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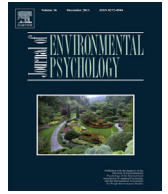
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## Spatial effects on the image and identity of a rural area



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### ABSTRACT

The Veenkoloniën is a relatively poor region within the peripheral north of the Netherlands. A negative regional image was suggested as one of the causes of this poverty. Our study focuses on what the images of the Veenkoloniën are within the Netherlands, and how the images change according to distance from the region. The data was obtained through a nationwide questionnaire ( $N = 922$ ). The analysis shows that the valuations ascribed to the Veenkoloniën for living and recreation are lowest in the neighbouring regions, and increase with distance. In addition, the associations with the Veenkoloniën change from regional-specific to general-rural associations as distance increases. Both observations suggest a degree of othering which varies with distance. Othering, defining the self from the other, is generally analogous to defining the good from the bad, which explains the lower valuation given in neighbouring regions.

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### 1. Introduction: regions and identity

This paper studies the distance dependence of regional images through a case study in the north of the Netherlands: The Veenkoloniën. Since the cultural turn in geography, regions are no longer considered to be static phenomena, but rather dynamic in both their definition and identity (Johnston, Gregory, Pratt, & Watts, 2006; Paasi, 2003). According to Johnston et al. (2006, p. 687), a region is a “more or less bounded area possessing some sort of unity or organizing principle(s) that distinguish it from other regions”. This unity or organizing principle(s) can be a set of characteristics ascribed to the region, historical developments which allow the region to be distinguished from other regions, or political or organisational boundaries delimiting the region.

Defining a region is dependent on the context in which the definition is made. The purpose of the definition, the cultural framework and context of the person or entity making the definition all have an important influence on how a region is actually defined. Once this definition is made, it can have a significant effect on the future development of the region. Jones and Paasi (2013) list a number of processes relating to regionalism, including reorganization of governance, devolution of state power, regional economic development and increasing social cohesion and fostering regional

identity. Paasi (2003) asserts that the process of defining a region is closely linked to the context in which this definition is made (i.e. it depends on the purpose for which the region is being defined and distinguished) and that the defining characteristics are not necessarily unanimously ascribed to the region but, especially when defining regions by socio-economic characteristics, are contested.

#### 1.1. Defining regions and the identity of a region

The basic principle of defining a region is to find a set of common characteristics, which include, but are not limited to, geographical location, physical features, socio-economic qualifications, political situations and cultural characteristics. Defining a region requires it to be distinguishable from other (neighbouring) regions, so it follows that in defining what a region is, equally we are defining what a region is not.

As a parallel to the definition of a region, the identity of a region (not to be confused with regional identity) is constructed through a very similar process (see Fig. 1). The identity of a region is the combination of characteristics a person ascribes to that region (Paasi, 2003). Again, it is the context, and to a large extent whether or not this person has lived in or visited the region (Hernandez, Carmen Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace, & Hess, 2007), that determines which characteristics are ascribed to it. It follows that the process of defining a region and the construction of the identity of a region are mutually dependent (Haartsen, Groote, & Huigen, 2000). Regions are defined by the characteristics they are associated with, which in turn influence the identity ascribed to that region. Equally, regions that are defined as being different to a certain region help shape the identity of this region, as characteristics attributed to the other

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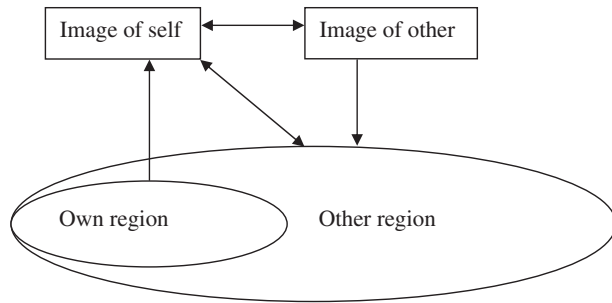


Fig. 1. Identity of a region, regional identity and othering.

region, but not associated with one's own, solidify the definition of one's own region.

### 1.2. Regional identity and othering

An important aspect of identity formation is the process of othering. In this paper we focus on the process of 'othering', through which people distinguish themselves from the 'other'. To do this we have to shift the focus from the identity of a region (a feature ascribed to a region by a person) to regional identity (a component of a person's identity). The concept of identity encapsulates two components: Sameness on the one hand (identifying with), and on the other hand distinctiveness (identifying against). Côté and Schwartz (2002) refer to this process as individuation. Through the process of individuation the infant establishes a boundary between 'me' and 'not me'. This part of identity formation extends into adulthood and is primarily focused on distinguishing between the 'self' and the 'other'. Defining the 'other' is therefore constitutive to defining the self, in the sense that characteristics attributed to the 'other' are inherently characteristics not associated with the 'self'.

One of the first mentions of the term 'otherness' was by De Beauvoir (1949), classifying women as the 'other' sex. In geography, the term 'othering' is strongly associated with 'Orientalism' (Said, 1978), where the image of the 'orient' in western discourse is composed of elements not associated with the 'occident'. Othering has been used to describe a variety of interpersonal relationships, such as gender relations, ethnic relations and relations between people of different nationalities. The concept of othering was initially developed to explain social phenomena but can also include the othering of objects (Sibley, 1995) and takes on spatial characteristics as people identify themselves with and against places. Additionally, Sibley (1995) elaborates that defining the 'self' from the 'other' is, from an early age, dominated by defending the good (self) from the bad (other), a notion previously recorded in De Beauvoir (1949) and Said (1978). Consequently, if something is defined as other than the 'self', it is more inclined to be associated with negative characteristics.

The concept of othering holds close ties to regional stereotyping. In regional stereotyping, "people reduce their uncertainty about others ... by using their previously stored knowledge about people ... This process is often unfairly detrimental to the person being judged" (Stangor & Lange, 1994; pp. 357–358). In this sense, both in othering and social stereotyping, the 'other' will be identified against. The difference between the two concepts is that in stereotyping a person ascribes characteristics to another person, based on identity of the group the other is associated with, while in othering a person ascribes characteristics to a group or region based on his/her own identity. In the context of regional stereotyping the concepts overlap (cf. Jost, Kivetz, Rubini, Guermandi, & Mosso, 2005; Reed, 2010). Several studies dealing with regional

stereotypes have found them to be very persistent, even in areas that have undergone major socio-economic change, for instance the North versus South stereotypes in the United States of America and in Italy (cf. Jost et al., 2005; Reed, 2010), rooted in the past (Schuman, 1966) and influencing behaviour and attitudes towards the person or persons being stereotyped.

### 1.3. Regional identity

Regional identity overlaps with a plethora of concepts such as sense of place (cf. Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001), place attachment, place meaning and place dependence. Several authors have attempted to address this confusing status quo by listing the various concepts and their definitions (for a more detailed analysis of these concepts see Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Lewicka, 2011; Paasi, 2003). The conceptualization of people–place relationships that is most used is a distinction between place-dependence and place-attachment (cf. Lewicka, 2011; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981; Williams & Vaske, 2003). This way of measuring however does not distinguish between attachment, defined as "a positive connection or bond" (Williams & Vaske, 2003, p. 831) and identity. In our paper it is important to make this distinction, since the respondents might not identify with the region (i.e. they live further away from the region), but can still feel a level of attachment to it, through family, friends, memory, recreational visits, etc.

For this study we follow the categorization made by Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) who use the components of place identity, place attachment and place dependence to define the overarching concept of sense of place. For the purpose of this study, measuring place attachment and place dependence as two different concepts allows us to recognize the attachment to the Veenkoloniën despite an expected lack of dependence in the case of people living far away from the region.

In this framework place identity is defined as "part of a more global self-identification in the same way that one might consider gender identity" (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, p. 234). In this definition place identity is a feature of the person, as opposed to the 'identity of a region', where the identity is a feature of the place (region). Place attachment, in the framework of Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) is "a positive bond that develops between groups or individuals and their environment", and place dependence is an "occupant's perceived strength of association between him or herself and specific places" (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). They assert that sense of place is "not imbued in the physical setting itself, but resides in human interpretations of the setting".

A second process of place-identity formation consists of the formation of the identity of a region. In this process, people ascribe characteristics to places (and to people within those places). The identity of a region as described by a person is therefore dependent on the regional identity of that person, whether a person identifies with a region (when a region and the people in the region are perceived as congruent with the 'self'), or against a region (when the region and its inhabitants are considered incongruent with the 'self'). This identity of the region allows places to be distinguished from each other (Paasi, 2003).

The collective regional characteristics which people incorporate in their own identity help to construct their sense of self, thereby distancing themselves from both people and objects that are perceived to incorporate other identifying features. The other region is therefore constructed as being dissimilar from the 'own' region, and as stated before, this construction is likely to be of a negative nature. It is important to note however that this construction is neither static nor uniform. Crang (1998, p. 60), for instance, states that 'the characteristics that have been treated as definitive [for identifying the self from the other] vary over space and time'.

Othering and its influence on the image of the self depend on the social context of the person forming those images. At the same time, regional stereotypes are rooted in the past and are very resilient to change (Reed, 2010; Schuman, 1966). These stereotypes are reinforced by attitudes and behaviour based on preconceptions, and reproduced in for instance ethnic jokes (Davies, 1982). These ethnic jokes project characteristics that are unwanted by the in-group onto one or more out-groups, and hereby reinforce (geographical) boundaries and stigmatize behaviours and identities unwanted by the in-group. Whether othering of regions takes place is therefore dependent on personal context, on the way regions are defined and the extent to which a person identifies with (and against) these regions. Although the theory behind othering predicts these variables to be indefinite, studies into regional stereotyping show that if this identification against a region occurs, it is very resilient to change.

## 2. Images and identity

### 2.1. Images and identity: introduction

Because the image of a place is incorporated in the process of defining it, the image adds to what the place is, both in the sense of laying out the boundaries of the place (see Paasi's definition of regions, 2003) and as a determinant of what belongs in this place (past, present and future) (Sibley, 1995), thereby shaping the place. In addition to defining the way a place is produced, the existing images that people have of a place will shape the way the place is represented (Hall, 2003) fixing and strengthening the dominant representation of what a place is and conveying that image to a wider audience. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005, p. 507) assert that these 'stable and learned images' form the basis of place-based actions. In summary, the image of a place determines how the place is constructed, reproduced and how or if people use this place and to what purpose.

### 2.2. Images of place: construction of images

The two main aspects of place-images influenced by the distance to the region are the way people obtain information about the region, and the way people interact with the region. Both aspects are again mutually dependent on and constitutive to the images of a place. We will now discuss the way images of place are constructed, starting with personal interaction.

Even when a place is experienced through personal interaction, the way a place is 'known' is still guided through a number of filters. The cultural framework a person has filters what information gets stored, and what gets ignored (cf. Rigsby, 1999; Said, 1978), and the purpose of a person's visit - or consequently, the purpose for which information is gathered - will further narrow the gaze. In short, our own perception and cognition drastically limit the amount of information we are able to take in and the way it is processed (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001).

When information is gathered through sources other than personal experience, the information exchanged will be limited even more. The 'sender's' own cultural framework limits what information and images s/he is able to take in. From this s/he selects what is relevant for the message s/he is trying to convey, which then gets filtered by the 'receiver's' own cultural framework, further narrowing the scope of the image of a region.

In line with the theory of distance decay (Tobler, 1970), the further a person lives from a given place, the less personal interaction this person is likely to have with it. The result is that the images of the region for people who live further away from the region will consist of only those images that have survived both the

first filtering process (by the third-party source) and the second filtering process (by the person him or herself). The image of a region then becomes increasingly simplified and uniform (Crang, 1998, p. 63) according to distance, so that the imagined region is recognisable to a wider audience.

Relph (1976) claims that attachment to place is based on the amount of experience a person has with a place (see also Hernandez et al., 2007). Together with Tobler's theory of distance decay, this should result in gradually decreasing place-attachment (Fig. 2). Proshansky (1978), in defining place identity, also emphasises the importance of the physical environment in constructing the identity, leading to the assumption that first-hand experience plays a large role in the formation of place-identity. This would mean that place identity also declines gradually as distance to the place increases. Place-dependence is defined as "how well a setting serves goal achievement given an existing range of alternatives" (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, p. 234). Since people living further away from the Veenkoloniën are less likely to depend on the region for their specific goals, this value is also expected to decrease with distance.

In addition to the processes which are influenced by distance, there are a number of influences that can be derived from living or not living in a certain place. Post hoc rationalisation determines that a person justifies a decision in hindsight by focussing on the positive effects resulting from this decision. People who have moved to the Veenkoloniën are expected to rationalise their decision by focussing on the positive aspects of the region, leading to a more positive view of the Veenkoloniën.

Theories on cognitive dissonance predict that by stating that "the existence of dissonance [between two cognitions, for example not moving from an area while perceiving that area as unattractive], being psychologically uncomfortable, motivates the person to reduce the dissonance and leads to avoidance of information likely to increase dissonance" (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999), suggesting that residents are likely to rate their own region higher than other regions.

Finally, a negative perception of a region among residents might encourage them to move elsewhere, leaving people with a more positive perception behind (and vice versa for people moving into the Veenkoloniën). These theories predict that the valuation of the Veenkoloniën by residents will be relatively high. They also suggest that the valuations given by the former residents of the Veenkoloniën will be lower.

## 3. Research question and study area

Both the social context element of othering and the theory behind the construction of images of a region suggest there is a spatial dimension to othering and in the formation of the identity (and images) of a region. To explore this spatial dimension, the main question in this paper is:

How do the image and valuation of a region change in relation to distance from that region?

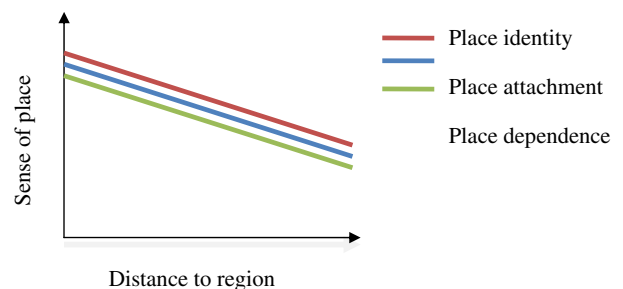


Fig. 2. Sense of place (components) decrease with distance.



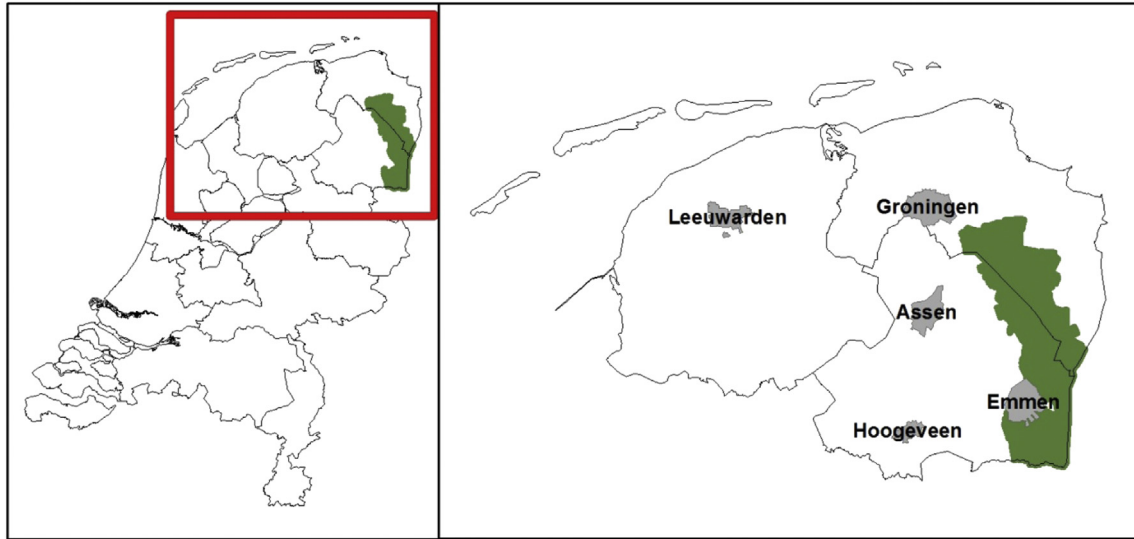


Fig. 3. The research area.

We study this question along three different, but related topics. First, the valuations of the region are analyzed. The theory of othering predicts that the “other” will be viewed in a more negative light than the “self”. In this paper we investigate the spatial component of othering, and therefore we analyze the relation between valuation and distance, along with the influence of residential history on the valuation and the main source through which information about the region was acquired:

1) How does the valuation of a region change with distance to the region?

2) How does the valuation of a region change with residential history?

3) How does the valuation of a region change according to the source through which the region is known?

Othering implies that differences in valuation can be explained through the regional identity of a person and the degree of othering taking place. Therefore, we analyze the regional identity of respondents with the region:

1) How does regional identity change with distance to the region?



Fig. 4. a Large-scale agriculture in the foreground, with the dominant potato-starch industry in the background. b Flat and straight plots of land dominate the landscape in the Veenkoloniën. c An infrastructure of long and straight canals complemented with an intricate system of locks and bridges (all photographs courtesy of Harry Cock Photography).

Regional identity consists of (perceived) characteristics of a region incorporated in one's own identity; therefore it is relevant to study the images people have of the region and how these images change with distance.

- 1) What images are associated with the region and how do these images change with distance?
- 2) How region-specific are the images associated with the region?

In order to answer these research questions, we studied the images of a rural region in the North-East of the Netherlands: The Veenkoloniën. The Veenkoloniën is a poor region within the already generally less affluent peripheral Northern-Netherlands (cf. Ashworth, Groote, & Pellenburg, 2007; Commissie Hoekstra, 2001; Strijker, 2008; Thissen, Drooglever Fortuijn, Strijker, & Haartsen, 2010). The average income in the Veenkoloniën is 15 per cent lower than the national average, while unemployment is over three per cent higher than the national average (Markantoni & van Hoven, 2012). The region's socio-economic position is considered to be fragile, due to the reliance within the region on subsidized farming and related industrial activities, combined with low presence in, and little in-migration to the area of people with qualifications in higher education (Commissie Hoekstra, 2001; Strijker, 2008; Thissen et al., 2010).

In addition to the socio-economic processes, the physical layout resulting from peat-excitation in the area is flat, large-scaled and straight, an ideal layout for farming (Fig. 4a, b and c), but generally perceived as less (aesthetically) attractive compared to the smaller-scaled, sand-soil based bordering regions of the Honsdrug and Westerwolde (Bijker & Haartsen, 2011; Thissen et al., 2010).

In a socio-economic analysis of the Veenkoloniën (Commissie Hoekstra, 2001) it is supposed that a negative image of the Veenkoloniën as an unattractive and socially backwards region is contributing to its lack of economic development. However, no studies have been undertaken to assess what image the Veenkoloniën has inside the region and in a wider area outside the region. This is the subject of our study.

#### 4. Method

The data for the analysis come from a household survey undertaken across The Netherlands. In order to determine the distance to the Veenkoloniën, the research area was split into four areas, sorted by distance to the Veenkoloniën (closest to furthest away; see Fig. 3):

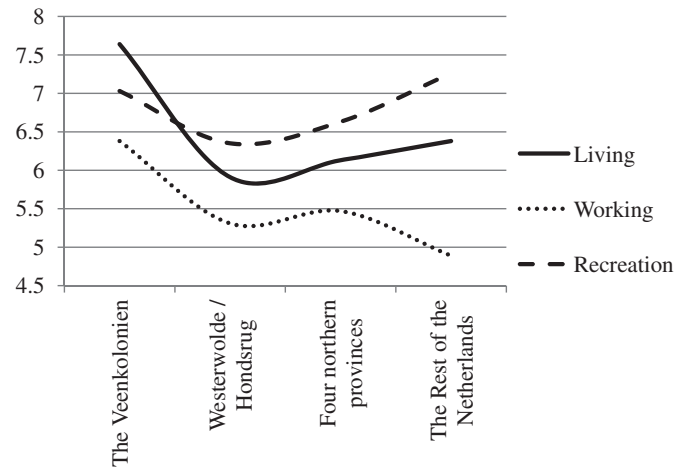
1. The Veenkoloniën
2. The immediate bordering regions of Westerwolde and the Honsdrug
3. The four northern provinces of The Netherlands
4. The rest of The Netherlands

Questionnaires were distributed by a team of researchers, one questionnaire for every fifth house on a street (streets were

**Table 1**  
Valuation attributed to the Veenkoloniën, on a scale of 1–10, 10 being the highest ( $N = 922$ ).

	Living	Working	Recreation
The Veenkoloniën	7.64***	6.38***	7.03***
The Netherlands (Veenkoloniën not included)	6.10***	5.36***	6.64***
Westerwolde/Honsdrug	5.91	5.31	6.35
Four northern provinces	6.13	5.47	6.63
The Rest of the Netherlands	6.38	4.89	7.26

\* $p < 0.10$ . \*\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .



**Fig. 5.** Valuations of the Veenkoloniën (on a scale of one to ten, ten being the highest).

selected from randomised postcodes and clustered to two streets per postcode for research practicality). Where possible, the survey was conducted face-to-face to obtain a higher degree of (correctly) completed questionnaires. If, after two visits, no eligible (18 years or older) respondent was present, a questionnaire and self-addressed envelope were left behind. In total 3064 households were approached in the survey, yielding 922 returned questionnaires (30.1 per cent).

It should be noted that the researchers reported an increased reluctance in filling in the questionnaires as the distance to the Veenkoloniën increased. This was due to people either saying they did not know the area (researchers were instructed to collect background information from the respondent in such cases) or being unwilling to participate because they did not see the point of participating in a survey about a region so distant from their own.

The respondents' images of the Veenkoloniën were collected through three instruments.

First, respondents were asked to name the first three words or phrases that came to their mind when thinking about the Veenkoloniën. The three associations listed by respondents were compiled and recoded into three dimensions, following Haartsen (2002), to allow for quantitative analysis.

Second, respondents were asked to rate their level of association between 26 different identity markers and the Veenkoloniën. Through these identity markers the presence of a pre-composed list of regional attributes in respondents' images was quantified.

Third, respondents were asked to self-report their agreement with a list of nine statements, adapted from Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) to measure their place identity, place attachment and place dependency and the overarching sense of place. Both within the Veenkoloniën and in the other regions, questionnaires were kept as consistent as possible, although some questions had to be worded differently.

**Table 2**  
Valuation of the Veenkoloniën according to residential history, on a scale of 1–10, 10 being the highest ( $N = 922$ ).

	Living	Working	Recreation
Born and/or raised in the Veenkoloniën and living in the Veenkoloniën	7.68	6.38	6.80
Moved into the Veenkoloniën	7.75	6.35	7.26
Born and/or raised in the Veenkoloniën but living outside the Veenkoloniën	7.42	6.43	7.19
Not born, raised or living in the Veenkoloniën	5.89	5.12	6.57

**Table 3**  
Through which source(s) did you obtain your image of the Veenkoloniën? (Multiple answers possible –  $N = 730^a$ ).

	Direct contact			Third parties			
	Have lived there	Visits for recreational purposes	Visits for work	Friends/family	Know people from the area	News, news-paper, TV	Don't know
Westerwolde/Hondsrug	19.6%	34.6%	25.3%	33.0%	34.7%	28.7%	10.3%
Four northern provinces	12.7%	25.3%	13.7%	22.4%	20.7%	34.8%	13.7%
Rest of The Netherlands	5.1%	42.4%	10.2%	18.6%	16.9%	45.8%	10.2%

<sup>a</sup> Only respondents who have never lived in the Veenkoloniën are included in the analysis.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Valuation of the Veenkoloniën

Table 1 shows the average valuation given to the Veenkoloniën by respondents, divided according to three categories: living, working and recreation. In the first part of the table it becomes clear that people living outside the Veenkoloniën give a significantly lower valuation to the area than people living in the Veenkoloniën, most notably on the subject of living (ANOVA analysis of valuation by region with Bonferroni post-hoc testing). This finding is consistent with Permentier, van Ham, and Bolt (2007), where city-neighbourhoods were rated by residents and non-residents living in other cities.

When the regions outside the Veenkoloniën are viewed separately the average ratings for living and recreation in the Veenkoloniën rise along with distance to the Veenkoloniën (see Fig. 5). In the most distant region, the 'Rest of the Netherlands' the average valuation for the Veenkoloniën as a region for recreation even surpasses the valuation given by residents of the Veenkoloniën. The valuation given in Table 1 by residents for the Veenkoloniën as an area to live are in line with the Veiligheidsmonitor (national –sense of– security evaluation) conducted by the CBS, 2011), where the provinces containing the Veenkoloniën averaged a 7,5 (Groningen) and a 7,7 (Drenthe) on a one to ten scale, ten being the highest.

In our survey, ratings given to the Veenkoloniën by people living in the neighbouring regions of Westerwolde and the Hondsrug were significantly lower than the ratings given by residents of the Veenkoloniën. Although theories of cognitive dissonance, post hoc rationalisation and negative sorting predict a relatively high rating given by residents to their own area and relatively lower ratings by people not living in the area, they do not account for the low ratings given by the region's neighbouring areas, compared to the areas further removed from the Veenkoloniën.

Table 2 shows the valuations given to the Veenkoloniën by groups who have either lived in the Veenkoloniën all their lives, moved to the Veenkoloniën, moved out of the Veenkoloniën or have never lived in the Veenkoloniën. The valuation for recreation by people who moved into the Veenkoloniën is higher than the valuation given by residents of the Veenkoloniën who were also born and/or raised there, as predicted through post-hoc

rationalisation. The valuations for living and working in the Veenkoloniën are similar for people who moved to the Veenkoloniën and people who were born and raised there. The valuations for living, working and recreating by respondents who were born/raised in the Veenkoloniën but subsequently moved out are not significantly lower than the valuations given by the respondents who have not moved out, contradicting the assumption, based on negative sorting, that people who have left the region have a more negative perception of it.

### 5.2. How do people outside the Veenkoloniën know the area?

The valuations given by people living outside the Veenkoloniën and who have never actually lived there (Table 2) are lower for all aspects than those of people who have at some point lived in the Veenkoloniën. Holloway and Hubbard (2001) emphasise the importance of environmental knowledge, both first-hand and second-hand, in the formation of images of place. From this it seems important to analyse which resources are employed by respondents who have never lived in the Veenkoloniën in order to form their image of the area. To this end, respondents from the Rest of the Netherlands were asked to indicate the source through which they had become familiar with the Veenkoloniën. Respondents could tick a box to indicate whether they had or had not heard of the area through each source (multiple answers allowed); percentages in Table 3 represent the fraction of each group that had heard of the area through the respective source.

As expected, respondents living further away from the Veenkoloniën report fewer visits to friends, family and acquaintances in the area, as well as fewer visits for work as sources of information. They also know fewer people from the area and are less likely to have lived there. The relatively high number of people who make recreational visits to the Veenkoloniën from the neighbouring regions is also conform expectations (Tobler, 1970), although the high percentage of visits from the Rest of The Netherlands is somewhat surprising. From the table above it appears that people living the furthest away from the Veenkoloniën rely mostly on mass-media in forming their images of the area.

To determine the effect of the information source on the valuation of the Veenkoloniën given by respondents who have never lived in the area a stepwise backwards linear regression was performed (Table 4). Visits for recreational purposes have a significant positive influence on all valuations. The other factor influencing the

**Table 4**  
Valuations by source, on a scale of 1–10, 10 being the highest ( $N = 689$ ).<sup>a</sup>

Variable	Living		Working		Recreation	
	B	p	B	p	B	p
(Constant)	5.807	.000	4.992	.000	6.339	.000
Visits for recreational purposes	.366	.010	.238	.080	.773	.000
Visits for work	–	–	.210	.010	–	–
	$R = .105$		$R = .123$		$R = .215$	

<sup>a</sup> Only respondents who have never lived in the Veenkoloniën are included in the analysis.

**Table 5**  
Valuations by neighbouring regions of the Veenkoloniën, on a scale of 1–10, 10 being the highest ( $N = 145$ ).

	Living	Working	Recreation
Born and/or raised in the Veenkoloniën but living outside the Veenkoloniën	7.43	6.50	7.08
Not born, raised or living in the Veenkoloniën	5.58	4.98	6.24
Difference	1.85***	1.52***	.84**

\*\* $p < 0.05$  \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 6**Through which source(s) did you obtain your image of the Veenkoloniën? ( $N = 131$ ).<sup>a</sup>

	Friends/family/acquaintances	Visits for recreational purposes	Visits for work	News, newspaper, TV	Know people from the area
Westerwolde/Hondsrug	31.6%	36.5%	24.8%	32.9%	35.9%

<sup>a</sup> Only respondents who have never lived in the Veenkoloniën included.

valuation of the area with regard to working is if people have made work-related visits to the Veenkoloniën. The analyses in this paragraph help to explain the rise in valuations given in areas further away from the Veenkoloniën, especially the valuation of the Veenkoloniën for recreation. However, the low valuations given by the neighbouring regions remain unexplained.

### 5.3. Othering the Veenkoloniën

Despite the high percentage of residents of the neighbouring regions who visit the area recreationally, and the positive influence recreational visits have on the valuations of the Veenkoloniën, the valuations given in these neighbouring regions are the lowest of all three external regions. This begs the question what other causes can be found to explain the low valuations given in the neighbouring regions.

Table 5 shows the valuations given by the neighbours of the Veenkoloniën, crossed with residential history. From Table 5 it becomes clear that in the neighbouring regions (Westerwolde and Hondsrug) the respondents who have never lived in the Veenkoloniën have the most negative perception of the area. Table 6 shows which sources these respondents indicated as having used in order to form their images.

Respondents who live in the neighbouring regions of the Veenkoloniën but have not lived in the Veenkoloniën itself use a variety of sources to compose their image of the area. The most-cited source is visits for recreational purposes, followed by knowing people from the area. The influences exercised by these sources are displayed in Table 7. The results in Table 7 show that respondents from the neighbouring regions form their negative views regarding the Veenkoloniën as an area for living or recreation mainly from knowing people from the area. Recreational visits have a significant positive effect for the valuations given for both working and recreation in the Veenkoloniën.

The valuations of the Veenkoloniën by people who live just outside it are significantly lower compared to both residents of the Veenkoloniën and to people who live further away from the area. If this is caused by othering it would mean that on the smaller distances the regional identity of the Veenkoloniën would be lower. In order to determine if people from the neighbouring regions also identify against the Veenkoloniën, the respondents were asked to rate statements about their sense of place (in this case the Veenkoloniën) on a one to five scale. The values in Table 8 show that the gradual decrease as predicted in paragraph 2.2 is absent for the aggregated sense of place.

On closer inspection with a one-way ANOVA/Bonferroni analysis, the gradual decrease occurs only in the two regions furthest

**Table 7**Valuations by source, on a scale of 1–10, 10 being the highest ( $N = 131$ ).<sup>a</sup>

Variable	Living		Working		Recreation	
	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	6.047	.000	4.867	.000	6.180	.000
Know people from the area	-.847	.002	–	–	-.557	.001
Visiting for recreational purposes	–	–	.744	.004	1.048	.068
	$R = .220$		$R = .211$		$R = .260$	

<sup>a</sup> Only respondents who have never lived in the Veenkoloniën are included.

away from the Veenkoloniën; all the averages in the Rest of the Netherlands are significantly lower than the averages in the four northern provinces (Table 9). Although the values for place identity, place attachment and place dependency are expected to be higher for regions closer to the Veenkoloniën, Table 9 shows that these values are in fact at the same level in the Westerwolde-Hondsrug as the values in the four northern provinces, in the case of the place-identity of the Veenkoloniën in Westerwolde-Hondsrug the values are significantly lower than in the four northern provinces (see Fig. 6 – also, compare Fig. 6 with the theorized Tobler's distance decay in Fig. 2).

### 5.4. Images of the Veenkoloniën

The valuation of the Veenkoloniën is based on the images or knowledge a person has of the area. In addition to the respondents' valuation of the area, data was collected on the elements constituting the image of the Veenkoloniën which a respondent has. Table 10 shows the top five associations with appreciations (from one – very negative, to five – very positive) in brackets, ordered by distance to the Veenkoloniën. The results show that the most-cited (elements of) images of the Veenkoloniën are similar for all areas. The main differences are in the appreciations of the cited images, with residents of the Veenkoloniën giving higher average ratings for their associations with the area. The element that stands out as a negative image of the Veenkoloniën is the image of poverty, which is most dominant in the regions of the Rest of the Netherlands and the four northern provinces.

In line with Crang (1998, see paragraph 2.2), the images of the Veenkoloniën are expected to become more simplified and uniform as the distance between the respondents' households and the Veenkoloniën increases. In order to test this hypothesis, the images respondents associated with the Veenkoloniën were compared with a similar dataset concerning the views of the rural Netherlands as a whole.

In a study by Haartsen (2002), images of the rural Netherlands were collected through a similar questionnaire to the one used in our study. Respondents were asked to list four (as opposed to three in our study) words or phrases they associated with the rural Netherlands. To quantify these results, every word was given a score related to the number of times this word occurred in the dataset. The higher the score, the more often the word or phrase occurred in the dataset, and consequently, the more prominently it features among the general rural images in the Netherlands. These scores were coupled with the words in the dataset about the Veenkoloniën and a linear regression was performed to determine if a greater distance to the Veenkoloniën produced a more simplified general rural image of the region.

**Table 8**Sense of place ratings, on a scale of 1–5, 5 being the highest ( $N = 689$ ).<sup>a</sup>

	Identity	Attachment	Dependence	Sense of place total
Westerwolde-Hondsrug	2.31	2.59	2.41	2.43
Four northern provinces	2.58	2.60	2.52	2.57
Rest of the Netherlands	2.18	2.18	2.00	2.12

<sup>a</sup> Respondents with residential history in the Veenkoloniën excluded from this analysis.



**Table 9**Bonferroni p-scores of the differences between the regions for the three components of sense of place and for sense of place in total ( $N = 689$ ).<sup>a</sup>

		Place-identity	Place-attachment	Place-dependence	Sense of place
Westerwolde-Hondsrug	Four northern provinces	.000	1.000	.107	.009
	Rest of Netherlands	.741	.000	.000	.000
Four northern provinces	Westerwolde-Hondsrug	.000	1.000	.107	.009
	Rest of Netherlands	.000	.000	.000	.000

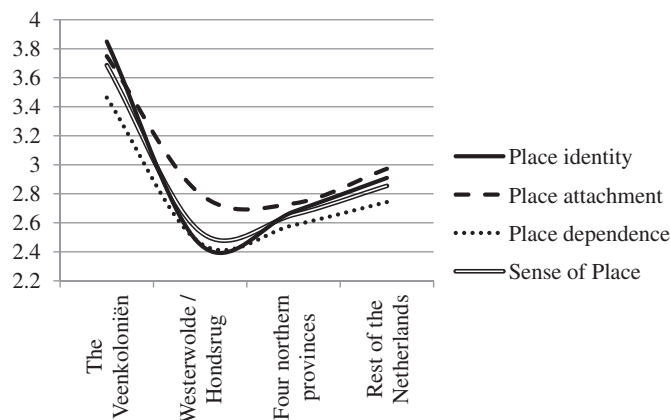
<sup>a</sup> Respondents with residential history in the Veenkoloniën excluded from this analysis.

Table 11 shows the results of this regression. As distance to the region increases, the images associated with the Veenkoloniën are indeed more consistent with general rural images of the Netherlands. The observed differences could not be explained by general background characteristics, like respondents' residential history, age, sex and current living situation. There are some drawbacks to this form of analysis, since there is no way of determining to what extent the images associated with the Veenkoloniën and the images associated with the general rural image overlap. Therefore, the results reported in Table 11 should be considered as indicative.

## 6. Discussion

In this paper we have discussed the images and identity people ascribe to the Veenkoloniën. We have distinguished between the valuation of the Veenkoloniën, the images respondents have of the Veenkoloniën and the sense of place respondents have of the Veenkoloniën. Our study is based on data collected through a household survey held across the Netherlands. In regional geography, defining a region and the identity of a region are two closely linked concepts. Defining a region relies on finding a common set of characteristics that distinguish the region from other regions, and the identity of a region is the set of characteristics ascribed to a region. In order to distinguish between what the person's own region is, and the other region, it is essential to determine what the other region is. Usually, the normative "good" is linked to the "self", and "bad" to the "other". For residents of the region, other concepts (post hoc rationalisation, cognitive dissonance and negative sorting) tend to produce a more favourable image of their own region.

As expected we found that residents of the Veenkoloniën give higher valuations for their region regarding living, working and recreation than non-residents. However, the valuations of the Veenkoloniën were lowest for respondents from the neighbouring areas, and gradually increased again with distance to the



**Fig. 6.** Sense of place of the Veenkoloniën (on a scale of one to five, five being the highest).

Veenkoloniën. No evidence was found of negative sorting or post hoc rationalisation by respondents who had moved from the Veenkoloniën. On the contrary, the valuations given to the Veenkoloniën by former residents were as high as the valuations given by residents. Valuations given to the Veenkoloniën regarding working and recreation increased if the region had been visited for recreational purposes, but this did not have an effect on the valuations given for living in the Veenkoloniën. The main influence on the valuation for living in the Veenkoloniën was knowing people from the area, which had a strong negative effect on the valuation of the area. This is surprising, since there was no evidence of people moving out of the Veenkoloniën projecting a negative image of the area.

The lower average rating directly outside the Veenkoloniën can be explained through the concept of othering. Respondents living closest to the Veenkoloniën displayed the strongest degree of othering of the Veenkoloniën, compared to respondents living further away. The average ratings for sense of place, and its components, were expected to decline gradually as distance to the region increased (cf. Hernandez et al., 2007; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Relph, 1976). However, in our study we again found that results for the neighbouring regions were lower than expected. This was particularly the case for the valuation of place identity. The ratings for sense of place in regions further away from the Veenkoloniën behaved as expected, with respondents who lived the furthest away giving the lowest average scores.

From the differences in sense of place the importance of separating place-attachment and place identity as two separate constructs becomes apparent. It seems that it is possible to feel attached to an area without identifying with it (cf. Lewicka, 2011, p. 209). It should also be noted that the method of measuring sense of place as proposed by Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) only accounts for identifying with a region, not identifying against a region as predicted through the theory of othering. The results from this study imply that both a positive and a negative scale should be used to cover the concept of place identity.

The collected images of the Veenkoloniën were more in line with a general rural image as distance to the Veenkoloniën increased. This is consistent with Crang (1998) who states that through production and reproduction of images of a region, these images become simplified and uniform.

Overall, it has become clear that the process of othering has a profound influence on the way images of an area are formed, especially for shorter distances. Respondents show a gradual decline in sense of place (as suggested by Hernandez et al., 2007; Relph, 1976) as their distance to the Veenkoloniën increases, with the exclusion of the neighbouring regions of the Veenkoloniën. Although respondents from the neighbouring areas have more direct contact with the Veenkoloniën (cf. Tobler, 1970), this does not lead to a higher sense of place. Especially for the component place-identity, the ratings in the neighbouring areas are lower than expected, indicating the presence of the phenomenon of othering (i.e. identifying against the region). For the purpose of (re-) branding a region to attract visitors/residents/firms, it is tempting to think that the highest expected results are to be

**Table 10**Five most-cited images of the Veenkoloniën and their valuations, on a scale of 1–5 being the highest (open-ended questions) ( $N = 922$ ).

Residents of the Veenkoloniën	Westerwolde/Hondsrug	Four northern provinces	Rest of the Netherlands
Quiet environment (4.45)	Peat (3.43)	Turf (3.66)	Turf (3.53)
Turf (3.58)	Turf (2.92)	Peat (3.49)	Poverty (1.60)
Peat (3.56)	Nature (4.56)	Poverty (1.70)	Groningen/Drenthe (3.73)
Spacious (4.59)	Quiet environment (3.91)	Groningen/Drenthe (3.32)	Peat (3.75)
Nature (4.42)	Groningen/Drenthe (3.75)	Nature (4.43)	Quiet environment (4.33)

**Table 11**Linear regression of the proportion of images of the Veenkoloniën in general rural image ( $N = 922$ ).

	B-coefficient	p
Constant	.002	.002
Distance to Veenkoloniën	.001	.059
R = .049		

found in the neighbouring areas (see for instance distance decay). This study shows that a strong presence of the process of othering for shorter distances can invert these expectations.

The concept of othering is outlined as a dichotomy between the 'self and the 'other'. Studies into othering and regional stereotyping reflect this dichotomy in study design, generally investigating the views of one group on the other, and vice versa (cf. Jost et al., 2005; Permentier et al., 2007; Reed, 2010). Our study indicates that the physical distance between the subject groups and their conceptualization of regional differences plays an important role in the identification and valuation of both the 'self' and the 'other', and therefore requires careful consideration. For shorter distances the resulting stereotyping and othering could amplify perceived differences between regions. For larger distances the differences could be diminished, the view of the distant region becomes more generalized and for the purpose of self-identification othering regions closer to the (distant) resident's own region takes on more significance.

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### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2013.07.008>.

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