neer als rauw en gezellig. In hun reacties op de serie geven inwoners uitdrukking aan hun trots op Tilburg. Ze spotten locaties die ze kennen en krijgen, voor de verandering, inzicht in de productiekant van het programma. Juist doordat de karakters Theo en Willem zich door de straten van Tilburg begeven, roept de serie een gevoel van herkenning op die men in andere series op televisie niet of nauwelijks ervaart. Hoewel sommige Tilburgers het gewoon leuk vinden om Tilburg te zien, uiten anderen hun trots op en identificatie met Tilburg door inconsequenties in de serie te melden en hun kennis van de lokale stad in het openbaar te delen.

Tot slotte, reflecteer ik in het laatste hoofdstuk van mijn proefschrift op wat deze casussen ons nu eigenlijk vertellen over regionale identificatie. Allereerst is het van belang dat mensen vaak onbewust bezig zijn met hun regionale identificatie, zelfs als ze zich wel verbonden voelen met de regio. Zo zit Brabant niet alleen verankerd in alledaagse symbolen, maar ook vinden mensen het soms lastig om te zeggen waarom iemand nu Brabants is en doen ze een beroep op gevoel. Daarnaast lijken de herkenning en de kennis van het lokale bij te dragen aan een identificatie met een regio. Zowel de meer concrete kennis over het lokale (zoals soms geuit wordt in reacties op Facebook) als de meer intuïtieve kennis (zoals het vertrouwde van Tilburg in *Smeris*) speelt hierbij een rol. Bovendien definiëren mensen Brabant op basis van wat nabij is. Identiteiten moeten gezien worden in de context waarin ze geconstrueerd worden. Het idee van nabijheid is hierbij nog specifieker: het refereert aan de plek die door en door vertrouwd is, die wordt gezien als iemands persoonlijke Brabant. Dat vertaalt zich niet naar de hele provincie, maar dat is een Brabant dat aansluit bij iemands eigen vertrouwde en nabije omgeving.

Mensen relateren de elementen die ze ervaren als 'van hier' aan Brabants dikke identiteit. Het proces van identificeren met je omgeving wordt gekoppeld aan een bestaande regio; in dit geval dat van Brabant. In die zin volgt identificatie met Brabant de bestaande territoriale grenzen. Hoewel het gebied in dit geval Brabant heet, had het als we het over de werking van identificatie hebben, ook een andere naam kunnen hebben met een andere omvang. Uit mijn analyses blijkt ook dat hoewel mensen over Brabant spreken, dat niet betekent dat ze daarbij altijd aan Brabant refereren maar ze kunnen ook naar hun lokale omgeving of land refereren. Brabant heeft een sterke naam en waarschijnlijk identificeren mensen zich daarom met Brabant. Dit proefschrift laat zien dat Brabant in het dagelijkse leven vooral betekent dat wat 'hier' is.

Tilburg Dissertations in Culture Studies

This list includes the doctoral dissertations that through their authors and/or supervisors are related to the Department of Culture Studies at the Tilburg University School of Humanities. The dissertations cover the broad field of contemporary sociocultural change in domains such as language and communication, performing arts, social and spiritual ritualization, media and politics.

1   Sander Bax. *De taak van de schrijver. Het poëticale debat in de Nederlandse literatuur (1968-1985)*. Supervisors: Jaap Goedegebuure and Odile Heynders, 23 May 2007.
2   Tamara van Schilt-Mol. *Differential item functioning en itembias in de cito-eindtoets basisonderwijs. Oorzaken van onbedoelde moeilijkheden in toetsopgaven voor leerlingen van Turkse en Marokkaanse afkomst*. Supervisors: Ton Vallen and Henny Uiterwijk, 20 June 2007.
3   Mustafa Güleç. *Differences in Similarities: A Comparative Study on Turkish Language Achievement and Proficiency in a Dutch Migration Context*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 25 June 2007.
4   Massimiliano Spotti. *Developing Identities: Identity Construction in Multicultural Primary Classrooms in The Netherlands and Flanders*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon and Guus Extra, 23 November 2007.
5   A. Seza Doğruöz. *Synchronic Variation and Diachronic Change in Dutch Turkish: A Corpus Based Analysis*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Ad Backus, 12 December 2007.
6   Daan van Bel. *Het verklaren van leesgedrag met een impliciete attitudemeting*. Supervisors: Hugo Verdaasdonk, Helma van Lierop and Mia Stokmans, 28 March 2008.
7   Sharda Roelsma-Somer. *De kwaliteit van Hindoescholen*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Sjaak Braster, 17 September 2008.
8   Yonas Mesfun Asfaha. *Literacy Acquisition in Multilingual Eritrea: A Comparative Study of Reading across Languages and Scripts*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon and Jeanne Kurvers, 4 November 2009.
9   Dong Jie. *The Making of Migrant Identities in Beijing: Scale, Discourse, and Diversity*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 4 November 2009.
10 Elma Nap-Kolhoff. *Second Language Acquisition in Early Childhood: A Longitudinal Multiple Case Study of Turkish-Dutch Children*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 12 May 2010.
11 Maria Mos. *Complex Lexical Items*. Supervisors: Antal van den Bosch, Ad Backus and Anne Vermeer, 12 May 2010.
12 António da Graça. *Etnische zelforganisaties in het integratieproces. Een case study in de Kaapverdische gemeenschap in Rotterdam*. Supervisor: Ruben Gowricharn, 8 October 2010.
13 Kasper Juffermans. *Local Languaging: Literacy Products and Practices in Gambian Society*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 13 October 2010.
14 Marja van Knippenberg. *Nederlands in het Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs. Een casestudy in de opleiding Helpende Zorg*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Ton Vallen and Jeanne Kurvers, 14 December 2010.

15   Coosje van der Pol. *Prentenboeken lezen* als literatuur. *Een structuralistische benadering van het concept 'literaire competentie' voor kleuters*. Supervisor: Helma van Lierop, 17 December 2010.

16   Nadia Eversteijn-Kluijtmans. *"All at Once" – Language Choice and Codeswitching by Turkish-Dutch Teenagers*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Ad Backus, 14 January 2011.

17   Mohammadi Laghzaoui. *Emergent Academic Language at Home and at School. A Longitudinal Study of 3- to 6-Year-Old Moroccan Berber Children in the Netherlands*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Ton Vallen, Abderrahman El Aissati and Jeanne Kurvers, 9 September 2011.

18   Sinan Çankaya. *Buiten veiliger dan binnen: in- en uitsluiting van etnische minderheden binnen de politieorganisatie*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Frank Bovenkerk, 24 October 2011.

19   Femke Nijland. *Mirroring Interaction. An Exploratory Study into Student Interaction in Independent Working*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Sanneke Bolhuis, Piet-Hein van de Ven and Olav Severijnen, 20 December 2011.

20   Youssef Boutachekourt. *Exploring Cultural Diversity. Concurrentievoordelen uit multiculturele strategieën*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Slawek Magala, 14 March 2012.

21   Jef Van der Aa. *Ethnographic Monitoring. Language, Narrative and Voice in a Carribean Classroom*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 8 June 2012.

22   Özel Bağcı. *Acculturation Orientations of Turkish Immigrants in Germany*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 3 October 2012.

23   Arnold Pannenborg. *Big Men Playing Football. Money, Politics and Foul Play in the African Game*. Supervisor: Wouter van Beek, 12 October 2012.

24   Ico Maly, *N-VA. Analyse van een politieke ideologie*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 23 October 2012.

25   Daniela Stoica. *Dutch and Romanian Muslim Women Converts: Inward and Outward Transformations, New Knowledge Perspectives and Community Rooted Narratives*. Supervisors: Enikö Vincze and Jan Jaap de Ruiter, 30 October 2012.

26   Mary Scott. *A Chronicle of Learning: Voicing the Text*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert, Sjaak Kroon and Jef Van der Aa, 27 May 2013.

27   Stasja Koot. *Dwelling in Tourism. Power and Myth Amongst Bushmen in Southern Africa*. Supervisor: Wouter van Beek, 23 October 2013.

28   Miranda Vroon-van Vugt. *Dead Man Walking in Endor. Narrative Mental Spaces and Conceptual Blending in 1 Samuel 28*. Supervisor: Ellen van Wolde, 19 December 2013.

29   Sarali Gintsburg. *Formulaicity in Jbala Poetry*. Supervisors: Ad Backus, Sjaak Kroon and Jan Jaap de Ruiter, 11 February 2014.

30   Pascal Touoyem. *Dynamiques de l'ethnicité en Afrique. Éléments pour une théorie de l'État multinational*. Supervisors: Wouter van Beek and Wim van Binsbergen, 18 February 2014.

31   Behrooz Moradi Kakesh. *Het islamitisch fundamentalisme als tegenbeweging. Iran als case study*. Supervisors: Herman Beck and Wouter van Beek, 6 June 2014.

32   Elina Westinen. *The Discursive Construction of Authenticity: Resources, Scales and Polycentricity in Finnish Hip Hop Culture*. Supervisors: Sirpa Leppänen and Jan Blommaert, 15 June 2014.

33 Alice Leri. *Who is Turkish American? Investigating Contemporary Discourses on Turkish Americanness*. Supervisors: Odile Heynders and Piia Varis, 9 September 2014.

34 Jaswina Elahi. *Etnische websites, behoeften en netwerken. Over het gebruik van internet door jongeren*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Sjaak Kroon, 10 September 2014.

35 Bert Danckaert. *Simple Present*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Odile Heynders, 29 October 2014.

36 Fie Velghe. *'This is almost like writing': Mobile phones, learning and literacy in a South African township*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert, Sjaak Kroon and Piia Varis, 3 December 2014.

37 Nico de Vos. *Lichamelijke verbondenheid in beweging. Een filosofisch onderzoek naar intercorporaliteit in de hedendaagse danskunst*. Supervisors: Odile Heynders and Frans van Peperstraten, 16 December 2014.

38 Danielle Boon. *Adult literacy education in a multilingual context: Teaching, learning and using written language in Timor-Leste*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon and Jeanne Kurvers, 17 December 2014.

39 Liesbeth Hoeven. *Een boek om in te wonen. De verhaalcultuur na Auschwitz*. Supervisors: Erik Borgman and Maaike de Haardt, 21 January 2015.

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