

# Online Content Strategy for Place Branding:

Attracting Talent to South and East Groningen by Offering Internship Opportunities and by Branding the Region

Bachelor Thesis

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**Online Content Strategy for Place Branding:**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### CLIENT OBJECTIVE

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The report's goal is to clarify the research process which was utilized in order to come up with the advice for the client, the professional network 'De Compagnons van Zuid en Oost Groningen' (English: The Companions of South and East Groningen, referred to as 'De Compagnons').

The advice entails the content strategy for the online place branding of the region South and East Groningen (referred to as SEG) as it has emerged from the research. Place branding, in this case, aims at improving the image of the region while increasing visibility and attractiveness among excellent students.

The project, part of the honours graduation programme International Business Talent (IBT), is divided into a research phase and a four-month implementation phase. In the research phase, an advice is formulated and in the implementation phase, the advice is applied.

### COMPANY SUPERVISION

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During the research phase, the researcher was working within the facilities of PuurIDee, a communication agency in Stadskanaal. Kirstin Smid, founder of PuurIDee, took the role of the company supervisor. During the implementation phase, the knowledge of the communication agency PuurIDee will be capitalised on through collaboration.

### METHOD

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In order to come up with an online place branding content strategy, a mix of semi-structured interviews with business people, desk research and a student survey was applied.

The interviews with local businesses were set to gain knowledge about the region and the business located there. The information retrieved offers means to include the businesses into the branding efforts, also through internship opportunities. These are important in order to make the region more attractive to excellent students from the Netherlands and abroad, which form the target group of the online branding.

The student survey was disseminated in order to gather insights about the opinions of the target group. The data gathered allows the communication to be suited to fit the wishes, interests and preferences of the target group.

Desk research was used to phrase the research questions and justify the findings. Additionally, the theoretical findings deliver a framework of what is important for an online place branding strategy.

## ADVICE

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The desk research described earlier led to a clear overview of what needs to be considered in online place branding. The utilization of word-of-mouth communication, the building of a community around the brand and to create an identity that takes into consideration the opinions of the inhabitants of the place are especially valuable.

Based on these findings concerning the strategy for the online place branding platform, an advice was formulated according to which the online platform will be constructed.

### MESSAGE PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy should be present in the messages of the communication efforts. It entails the unique selling proposition (USP) which is the mentality of changing the current situation through investments in infrastructure and chances to grow that increase the attractiveness of the region and therefore improve the living climate. This USP represents the opinions of the inhabitants while also appealing to the interests of the students.

Next to that, aspects culture should play a role in communications. This includes the corporate cultures of the companies which students find important. The students' interests and preferences, such as being challenged, a relaxed atmosphere, and the housing prices should be incorporated into the communication frequently.

### CHANNEL

The channel should be an interactive online platform available in Dutch, English and German. The online platform should be based on word-of-mouth communication since it is the most effective kind of communication that can be implemented online. A blog in combination with social media appearances an effectuate this, since students can share their experiences there.

## CONTENT AND CONTENT ORGANISATION ON ONLINE PLATFORM

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In terms of how the content will be organised on the online platform, a clear division of the content is needed in order to offer the students a clear overview of the region according to what they find important.

Content-wise, the research showed that students, when looking for a new place to live, find the work opportunities available at the location very important. Therefore, a section where the location, as in the region itself, is presented should be included on the online platform. A possible heading could be 'About the region'. A sub-section that is possible may include information on housing prices, the culture of the region, and the past-time activities available, which students also indicated as valuable to them.

Including the chances for personal and professional growth on the online platform is important for the students who participated in the survey. Also, the businesses typically value the development of their employees highly. In terms of companies and employment, the students asked indicated that they especially wish to be challenged. This calls for a section which communicates such chances to the students, e.g. through phrasing internships in an according style under a heading such as "Research Opportunities" or "Internship" where internship assignments will be communicated accordingly.

To increase visibility and image of the region, the section 'Media' should be included, containing a gallery for videos and photos to deliver visual material.

To enable word-of-mouth communication on the online platform, a section including the blog, the main part of the site, will be placed as the 'Home' page.

## INTERNSHIPS

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So far, six concrete internship assignment opportunities have been specified through the interviews while the survey delivered insights on how to communicate them to the target group. These internships are typically related to innovation or internationalisation and are cases in which the companies require students to conduct research on their behalf. More internships will be formulated during the implementation phase.

## IMPLEMENTATION

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The online place branding platform will be created between August and December 2017. In August, more interviews will be conducted to reveal more internship assignments. Then, in September, the design will be created which, in October, will be filled with content. In November, extensive testing will take place as well as the official launch. Additionally, a planning has been created regarding the later maintenance of the online platform.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would like to thank Lisette Derksen, my former lecturer and my supervisor throughout this project, whose constructive feedback greatly assisted the creation of this thesis.

Next, my gratitude goes out to Kirstin Smid who offered me a desk in her company, PuurIDee, where I could write my thesis and learn from her valuable input about the profession and also the region.

Also, I would like to thank Rob Heilijgers and Harry Scholte who are the initiators and financiers of this project.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family, friends and partner for understanding my time restrictions during this period and who offered me an ear whenever necessary.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT CONTEXT

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In this dissertation, research into how an **online content strategy for place branding** can be developed will be effectuated in order to successfully improve the image and attractiveness of the region of South and East Groningen (SEG).

The research is conducted within the frame of the Honours graduation programme International Business Talent (IBT), which is offered by the Hanze University of Applied Sciences. The programme entails not only challenging graduation assignments but provides a four-month traineeship subsequent to the research phase in which the advice given in the advice report (starting on p. 57) is implemented by the graduate.

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## PRACTICAL PROBLEM

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The region of South and East Groningen (SEG) hosts many different companies but has been suffering from a **decrease in population** over the last years (ING, 2016). Especially the young population is decreasing which is leading to few educated young people living there which again leads to an aging population. This brings an array of problems, especially for the companies in the region (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017). Therefore, it is also clear that this is especially a problem for the companies of the region and therefore also for the client, 'De Compagnons van Zuid en Oost Groningen' (De Compagnons), a network of businesspeople.

The region encloses the municipalities of Bellingwede and Vlagtwedde, Oldambt, Menterwolde, Stadskanaal, Veendam and Pekela (De Compagnons van Zuid en Oost Groningen, n.d.).

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## COMMUNICATION PROBLEM

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Since the region is lacking young people, according to the client, especially students are needed (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017). As an active measure to attract young, highly educated students to the area while also attempting to keep the young people that are from the area from moving away, internship assignments related to innovation and/or internationalisation are to be phrased as a main pillar for the communication efforts that are later to be displayed on an interactive online platform (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017). These **internship assignments need to be communicated to the target group** in a manner that arouses their interest and motivates them to come to the region.

It has been decided to construct an online platform because of the large variety of opportunities it offers for creating an effective communication tool (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017).

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### KNOWLEDGE PROBLEM

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A crucial factor of creating a successful place branding tool is to first gain sufficient **knowledge about place branding**, such as what kind of message has been successful in past place branding projects, what research suggests how the message should be conveyed and which features such an online platform should offer. The client is lacking this knowledge and has therefore sought consultation.

Furthermore, the client lacks knowledge in **how to communicate the internships** in an appealing way to the target group of students.

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### INTERNATIONAL ORIENTATION & IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE

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The research project has a certain international focus since De Compagnons are trying not only to hold talent in the region but also to attract new talent, also from abroad. The final product, the online branding platform, will therefore be set out to **target people from the Netherlands and abroad alike**. This may require different approaches, depending on how similar the cultures of the countries are and what the students value.

Due to this international focus encompassing also potential cultural differences existing between different countries, a certain level of **intercultural sensitivity**<sup>1</sup> is required throughout the entire project (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009). This comes as it is not the goal to change the culture of the region but to operate within its norms and values (Schein, 2004). This requires intercultural sensitivity since the researcher is not from the region and therefore has to adapt to the culture present in SEG and communicate accordingly.

Since also students from abroad are to be targeted by the communication effort, potential cultural differences need to be examined closely. Next to that, the **culture of the region South and East Groningen** is a factor that may play a role while profiling the area.

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<sup>1</sup> **Intercultural sensitivity** means the ability to regard different cultures from outside one's own culture and therefore mentally immersing into the foreign culture (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009)

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## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

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The professional network 'De Compagnons van Zuid en Oost Groningen', who is the problem owner and client, is looking to establish an **online platform** to brand the region. The goal is to motivate excellent students to stay in the region while attracting students from other regions of the Netherlands and abroad. For this, the client wants the benefits and opportunities given in the region to be communicated effectively to students (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017).

## 2. ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

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### 2.1. PROJECT OWNERSHIP

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De Compagnons, the project owner and client, is a professional network with 46 members from different companies within South and East Groningen (SEG) (De Compagnons van Zuid en Oost Groningen, n.d.). These members are the **main stakeholders** of the research project due to its possible direct impact on them. The network carries out several projects that serve a large variety of purposes, e.g. the project 'Trots op Oost-Groningen' ('Proud of East-Groningen') that set the goal of establishing pride among the inhabitants of the area (De Compagnons van Zuid en Oost Groningen, n.d.).

### 2.2. PROJECT SUPERVISION

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PuurIDee, the company supervising the research and the subsequent traineeship, creates whole-package solutions in terms of branding, corporate identity, advertising, strategy, communication, promotional print media, email marketing, web design, usability, and SEO (PuurIDee, 2017). Founders and owners of PuurIDee, Kirstin Smid and Bastiaan Amsing, have gathered a team of 14 professionals since the founding of the company in 2008 (PuurIDee, n.d.). The team consists of communication consultants, a system architect, graphic designers, a traffic manager, a pre-sales consultant, web-application developers, and a copywriter (PuurIDee, 2016). Due to the agency's competencies in the field of communication it has been trusted with the supervision of the project by De Compagnons and the student conducting the research.

### 2.3. COMPETITION

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Potential competitors of the client, De Compagnons, could be other professional networks operating in the area. However, De Compagnons is a network focussed on the development of the area through collaboration which renders competition unlikely (De Compagnons van Zuid en Oost Groningen, n.d.).

### 3. RESEARCH CONTEXT / DESTEP ANALYSIS

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The research context in this case mainly discusses the region in which the research project will take place, since the region of South and East Groningen (SEG) can be seen as the context in which the research is conducted. First, however, the research perspective needs to be explained.

#### 3.1. RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

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This research attempts to find a **communication strategy** in order to brand SEG using an online platform. Therefore, the research focuses on how certain aspects can be communicated to the target audience in order to increase awareness in order to respond to the communication problem explained before (p. 1).

However, in order to be able to communicate about the companies within the region, specific details of these companies are important. Therefore, the research will also include insights into business such as corporate culture, operations, international orientation and the attitude towards innovation. This additional perspective next to the communication perspective is a result of the challenging research project as appointed by the IBT programme.

These insights into the businesses are likely to assist the detection of internship assignments, which are a part of the communication strategy since it is believed that these **internships can aid attracting students to the region** (Heijligers, personal communication, 2017).

Therefore, the main problem remains the communication problem since the effective **presentation of the internships** on the website remains the focus but requires further research in areas rather disconnected from communication.

### 3.2. DESTEP ANALYSIS

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The DESTEP analysis<sup>2</sup> by Kotler et al (2016) is applied to SEG in order to get a multifaceted overview of how the region is constructed. In the section below, the full analysis is presented. The DESTEP analysis covers the demographic, economic, sociocultural, technological, ecological, and political aspects of the region.

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#### DEMOGRAPHIC

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SEG has around 180.000 inhabitants (Centre for Innovative Craftsmanship, n.d.). However, the region is experiencing a steady decrease in population of around 2,5-10% (Dutch Ministry of Health, Wellbeing, and Sport, 2015b). Furthermore, less than 20% of the inhabitants are younger than 20, which is not expected to change until 2030 (Dutch Ministry of Health, Wellbeing, and Sport, 2015a).

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#### ECONOMY, CORPORATE CULTURE AND TRADE

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Economy and the mutual corporate culture within SEG are characterised by a strong local vision, collaboration and a doing-mentality (Centre for Innovative Craftsmanship, n.d.). According to ING (2016), the economy of the region of east Groningen grew by 1,4%, making it only region within the province of Groningen to record a growth instead of a decrease (ING, 2016). The unemployment rate of 7,9% is above the Dutch average of 6,9% but lower than the unemployment rate within the rest of the province of Groningen, where the average lies at 8,7% (ING, 2016).

In terms of export, the province of Groningen leads the list of the highest amount of exports among the northern provinces of the Netherlands with €6,9 billion that come from the **export of gas**<sup>3</sup>. Another €0,9 billion come from the export of chemicals (ING, 2016).

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#### SOCIOCULTURAL

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The sociocultural aspect will be analysed using Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (2017) and Kluckhohn's Model of Basic Assumptions (1961).

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<sup>2</sup> Analysing demographic, economic, social (sociocultural), technological, environmental, and political influences on a company (in this case: region) (Kotler, Dingena, & Pfoertsch, 2016)

<sup>3</sup> The province of Groningen is located above one of the biggest natural gas fields of the world with an initial volume of 2800 billion m<sup>3</sup> in 1959 (NAM, n.d.)

## **HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL DIMENSIONS**

According to Hofstede (2017), the Dutch culture in general is of individualistic nature, meaning that people are generally more responsible for themselves and their direct family. However, power distance relationship is relatively low, matching the low score in masculinity. Furthermore, the Dutch are generally leaning towards uncertainty avoidance which also reflects in the tendency to be long-term oriented. Lastly, people of the Dutch culture, in general, follow their inner impulse, generating a high score for the dimension of indulgence (Hofstede G. , 2017). More in-depth explanations can be found in the appendices (p. 81).

## **KLUCKHOHN'S MODEL OF BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

Kluckhohn (1961) has established a set of basic assumptions by which generalised cultures can be categorised. According to one of these assumptions, namely whether cultures live dominating, in harmony with, or subjugated to nature, the Dutch culture is generally known for living dominating to nature (Kluckhohn & Stodtbeck, 1961). An example for this is that the Dutch have infamously created land to live on where there had not been land before. Next to that, the Dutch culture can generally be described as a doing culture, meaning that people “live to work” (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009).

A more in-depth analysis of the culture of the Netherlands in general and SEG is presented in the section ‘Findings’ (p. 36) and in the appendices (p. 81).

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## TECHNOLOGICAL

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In 2015, SEG carried out one of the two 'Toptechniek' (English: top technology) programmes that were carried out in the Province Groningen (Dutch Government, 2015). The region focusses on a qualitative improvement of the level of work together with the internationalisation of the area of distribution (Centre for Innovative Craftsmanship, n.d.).

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## ECOLOGICAL

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Around 8.000 businesses from SEG are participating in a pilot project established through the network Energy Valley (Energy Valley, 2016). The goal of the project is to see whether energy can be split up among companies flexibly according to the current usage and need by utilizing a so-called Smart Grid<sup>4</sup>. This is not only beneficial for the businesses since they can save money on electricity but also for the environment since less energy is going to waste. Furthermore, it is the goal to use as much renewable energy<sup>5</sup> as possible (Energy Valley, 2016). The mere fact that such an amount of companies participates in this project shows that there may be a mind-set dominant in the region that strives towards sustainability.

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## POLITICAL

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Historically, SEG has been a politically controversial region due to numerous communist inhabitants who stood up against the persecution of the Jewish during WWII (RTV Noord, 2016).

In the elections that took place in March 2017, SEG made it into the headlines as one of the regions where Geert Wilder's controversial far-right PVV (Freedom Party) could convince many voters (Ramaker, 2017). Second strongest party in the region was the socialist party SP while the labour party PvdA, which had previously been among the strongest parties in the region, lost many voters and has lost its position in the region. Except for Stadskanaal, where the CDA (Christian democratic party) won the most votes, PVV or SP are dominating the municipalities of the region. According to Elsevier (2017), these results reflect the high unemployment rate and the decrease in population that are present in the region (Ramaker, 2017).

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<sup>4</sup> A smart grid is a special power supply which adapts the amount of electricity conducted towards e.g. a company facility according to the current need (Energy Valley, 2016)

<sup>5</sup> The term renewable energy includes all means of generating electricity or other forms of energy that do not use fossil resources such as natural gas or oil (Energy Valley, 2016)

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## CONCLUSION

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Drawing new talent, also from abroad, while holding existent talent could influence aspects of crimp. For that, making the region appear more attractive for excellent students may be required. Place branding could result in a nationally and internationally improved visibility and higher attractiveness of SEG. The professional network 'De Compagnons van Zuid en Oost Groningen' ("De Compagnons") desire to further boost this attractiveness by offering around 15 high-level internship opportunities concerning problems related to innovation and/or internationalisation within the region. To detect and later formulate these problems into internship assignments, different companies within the region will be analysed through desk research and in-depth interviews.

For this to be possible, the region's business landscape, as in which businesses operate within the area, needs to be analysed. This, as previously mentioned, is done through data collection within the frame of qualitative interviews with businesses in the region. These interviews have the goal to deliver insights into how businesses deal with innovation, whether or not they are internationally active or show potential for internationalisation. The companies are therefore analysed for what the corporate culture looks like and how they operate. This is important since the online platform will communicate to the specific target group on behalf of the companies, which needs to be appealed to. Therefore, in-depth knowledge into the operations as well as the identity of the different companies are indispensable.

During the phase of preliminary research, first analyses of the culture and the current situation of the region have been made. Essentially, the findings of the research are then to be made into an inventory of attractive high-level internship assignments which will then be used as a tool and communicated to excellent students to make the region more attractive for them. However, these internships need to be communicated to the target group in a way that appeals to them via the online platform. Therefore, knowledge on how the internships should be communicated about to the target group is needed.

## 4. OBJECTIVE

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### 4.1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

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The research objective, set according to Verschuren and Doorewaard (2013), comes as follows:

The research objective is to (A) give communication advice in form of a content strategy for a national and international online platform with the purpose to brand and improve the visibility and image of the region of South and East Groningen (SEG) in order to attract students to the companies operating in SEG by offering high-level internships to students from the Netherlands and abroad in a way that is appealing to them

(B) by analysing the region's culture and its physical surroundings as well as its business landscape<sup>6</sup> in terms of innovation, international activity, potential for internationalisation, and corporate culture in order to be able to brand the region and to communicate effectively towards the target group on behalf of the companies when publishing the internship opportunities to arouse interest among the target group.

### 4.2. JUSTIFICATION

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The main goal is to attract talented students from the Netherlands and other countries to SEG and to keep the talent from the region there. For this, a change of image may be needed to make the region appear more interesting and attractive through means of communication. Also, the region needs to be made known to students who are not originally from the region. These goals, according to the representative of the client Rob Heilijgers (personal communication, 2017) can be achieved via an online platform.

The objective clarifies that a mix of desk research<sup>7</sup> and field research<sup>8</sup> are used to fulfil the research objective. The different topic areas that are researched in (B) are necessary to lead to a sophisticated branding campaign as (A) suggests.

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<sup>6</sup> **Business landscape:** The different business present in the region

<sup>7</sup> Research method based on literature reviews (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007)

<sup>8</sup> Research method based on primary research for data collection (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007)

### 4.3. THE INTERVENTION CYCLE

The Intervention Cycle (Figure 1, below) (Verschuren and Doorewaard, 2010), assists solving a practical problem through structure. In this case, the first of five phases “what the exact problem is, why it is a problem and whose problem it is” (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010) is known to the client. The problem, as previously explained (p. 1), is that the population within SEG, especially the younger population is decreasing. The result is that there are fewer educated young people living in the region. This, in turn, results in an aging population which causes issues especially for the companies in the region (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017). This also impacts De Compagnons as a business network.

The research project focusses on diagnosing what is needed and desirable for creating an online place branding platform that communicates its content well to the target group. Therefore, it can be placed in the diagnosis stage of the intervention cycle (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

Then, these findings will be implemented in the design phase which will follow the research period as part of the traineeship included in the IBT programme. In this stage, the online platform as a means to fight the crimp in population is designed and constructed on the fundamentals of the results of the research conducted to assist resolving the problem existing in the region.

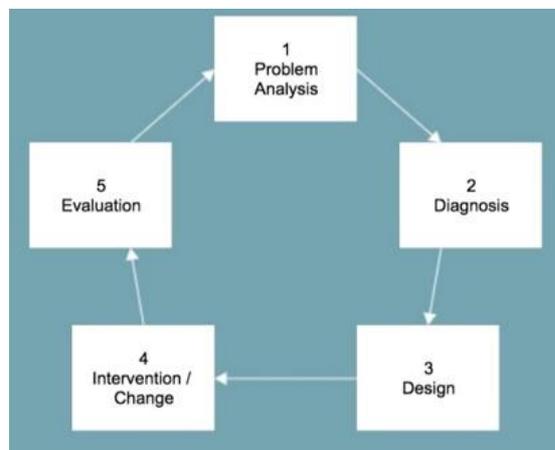


FIGURE 1: INTERVENTION CYCLE

#### 4.4. RESEARCH OBJECTS / TARGET GROUP

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The region of SEG (including inhabitants, sights and businesses) forms one group of research objects<sup>9</sup>. To brand the region successfully, extensive research will be conducted focussing on factors distinguishing SEG from other regions that can be communicated to the target audience<sup>10</sup> on the online platform later on (Braun, 2014). In effort to specify this rather generic research object, it is split up in three sub-objects. The sub-divisions within the general research object of the region are likely to overlap to a small extent. This is elaborated on in the according sections below.

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##### THE REGION: BUSINESSES

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The first sub-division of research objects consist of around 15 businesses from SEG selected in order to allow analyses of businesses from a large range of different industries, enabling the targeting of students from various fields of expertise. These businesses are interviewed in order to discover potential internship assignments concerning innovation that are suitable for excellent students. Most businesses that are interviewed are either members of De Compagnons or were guest speakers at a convention about “Expeditie Toptalent” (English: Expedition top talent) (De Compagnons van Zuid en Oost Groningen, n.d.).

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##### THE REGION: INHABITANTS

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The inhabitants form the second sub-division of the research object ‘the region’. Here, especially culture plays a role. Insights about the inhabitants will mostly be gathered by interviewing businesses on their life in the region, since the business people can be expected to also be inhabitants of the region.

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##### THE REGION: LOCATION

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The location itself may be valuable to branding since it is what the target audiences should be appealed to (Medway, 2015b). This sub-division furthermore includes aspects such as infrastructure, architecture and nature. Braun (2014) refers to these aspects of branding as “physical place brand communication” (Braun, 2014).

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<sup>9</sup> What is researched about (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007)

<sup>10</sup> The people at whom communication is directed (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007)

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## TARGET GROUP

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The focus lies specifically on excellent students since the client has explicitly indicated that the wish is to attract highly educated and motivated talent to the region (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017).

Students classify as research object since they are researched into by means of secondary research and a survey questionnaire<sup>11</sup>. The student demographic will be targeted directly during the effort of branding the region as it is them who should grow into excellent interns for the businesses in SEG. This will be elaborated on in the section 'Methodology' (p. 25).

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<sup>11</sup> A survey questionnaire is usually a standardised set of questions to gather comparable data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007)

## 5. THEORETICAL RESEARCH AREAS

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Next to the interviews and the student survey questionnaire, thorough desk research is conducted based on the following theoretical research areas.

### 5.1. CULTURE THEORY

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Culture, according to Hofstede (1991), “[...] is the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another”.

In terms of culture, especially the Dutch culture is investigated. For that, theory established by Geert Hofstede and the corresponding online tools are used (Hofstede, n.d.). This theory is added on to using Kluckhohn’s Model of Basic Assumptions (Kluckhohn & Stodtbeck, 1961) which presents yet another set of dimensions, often overlapping slightly with those of Hofstede (n.d.).

However, theory on culture provides insights into how people think and behave. Therefore, culture is crucial not only when portraying the region but also when communicating to students from abroad.

### 5.2. PLACE BRANDING

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The essence of place branding, per definition, is to generate an identity and image for a region (Braun, 2014) and “to create unique mental associations in the minds of consumers linking it to a name, symbol or other feature of identification” (Govers, 2015).

Theory in place branding is used to acquire knowledge on how to brand a region and increase the attractiveness, visibility and image of that region towards other regions and countries. Essentially, this will lead to a content strategy for an online platform to respond to the communication problem of the client as described earlier (p. 1).

By implementing a nationally and internationally applicable branding strategy, a larger amount of people may be exposed to the content offered on the platform (Andéhn, et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the essence of branding is to generate an identity and image for a location (Braun, 2014). The aim is to generate a positive identity for the region in order to increase attractiveness and ultimately the image of SEG (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017).

Knowledge on place branding contains a variety of different aspects of branding that the researcher needs to know about in order to create a strategy for online place branding such as which channel of communication to use, which message to send to the viewers of the platform and who the communicators who spread these messages on the chosen channel should be in order to make the branding effort more likely to succeed.

Insights into online place branding is mostly derived from Hanna & Rowley's '7 C's of Place Brand Management' (2015), which discusses the aspects of "channels, clutter, community, chatter, and communication" (Hanna & Rowley, 2015). A more in-depth explanation of the '7 C's' can be found in the appendix (p. 84).

These theories combined can lead to a profound online place branding content strategy for SEG.

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#### UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION (USP)

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The unique selling proposition (USP), is "[...] used to convince customers to use a particular brand/product by focusing on the unique benefit" (Shen et al, 2017).

In place branding, specifying what makes a region stand out in comparison to e.g. another region is a crucial step in adding value to a region (Govers, 2015). A USP for the region could be e.g. the landscape, distinctive features in business, or anything that can serve as one of the "landmarks [that] may become synecdoches for a region" (Andéhn, et al., 2015).

### 5.3. BUSINESS THEORY

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Insights into business are essential when analysing different companies within SEG in order to successfully conduct interviews and detect and formulate possible internship opportunities. General knowledge about various business theories is likely to help gain access to information held by the interviewed businesses (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007).

Ultimately, resulting from the theoretical research area of 'Business Theory', background knowledge for asking questions to businesses about the corporate culture, but also potential business opportunities like innovation and internationalisation is required.

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#### CORPORATE CULTURE

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Corporate culture, defined as “an organization’s values, behavioural norms, and management style” (Morrison, 2011) is researched and put into context, among others, with how the companies deal with innovation. Among others, Morrison’s book “The Global Business Environment” (2011) delivers insights into the topic next to further definitions and explanations of what corporate culture entails and what it is influenced by.

The content of the corporate culture of the individual businesses is determined through the interviews (see p. 25). This is done in order to get a picture of specific businesses while also ground for generalisations for the region is sought. In general, it is established how innovation and internationalisation are approached by the companies.

Morrison (2011) indicates that „companies tend to reflect the national culture of their home country, despite globalization to their operations“ (Morrison, 2011). This clarifies the need for the inspection of corporate culture among the different businesses within SEG also as a tool to identify the culture of the region. Vice versa, the theories mentioned in chapter 5.1. 'Culture Theory' (p. 14) also play a role in the determination of the corporate culture.

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#### INNOVATION

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Innovation, as defined by Morrison (2011), is not restricted to inventions as it “[...] also includes improvements which are less radical but offer commercial benefits”.

The interviews, as requested by the client, require a strong focus on innovation (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017). Ultimately, the internship placements resulting from the research, which are

to be communicated to the target group, are related to assisting companies in the region in the process of innovating and therefore the interviews need to produce the following:

1. Is there a need for assistance in the process of innovating within the company?
2. What kind of innovation is necessary to develop the business further?
3. What kind of knowledge is required to assist the company in the process of innovating?

The content of these questions, albeit in different wording, are transformed into interview questions.

Again, Janet Morrison's "The Global Business Environment: Meeting the Challenges" (2011) is used to gather insights into the field of innovations, mainly from a business standpoint. However, the book also addresses the technological side of innovation and may therefore be crucial to the research project. According to Morrison (2011), "technological innovation and the capacity to sustain a technological lead are crucial to success in the competitive environment, for both companies and countries".

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## INTERNATIONALISATION

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Internationalisation, as defined by Hollensen (2012), "occurs when the firm expands its R&D, production, selling and other business activities into international markets".

Therefore, as another tool for business development, internationalisation of the companies plays a crucial role in the phrasing of interview questions (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017). For that, e.g. knowledge about the current status of international operations, the willingness to operate internationally and the competence to operate internationally are assessed.

Internationalisation as a topic on which to ask businesses of SEG is included in the questions of the interviews. Since the internationalisation is being approached in different modes by different companies, as Hollensen (2012) explains in his book "Essentials of Global Marketing", these interviews show how the individual businesses view internationalisation and how they go about it.

## 6. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

### 6.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

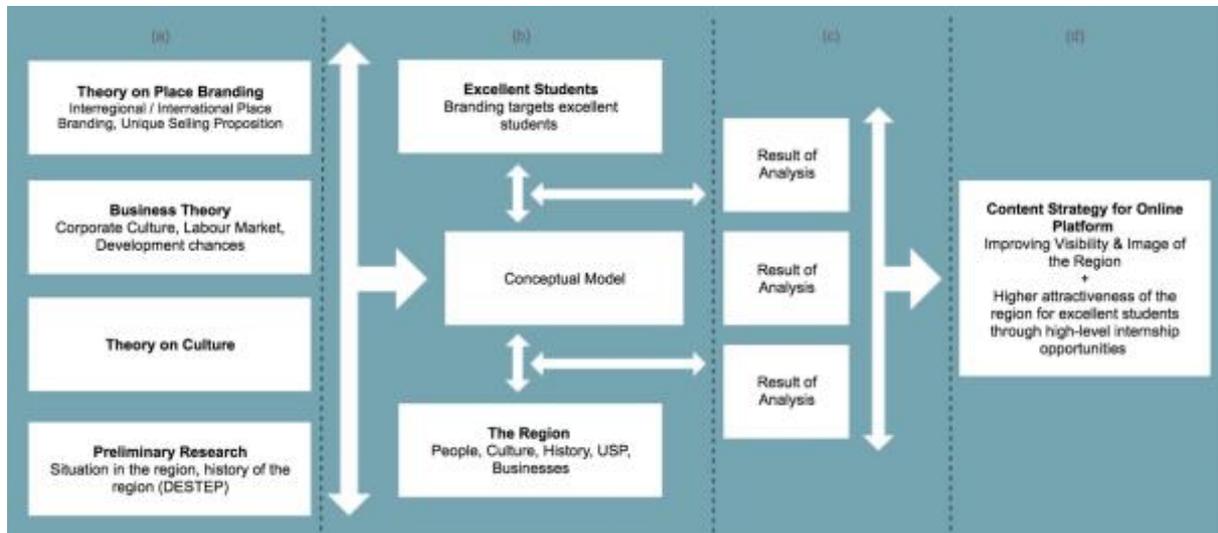


FIGURE 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research framework (above) is formulated according to Verschuren and Doorewaard (2010) and is phrased as follows:

(a) By conducting preliminary research into the situation and the history of the region through means of a DESTEP analysis and secondary desk research by investigating theories on place branding, business theory and theory on culture, a conceptual model is formulated.

(b) Based on the findings from the analysis of literature regarding place branding, business theory, theory and culture and with the outcomes of the DESTEP analysis, research questions are phrased and refined for the research objects, namely the region and excellent students who are to be drawn to the area from other regions of the Netherlands and abroad while attempting to keep the local talent from leaving the region.

For the businesses within the region that will be interviewed, interview questions are phrased to acquire insights into the corporate culture, the labour market, development chances and into the region in terms of culture and its USP. Simultaneously, a student survey is set up to get to know how the target group of students can be addressed.

(c) The outcomes of the interviews as well as the desk research are analysed, concluded and

(d) delivered as advice on a content strategy for an online platform with the purpose of improving the attractiveness, the visibility and image of the region nationally and internationally by branding

the region and publishing several high-level internship assignments (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

## 6.2. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The conceptual model (Figure 3) delivers insights into which variables of the research have an influence on each other (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). Together, the research framework and the conceptual model provide an overview over the fields that will be researched during the project and how the desired outcome depends on them.

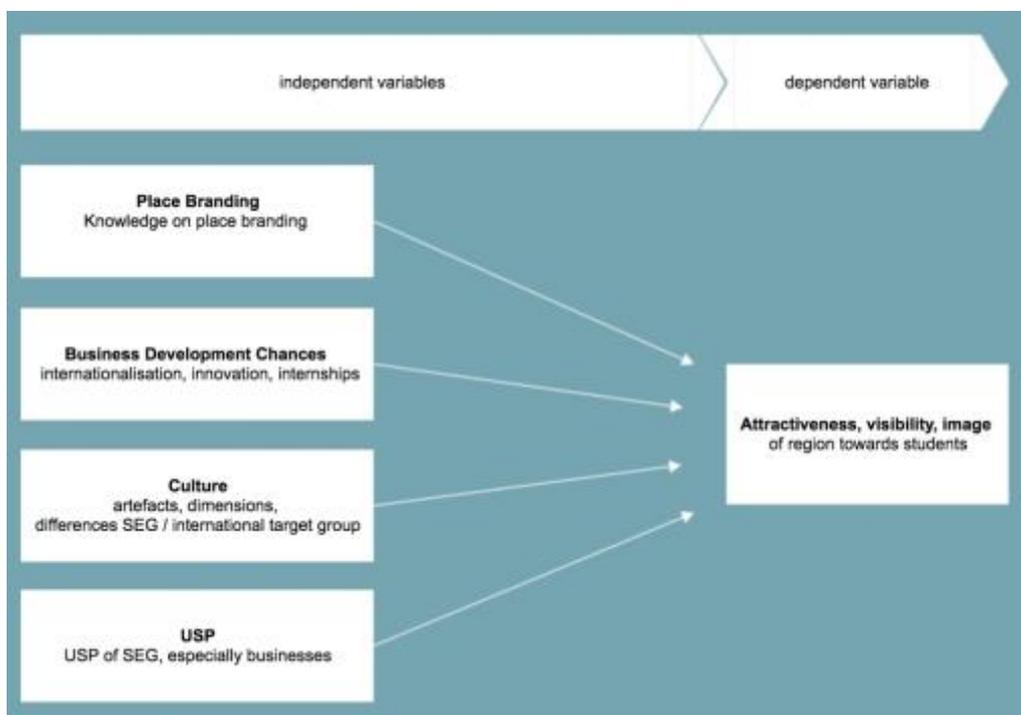


FIGURE 3: CONCEPTUAL MODEL

### 6.2.1 JUSTIFICATION

The dependent variable is the improved attractiveness, visibility and image of SEG perceived by students. The independent variables on the left are what may impact the attractiveness, visibility and image of the region, as explained in the theoretical framework (p. 18).

## 7. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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The research questions were unravelled from the theoretical framework as suggested by Verschuren and Doorewaard (2010). These research questions can be found again in the section Findings (p. 30) where the research questions are answered.

In order to create an adequate set of research questions, every central research question must have at least two, if any, sub-questions (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). Especially important when phrasing research questions from the set of theoretical research areas (p. 14), according to Verschuren en Doorewaard (2010), is that the questions are efficient<sup>12</sup> and steering<sup>13</sup>. The research questions can be found on the following page (p. 21).

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<sup>12</sup> **efficiency** “refers to both the degree of knowledge that yields the answers to the questions contained in the set of research questions, and the degree this knowledge actually contributes to achieving the research objective” (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010)

<sup>13</sup> **steering** “refers to the extent to which the set of research questions throws light on the activities which need to be performed during the carrying out of the research” (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010)

**CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION 1:**

THROUGH WHICH CONTENT CAN SEG BE BRANDED SUCCESSFULLY VIA AN ONLINE PLATFORM?

**SUB-QUESTIONS:**

- a. What content options do interviews and desk research about the business landscape<sup>14</sup> in SEG deliver in terms of corporate culture, including innovation and internationalisation, that are valuable for branding SEG?
- b. How can analysing the business landscape of the region in terms of industries, including the labour market, lead to valuable content for branding SEG?
- c. How can analysing the culture of SEG in terms of its inhabitants through interviews lead to valuable content for branding SEG?
- d. How can analysing the physical surroundings within SEG, also in terms of nature and sights, through desk research and interviews lead to valuable visual content for branding SEG (e.g. visual trademark/landmark)?
- e. What does theory suggest could be a successful place branding strategy for SEG?
- f. What, according to businesses in SEG, is the USP of the region?

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<sup>14</sup> **Business landscape:** As in the different business that are to be found within the region of South and East Groningen

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## JUSTIFICATION

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By inspecting what could make the region be more attractive to excellent students from the Netherlands and abroad regarding the business landscape<sup>15</sup>, culture, and physical surroundings<sup>16</sup> the content for the online platform can be generated.

The culture of the region, since it is undescribed as of now, will be further investigated during the interviews with the businesses from the region.

The USP of the region, regardless of where it lies (e.g. business landscape or the physical surroundings) should be determined in order to be able to strengthen the place brand (Andéhn, et al., 2015).

This central research question is **efficient** according to the standards of Verschuren and Doorewaard (2010) since it is the goal to create a content strategy with the purpose of improving, among others, the image and attractiveness of the region. Therefore, the question clearly “contributes to achieving the research objective” (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). The content for this content strategy can be delivered through this central question. The knowledge to answer the central research question is provided by the set of sub-questions.

Next to that, the sub-questions clearly indicate which research methods are to be utilized in order to acquire the desired knowledge. In terms of Verschuren and Doorewaard (2010), that classifies the questions as **steering** since they cast “light on the activities which need to be performed during the carrying out of the research” (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

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<sup>15</sup> As in the different business that are to be found within the region of South and East Groningen

<sup>16</sup> As in the tangible environment such as buildings, the nature or the (visible) infrastructure such as bridges, roads and harbours

## 7.2. TARGET AUDIENCE

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### CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

HOW AND THROUGH WHICH MEANS<sup>17</sup> CAN THE REGION BE BRANDED SUCCESSFULLY TOWARDS THE TARGET AUDIENCE?

#### SUB-QUESTIONS:

- a. Through combining knowledge from desk research and a quantitative survey, how can the region be branded successfully towards excellent students according to the groups' proficiency in language and its interests?
- b. Which high-level innovation-related internship assignments that are relevant to businesses in SEG can be revealed in interviews that may lead to a higher attractiveness of the region among excellent students from the Netherlands and abroad?

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#### JUSTIFICATION

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The central research question clearly serves the purpose of answering the research objective since part of the research objective is to brand the region to the target audience. According to Verschuren and Doorewaard (2010), the question is therefore **efficient**.

The sub-questions add knowledge that is important for answering the central research. They specify what kind of knowledge exactly is needed to answer the central question sufficiently. Both sub-questions clearly dictate the method necessary to reveal the information required. Therefore, the questions are **steering** (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

Sub-question 'a.' aims at analysing the target group's language proficiency and interests. This is crucial since the students are likely to come from different countries and therefore cultures. Consequentially, this sub-question may lead to knowledge indispensable for creating a strategy that increases the attractiveness, image and visibility of the region specifically for students. Thus, it can be concluded that this sub-question therefore clearly contributes to the research objective, making it **efficient** (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

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<sup>17</sup> As in communication channels (print, online, radio, TV, ...)

To fulfil the client's wish for a number of internship assignments that make the region attractive to the target audience while also assisting businesses during the process of innovating, the businesses in the region will be analysed (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017). This is the aim of sub-question 'b.'. This sub-question is **steering** since it dictates the method of how data will be gathered and efficient since it contributes to the goal of making the region more attractive to the target audience (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

The central research question then sets out to examine how these internships can be presented to appeal to the target audience's interests and thus combines 'a.' and 'b.'.

## 8. RESEARCH STRATEGY AND MATERIALS

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### 8.1. METHODOLOGY

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#### INTERVIEWS

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The research is, to a large extent, done by utilizing field research since it is an expectation of the client that **semi-structured in-depth interviews**<sup>18</sup> with the research objects of ‘companies from SEG’ being interviewed.

These interviews are to reveal information about the research objects of ‘the region’, ‘the businesses within the region’, and ‘the inhabitants of the region’. Next to that, the interviews are set to reveal potential internship opportunities within the businesses.

The interviews are transcribed, translated and entered into Interview Nexuses (Schouten, 2006). The translated transcriptions and the interview nexuses can be found in the appendices (p. 87).

Five such interviews have been carried out and more will follow during the traineeship subsequent to the research phase. This has been decided upon as data saturation regarding data valuable for the branding strategy has been reached (Ng & Coakes, 2014). The responses have been repeating themselves frequently, barely adding to what is valuable for the content strategy. According to Ng and Coakes (2014), “in situations of well-informed individuals that are in a homogenous culture, as few as four respondents can produce a high level of accuracy” (Ng & Coakes, 2014) which applies here since only business experts, a homogenous group, have been interviewed. The interviews conducted during the traineeship will focus on finding more internships and not on knowledge for the place branding content strategy.

#### SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

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In order to gather data about the student demographic, a **survey questionnaire** is disseminated among students from different countries and regions. The questions focus on the **preferences** as well as **demographic data** of the students. They are phrased to deliver generalizable quantitative<sup>19</sup> data. Therefore, most questions asked are phrased as list questions, ranking questions, or rating questions

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<sup>18</sup> **Semi-structured interviews:** Interviews following prepared questions but intentionally allow and even promote a free-flowing conversation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007)

<sup>19</sup> **Quantitative data:** Data that is countable and therefore easily comparable (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007)

(Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). It is chosen to conduct a survey questionnaire since, among others, the specific interests of the target group need to be identified. There is no sufficient amount of pre-existing data available which can answer the research questions regarding interests of the students.

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## SURVEY SAMPLING

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Since it is the idea to gather general preferences of students from around the world, the survey could be sent out to anyone qualifying as 'student' without further segmentation. However, the sample mainly includes students that study in the Netherlands or Germany due to proximity and approachability (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). Students from other countries are addressed, too.

With the help of an online tool found on SurveyMonkey (n.d.), it was calculated that the survey requires 97 students to answer the survey if it is estimated that there are around 200 million students worldwide<sup>20</sup>, the confidence level is 95%<sup>21</sup> and a margin of error<sup>22</sup> of 10% (SurveyMonkey, n.d.). As can be read in 'Limitations' (p. 29), a lower error margin was impossible to achieve.

In total, 114 students participated in the 'Student Demographic Survey'. The blank survey can be found in the appendices (p. 134).

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## SECONDARY RESEARCH

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The primary research, meaning the semi-structured interviews and the survey questionnaire, are supported with **deductive secondary research** in order to enable a scientific analysis. The theoretical areas that are researched into can be found in the section 'Theoretical Research Areas' (p. 14).

The findings from the secondary research are also reflect upon in the discussion section (p. 48 and later in the advice report (p. 57)).

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<sup>20</sup> This estimation is based on a 2012 estimation of 183 million students globally with a forecast of that amount doubling until 2025 (University World News, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> **Confidence level:** the likeliness with which the outcome will reliably mirror the answers of the entire research population (SurveyMonkey, n.d.).

<sup>22</sup> **Margin of error:** The range in percentage by which the sample's answers may be different from those of the entire population

## 8.2. RELIABILITY/VALIDITY

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The “reliability and validity” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007) of the findings, especially regarding secondary research, are tested through close examination of the sources. The sources used should be widely recognized literature in order to be trustworthy. Furthermore, it features a “highly structured methodology to facilitate replication” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). Furthermore, access to information from the interviewed businesses can be gained through demonstration of knowledge about the businesses since the businesses are more likely to be “convinced about your credibility and competence” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). Due to the timeframe given and the generally available data it can be summarized that the research project is feasible<sup>23</sup>, however limitations (p. 28) need to be reckoned with (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007).

The survey is tested and re-tested<sup>24</sup> in regards of reliability and validity by first disseminating the survey to selected students asking for feedback. Then, after having made any necessary improvements, the questionnaire is sent to different students asking for feedback again. This can be repeated indefinitely. Ultimately, this can help constructing a survey that is consistent in the way it is answered and understood (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). To facilitate this process, as suggested by Saunders et al (2007), the online service “SurveyMonkey.com” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007) will be used to create and test the survey. Due to budget limitations, the survey will ultimately be spread and analysed with Google Forms which offers similar online tools for sending and analysing survey questionnaires.

## 8.3. IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERVIEWS

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The planning of the interviews has been discussed with the client beforehand. It was established that first contact with potential interview partners is established by Rob Heilijgers, the project leader of De Compagnons (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017). Then, the respondents receive an email from the researcher including the purpose of the interview and the interview questions. The interviewee is first requested to reply via email. This gives the interviewee sufficient time to thoroughly answer the

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<sup>23</sup> Possible within the given time (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007)

<sup>24</sup> Testing and re-testing ensures that participants understand the survey in a similar if not identical way which improves the quality of the received data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007)

questions. Next, the researcher formulates follow-up questions which are asked in a personal interview.

An in-depth planning can be found in the appendices (p. 86). The implementation planning is part of the advice report and will be presented accordingly (see p. 70).

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## 9. LIMITATIONS

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A number of limitations that potentially impede the research project have come to light.

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### REGION-SPECIFIC LIMITATIONS

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Firstly, SEG is a specific areal segmentation. Therefore, some data was difficult to allocate, e.g. on sociocultural norms and values for the region since the general Dutch culture may not be the same as the culture of SEG. Additionally, some companies may not only operate within SEG but perhaps also e.g. North-East Groningen and it is difficult to clearly say where the boundaries lay. Therefore, there may be minor overlaps. Potentially, this could impact the accuracy of findings that should, however, be of minor moment.

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### LITERATURE AVAILABILITY

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Furthermore, place branding is a field relatively new to the academic sphere (Hankinson, 2015). Therefore, information is more difficult to acquire and what is accepted as general truth in the field may change over time.

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### DATA ACQUISITION: BUSINESSES

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The acquisition of data also relies on how cooperative the businesses are. Even if businesses agree to participate this does not guarantee valid, extensive and well-explained information. Some businesses have agreed to be interviewed but realized not to have enough time or to not wish to enclose any information at all, while others may haste and not answer the questions to an adequate extent. Next to that, some businesses may have misperceptions about themselves.

Since sometimes sensitive questions may be asked, the goodwill of the interviewee may not always persist throughout the whole course of the interview leading to incomplete interviews.

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### DATA ACQUISITION: STUDENTS

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Similarly, as it is the case when researching businesses, the response rate of students to the survey questionnaire as well as misperceptions can impact the precision of the findings. This is especially the case due to the great population size of around 200 million students worldwide. Therefore, an error margin below 9% was not achievable.

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### DATA ANALYSIS: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

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The analyses of survey questionnaires are further limited through budget, since the utilisation of the pricey online service “SurveyMonkey” does not lay within the appointed budget. Therefore, Google Forms is used which may offer similar possibilities for data analysis but may also, in some instances, offer less than its costly counterpart.

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### LANGUAGE LIMITATIONS

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Throughout the research project, communication with the clients, the business interviews and communication with other stakeholders will take place exclusively in Dutch as requested by the client, De Compagnons (Heilijgers, 2017). Since this is not the first language of the researcher, some small translation issues could arise. Written communication will be proof-read by the company supervisor. This may lead to delays and impede planning.

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### PROJECT LIMITATIONS

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This research project may deliver an incomplete view of the region since it e.g. may not sufficiently include government actions and educational institutions within the region. The reasons for this are that a specific scope needed to be chosen and that there is a strict word count maximum for the body part of the research- and advice reports. A need for further research may arise from this in the future.

## 10. RESEARCH OUTCOMES & FINDINGS

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As mentioned in the section 'Methodology' (p. 25), five interviews with businesspeople from the region are conducted. A list of these companies can be found in the appendices (p. 87). The survey was answered by a total of 114 students from all around the world. However, most students are either Dutch or German and most live in the Netherlands. The questions asked can be found in the appendices (p. 134), as well as the individual answers that were received (p. 137).

The research findings are presented in order of the sub-questions that were answered. In many cases, in-depth research can be found in the appendices (from p. 81). In this chapter, the findings directly relevant to the research sub-questions are presented.

Each question will be answered through data that was acquired according to the method that is indicated within the question. Therefore, the steeringness of the questions according to Verschuren and Doorewaard (2010) will be tested.

The complete analysis of the survey can be found in the appendices (p. 137), as well as the in-depth transcriptions of the interviews and the interview nexuses for each interview (p. 87).

### 10.1. RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 1

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WHAT CONTENT OPTIONS DO INTERVIEWS ABOUT THE BUSINESS LANDSCAPE IN SEG DELIVER IN TERMS OF CORPORATE CULTURE, INCLUDING INTERNATIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT THAT ARE VALUABLE FOR BRANDING SEG?

#### INTERNATIONAL ORIENTATION IN CORPORATE CULTURE

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In terms of internationalisation, different approaches subside in the region. In general, none of the companies interviewed say that they would never expand to international markets. Some of the companies seem more inclined to internationalise, some are already operating internationally while others show to be quite reserved while not excluding the option for the future. The extensive explanation can be found in the appendices (p. 156).

The companies in the region often focus strongly on innovation. A shared mentality seems to be that standing still is the same as moving backwards (Bruning, personal communication, 2017; Smits, personal communication, 2017).

### **LACK OF INCORPORATION INTO CORPORATE CULTURE**

However, the interviews also showed that some companies are not yet satisfied with the extent to which their company has incorporated innovation as part of their corporate culture. A complete analysis of which company is lacking incorporation into the corporate culture can be found in the appendices (p. 157).

### **IMPORTANCE OF INNOVATION AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION**

The companies in the region generally find innovation important, as the interviews show.

For Nedmag, the introduction of an 'Innovation-Monday' as a date set for innovation-related tasks is hoped to manifest the mentality that "everybody is responsible for innovation, not just the men in the white coats" (Bruning, personal communication, 2017b).

Pander & Lier only has three employees, minimizing capacities and time that can be freed to discuss innovation. An innovation that Rotman could imagine is a digital employer-employee matching platform (Rotman, personal communication, 2017).

RSE Telecom utilizes technical innovations as developed by the suppliers in the field such as Vodafone (Smits, personal communication, 2017). According to Joost Smits (2017), technical innovation is the definition of innovation in the business. The company installs the technology and accompanies its clients thereafter. However, the company engages in combining services to create new all-round solutions.

WPT is a trade organisation (Siebring, personal communication, 2017). Therefore, practical innovation is not really present in the mind-set of the company.

Novariet seeks the ideas of its employees on all levels to come up with new innovative uses for its plastic. Therefore, innovation plays a big role in the company (Eikens, personal communication, 2017).

The product, the reed made out of plastic, is an innovation itself and has not been on the market for a long time yet (Eikens, personal communication, 2017).

Innovative thinking could potentially be portrayed on the online platform to attract student interns. Being able to bring forth their own ideas even from an entry position could be tempting since many companies depend on ideas brought up by the managerial level and not by entry level employees (Eikens, personal communication, 2017).

## **EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT**

Employee development, as the interviews show, is highly valued among businesses in the region. Many companies expect a certain level of self-study for the sake of staying up-to-date with current trends in the respective industries next to the workshops that they often supply.

Nedmag likes to employ people with little to no prior work experience in order to be able to shape the employees more according to their needs (Bruning, personal communication, 2017). One of their core values is set to be “bring the best to the surface” (Bruning, personal communication, 2017). This is meant in a literal sense when mining magnesium but also when bringing out the best in their employees.

Pander & Lier values employee development, especially in regard to interns. According to Rotman (personal communication, 2017), every intern is expected to be proactive and leave the company with a feeling of having learned something and having worked well on their project.

RSE Telecom has a drive to always be able to work on “Champions League level” (Smits, personal communication, 2017). This means that they always want to be among the best. For that, the employees of the company need to take trainings, have instruction sessions with the developers such as Vodafone and interact with new technology on a daily basis, also through self-study (Smits, personal communication, 2017).

WPT also offers seminars to its employees to stay up to date (Siebring, personal communication, 2017). He further explains that a certain extent of curiosity is important in order to keep growing as a professional.

Novariet puts employee development on a pedestal as the participation in seminars and the self-development is not only valued but made a crucial aspect of corporate culture since the company

depends on new inputs by the employees to develop new products or services or improve these (Eikens, personal communication, 2017).

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#### APPLICATION TO CONTENT STRATEGY

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The three above mentioned aspects of corporate culture, namely employee development, drive towards innovation and international orientation are chosen to be content options to brand SEG. The companies' views seem to intersect frequently on these points. This is an incomplete depiction of the corporate cultures of the companies but these show the most value for branding SEG. More insights into the corporate cultures can be found in the interview nexuses in the appendices (p. 87).

## 10.2. RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 2

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HOW CAN ANALYSING THE BUSINESS LANDSCAPE OF THE REGION IN TERMS OF INDUSTRIES, INCLUDING THE LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT LEAD TO VALUABLE CONTENT FOR BRANDING SEG?

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### INDUSTRIES

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There is a large spectrum of different industries present in SEG which are often quite unique, such as magnesium mining, production of artificial reed, or international trade with waste paper.

According to Bruning (personal communication, 2017), the magnesium source in SEG is the only one in the world where a magnesium of that level of purity can be won that is accessible. With the resource of mining, there are many unexplored possibilities e.g. in the sectors of farming, energy storage, and health supplements

Eikens (personal communication, 2017) is the director Novariet, a unique company that is the only developer and producer of artificial reed, e.g. for roofing or other architectural applications.

Waste Paper Trade (WPT) sells and buys waste paper in various different locations in Europe and transports it from the source to the address of delivery (Siebring, personal communication, 2017).

Since these are only examples for some of the relatively unique industries present in SEG, it can be said there is a large variety of different professions that can be practiced in the region which may not be practiced in other places.

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## LABOUR MARKET

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As Jorg Rotman (personal communication, 2017) from the employment agency Pander & Lier concludes, there is a need in the highest segment of the labour market and in the lowest. Especially from abroad, native speakers of different languages are required in order to work e.g. in recruitment in order to attract more work force from their country. Due to the vicinity to Germany, the language looked for is often German (Rotman, personal communication, 2017).

Less interesting for the branding of the region, especially towards students, is that in the lowest sector of labour where mostly employees are needed that have “lower demands” (Rotman, personal communication, 2017). This means that there are tasks that Dutch employees simply do not want to do, such as harvesting. Hence, the need for foreign work force emerges.

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## EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

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Since employee development showed to be anchored in the corporate cultures of all companies that have been interviewed, an extensive analysis of what the companies from SEG think of employee development can be found underneath the previous sub-question (p.32). In the discussion (p. 49), these are linked to findings from desk research.

### 10.3. RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 3

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HOW CAN ANALYSING THE CULTURE OF SEG IN TERMS OF ITS INHABITANTS THROUGH INTERVIEWS LEAD TO VALUABLE CONTENT FOR BRANDING SEG?

In the interviews, the trait most frequently associated with the inhabitants of the region is that the people have a down-to-earth, no-nonsense mind-set (Bruning, personal communication, 2017). The people are generally said to be hard working and, once persuaded that an innovation is a good idea, supply full support of the company. Therefore, loyalty is highly valued.

Further aspects which were less common between the companies can be found in the appendices (p. 87).

#### 10.4. RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 4

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HOW CAN ANALYSING THE PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS WITHIN SEG, ALSO IN TERMS OF NATURE AND SIGHTS THROUGH INTERVIEWS LEAD TO VALUABLE VISUAL CONTENT FOR BRANDING SEG (E.G. VISUAL TRADEMARK/LANDMARK)?

As mentioned by Joost Smits from RSE Telekom and Bert Jan Bruning from Nedmag, the city of Winschoten and its surroundings could serve as visual content for the online platform (Bruning, personal communication, 2017; Smits, personal communication, 2017). For Bruning, the ongoing renovations e.g. in Winschoten show that the region is investing to fight crime by making the rural cities more attractive.

Winschoten and the close-by Blauwestad, a city which is just now being built next to a lake, offer good living possibilities for a reasonable price in a region with a strong infrastructure, good labour opportunities and in vicinity to Groningen. For families, says Bruning, small rural cities are a lot more suitable. Therefore, he thinks these are suited visual as content (Bruning, personal communication, 2017).

Joost Smits also commented on Winschoten, mentioning that the city does not lack opportunities the city of Groningen has (Smits, personal communication, 2017). Of course, Winschoten is a lot smaller but it has malls, cultural institutions and many leisure activities. For Smits, however, the nature of the surroundings also play a big role and the peace that the nature supplies (Smits, personal communication, 2017).

Jorg Rotman from Pander&Lier was less enthusiastic about the region, saying that he would not have stayed there when he was young if he had had the chances to leave to a city (Rotman, personal communication, 2017). However, having stayed in the region, he is able to see the positive in e.g. the nature and the space that one has.

WPT's Harm Siebring (personal communication, 2017) thinks that the amount of new buildings in which business is conducted could show the room for personal development in a nice way. The business space available next to the nature could show the work-life balance present in the region.

## 10.5. RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 5

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WHAT DOES THEORY SUGGEST COULD BE A SUCCESSFUL PLACE BRANDING STRATEGY FOR SEG?

In order to construct a well-founded online place branding communication strategy, several pieces of literature are reviewed. However, the concept of branding requires a definition to start with. According to Govers (2015), “a brand intends to create unique mental associations in the minds of consumers linking it to a name, symbol or other feature of identification” (Govers, 2015).

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### PURPOSE

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As a reminder; the purpose is to increase attractiveness and image of the region. This will be done by offering excellent students the chance to run an internship in the area, as wished for by the client (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017). It is hoped that this will help fight the population crimp (Dutch Ministry of Health, Wellbeing, and Sport, 2015b).

Literature indicates that it is in fact possible to use place branding to effectively deliver “solutions to practical/functional place-related problems” (Ashworth, Kavaratzis, & Warnaby, 2015).

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### MESSAGE

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As mentioned, De Compagnons wish to offer innovation-related internship opportunities in SEG to excellent students. However, Govers (2015) mentions that because many places attempt to brand themselves as disposed to innovation, it becomes less likely that this leads to the anticipated distinction that makes the region stick out among the others (Govers, 2015).

Govers (2015) also explains that word-of-mouth messages are, next to the actual experience of the place, most crucial in the process of online place branding, also because people tend to be least open to messages with a clear promotional purpose (Govers, 2015). In other words, branding should depend less on disseminating produced messages but rather “allow for the enrichment and sharing of experiences” (Govers, 2015). This makes social interactions about the specific place a largely important tool for branding which explains the increasing significance of online platforms and e.g. social media in place branding (Govers, 2015).

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## STRATEGY

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Govers (2015) says that brands are “largely virtual” (Govers, 2015), meaning that they exist mostly online. Therefore, especially online place branding requires a thorough strategy because people who are interested in the region, whether they are current inhabitants, possible investors, tourists or potential inhabitants look for information about the area online (Hanna & Rowley, 2015). The authors further explain that “chatter” (Hanna & Rowley, 2015) is facilitated on social media, which further increases the visibility of the brand and of which Govers (2015) expects it to “[...] take over from advertising-driven ‘branding’ in future”.

### WORD-OF-MOUTH

Even though word-of-mouth communication is more difficult to steer, Hanna and Rowley (2015) argue that the mix of positive and negative messages that can be placed in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) e.g. on social media or blogs arouses interest and increases the visibility.

Furthermore, online place branding offers the chance to truly build a community about a place and have ambassadors of the brand which may increase the perceived value of the brand (Hanna & Rowley, 2015), which, according to Govers (2015) belongs to the “most important sources of information for people to form images of places” which can be enhanced through two-way communication (Therkelsen, 2015).

For place branding SEG, this could mean that “place stories” (Ashworth, Kavaratzis, & Warnaby, 2015) e.g. about the culture of the region could have a larger impact on the attractiveness and image of the region than when focussing e.g. on numbers.

### IDENTITY

The identity of the place needs to be reflected in the strategy since “a place brand strategy that is far removed from its place identity (what we are) will not likely be accepted as true by residents let alone the external recipients of advertising communications” (Kerr & Oliver, 2015). Also, attractiveness of a place often depends on “local commitment and pride” (Therkelsen, 2015).

This will be further explained when discussing the USP of the region (p.41).

WHAT, ACCORDING TO BUSINESSES IN SEG, IS THE USP OF THE REGION?

### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

In the interviews with the businesses, it often came up that the traffic situation and infrastructure benefit the region greatly. Not only is it only a two-hour drive to the city centre of Amsterdam, but also the many airports like Bremen or Eelde are reached easily. Next to that, the infrastructure offers good export modes to the businesses since wide parts of the region are accessible not only via road but also via train and water. Nedmag, for example, has a small loading port attached to the company headquarters with which boats on the canal can be loaded directly before heading to the sea (Nedmag, 2017).

### **CULTURE**

As previously explained, the culture of SEG is down-to-earth (Bruning, personal communication, 2017). Jan Bert Bruning, director of Nedmag, also values the short lines of communication within the region with little unnecessary steps in between (Bruning, personal communication, 2017).

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

Among others, Siebring (personal communication, 2017) from WPT says that the region offers countless opportunities, especially for growth. This also comes through the wide empty lands that offer room for businesses to grow. However, in the preliminary research, it was found out that the unemployment rate is relatively high (ING, 2016). Siebring's opinion on that is that attracting young and educated students could change that since more companies could be started (Siebring, personal communication, 2017).

### **BALANCE**

Bruning (personal communication, 2017) from Nedmag furthermore stresses that the balance would be something that could be interesting to people not from the region. The amount of high-tech companies offering challenging work balanced by the opportunity to explore completely different

environments within an hour of driving. According to Bruning (personal communication, 2017), the younger generations are finding this more and more important.

Joost Smits (personal communication, 2017) from RSE Telecom also enjoys this combination. Specifically, he enjoys the widespread farmlands and the nature for a peaceful and calm atmosphere. But, also the opportunities e.g. for water sports or the historically interesting Fort Bourtange.

## **INVESTMENTS**

The businesspeople of the region seem to also value that something is being done with the region, also to face the crimp situation. Investments in Blauwestad (a newly built village next to a lake that was built after the land had become unusable), the renovations in Winschoten, the building of recreation possibilities such as bicycle roads and further projects are currently being implemented or planned (Bruning, personal communication, 2017; Smits, personal communication, 2017).

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## UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION

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Combining this into one unique selling proposition from the aspects mentioned by the businesspeople from the region that have been interviewed, it can be said that the mentality of changing the current situation through investments in infrastructure and other measures that increase the attractiveness of the region and therefore improves the living climate could be named as the USP of the region.

## 10.7. RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 7

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WHICH HIGH-LEVEL INNOVATION-RELATED INTERNSHIP ASSIGNMENTS THAT ARE RELEVANT TO BUSINESSES IN SEG CAN BE REVEALED IN INTERVIEWS THAT MAY LEAD TO A HIGHER ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE REGION AMONG EXCELLENT STUDENTS FROM THE NETHERLANDS AND ABROAD?

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### INTERNSHIP ASSIGNMENTS

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#### **NEDMAG**

Bruning (personal communication, 2017) explained that Nedmag currently explores new usage opportunities for magnesium. The next big project may be to create energy storage solutions using magnesium. This could be via storing heat or by creating batteries similar to lithium batteries. These could find applications e.g. in the automobile industry to replace the mentioned lithium batteries (Bruning, personal communication, 2017).

Internship possibilities could here be to find out how these batteries could be made and who could be a partner that has the know-how and technology to build these batteries. As of now, barely any research has been done and methods of how to make e.g. batteries may prove to be very complex (Bruning, personal communication, 2017).

#### **PANDER & LIER**

Pander & Lier has two potential internship opportunities within their company. One could be a market analysis to find out about the customers' perception of their services. As of now, Pander & Lier has never asked what the customers think of the company (Rotman, personal communication, 2017).

The second internship could be to analyse data and make a programme to enable automatized employee/employer matching. This would be an IT internship (Rotman, personal communication, 2017).

## **RSE TELECOM**

RSE Telecom would like to know whether or not they would have a chance to establish themselves on the German market. For that, market research would be needed to be conducted by an intern. Since the company has not yet explored any opportunities, the research would have to go from ground up (Smits, personal communication, 2017).

## **WPT**

Waste Paper Trade is always expanding to new countries and could therefore always use new interns from different countries to explore the opportunities and then to build up a network in their respective home countries. (Siebring, personal communication, 2017).

## **NOVARIET**

Novariet has a somewhat unusual idea for what they could use an intern, or much more a student researcher (Eikens, personal communication, 2017). The idea is to have a student explore the company in order to find possibilities to innovate. The student researcher would work on his/her own project (Eikens, personal communication, 2017).

These internships merely serve as examples for the content strategy that is to be developed. Further internships will be added throughout the subsequent traineeship in order to have a sufficiently large amount and variety of internships on the online platform. However, that exceeds the definition of content strategy.

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## ATTRACTIVENESS

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The effect these internship assignments may have on the attractiveness of the regions needs to be assessed regarding also the results from the student survey that has been done. These results can be found under 'Interests' (p.44) while the linking of the two methods can be found in section 'Discussion' (p. 51).

## 10.8. RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 8

THROUGH COMBINING KNOWLEDGE FROM DESK RESEARCH AND A QUANTITATIVE SURVEY, HOW CAN THE REGION BE BRANDED SUCCESSFULLY TOWARDS EXCELLENT STUDENTS ACCORDING TO THE TARGET GROUPS' LANGUAGES AND INTERESTS?

### LANGUAGES

The 'Student Demographic Survey' that was conducted specifically for this project seems to prove that, as Varner and Beamer (2011) state, English is main common spoken language. The survey was answered by 47 German students, 33 Dutch students and 34 students from a total of 23 countries. Remarkably, 96.5% of these students speak English fluently (Figure 4, below). Another 53.1% speak German fluently while 35.4% speak Dutch.

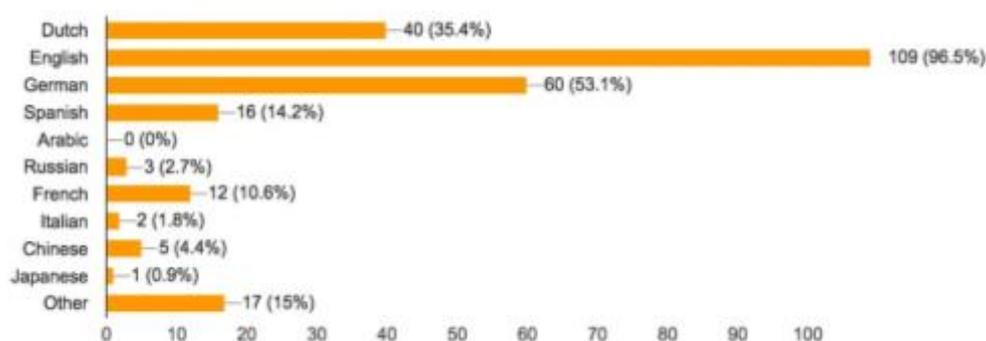


FIGURE 4: LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY STUDENTS ('STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY')

### INTERESTS

#### WHEN LOOKING FOR A NEW PLACE TO LIVE AND WORK

For the students, the work opportunities found in a location are the number one factor they look for when searching for a place to live and work. This aspect is followed by the housing prices and the chances for personal growth. Past-time activities are also something students look for. However, these four appear to be by far the most important aspects.

The middle of the table (Table 1, p. 43) is headed by nature, a student atmosphere, and family suitability which is quickly followed by nightlife. It has to be noted at this point that the aspect of 'family suitability' was ranked by 10 people less than the remaining aspects.

The quality of air plays a rather small role for students looking for a place where to live and work. Relatively insignificant to the students are the history of the area and which political parties are strong in the area.

The top three aspects important to students when looking for a new location to work and live in will be examined more closely in the discussion (p.48).

	Number of respondents					Score
	1	2	3	4	5	
Nature	5	21	32	35	15	358
Nightlife	13	21	34	31	9	326
Housing prices	1	5	24	43	35	430
Past-time activities	2	6	23	50	27	418
Work opportunities	2	8	14	46	38	434
Chances for personal growth	3	6	21	46	32	422
Quality of air	12	28	36	23	9	313
Student atmosphere	6	23	29	39	11	350
History of the area	17	39	32	15	5	276
Political parties strong in the area	33	36	23	13	3	241
Family suitability	4	18	27	37	12	329
	1	2	3	4	5	
	Weight					

TABLE 1 STUDENTS INTERESTS WHEN LOOKING FOR A NEW PLACE TO LIVE AND WORK

## WHEN LOOKING FOR AN INTERNSHIP

After having established that the theoretical chance for internships is given, the question what makes internships attractive to students needs to be answered.

The responses received for the question what students find most important when looking for an internship indicate that size of the company and the salary are the two least important. The most important aspects are the specific assignment, the location and the culture within the company as can be seen in Table 2 (below). A further examination of what students find important in terms of corporate culture can be found in 'Corporate Culture' (p.49).

	Number of respondents					Score
Salary	16	28	26	10	5	215
Size of company	16	19	13	19	8	209
Location	1	4	21	39	20	328
Specific assignment	1	5	22	30	27	332
Culture within the company	1	5	26	32	21	322
	1	2	3	4	5	
	Weight					

TABLE 2 STUDENTS INTERESTS WHEN LOOKING FOR AN INTERNSHIP

## WHEN LOOKING FOR A COMPANY TO WORK AT

Students, as can be seen in Table 3 (below), are interested in finding companies that challenge their employees. Next to that, a relaxed atmosphere is important. Thirdly, the location is something the students attentively look out for.

The three least important, at least from the selection of aspects that were asked for is the profit orientation of the company, a flat hierarchy within the company and sustainability. The rest of the scores per aspect can also be viewed in the aforementioned Table 3 (p. below).

	Number of respondents					Score
	1	2	3	4	5	
Drive towards innovation	3	9	26	52	18	397
Sustainability	3	19	29	40	17	373
Flat hierarchy	10	22	36	27	13	335
Success	2	12	31	39	24	395
Relaxed atmosphere	0	5	23	50	29	424
Profit orientation	19	28	31	23	7	295
Social responsibility	3	12	28	44	21	392
Location	2	9	24	51	22	406
International orientation	2	17	18	35	36	410
Multicultural teams	7	16	26	35	24	377
Being challenged	2	7	12	44	42	438
	1	2	3	4	5	
	Weight					

TABLE 3: STUDENTS' INTERESTS WHEN LOOKING FOR A COMPANY TO WORK AT

## 11. DISCUSSION

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Below, the findings from the different means of data acquisition are combined in order to deliver clear insights into the different theoretical research areas in order to answer the research sub-questions. The strategy is further examined in the conclusion and recommendation part, where the central research questions are answered (p.54).

### 11.1. CULTURE THEORY

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#### CULTURE

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The culture of SEG, if regarded carefully, often resembles the general culture persistent throughout the Netherlands as established by Nunez, Nunez and Popma (2009) according to Kluckhohn's Model of Basic Assumptions (1961) and Hofstede (2016).

The no-nonsense, down-to-earth attitude as described in several interviews (e.g. Bruning, 2017) can be compared to the uncertainty avoidance as observed by Hofstede (2016). This specific dimension could also be linked to being inclined to keep operations purely national since, among other reasons, companies such as Pander & Lier and RSE Telecom refrain from expanding abroad to minimize the risk (Rotman, personal communication, 2017; Smits, personal communication, 2017).

Long-term orientation as agreed upon by Hofstede (2016) and Kluckhohn (1961) can be observed in the loyalty that was described by the businessmen.

Next to that, students seem to enjoy working in relaxed atmospheres as the survey has shown. This, according to Hofstede's (2016) evaluation of the Dutch being a feminine culture, fits well. In context to Kluckhohn's (1961) 'doing-culture' it slightly contradicts the aforementioned. However, the Dutch culture is only slightly on the 'doing' side as opposed to the 'being' side (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009).

Also, the Dutch as an indulgent culture (Hofstede, 2016) may support the drive towards personal growth.

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## LANGUAGES

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Dutch is the main spoken language in the Netherlands and is spoken by 97,5% of the population (van Parys, 2017a). However, there is a remarkably average high level of English proficiency throughout the country (Education First, 2017).

Many companies that have international employees, such as WPT and Nedmag, have so many international employees or many influences from terminology that the business language often is English (Bruning, personal communication, 2017; Siebring, personal communication, 2017).

### 11.2. BUSINESS THEORY

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## CORPORATE CULTURE

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The corporate culture of the companies within SEG often show similarities with the regional culture or national culture (Morrison, 2011).

### INTERNATIONAL ORIENTATION

The respondents of this survey in total value profit orientation in companies the least, despite 7 people replying that it is the most important trait to them. In general, that resonates well with what Jorg Rotman from Pander & Lier says, since he does not believe that the focus should primarily lie on generating profit but on the customers (Rotman, personal communication, 2017).

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## LABOUR MARKET

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Students often seem to base their decisions on where to live on the availability of labour. However, the region boasts a relatively high unemployment rate of 7,9%, which lies above the Dutch average of 6,9%. Nonetheless, the unemployment specifically within the region is lower than the unemployment rate within the rest of the province, where the average lies at 8,7% (ING, 2016).

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## EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

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Most of the companies interviewed, as was concluded earlier (p.32), stress development as a crucial personality trait in their employees (e.g. Smits, personal communication, 2017). Next to that, students themselves also wish to find chances for personal growth in the locations where they live and work.

The interest in personal and professional growth is touched upon by several researchers, as for example Tholen (2014) explains that higher education plays a large role in the Netherlands as “higher education is seen as an entitlement” (Tholen, 2014) and as a mean to develop one’s talents in order to later utilize this in the labour market (Tholen, 2014).

As brought together by Silva et al (2016), internships offer various benefits such as development of problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, the authors state that “by acting and making decisions in realistic situations, students may accelerate their professional growth, as they are expected to assume the posture of young professionals” (Silva, et al., 2016).

According to Meijers, Kuijpers and Gundy (2013) “it is assumed that students can match their skills with education, training or job opportunities efficiently, if they have enough information about (a) their own skills, preferences and personality and (b) the educational, training or job requirements” (Meijers, Kuijpers, & Gundy, 2013), which could prove to be important when phrasing the internship assignments and communicating them to the target group.

The desire to improve oneself can be seen as a result of an individualistic culture where people are generally oriented towards their own persona instead of the general public (Hofstede, 2016).

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## INNOVATION

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### DEFINITION

According to Morrison (2011), “Technological innovation and the capacity to sustain a technological lead are crucial to success in the competitive environment, for both companies and countries” (Morrison, 2011). Essentially, according to the author, innovation can play a key part in reaching competitive advantage.

As described by Morris (2011), innovation goes beyond innovations of technological nature but reaches to include e.g. novelties in marketing or of corporate nature. The current wave of innovations concerns mostly “microelectronics and computer networks” (Morrison, 2011). Furthermore, innovation is by no means limited to revolution-like advancements since even smaller innovative ideas can potentially lead to economic value which innovations are per definition (Morrison, 2011).

## **IMPACT OF CULTURE AND EDUCATION ON INNOVATION**

As previously stated by Tholen (2014), higher education is perceived as a privilege in the Dutch culture. Morrison (2011) argues that in cultures in which studying is treasured, technologically talented individuals may thrive due to the knowledge provided in study programmes essentially leading to innovation. However, she also states that a large part of learning comes through first-hand experiences (Morrison, 2011).

## **STUDENTS' FOCUS ON INNOVATION**

However, students do not seem to particularly seek for companies that feature a drive towards innovation as the 'Student Demographic Survey' has shown since it was evaluated as only the fifth important trait of a company of eleven possibilities.

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## INTERNATIONALISATION

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### **STUDENTS' FOCUS ON INTERNATIONALISATION**

As previously mentioned, an important trait for students is international orientation. This indicates that there is a wish to work on international projects. Therefore, when communicating e.g. the internships on the online platform, this could be a focus point.

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## ATTRACTIVENESS OF INTERNSHIP ASSIGNMENTS

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The internship assignments all follow the scheme of being challenging. Since that is what students seem to value in a company, it is likely that they can function as communication tools to increase the attractiveness of moving to the area. Also, ties between being challenged and personal growth, which is also highly valued, have already been established (p.49).

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## UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION (USP)

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The unique selling proposition in place branding could be seen as what makes the region stand out compared to other regions. According to Govers (2015), that is a crucial step to adding value to a region. Next to that, finding specific physical aspects in the region that could serve as a sort of trademark can be important (Andéhn, et al., 2015). Ultimately, the USP can be crucial in order to come up with a clear message in order to successfully communicate the perks of the region.

To some, utilizing the principle of USP, may seem outdated since it focusses on the "product, rather than the brand" (Lindstrom, 2005). However, if no established brand is pre-existent like in the case of

SEG, it can be argued that first a brand needs to be formed around the product. In place branding, 'product' could be translated to 'place identity' since "place identity is the content and result of place communications" (Kerr & Oliver, 2015).

As stated in the findings (p.40), business people perceive the USP of the region to be the mentality of changing the current situation through investments in infrastructure and other measures, with the purpose to increase the attractiveness of the region and improving the living climate.

Having the residents dictate the USP may have the effect of the residents being more likely to accept the branding effort (Kerr & Oliver, 2015) and, according to the 7 C's of Place Brand Management, 'Co-Creation' increases the brand equity (Hanna & Rowley, 2015).

## 12. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 12.1. CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

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THROUGH WHICH CONTENT CAN SEG BE BRANDED SUCCESSFULLY VIA AN ONLINE PLATFORM?

The content should combine what theory suggests as potentially successful, what students have indicated their preferences are and what the companies can offer. The concrete advice is presented in the advice report and goes further into depth on the recommendations indicated below.

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#### USP

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The USP of the region South and East Groningen (SEG) is the mentality of changing the current situation through investments in infrastructure and other measures such as pastime activities with the purpose to increase the attractiveness of the region and improving the living climate.

This is the USP because this mentality could be observed repeatedly during the interviews and because it includes many aspects which students find important.

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#### CULTURE

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The culture and mind-set of the inhabitants in the region will be additionally emphasized by portraying the companies that have internships to offer. A part of this will surely be the corporate culture, since that is important to students. Depending on the business and its culture, it would make sense to focus on the development of the employees since that was something stressed upon by many students while also playing an important role in many of the businesses that were interviewed.

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#### INTERNSHIPS

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Next, the challenging and often international internship opportunities will combine some of the biggest interests of the students while also delivering the client with what he asks from this research (Heilijgers, personal communication, 2017). The companies offering the internships will furthermore benefit from the excellent students who assist them in internationalising, innovating or improving their businesses in some other sense.

## 12.2. CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

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HOW AND THROUGH WHICH MEANS<sup>25</sup> CAN THE REGION BE BRANDED SUCCESSFULLY TOWARDS THE TARGET AUDIENCE?

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### STRATEGY

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The strategy of the online place branding project will be to implement word-of-mouth communication through blogging and social media in order to construct messages that are trustworthy and effective in making the region more attractive to excellent students and improving the image (Govers, 2015). The fact that online branding facilitates this further reinforces the decision to construct an online platform, also since it enables the interns and business people to function as ambassadors of the region (Hanna & Rowley, 2015).

Additionally, Hanna and Rowley (2015) stress the need for consistency in strategies and messages between the place branding effort and others of the same region. Since De Compagnons also have an array of branding projects with different focus points, this needs to be reckoned with (De Compagnons, n.d.).

### MESSAGE

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Branding the region as innovative may not prove fruitful due to the number of regions that brand themselves as such (Govers, 2015). Next to that, the survey has shown that a drive towards innovation is not the thing students look for the most in a company. The message needs to be adopted accordingly. However, the findings allow insights into what the students do find crucial.

As Mijers, Kuijpers and Gundy (2013) pointed out, especially Dutch students or other students from cultures such as the German culture need to be **aware of what they can do, what they are expected to do and what they actually want to do** in order to find a placement that suits them. Therefore, in order for students to apply for internships in SEG, especially the job **requirements must be made very clear**. If the assignment is not clear enough, students may not know if they are able to fulfil the internship assignment while also not being sure whether they want to apply for the internship. As many of these uncertainties as possible need to be removed in order for students to be likely to apply.

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<sup>25</sup> As in what could persuade students to do an internship in SEG

This is in coherence with the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance, in which the Netherlands scores highly (Hofstede, 2017). Ultimately, **if the messages on the online platform are carefully phrased, the students' doubts may be reduced**. The internship vacancies could be phrased to directly address skills required in a challenging way, such as 'Are you a creative thinker striving to bring forward the energy transition, and have sufficient know-how about renewable energy to establish a practical solution for (company)?'. With a formulation like this, students may feel challenged to apply and, in the best-case scenario, can identify with what is advertised while also having sufficient knowledge. It serves as a self-test for the potential applicant.

### 12.3. FURTHER RESEARCH

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Additionally, it can be concluded that further research can be conducted. This research has a strong focus on the businesses in the region. However, as previously mentioned in the limitations (p. 29), it may also make sense to include the regional political sphere and the education more into the efforts in order to get a clearer overview over what may further impact branding efforts regarding SEG.

# Online Content Strategy for Place Branding:

Attracting Talent to South and East Groningen by Offering Internship Opportunities and by Branding the Region

ADVICE REPORT

Author: Benedikt Wieferig

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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The project objective is to create an online place branding content strategy for the region of South and East Groningen (SEG). Currently, the region is experiencing a crimping population since many young people are leaving the region to live in an urban environment (Heijligers, personal communication, 2016). The goal of the project has been set to improve the image and visibility of the region in order to make it more attractive for students. Ultimately, this is to motivate them to stay in the region. Next to that, the project is set out to attract students from other regions from the Netherlands and other countries.

The research that has been conducted in order to create a well-founded base for the online platform can be found in the research report. This advice report serves the purpose of providing clear guidelines over how the research will be implemented.

This implementation will be done by the researcher himself in a four-month traineeship subsequent to the research phase as a part of the IBT-programme of the Hanze Hogeschool. Furthermore, the planning aims at facilitating the rest of the project for the client as much as possible.

## 2. STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

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In the following section, the online place branding content strategy will be explained. This will be done by first showing the basic layout and sitemap of the to-be-made online platform. Then, each point on the sitemap will be explained and linked to outcomes of the research report.

Following the outlines of how the channel is likely to be used, the messages towards the target audience will be examined. Here, it will be discussed how the messages should be formulated and, in order to provide a clear idea over why the messages should be formulated as such, the philosophy will be explained. Then, the possible content of the messages will be examined.

## 2.1. CHANNEL

The main channel that is to be used is an online platform. Upon request by the client, the style will be somewhat adapted to fit the general design of the online appearance of the professional network 'De Compagnons van Zuid en Oost Groningen' (De Compagnons'). This online platform will be linked to several social media accounts such as Facebook and Twitter, since Hanna and Rowley (2015) mentioned that social media offer a good platform on which electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can take place. This facilitates word-of-mouth for the client.

### 2.1.1. LAYOUT

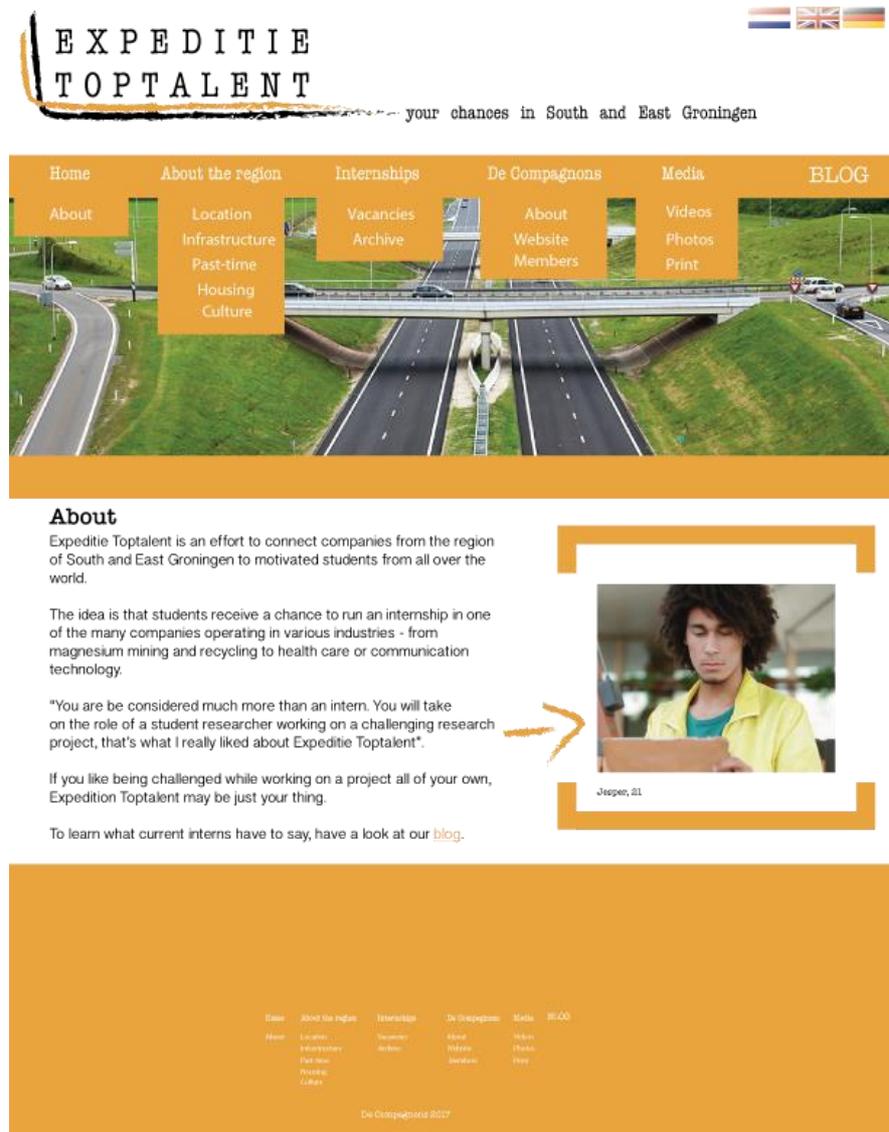


FIGURE 5: LAYOUT

On the previous page (p.58), a preliminary design of the 'About' page of the English version can be seen. Please note that this is a very basic design which is still to be refined in collaboration with graphic designers, usability experts, copywriters, and web developers from PuurIDee. The landing page is likely to be the blog, as will be further examined (p.60).

### 2.1.2. HEADER

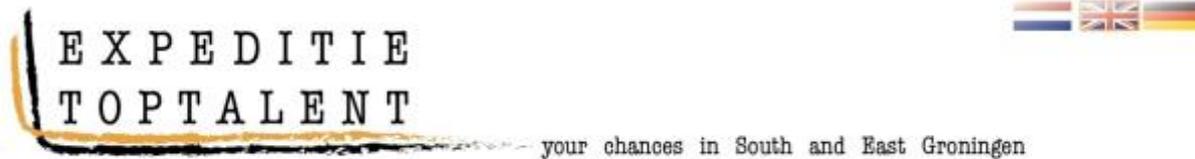


FIGURE 6: HEADER

The header of the landing page (above) will include a logo on the left-hand side of the top row of the website. The logo is still to be developed in collaboration with the graphic designers working at PuurIDee during the implementation phase of the project.

Next to the logo, a slogan will be placed. This slogan will be discussed in detail in 'Message/Communication Policy' (p. 64).

In the top-right corner of the header, the buttons for the different language options (Dutch, English and German) will be located. These will be placed in a well-visible and attention-grabbing way in order to establish a clear international orientation.

### 2.1.3. NAVIGATION BAR



FIGURE 7: NAVIGATION BAR

The navigation bar (above) can be seen as the menu from which other parts of the online platform can be found. The individual navigation buttons will be further developed in close collaboration with an interaction designer and a usability expert from PuurIDee regarding, these displayed in Figure 7 (above) are merely examples with a focus on what content should be found on the online platform, based on the findings of the research report.

#### HOME

First, on the left, a 'Home' button will appear with a subordinate button leading to 'About'. In the layout, as can be seen on page 58, the 'About' page is located on the landing page in the style of a scroll-down page.

The landing page, and therefore the home page, will be the blog in order to direct the viewer directly to the section, on which word-of-mouth communication takes place.

#### ABOUT THE REGION

Next, the button 'About the region' can be found. In similar style to the aforementioned scroll-down landing page, clicking on 'About the region' will bring you to that specific page.

Then, clicking on 'Location' will lead the reader to the 'Location' section further down that same page. Here, information about where the region is located can be found.

The next button is '*Infrastructure*'. Here, a roadmap showing how the traffic infrastructure is organised and also how money has been invested into it can be seen. This represents the USP of the region which is the mentality of changing the current situation through investments in infrastructure and other measures, with the purpose to increase the attractiveness of the region and improving the living climate (Research Report, p. 53).

Under '*Pastime*', the pastime activities present in the region will be listed. As was found in the research, the past-time activities are not quite unimportant to students. Therefore, including a list of the possible activities could make the region more attractive.

As the research brought to light, the students care quite a lot about the housing prices when looking for a new place to work and live. Therefore, information about *housing* will be provided, including the generally low prices. Here, also family suitability could be mentioned. Further options could be e.g. partnerships with housing corporations. That, however, will have to be determined at a later point.

Next, the *culture* of the region will be explained in brief. This will include the history, which seemed to be important to some students but is generally not valued greatly when seeking for a new location to live.

## **INTERNSHIPS**

The next main point on the navigation bar could be '*Internships*' or '*Research Opportunities*'. This is one of the most important buttons on the entire online platform.

Under '*Vacancies*', the challenging internship possibilities where student researchers are searched will be listed. In order to stay up to date, an option for an email alert can be selected by the viewer. This way, it can be monitored how many students in general would be interested in participating in the 'Expedition Toptalent'. This email alert would then send a short email whenever a new student researcher is needed, including the brief description. How specifically these assignments will be formulated will be further examined '3. Internships' (p. 67).

On the sub-site '*Archive*', past projects can be found in order to show students what kind of projects already have been part of the Expedition Toptalent and what kind of chances the region has to offer. This may lead to the online platform becoming something the students frequently visit if there is no internship currently available that suits them but they have seen one in the past that they find interesting. Due to that, they may start monitoring the website frequently.

#### 2.1.4. PICTURES

Firstly, right under the navigation bar, a picture slideshow with photos that depict the region can be found. The example picture used here is to show the infrastructure and investments in such as in accordance with the USP of the region. Other pictures could show e.g. the city centre of Winschoten or Blauwestad. An example can be seen below (Figure 8).



FIGURE 8: SLIDESHOW EXAMPLE

Next to that, in order to create a consistent word-of-mouth scheme throughout the online platform, pictures of students who have run internships in the area will be shown next to their quotes as depicted in Figure 9 (right). Of course, the current picture and quote are only place holders and will definitely not be used on the actual online platform. Additionally, until there have been students to run an internship, it is likely that this place will be either empty or feature a photo and quote of a member of De Compagnons.

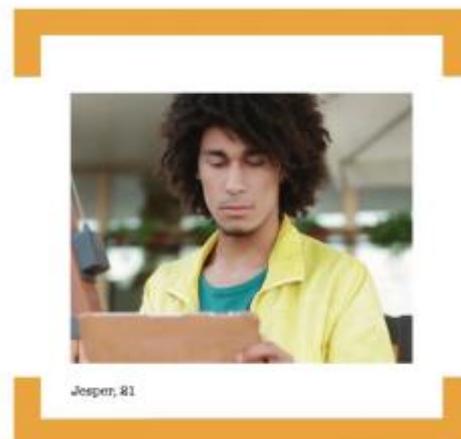


FIGURE 9: STUDENT PORTRAIT

## 2.1.5. TEXT CONTENT AREA

### About

Expeditie Toptalent is an effort to connect companies from the region of South and East Groningen to motivated students from all over the world.

The idea is that students receive a chance to run an internship in one of the many companies operating in various industries - from magnesium mining and recycling to health care or communication technology.

"You are be considered much more than an intern. You will take on the role of a student researcher working on a challenging research project, that's what I really liked about Expeditie Toptalent".

If you like being challenged while working on a project all of your own, Expedition Toptalent may be just your thing.

To learn what current interns have to say, have a look at our [blog](#).



FIGURE 10: TEXT CONTENT AREA

Text content will be kept short and concise. Since the general focus of the online platform lies on two-way communication and word-of-mouth, the blog is the most important aspect of the platform. Therefore, it will be referred and linked to frequently.

The style of the text content will frequently be a mix of two different types of fonts in order to create a modern touch. Additionally, this helps in separating the heading from the body part of the text.

More about how messages will be formulated can be found in the following section '2. Message' (p. 64).

---

### 3. MESSAGE / COMMUNICATION POLICY

---

In the following, close examinations over how messages will be constructed and what will be focused on. This section can be used as a guide to constructing messages in the future in order to facilitate the communication for 'De Compagnons' with the target audience even after the traineeship.

The final messages and the tone of voice that will be presented on the online platform will be developed together with the copywriter working within PuurIDee. This is to guarantee that the message content reflects the communication policy and uses the correct tone of voice. After the traineeship, these formulations can be used as a guide by the client in order to further facilitate the communication for them.

#### 3.1. COMMUNICATION POLICY

In general, the communication policy needs should consider the following in terms of messages:

- a. **USP:** USP of the region is the mentality of changing the current situation through investments in infrastructure and other measures, with the purpose to increase the attractiveness of the region and improving the living climate.  
This assists in having a message that is linked to what the inhabitants of the region perceive as a positive aspect of the region
- b. **Culture:** The culture of the region or, if applicable, the corporate culture, shall be highlighted in order to give insights into the region or the businesses on a level that reaches beneath the mere surface
- c. **Students' interests and preferences:** The messages should be phrased in a way that the targeted students can recognise aspects they find important. For the internships, the specific assignment and, as previously mentioned, the corporate culture needs to be highlighted. Also, the students care greatly about the location of where the internship will be. Next to that, the students especially like to be challenged. However, the working atmosphere should be relaxed. Additionally, international orientation is quite important, too. When displaying the region, the housing prices should be especially focused on. Next to that, the chances for personal growth should be brought up frequently while also not

neglecting the opportunities for pastime activities. Also, the messages must be written in a style that is appealing to the target group of students.

The communication policy also needs to include internal communication and who the message carrier should be.

#### **INTERNAL COMMUNICATION POLICY**

The internal communication policy regarding this website needs to be consistent in order for, if multiple people are assigned with the maintenance of the website, the branding efforts to be consistent, too, as previously mentioned in the research report (p. 54). This is especially important for De Compagnons since they are also busy with other means to brand the region while having their own internet appearance.

In order for the internal communication to be successful and as easy as possible, the lines of communication have to be short. Also, having meetings dedicated to the online platform in order to keep in on the agenda of the client could be a helpful measure.

#### **MESSAGE CARRIER**

The main message carrier, as can be concluded from the research report (p. 54), should be ambassadors of the place brand, in this case students who do an internship and, especially before interns have participated, businesspeople from the region.

#### **FACILITATION**

To make the above mentioned online platform and social media appearances easy to maintain for the clients, they will be created during the four-month traineeship subsequent to this research phase. After those four months, the trainee will meet with the client and, by giving them a workshop, will clearly explain what needs to be done in certain situations that can be encountered on social media. Next to that, the workshop will cover how the website can be kept updated. Potentially, this can be done in collaboration with employees from PuurIDee who have sufficient expertise to truly give advice.

## 3.2. MESSAGES

### **SLOGAN**

The preliminary slogan, which is likely to still be changed in wording in collaboration with the previously mentioned copywriter, is 'your chances in South and East Groningen'. This slogan predominantly aims at fulfilling what has previously been mentioned as 'Students' interests and preferences' (p. 54). Within this category, especially the chance for the development of the students is highlighted in close relation to the region itself. This way, 'chances' and 'South and East Groningen' are brought into connection.

### **ABOUT THE REGION**

In the navigation buttons underlying the main button of 'About the region' (p.60), the USP and the culture of the region need to be made known in order to offer content to the target group that matches their interests and preferences. Specifically, the renovation works and other sights where investments are obvious will be integrated into this sub-site, as can be concluded from what the businesspeople from the region consider the USP of the region to be (p.53).

Therefore, it combines all three points crucial to the message philosophy. That potentially renders the section 'About the region' as one of the most important sections since most of what is to be portrayed can be placed here.

## VACANCIES

The internship vacancies need to be made highly attractive to the students viewing the online platform. If this is not achieved, the project will be a failure. Therefore, high importance must be given to this section and it needs to be carefully monitored that as many of the students' interests are represented in the formulation.

If possible, connections to the USP and the culture of the region should be included. Information about the corporate culture, as research has shown (p.53), are a vital part.

Also, as it can be found in the Research Report (p.53), students from uncertainty avoidant cultures, such as the German culture or to a lesser extent the Dutch, need to be aware of what they can do, what they are expected to do and what they actually want to do in order to find a placement that suits them. Therefore, in order for students to apply for internships in SEG, especially the job requirements must be made very clear. If the assignment is not clear enough, students may not know if they are able to fulfil the internship assignment while also not being sure whether they want to apply for the internship. As many of these uncertainties need to be removed if students are to be persuaded to apply.

## 4. INTERNSHIPS

---

Then, it is also crucial to find internships that especially challenge the. However, it is not only important to find but also to publish these internships in a way that highlights what the students are looking for. The first internship assignments for the project have already been established. More are to follow.

Again, it is important to say that these formulations will still be worked out in collaboration with a copywriter from PuurIDee.

## INTERNSHIP ASSIGNMENTS

Below, a list of the already found internship assignments with an explanation can be found. These explanations function as examples of how internship opportunities could be formulated on the online platform in order to increase the likeliness of students applying for them.

1. *Nedmag, a magnesium mine in Veendam, is currently busy exploring new usage opportunities for magnesium. The company is always looking for new applications, especially in the fields of health and sustainability.*

The next big project will be to create energy storage solutions using magnesium. The possibilities are next to endless. An example could be to develop batteries similar to lithium batteries. These could find applications e.g. in the automobile industry to replace the mentioned lithium batteries, since lithium is a scarce and dangerous resource.

The unresolved questions here come in large numbers. Who could Nedmag partner up with to develop and create the storage devices? Who has the know-how? Who has the technology? Are there already companies busy? Could a company like Tesla be interested?

It is up to a student researcher to pick up this project and possibly work on creating a solution that could, for example, boost the electric car industry and bring forth the energy transition.

2. *The recruitment agency Pander & Lier; need for a digital matching platform for their clients and candidates.*

However, the company does not have the personnel with the specific knowledge required to gather and analyse data about those searching for a job and the companies looking for employees and then utilize that data to create an automatized matching platform.

Therefore, a student researcher is needed to pick up on the data analysis and then the development of a programme in order to establish such a platform.

3. *Pander & Lier; marketing research*

As of now, the marketing of the company is handled by a partner organisation operating from the same building. The company doing the marketing, however, is a one-person operation and therefore has limited capacities to assist its three partner companies who work in the same building.

Therefore, an intern in marketing could help **Pander & Lier**, a recruitment agency, **WerkWaar**, a company for work clothing, **Syntaks**, an administration office, and **Attent Marketing** to

expand their marketing efforts and conduct market analysis for these four vastly different companies.

Professional guidance from a marketing professional is provided by Attent Marketing.

4. *RSE Telecom like to know whether or not they would have a chance to establish themselves on the German market.*

For that, market research would be needed to be conducted by a student researcher, preferably somebody with at least rudimentary German proficiency and a clear international focus.

Finding potential partners, entry modes, and researching into other different fields of business theory through secondary and primary research could be helpful here.

5. *Waste Paper Trade from Winschoten is always expanding to new countries and could therefore always use new interns from different countries to explore the opportunities and then to build up a network in their respective home countries.*

Have a look at the list of the countries in which the company operates ([link](#)). Is your nationality among the list? No? Well then, go ahead and apply!

You do need to have some knowledge about how businesses can internationalise. The focus is that you can then apply it to the situation in the country and find out how a trade company selling mostly paper and other recyclables could adapt. Good luck!

6. *Novariet has a somewhat unusual idea for you. Why don't you go over to Polytech Kunststoffen (plastics) in Musselkanaal and have a look at what you can do for them. They don't know, they need your ideas.*

Sounds interesting? Go ahead and send them a message [here](#).

## 5. PLANNING

The implementation of the online platform and the underlying social media channels will kick-off in August 2017 and will be finished by December 1<sup>st</sup> at the very latest. Below, please find a table (Table 4) showing the planning from August 2017 until December 2018.

Activities	2017					2018											
	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Start of month meeting	█	█	█	█		█				█				█			
End of month meeting	█	█	█	█		█				█				█			
Interviews with businesses	█						█	█	█		█	█	█		█	█	█
Content creation		█								█				█			
Content adaption			█	█		█			█			█			█		
Design creation			█														
Design adaption				█		█			█			█			█		
Testing				█													
Launch				█													
Post-launch revision				█													
Check-up						█			█			█			█		
Social Media Preparation			█	█													
Social Media Launch				█													
Social Media Management				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

TABLE 4: PLANNING

### 5.1. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN: TRAINEESHIP (01-08-2017– 01-12-2017)

As can be seen on the chart above, there are end-of-month (EOMM) and start-of-month meetings (SOMM) planned for every month of the four-month traineeship from August 2017 until December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. This is to ensure that the client and the trainee are on the same page and that the client's wishes and expectations are met throughout the project.

In August, further interviews with businesses from the region will be conducted to gather more internship assignments alongside the information about the companies that is to be placed on the online platform as discussed before (p.25).

In September, the content of the online platform will be created in Dutch, English and German. A close collaboration with copywriters from PuurIDee will take place in order to achieve a wording that expresses exactly what the communication policy (p.64) dictates. After EOMM, this content will be adapted.

In October, the design will be created after the client has given the 'ok' for the content in SOMM. This also includes that the content and the design will be merged. Again, there is room for adaptations after EOMM. In October, the preparation for the social media appearance will be kicked off.

November will be the month of testing the online platform. In total, there should be three rounds of tests with room for adaptations afterwards. The social media appearances will be further prepared and eventually launched simultaneously with the online platform. At the end of the month, a post-launch revision will take place.

---

## 5.2. FUTURE CONTENT MANAGEMENT (01-12- 2017 – 31-12-2018)

---

From December onwards, the project must be taken over by either PuurIDee, De Compagnons or an external company. However, it could also be an internship assignment for a communication student.

Either way, in order for the online platform to be successful, internship opportunities will have to keep being published on it. For that, interview phases and content creation phases have been spread over the course of the coming year as well as SOMMs and EOMMs. Furthermore, constant social media management is advised.

Furthermore, frequent check-ups are necessary after which adaptations to the design and the content will need to take place. Similarly, it would make sense to plan an evaluation for one year after the launch of the website in order to see whether the online platform is effective and efficient.

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### 5.3. BUDGET PLANNING

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For the implementation, De Compagnons have paid a fix sum to the International Business Talent programme (IBT) of the Hanze University of Applied Sciences of, in total, 8.000€. Adding to that, another 6.000€ are available for the creation of the website (Smid, personal communication, 2017).

## 6. CONCLUSION

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### 6.1. A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE STRATEGY

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The strategy entails offering challenging student research assignments within the companies in order to generate interest in working in the region. Additionally, the strategy implements branding theory to the region in order to further increase the visibility and improve the image that especially young people have of the region.

### 6.2. CONTRIBUTION TO OBJECTIVE

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The objective, as frequently mentioned, is to give communication advice in form of a content strategy for a national and international online platform. This platform should contribute to branding the region and therefore improving the visibility and image of the region internationally as well as throughout the Netherlands. Next to that, it should help solving innovation and internationalisation related issues existing within different companies operating in SEG by offering high-level internships. The targeted students are students from the Netherlands and abroad and the wish is to attract them to the region in order to fight the crimping population.

This advice is a national and international online platform due to the Dutch, English and German language options and since it targets Dutch as well as international students. It attempts branding the region through the established strategy, which entails a communication approach tailored to the interests of students. According to the research conducted, this should assist in improving the image and visibility of the region. So far, a number of internship assignments that assist the companies from the region in solving innovation related issues have been discovered and there are yet more to come. This should, as the research has shown, assist in motivating students to live and work in the region.

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### E

#### **efficient**

"refers to both the degree of knowledge that yields the answers to the questions contained in the set of research questions, and the degree this knowledge actually contributes to achieving the research objective · 24

#### **export of gas**

The province of Groningen is located above one of the biggest natural gas fields of the world with an initial volume of 2800 billion m3 in 1959 (NAM, n.d.) · 11

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### I

#### **intercultural sensitivity**

means the ability to regard different cultures from outside one's own culture and therefore mentally

immersing into the foreign culture (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009) · 8

means the ability to regard different cultures from outside one's own culture and therefore mentally immersing into the foreign culture (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009) · 8

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#### **online platform**

an interactive website · 7

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The term renewable energy includes all means of generating electricity or other forms of energy that do not use fossil resources such as natural gas or oil (Energy Valley, 2016) · 12, 54, 88

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A smart grid is a special power supply which adapts the amount of electricity conducted towards e.g. a company facility according to the current need (Energy Valley, 2016) · 12

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"refers to the extent to which the set of research questions throws light on the activities which need to be performed during the carrying out of the research" (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010) · 24

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## APPENDICES

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### I. IN-DEPTH RESEARCH: CULTURE THEORIES

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#### HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

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For an overview of the culture, beliefs and values persisting in the Netherlands, Hofstede's (2016) dimensions and scores are used. Please note, however, that the generalisations made about the Dutch culture may not reflect the culture of SEG as the regional culture may differ from the national culture (see Limitations, p.28).

The scores indicate that the general culture of the Netherlands is **individualistic**<sup>26</sup>. However, the **power distance relationship**<sup>27</sup>, meaning e.g. the steepness of hierarchies, is relatively low. It also describes e.g. that everyone is seen as equal and that management is often decentralized.

In regard to **masculinity**<sup>28</sup>, the Netherlands score extremely low which makes the culture of the Netherlands a feminine one. Amongst other factors, it means that the balance between working and living is valued highly.

In general, the score the Dutch culture received is slightly leaning towards uncertainty avoidant behaviour. **Uncertainty avoidance**<sup>29</sup> is the dimension describing how inclined people are to take a risk. In contrast to that, the German neighbours have a much higher score since the need for rules and the need to work hard is lower in the Netherlands.

The dimension of **long-term orientation**<sup>30</sup> concludes whether a culture is pragmatic or of normative nature. The Dutch culture is perceived as pragmatic since it is believed that "the truth depends very

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<sup>26</sup> in **individualistic cultures**: everybody mostly responsible for oneself and direct family, "I-oriented"; **collectivistic culture**: responsibility towards the group you were born into, "we-oriented" (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> **high power distance**: large discrepancy in power (e.g. between parents and children); **low power distance**: everybody treated as equal (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> **Masculinity**: e.g. toughness, success, and achievement are valued; **Femininity**: emotions play a larger role, modesty is valued (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> **High in uncertainty avoidance**: people usually do not feel comfortable in unfamiliar situations, typically act in a very structured manner; **low in high uncertainty avoidance**: rules are often more flexible, uncertainty seen as standard (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009)

<sup>30</sup> **high in long term orientation**: people usually think and act towards the future; **low in long term orientation**: people are more focussed on the presence (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009)

much on the situation, context and time” (Hofstede, n.d.). Furthermore, the Dutch are known for their inclination to rather “save and invest” money (Hofstede, n.d.).

The last dimension, **indulgence**<sup>31</sup>, describes whether or not people try to suppress their inner drives. The Dutch culture clearly scores on the side of indulgence in comparison to restraint as the people tend to live out their impulses and show tendencies towards an optimistic mind set (Hofstede, n.d.).

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## KLUCKHOHN’S MODEL OF BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

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### **Dominating, in harmony with or subjugated**<sup>32</sup> to nature

The Netherlands are a country known for creating land where there had not been land before. In the province of Groningen, which lies at the sea in the north and the west, dykes and windmills installed to keep the water out are a frequent sighting. In the municipality of Oldambt in SEG, for example, there are multiple examples for such drainage mills (Marketing Groningen, 2017). Therefore, in Kluckhohn’s terms, the culture of the region can be described as nature dominating (Kluckhohn & Stodtbeck, 1961).

### **Past, present, future oriented**<sup>33</sup>

According to Kluckhohn (1961), cultures are either past, present or future oriented or possibly feature a mix. However, factors like occupation or age group may lead to differences within the same culture (Kluckhohn & Stodtbeck, 1961). As Nunez, Nunez Mahdi and Popma (2009) state, “economists in the Netherlands are more future-oriented than people in other professions” (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009).

### **Doing or Being Cultures**<sup>34</sup>

The difference between doing and being cultures can be described as “work to live” or “live to work” (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009). In general, the Dutch culture is a doing culture but with a lower extent compared to e.g. Germany (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009). According to Kluckhohn, the

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<sup>31</sup> **indulgence**: inner drives and motivations are followed more frequently; **restraint**: inner drives are often neglected (Hofstede G. , 2017).

<sup>32</sup> **Dominating**: shaping the surroundings to suit one’s needs; **in harmony with**: living without shaping the environment to a large extent; **subjugated to nature**: acceptance of the circumstances surrounding, making no alternations (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> Similar to Hofstede’s **Long term orientation** (p. 80) (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009)

<sup>34</sup> **Doing culture**: live to work; **Being culture**: work to live (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009)

difference between doing and being cultures is a basic assumption which largely influences the perception of labour (Kluckhohn & Stodtbeck, 1961).

### **Individualism and collectivism<sup>35</sup>**

The Dutch culture is an individualistic culture (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009). This is in line with the observations of Hofstede (n.d.). In culture oriented towards the individual, the own achievements count the most in contrast to e.g. what has been achieved in a collective effort (Kluckhohn & Stodtbeck, 1961).

### **Is space public or private?<sup>36</sup>**

This basic assumption discusses how valued possession of space is (Kluckhohn & Stodtbeck, 1961). There is a large discrepancy between cultures where large extents of place is public or privately owned. However, cultures can find themselves in between the two “extremes” (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009). In general, cultures in northern Europe and therefore also the Netherlands value private space, such as the own office or apartment (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009).

### **Human Nature<sup>37</sup>**

Basic assumptions about the human nature, so whether humans are “basically good, basically evil or a mix of both” (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009), have a large impact on how people treat each other and whether or not strangers are trusted (Kluckhohn & Stodtbeck, 1961). However, this basic assumption has not been linked to particular countries except for Canada and the United States of America (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009).

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<sup>35</sup> See Hofstede's **Individualism/collectivism** (p. 80) (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009)

<sup>36</sup> **Space is private:** Property (especially of space) is valued, e.g. own room, own garden, own car and that property has to be respected (e.g. knocking at door and waiting for signal to be allowed to enter); **Space is public:** shared offices, less sense of ownership of space (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> **Basically evil:** strangers encountered with mistrust, people lock their doors, superiors in the work field believe employees generally dislike work and need to be supervised; **basically good:** people lock the doors of their houses less frequently, managers trust their employees more; **mix of both:** belief that people can improve through training (Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2009)

## II. IN-DEPTH RESEARCH: 7 C'S OF DIGITAL STRATEGIC PLACE BRAND MANAGEMENT

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The essence of place branding, per definition, is to generate an identity and image for a region (Braun, 2014) and “to create unique mental associations in the minds of consumers linking it to a name, symbol or other feature of identification” (Govers, 2015).

In the editorial book ‘Rethinking Place Branding’ (Kavaratzis, Warnaby & Ashworth, 2015), Hanna and Rowley (2015) discuss their 7 C’s of digital strategic place brand management in the chapter ‘Rethinking Strategic Place Branding in the Digital Age’.

### C1: Channels

All media such as print and, more recently, the internet which is “inter- active, accessible, and widely available, and integrates marketing communications with commercial transactions and service” (Hanna & Rowley, 2015). One decision that is crucial here is whether the audience should encounter between several channels or whether one channel should be focused on (Hanna & Rowley, 2015). Next, the incorporation of “sub-channels, including blogs, social media, search engines and mobile platforms” (Hanna & Rowley, 2015) needs to be considered in online place branding.

### C2: Clutter

Clutter is a threat facilitated through the internet where too much information is always accessible and places tend to be “multi-branded” (Hanna & Rowley, 2015), meaning that there is more than one branding effort which may lead to the place being an inconsistent brand.

### C3: Community

Establishing a place brand community who can function as ambassadors of the brand may have influence on the brand through “electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)” (Hanna & Rowley, 2015), which may make the add more trustworthy and increase the perceived value (brand equity).

### C4: Chatter

“Great scope for chatter about the place” (Hanna & Rowley, 2015) is offered on certain websites such as Trip advisor but also social media, e.g. Facebook or Twitter. “Social media have helped to enhance the visibility of city brands” (Hanna & Rowley, 2015) through eWOM, which enables to increase visibility and arouse interest, even if some of the content may be negative due to its uncontrollability.

Social media also gives the chance to build a brand community which contains the responsibility to interact with them strategically (Hanna & Rowley, 2015).

#### C5: Communication

“Communication is central to community building and maintenance” (Hanna & Rowley, 2017). This means that for the place brand identity to be made visible, all actions need to be revised to be suitable for the internet. However, the website, or in this case the online platform, are still the most important (Hanna & Rowley, 2015).

This includes a web-design that contain a logo, visual material, text, shapes, and modern colours and a modern layout while it has to be ensured that the website is actually visit through “search engine optimising” (SEO) (Hanna & Rowley, 2015) and, e.g. through e-mail newsletters.

#### C6: Co-Creation

The brand identity can be developed in collaboration with the brand community, which in turn increases brand equity.

Through online place branding, “enabled interactive media alongside this as an economical, accessible and effective tool for creating and staging experiences incorporating the virtual world’s mediated experiences along with the real world’s lived experiences” (Hanna & Rowley, 2015).

#### C7: Collaboration

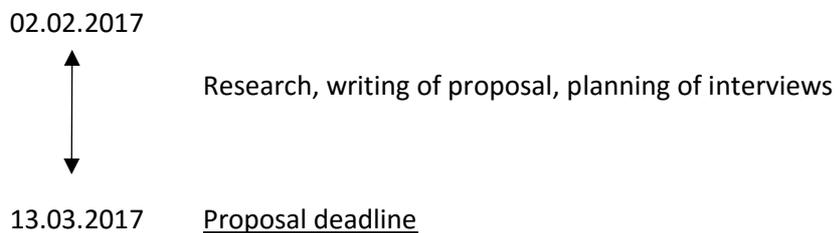
“Collaboration is about capitalising on the opportunities for building a web of brands associated with the place brand in a digital space” (Hanna & Rowley, 2015) which then results in an increased experience of the virtual brand. However, for this to occur, the brand identities of the different entities must be somewhat close to each other.

## PLANNING

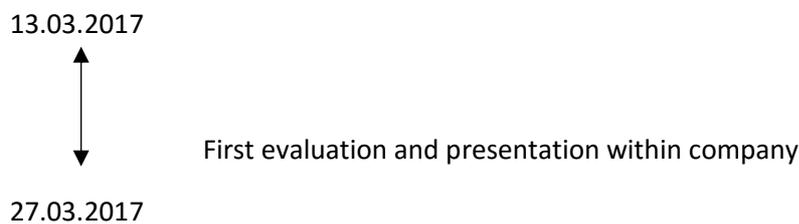
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The planning of the project was established together with the company supervisor. Several deadlines, such as the proposal deadline and the final deadline, are included. The planning focusses on which steps have to be fulfilled at what time between these deadlines. A timeline for the planning can be found below. Furthermore, a logbook will be kept throughout the entirety of the project and the subsequent traineeship. This will serve the researcher as guide to how much time each task requires while additionally serving as a calendar including individually set deadlines (e.g. for the duration of the interview phase).

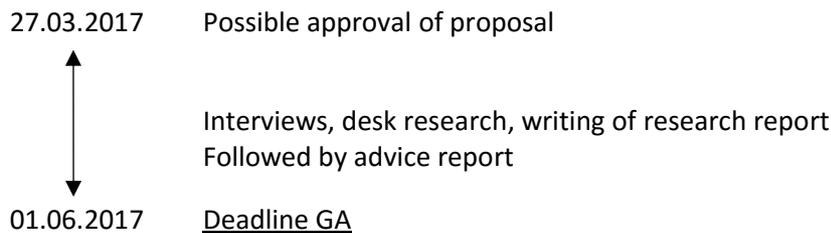
### Weeks 5 - 11:



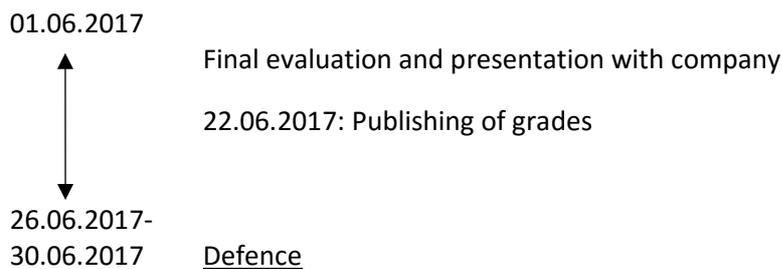
### Weeks 11 – 12:



### Weeks 12- 22:



### Weeks 22 - 26:



### III. INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS & NEXUSES

#### LIST OF COMPANIES INTERVIEWED

- A. Pander & Lier, employment agency (Winschoten)
- B. RSE Telecom, telecommunication service company
- C. Nedmag, magnesium-mining company
- D. Novariet (Polytech), inventor and producer of artificial reed
- E. Waste Paper Trade, trading company specialised on waste paper recycling

#### INTERVIEW NEXUSES

In order to be able to elaborate on the interviews, each interview has been recorded and entered into a standardised form as suggested by Schouten (2006).

#### A. PANDER & LIER

<b>Interview file n°:</b> 1	<b>Date:</b> 05.04.2017
	<b>Time:</b> 3 p.m.
<b>Main Topic:</b> Company Insights <b>Primary research question</b>	<b>Duration:</b> 55 min.
<b>Place:</b> Winschoten	
<b>Name of interviewer:</b> Benedikt Wieferig	
<b>Name of interviewee:</b> Jorg Rotman	
<b>Role of interviewee:</b> Director Pander & Lier	
<b>Sub-topics:</b> Region insights	
<b>Reason for interviewing:</b> Member of De Compagnons, insights into labour market, industry	
<b>Interview nexus</b>	
Main topic: Corporate Culture	
Main topic 2: Market	
Main topic 3: Innovation	
Main topic 4 : Labour market	
Main topic 5 : Internationalisation	
Main topic 6 : Internship possibilities	
Main topic 7 : The region	

## Transcript

**The core values of the company, as I asked earlier, are that you're reliable, service oriented and of high quality. How can you measure that? Do you measure it?**

That may sound very centralized, but it comes from my word. Just so that you have an idea of it: in this building, there are several companies which are all related to me and I think that every company should have the same quality standard that I use. And that is really my word that I find practical and I what I think is reliable. Reliability is difficult to measure.

**Do you know if customers show trust in the company? Has that ever be asked?**

Yes, a customer who has signed a contract here stated "you are more expensive, but we feel comfortable with you". And that's what it's about and I thought it was really nice to hear.

**So you're also satisfied with how the customers perceive the company?**

It would not be crazy to ask for feedback in an interview round or so. Pander and Lier is, of course, a recruitment agency, we handle the people and the jobs. So the employer is very important for us because without an employer, we have no revenue but without the employee just as little. Hence the matching is just very important and both the employee and the employer are equally important for us. And that's what it is actually about. We can look at the client but you won't get any further that way. So the customer realizes that you are service-oriented, then he is not the only one who pays the bills at the end but also the ones we have here that we match to them.

**So it could be a possible assignment for an intern to see if the value perceived by the customer is the same as what you really want?**

Yes, that could be.

**Then I would like to go on with the next question. I already asked "where do you see your chances to be a step ahead of your competition?" And the answer was "honest advice without direct profit-orientation". How can this be made clear to the customers?**

We do not wish to profile at this time. It must be part of how we act. It must be natural to act non-profit and a good example is that there was a customer who grew to some extent that is good for us and for him. So the turnover is higher. That wage that was guaranteed towards the employee was a bit on the low side and we went into conversation with the client, while we actually have a little more to do with the customer, the customer had a slightly lower fee [to pay to us], but also with the intention that the employee would get a higher salary. Then, all three parties are satisfied. And that's where we all can say "that [money] has to go to us", but no, we allowed the worker to get a part, too, because the salary was slightly low and on the other side we got the triple volume. You try to find a balance so that everyone is satisfied.

We will not communicate "we are ...", that is not, for me, the character of East Groningen. You are of course included in a project through the Compagnons and I think you should be more proud of but I still think that you mustn't shout it from a roof. And in the end it's not only about profit, profit, profit. A good example is that, in the financial newspaper, there was an interview with Heineken. And there it said "we do not think in quarters, we think in decades". And I think that's actually very nice. You can continuously exploit private equity, continuous profit, profit, profit, and all but no, you have to look at [the future]. And this is not just profit, that's giving each other benefits.

**And that is about the relationship with customers over the long stretch.**

Yes, and so actually all three of us won, both we as a company, as well as the client and the employee. That customer also helped us get a foot into another industrial business around here. And yes, we also sit at the table there now and are looking for personnel for them. Yes, that's great. So by doing a good job for one, we'll talk to others. It took years until we were there at the table, but we are there now, and may also participate.

**I think that, perhaps especially in this region, "word-of-mouth" what it is called or how people talk to each other about it plays a major role.**

Yes, and you would know from communication that what you have built can be unachieved by a small misstep. And so it should be a natural thing to think like that but I do believe that my colleagues do that, and I'm proud of that.

**I had already asked whether employees here develop their own projects, and the answer was "yes". But how loyal are the employees actually? How long does an employee stay in Pander and Lier on average?**

We are only three years old. An employee is now on maternity leave and will not come back because she had also said "okay it's been a learning experience for me and it doesn't fit me." Well, we saw that, too, so we said that the contract won't be extended after the pregnancy. That is unfortunate but you can communicate better and be honest and say this is not going to work in close consultation. The two others, yes, they still exist, and I have written that we have some vacancies. Yes, one has just started yesterday and another lady begins April 18th. Yeah, I do not know how long they will stay. At the moment, we are here with three.

**A part of this question is actually that if employees often go, that also means that there are often new employees that come in that then may have new ideas and who can develop these also in their own projects. So, this also happens?**

Yes. Well, the project-thinking that will probably come up in our conversation a few times on the basis of your questions, we are of course a small company and we have to work hard enough to earn money to pay salaries, and that's working out fine. But that does not mean that you have a lot of time to put into projects. While the knowledge is actually there. And that's a bit of tension that we have. We like to look further and further. My colleague David von Henning who recently, during an interview, mentioned the idea of lean thinking. I fully support that. I think that concept of lean thinking is very beautiful but it must all be done in between. And if I have 30 people, then that's a different story. No complaints, but it is now a bit difficult.

**Is that something where an intern might be able to help?**

An intern also needs attention. We want to get something out of an intern but an intern must leave as well with the thought of "hey, I've also gotten something out of it". And that takes time. You have to think very realistically. I have also a marketing / communications company. I think if someone comes in here, that person has to have a spot, time and attention so that both can benefit. And not that you say after half a year - because of placements of a month doesn't really help you a lot, but you can also have someone for half a year then it is possible that, at the end, he says - yes, I have indeed gained something. And I think that is important.

**It is also the objective that the student goes away with a feeling of "I've really done something and really learnt something. I could develop my own project within the company well. "**

Yes. You sit together for half a year but that does not mean you should not invest - both the intern and the company also. I expect something from an intern, too.

**Of course there will be something expected of the interns. Therefore, outstanding students are selected for this region.**

Yes, and what bothers me is like four days before anyone should start with an internship, I get the application. Yes, sorry but that, I cannot take seriously.

**What personalities exactly are asked for?**

Someone who should not have to be taken by the hand. That can be a bit independent in his/her work and who also independently approaches you with questions. So no one who sits in a corner, sweating and afraid to ask a question. Because we are here with three [companies], and there are some more companies that can enjoy this because the purpose of these companies is that you also have mutual interaction. So that you enjoy each other's network and knowledge. If there is an intern for Pander and Lier in marketing and Pander and Lier is an employment agency, but we have over a company engaged in work clothes because we are involved a lot with production staff, so we sit down with the businesses at the table to talk about staff clothing. Then, secure working is a second step. So we offer that. WerkWaar [staff clothing business], marketing there at this time is also somewhat undefined. So if someone comes here, an intern in marketing, then what can roll out and think for Pander and Lier but also bring WerkWaar into it. It must therefore be an alternative type that wants to switch and would like to think along with us.

**So someone who says I want more than just *one* tasks?**

Well, that should be possible but it can also be one job that must then be copied to the other companies.

**But does change the task because it is likely to be adapted to suit the other companies. But for me it would be something that would make it interesting. This way you can get a good overview of the different sectors that are actually working together. And other students might see that too, perhaps.**

Yes, the four companies all are in touch with each other. That makes it more interesting and because they have contact without disturbing one on the other.

**What I found interesting was that digitization platforms are a trend. How exactly does that work?**

In the past, of course, you had the job bank. You went looking for a job, you placed your resume, "I am so and so and I can this and that and my hobbies and that and that". Full stop. And the employer was searching and searching and then thought, "Gee, an accountant who also studied it." And that's it. Actually, you looking are for a match based on certain facts. But now they are also looking at personalities. In my previous work I was busy with talent motivation analysis (TMA), so what the drive is of a person. And I can say he should be commercial, he must be extrovert, and he must be this and that. But what else he is, you don't ask for that. Even if it could be very disturbing at work later. So to see the big picture "what is that person like and what is the company like" and that you have to match. So indeed more than just "I studied and I have English language" that is not enough. You can say that verbally but it is too enduring and digital is just the future. The match can be made much better digitally. And those platforms, I would find it nice to have that. I have to go deeper into the matter on that. The talent motivation analysis can also be done on a company. "How are all the different drives within a sales team represented?". And then I can say, "Well, I'm looking for a new account manager. I already have 10 and I need one more" and then you just pick the three that you think are best suited to the business, which lets you do a TMA (talent motivation analysis) and then you have a

benchmark. So you can say "these are my three best account managers and the new one must come near it." And then you can search better and select the one you want to get into your team. You must be careful that you do not have just one type, which is not always good, but you can say "so it turns out that a good account manager for me is not only commercial but also has social empathy and can empathize with the customer". There are plenty of account managers who see only profit but I think it's really nice when there's interaction, that's my personal opinion. For example, I know of a company where you can say "this company is looking for a type with so and so and drive that is this and that" and then you can search a bit better. If you then apply for a job and you have them fill out a TMA you match them better. So I think you will have a longer-lasting relationship and less employee turnover. Because employee turnover is not good for the candidate, because "why change your employer so often?", which will be asked anyway, and for a company it is not good if you become a real passer-through place staff.

**This way, it again creates a win-win-win situation, so everyone is happy again.**

Yes. And I know this [platform] is being developed at the moment, there are mostly startups that are very busy doing it. I find that very beautiful. I also think we are not precursors but we also have to meet a target, simply put, we can not fully begin with this one piece.

**Then it would perhaps be useful if someone who knows how it is done is with the company.**

Yes. Ultimately, you have to link data and databases.

**So there are now two possibilities for internships, one for marketing and one for data analysis for this digital platform.**

Yes, and I had the same four companies for marketing. That is on one side and Pander Lier, Payroll (payroll for companies) in connection with another company, namely Syntax (office administration, tax consulting firm which also offers payroll for permanent staff for employers). So Syntax does the payroll for Pander and Lier, so here is the link, the wages of people. Pander and Lier and WerkWaar, as I mentioned, for the production staff. In addition, we have a company, Attentive Marketing, and that says it all, is doing marketing. And that lady takes care of us all three on part of the marketing but also has a lot more customers next to that. And then you get a bit compromised because external clients are more important. That is just the way it is, you must deliver service to pay the bills and who need to be helped, and your own businesses move into the background. If an intern in marketing, that would be very welcome for the company, could be professionally supervised and assisted very well by the lady of Attent Marketing.

**So then the intern has ..**

A base where he can ask all the questions.

**For the data analysis this is probably not possible, right? That someone helps the intern who is working with the data analysis?**

These are two separate internships.

**Yes, of course, completely separate. And this would potentially also be of interest for my own research project. Perhaps it is possible to match also interns and companies for Expeditie Toptalent.**

Yes, of course.

**Then I would continue. I asked "what makes your service unique?", and the response was "we do not provide services but solutions". I liked that answer. But are these solutions are unique?**

Sometimes, yes. My colleague had taken it upon himself to develop a solution for the bakery world. Also with interns. It was said by several shops and offices "no, that's impossible" but he persisted and now he has a solution. And well, that's rolled out and it was nice because then the baker suddenly came along with a bowl of x number of large raisin breads and was handing them out to us because he was so happy. There, we have offered a solution and the customer is happy. And of course the recruitment business in itself is not unique. There is also a question about "what's the competition?" And the answer "which remains the same but the players keep changing." Players change because they might not be alert enough, but it also indicates that a lot of players are there and also makes you not unique. Of course not, I'm not going to say that we have a unique product.

**It's not unique but in a unique way with the other three companies. I do not think it's normal, especially for an employment agency, to collaborate in this way with other companies.**

No, most will then specialize by sector. Thus making a task of construction, and a task of office workers, and a task of transport. And that I think 'yeah there are so many" and there it is danger and you put stamps on the different people here. I find it very nice indeed to have different companies. For me personally, I do not only do Syntaks, Pander and Lier, and Attent Marketing. These are all business services. And suddenly there's WerkWaar and I must again perform administration with supplies, set prices, and the entire ERP package changes. That is personally beautiful to me, to get out and refresh my own knowledge again. Yes, I think it is therefore unique - I always find such a big word because I think that we will thus be a good business partner. We can bring knowledge to others. That is appreciated.

I'm from a business - I'm a financial guy, originally - but I could also get involved with IT, and quality building environment and PNO at the same time. PNO I found very interesting, I was sparring with university undergraduates as a professor. And I myself also become richer from their knowledge. And I tried to create that here, too, because I want to continue to develop and be challenged as well.

**I asked whether or not innovation is a part of corporate culture and how it is expressed. "The desire is there, not strength," was the reply. May there be a possibility to increase this strength?**

There you'll get back to internships or employing more people. Look, the company itself is doing great at the moment. But obviously you occasionally get a procedural thinking, therefore we consider the "lean thinking", so the exchange of contracts with a digital signature. If you make a digital contract with our company you will press "Yes, agree", then everything is done and the contract is legally valid with the signature. So those are processes that improve us. We do not have to copy anymore, print, sign everything, etc., therefore we have more time. That time goes - well, not unfortunately - but that time goes into serving even more customers. And that is the objective of a business. At least if you want to continue to develop yourself as a company. But you'll still be just as busy. And where does it usually lack, then? Indeed, innovation and other side-issues that are very important but just not directly - indirectly on the long-term surely - bring on a positive value. Positive value is indeed when the customer calls, comes with a problem and we solve it. Therefore, we usually are busy with that. The customer is satisfied, happy, and then they talk about us again, we get another new customer but we did no marketing, we have not made any innovations or digitization and it stays like that.

**But is there perhaps another way, not including trainees and adding more employees? Just to have another look and see if it maybe should be put on paper somewhere, written down that innovation is part of the culture? Then perhaps add what has to be done in regard to innovation each month in the business in order to make innovation a part of the culture and not an external part of the company.**

Just like it is part of us to come up with solutions that make a profit. And just like a part of us is reliable and doesn't act outside of laws. I know what you mean. But that is a transition from us as employers. Of course, we are together weekly, to discuss things. Not only commercially but also in terms of legal procedures. Innovation is not a part of it. And you ask whether we can make any part of our weekly consultation. You can, but still a project has to be set up. And for a project you must have knowledge and you must also take the time. And then, yes, we might take not take that right now. I then lose on the company's success and that is why it is not granted to us to reserve that time in our agenda. And you can indeed employ staff, who then becomes our staff which we have in our company and if he takes us along into his thought process that will end well. You can just buy someone directly, as if there is nothing. There are only a few things that are really unique, and such digital platform that we are talking about now, already exists. That, can buy you as well. But then you are forced to let go of my TMA analysis, which I know well and you suddenly need to work with the Big 5, which I don't really have in me. It can also be a choice. But I have of course, at the start of the company, looked for some software solutions that suit me in my way of thought. So I would have to let go what I have chosen and go with something that, in my view, is a lesser alternative. That's possible.

**Then I want to move towards internationalisation. The question was before, "How many customers are internationally?" And the answer was "none". Will it be possible, perhaps less for employers but rather for candidates, to find jobs abroad for them as well?**

I have mentioned that. At the top and at the bottom of the market. However e.g. "What kind of opportunities that you will be visible on the international market?" Well, for me it is candidates, and that sounds very negative, who are less demanding in the jobs they take for which it is difficult to find Dutch labour forces.

**This is also a well-known issue in Germany. These are often people from Poland who come for the summer to harvest strawberries or asparagus.**

Yes you have that here too, and that bothers me on one side and on the other hand you have to say "you have to continue to develop yourself." And also among the less educated there are people who want to develop themselves. And some do not and that is unfortunate. You can put a lot of energy in that but we as Pander and Lier are not involved. And then you see hardworking people from other countries, and of course, we have people here, we just have too little, seemingly, so we take them away from Poland or wherever. There are possibilities for that. You can also think of students who want to have a nice job in the summer months. Yes, you can think of that, too. And what I notice is that there is a particular shortage of staff in the technical field. And you might think of the international market for that. I see Pander and Lier as a solid, reliable business. Nonprofit. Some years from now I see a tendency that many agencies pounce on freelancers. There was the stage when many agencies pounced on the German market. Here, in East Groningen, there was not enough so we went to Papenburg and Emden and Leer because that was Valhalla. But I'm not chase every chance for profit, I'd rather just stay here and do good and solid work and expand rather slowly than I sometimes do this there, on the short term, and then do it somewhere else, I do not want to do that. So I've made a conscious choice not to go to Germany. Laws are very different so you should be organized differently, you have to have other certifications. And that is for the short term only. My base is simply

Groningen and Drenthe and if possibly, on the long run, Friesland, we'll see. But "exotic", as I call it, I do not believe in it that much. No.

**Do you think, however, that the people from Germany want to come here?**

There are companies here who have with German workers. And they satisfying, and sufficient, and also I think their family is here. So of course, it is. But it is often not with the service companies but rather those companies that have a long tradition in a certain field. There, you have value only if the companies look beyond the border. A German-speaking Dutchman is very nice but a native speaking German is even better. That's the way it is. Just because I chose not to go over the border, not in all cases, between Pander and Lier and Abiant, not sure if you know what that is, but Abiant also focuses quite heavily on the north and is a much larger company. And they, on the long run, have made the step, very aware and robust, to go to Germany. And I fully support that but I'm not, as small office, suddenly going to focus all my [attention] on Germany. Then I short-hand my clients here and I do not think we can do something there that adds value.

**And maybe it's something for the future.**

Yes in 10-15 years.

**You do not see any need for foreign workers for the mid-market?**

If you are internationally active they can be useful, yes.

**And that's not the case with Pander and Lier.**

I do know the ways to recruit and select people. But that also means that I need people to recruit in German. And it seems useful to me to have a German for that. Well, there are companies that recruit in the German newspaper, and perhaps also on the German digital platforms and who already have German employees, and I can well imagine that. But in terms of selection, there are few companies that can do that well from the Netherlands. And if I can't do something well, I don't do it. That's what it's about in the beginning, we offer solutions and we seek solutions outside of Pander and Lier, at concullega or a friendly office or somehow, we try to help the customers in any way possible to find the right match. If that's not via us, well, fine.

**Then let us talk about the labour market at the moment. This question is not specifically about Pander and Lier but more about the knowledge of Pander and Lier. I asked this before and the answer was "the demand is there, but the match often can not be delivered in the technical fields". So how would it be possible to perhaps turn this around?**

Recently, we had a member of the city council to visit and she also had questions about what's happening and that she had sent many questions to the government. We needed those who can decypher seals so everyone put this on his resume. These people flooded the labour market and suddenly we had too much or that you had not educated them well e.g. in central heating instead of air technology. Well, then you're with a lot of people who have skills in terms of knowledge who should be able to do that who needed to be re-schooled. So the council said also say "how can we act on it?" and I know there is a company that is actually a kind of small production site will fulfill the skilled people learn the work how the employer would like to see and can really perform in the factory so that people know better what is going on in the factory . And that I think is very good. I especially in the technical fields this will be asked a lot right now, apparently the people are not trained in order to properly manage the demand in the past, because people are not there, or they do not act in the proper knowledge. And that's just very difficult. You can not pass that on to the government or the education sector because they look than "okay,

how do you interpret it?" And I think the combination between employers and education simply must come together closer.

Description: summary of transcript and comments

### **Corporate Culture**

- F. does not yet focus on innovation because there are only three employees
- G. not enough room for project based work that could result in innovations
- H. innovations are left to start ups and bigger companies
- I. Jorg Rotman is the one dictating the values according to which the companies operate
- J. personal growth and continuous learning

### **Innovation**

- K. digital profiling platform that can be used to match employers and potential employees based on other traits than merely the certifications and professional abilities.
- L. company is currently lacking personnel that have sufficient skills in data analysis

### **Labour Market**

- M. companies looking for employees within the technical sector and cannot be matched

### **Internationalisation**

Regarding a potential need for international employees in the region, Rotman especially sees a need on the low-end of the labour market since Dutch employees are often too selective in the tasks that they wish to fulfil. Therefore, becoming internationally visible would carry the potential of attracting employees less reluctant to fulfil certain tasks (Rotman, 2017). However, Rotman also sees a need in the high-end of the market where e.g. international sales often could require employees who e.g. speak the language of the countries with which trade occurs (Rotman, 2017). Furthermore, there are not many people from abroad actively looking for jobs in SEG and that this is often related to circumstances in their families (Rotman, 2017). As a result, P&L entertains no international clients at this point in time (Rotman, 2017).

For P&L itself, international employees do not pose any benefits since there is neither the desire nor the possibility for the company to enter the international market which is already being exploited

by larger competitors such as Abiant who do have sufficient work force to commit to internationalisation (Rotman, 2017). The agency itself does not employ international employees but Mr Rotman sees a potential need for international colleagues if the model of generating revenue changes in the future (Rotman, 2017).

### **Internship Possibilities**

Potentially, the task of creating an online matching platform for employees and employers could be fulfilled by an intern well accustomed to data analysis, perhaps in cooperation with an intern in IT to write the matching programme.

As Mr Rotman stated, an intern in marketing would also be useful in order to become more visible. There is a one-person marketing company integrated into P&L. This person could offer the guidance necessary (Rotman, 2017).

### **The Region**

When asking about how the region is unique, Mr Rotman replied that the lasting fight for a right to exist has resulted in weaker companies to vanish while stronger companies get the chance to thrive (Rotman, 2017). Rotman, however, further stresses that he is proud of how companies and individuals in SEG are hardworking with a no-nonsense attitude and collaborate with each other due to their bilateral dependence on each other (Rotman, 2017). Next, Rotman mentioned that he values the perseverance and tough competition that has been part of this region throughout history (Rotman, 2017). Therefore, according to the director of P&L, the USP of SEG lies within the attitudes the people have, especially in how they view labour.

B. RSE TELECOM

<b>Interview file n°:</b> 2	<b>Date:</b> 19.04.2017
	<b>Time:</b> 3 p.m.
<b>Main Topic:</b> Company Insights	<b>Duration:</b> 54 min.
<b>Primary research question</b>	
<b>Place:</b> Winschoten	
<b>Name of interviewer:</b> Benedikt Wieferig	
<b>Name of interviewee:</b> Joost Smits	
<b>Role of interviewee:</b> Director Pander & Lier	
<b>Sub-topics:</b> Region insights	
<b>Reason for interviewing:</b> Member of De Compagnons, industry	
<b>Interview nexus</b>	
<b>Main topic:</b> Corporate Culture	
<b>Main topic 2:</b> Market	
<b>Main topic 3:</b> Innovation	
<b>Main topic 4 :</b> Internationalisation	
<b>Main topic 5 :</b> Internship possibilities	
<b>Main topic 6 :</b> The region	
AFS. 2006	
<b>Transcript</b>	
<p><b>I had already asked where you see opportunities for competition to be a step ahead or stay, the answer was "developing and marketing". What does the development at the company look like?</b></p> <p>RSE is not a development company. We do not develop products and services. We leave it e.g. to larger parties like Vodafone, KPN and Microsoft but if they develop something then you have to respond quickly to stay ahead of the competition. That's the development as it is now. Starting eight years ago it was only going mobile telephony, fixed telephony now it continues with the development of IT. So you have a total integration of all the services we provide. That's a development how we can continue to stay ahead the competition.</p> <p><b>At the door I saw a sign "Vodafone Business Partner of the Year".</b></p> <p>Yes, this is the second year in succession. That is unique. Despite that we are in this area, in this region, we have still are the best of all business partners in the Netherlands. That's pretty nice.</p>	

**RSE wants to be "the best and most enjoyable company of Northern Netherlands to do business with".**

Yes, we are very friendly and very customer-oriented. We go for the highest customer satisfaction and we are. We ask a very high NPS (net promoters score), where they 100 of our customers and when they reply positively, you will have a positive net promoters score as companies whose customers are neutral or negative about the business. Our NPS is 35, which is quite high. On average in the Netherlands on business partners is approximately 16 and provider-wise, so the providers themselves, it is almost always around zero or even slightly below. So there are more people who are negative about the company. So they are people who will not recommend them. But we are always there in the top three in the Netherlands. We stand for that and we we strive for that.

**There are no plans to start with the development of services, right?**

No, you have technology that the providers develop to the services as we provide the customers. We install and maintain the systems, help with questions but that is not really new technology development. We are the connection between the providers and the customers. We are service providers. The service from one provider goes until a certain point and there, RSE takes over. We install and accompany everything after installation. We develop services but not in technology. Our market is so dynamic and terribly fast, so that it is difficult for us.

**And the other way to stay one step ahead of the competition was marketing. Are there specific tasks within marketing that will be required and may also be suitable for a student / trainee?**

Not specifically, but well, for a student, a company like RSE is always interesting, we are engaged in marketing daily. There's always something to do. One of the areas where we are active now is creating a business center. This business center is a place, like a shop-in-shop in your company, where customers and potential customers come to and we talk about what the strategies are for the customer, which is its most ideal situation, and how we go on from there. And what colors we use it is not important in terms of the result. The goal is more important than the means. And we're really discussing purely on the strategic level with the clients about what is going on in their business. Yes, that is one of those things that we are now doing. That is likely to be rolled out this year, probably right after the summer holidays. This is something new, there are only two in the Netherlands who are offering this, so you again marketing and therefore you will make a difference among a particular audience. The companies that interest us are SMEs and SME+s.

**What makes the services and solutions unique? "The combination". Which is?**

The combination of services from our portfolio. This brings us to the highest customer satisfaction. We are a "one stop shop" where you can get everything with communication. That is unique in the Netherlands. There are only 15 companies as RSE in the Netherlands and of these 15 have only five have a portfolio as we have it.

**What are the latest trends in the sector? "Everyday new trends, integration of fixed, mobile, IT (portfolio)." And RSE is a top company in the sector. Is RSE also on top with newest technology?**

Yes. But we do sit in an region that is not leading the way with new technology. Nonetheless, we want our customers to hear from us when there are new techniques. Then, even if they do nothing with it at the moment, we have informed them and therefore they know that they are doing business with the right company. We are always on their "top of mind". If they think about communication, RSE should come to their mind first. That's the idea. We are trying that more and more. The location is quite difficult because there are many more people who do not know us. So it is important that getting an awareness of what we do in order to achieve that. If you people informed of new trends

and developments in the market, even if it's not important, if they hear it again in six months, they will think "oh yes, that I have heard from RSE". And when a competitor or concullega comes with "I want to tell you some more about this product" customers can say "never mind, I've already heard it from RSE". We want to be the competitor who is always ahead. In the past, that didn't go so well, in recent years.

**With a newsletter or how does that work exactly? Or in person?**

A combination thereof. Monthly news, contact with our account managers and seminars. The idea is that the people hear the information three times. Only with the third time they really get it. Power of repetition.

**How does the company always get latest information and know-how to work on "champions league"?**

Training courses, let our suppliers / partners who are continually trying new things teach us. These knowledge and skills, because you have a certain size, can be reeled in. If you get one person to do this, if that person is only concerned with learning, we have no time to deliver our service. And now we have two people who do the floor, they go deep into the matter, as they have the time and space to do so. Because we find it very important that our people continue to develop themselves constantly. They should always be engaged in self-study or update their specific knowledge. And there are two specialists for a particular component and they teach and persuade the others. That's their advantage. These specialists are from this company.

**So therefore everyone gets a chance to continue to develop.**

Indeed, if a person does not develop, we have no room for these people. If people have not done any workshops for years we have to have a talk about that. Because then they do their job for maybe another year but over five years, they won't. So always keep learning, you will never become more stupid of it.

**So the development itself is also one of the core values of the company?**

Knowledge is power. So yes, absolutely.

**What I found interesting was that it was said that only one contact point exists for the customer. How does that work?**

Each account manager has a set of customers. For that group of customers they are the contact. Most account managers have around 70 customers. When they are asked something they don't know, a specialist comes to help but the account manager remains the contact person.

**And how does the internal communication? How does everyone receive the knowledge of the customer?**

That's something the account manager should take care of. It is important to maintain short lines of communication.

**I asked what your experiences in regard to innovation. The answer was "high investment, high risk, not suitable for a sales / marketing company." Is there another way to deal with innovation? In marketing and sales for example?**

By innovation I mean innovation in technology. In sales and marketing we do it differently than our colleagues anyway. We have to innovate and there is also the time, energy and money. In technology, our partners can innovate much better because they can invest several millions. We then install and manage the technology.

**A company from Eindhoven was your example for a leader within your industry that you mentioned. What do they do that RSE does not do yet?**

That has to do with the internal organization. They are organized very strictly, everyone knows exactly what he must do and with us it is often not like that. They work very process-oriented, every sale that they make, there is a process behind it. That, we should learn something from. But we are now working to improve our internal processes. That's something they do much better than we do. I would also like to know more.

It looks a bit like "Operation Excellence" where everything is done in a way that nothing can go wrong. Until a certain point, the customer won't hear anything from us. PHC does it so that customer has a request and that request is carried out each week and the customers are called with the status of the project. Ultimately, the end product is the same only the perception of such a customer needs to change. Or at least we think it is better that way. That is what we are doing now.

**So you've already started to try to do something like that?**

Yes. Now, after signing the contract the customer will be called within 24 hours by the planning: "Welcome, I am .... Thanks for the job, if you have any questions please call me at any time". Therefore, more reactive to proactive. It is no longer that customers call "I had a job, what is the status?". Now it's the other way around. The idea is that customers are constantly surprised positively.

**But it is not yet "normal" to do this, right?**

No, it's a good surprise. And if you have nothing to say, you say that the project is running and you see no reason why you should not keep the deadline. If you then later say that the project takes two weeks longer, for whatever reason, then it is always still better than not having reported and then saying it will be a day later, because then the customers are irritated. And that's the big difference.

**This way it is clear that the company was already doing it just that there is a process behind it. Otherwise, it as if the company only just started working on the project.**

Yes exactly, it takes a little longer but the value proposition is all the way up and that's what you want. The customer must feel that you are doing something. They do it all, but customers don't get the feeling. "Because They Matter" is the idea a little.

**The customer-orientation goes up.**

Yes, even more. It can always be better. If you're over 35 [in net promoters score], there is also a 36 and 37 and so on. So that can always be improved. Even if we are already at the top you always want to get it higher.

**And the competition is decreasing? They "fall away at some point." What is the reason?**

We think, well we actually know for sure, that the customers opt for simplicity and convenience. And that is an aspect of our business. We have everything in regard to communication. Lots of companies do parts of it, so telephony or IT or security, meaning the customer has multiple contact points. We expect that the customer simply wants one point of contact for all in the field of communication and that parties such as us benefit from it and that other parties cannot take this step. We obviously have a certain size, so we have already made that step. We have well-developed departments so that we actually are full-fledged businesses. And many parties can't or don't dare to take that step. And therefore, they will lose. Of that I am convinced.

**So there is really no reason why RSE is likely to disappear in the coming years?**

Sure it can always happen, of course you never know how it goes but the way we look at it now, at the market and how the figures in the industry are, then we are on the right track. Year after year we are going against the current and grow. Our market is decreasing 5% year to year but RSE has grown in recent years. Against the current, so our market share has grown, too. And that has to come from somewhere because the market is saturated.

**That is a good sign.**

Very good, but we also work hard.

**What then is striking: RSE has no customers abroad. Is that by choice?**

The legislation of the Netherlands is very different from the rules of e.g. Germany. Whether here or whether I drive to Groningen or Leer, it takes the same amount of time until I am in Germany. But regulation and business models are different because in Germany, it is really based on subscriptions and you'll have to buy the device and you earn the money with the hardware and in the Netherlands, it is the total turnover of the provider of which we then receive a part. The business model is very different so we chose to keep it really pure in the Netherlands. Perhaps Germany can be part of that through globalization in the future, we don't exclude that, but for now we remain in the Netherlands. For example, Vodafone is one of our partners, KPN is one of our partners. Vodafone is a global provider, but we have business in the Netherlands.

We are here with some regulations of the ACM, the consumer market, and that's not like that in Germany. The business model is very different here and in Germany. And we have no customers yet so we need to start from 0 while we have a large base here and can only expand. Perhaps in the future if e.g. Vodafone becomes a European organization with a board and we fall under the European organization, perhaps it easier to also do something in Germany.

**Currently there is also no need or interest for international staff, and that's understandable if you want to work in the Netherlands because then you'll be happy to have Dutch employees.**

Yes, in principle. I can offer a foreign worker or a foreign student nothing. I can only offer what we have here in the Netherlands because I do not have foreign internships like our neighbours WPT / Virol that have German employees. And many foreign colleagues. We don't. We have a really purely regional focus.

**But there is not really a market analysis or something that has been done for the German market right?**

No. This, we haven't done yet.

**Because I had first asked whether there is a need for international staff or trainees and the answer was "no not really." And that there might be a way to work internationally but there is no overview yet. Maybe that's something for an international intern, so that they can do a market analysis?**

That's right, we do not know what it is, nor where to start. So if I have someone who will say "look at what the market is" and imagine the market has a very high potential, where we will start? Vodafone? T-Mobile in Germany? Yes, you name it. This is a completely new market for me. In today's cooperations with Vodafone and KPN, I know the chief executive of the Netherlands, I know him. Basically I can call him just like that. Only in Germany, I don't exactly who the partner managers are and how it works. That's a difficult story. If it is interesting, why shouldn't I do it? This is close to here. But we have not yet identified [the market].

**Okay. I have one last question and there it's about the region because it is also my task to develop a branding strategy for the region to make the region more attractive to young people who can run their internship here. So I want to offer internships and part of that is knowing what people from the region think of the region.**

**Eventually I could use this for the website that this would result in in the end. So I asked "what makes the region unique?" The answer was "the region is unique through the combination of people, quality of life, and the central location in Europe". What do you appreciate the most about the people of the region?**

That's hard to say. The people who are born and raised here in the region are basically people who say what they do and do what they say. If they say "A", this will also happen. And that's just honesty. You can easily make appointments with people, they arrive on time, they are punctual, they work properly, are polite, high set of values, they are not people who hop from one job to another job, they are basically quite faithfully and I think those are the characteristics of the people of the region. And that also makes it so strong. I think basically any company from anywhere in the Netherlands and in Europe, could have a use for Groningers. They have a certain sobriety, they think carefully about what they do. And they're just really really loyal. Neatly and tightly organized. That's what it is, no blah, no macho behavior (laughs). That's the main thing. And quality of life, there I don't have to tell you what I think. If you drive around here in the region, then you know what it is. It is fully equipped, we have space, we have peace and that's good, we have very beautiful nature. Of course, the "Blauwestad" is close to here, which is unique. We have a nice shopping center, we have it all. Good location, within two hours you are in the heart of Amsterdam Central Station and in no time you're over the border here [to Germany]. It's great. It's just a really nice area. Towards Scandinavia you're in a good location, too. There are also companies that operate internationally and if you want to go to Scandinavia with products or services then you are on a very good path here. Good infrastructure. The highways are good, so you're on the A31 and from the A31 you drive within an x-amount of hours, you're in southern Germany. That's just great to do. People always say it's far away, but you will still get there quickly, from my home I'm in the city of Groningen within 20 minutes. If you live in an average residential area then it takes you in the west of the country it will take you 20 minutes until you're out of the residential area and you drive straight into a traffic jam. Tell me, what's quality? I think this [region].

**Next, I have a question about the area. What specific aspect of the environment do you think is the best? Perhaps the fortress Bourtange or whatever, something between Groningen and the German border. What is a feature of which you think "this would also be nice for people who do not know the area"?**

I think the combination of vast farmlands (e.g. Delfzijl) and nature. Because there are great natural reserves e.g. Blauwestad because the Oldambtmeer is beautiful. Especially the combination. So if I want peace, I cross the road and have farmland. This is a feature and find people, I think, very interesting to see and speaks to the imagination. Do you want it busy you can have it, you want to rest can have it, you may want to visit the nature, and if you want water-sports you can have it. This is all within a fraction of an hour of driving. But Bourtange is also nice. People find that very interesting. Not Bourtange itself but the story around it. That people find interesting. If you do just walk around in Bourtange, then you think "yes, nice village", but if you know the past that's behind it ... if you are here on Blauwestad, the lake, if you know the story why it was built and by whom and how quickly this was done then speaks to the imagination. [If you know] they were farmlands and through change in the land it has become a lake to strengthen the economy. That's 20 years ago, maybe 25 years, there had been the plan for the declining economy, what is happening now, an aging of the population, so people are getting older, it was a response that you would get more recreation. That is of course successful. Very successful. And

later the house were added to make it financially attractive. But the basis of the plan was actually to do something recreational to make the region interesting, which succeeded. Thanks so well done even. People always forget. We never had such beautiful bike lanes as now. There, you can talk about a successful project. And that the houses are not yet ready, we are still working on them. Sure it was necessary to make it financially feasible but the purpose of the whole thing has been achieved. This is just really cool, really super. The Groningers are actually not proud enough of that, I think. They are very modest. There are several reasons to be proud of this region, but that's what people here are like. People here are not like that. "Oh we're so happy," No that's a very different world. That is the sober behaviour. They are satisfied but they don't express it (laughs). If done something new is done, everyone, by definition, is against it. In one way or another. Until such time as it is realized. And they are all very pleased. That is the area, you need to be able to deal with that.

#### Description: summary of transcript and comments

##### 1. Corporate Culture

- Wants to be "most comfortable business in North-Netherlands to conduct business with"
- Very customer oriented
- Emphasis on delivering a convenient '**one-stop**' service
- Communication of the company: keep the lines of communication short
- Joost Smits: proud of company being named 'Vodafone Business Partner of the Year' for the second time in a row (national award)

##### 2. Market

- Competition shrinking in the region

##### 3. Innovation

- Does not develop new products and services; rely on bigger business partners such as Vodafone and KPN (Royal Dutch service for post, telephone, internet, television)
- But: update the services they offer to these innovations as soon as possible
- Linking different services to create package solutions
- Trying to innovate in marketing approaches

##### 4. Internationalisation

- Wants to see whether it is possible to expand to German market
- Otherwise not international

##### 5. USP of SEG

- Space
- Balance
- Opportunities
- Infrastructure
- Investments

##### 6. Internship Possibilities

- Researching the German market (see 'Internationalisation')

AFS, 2006

C. NEDMAG

<b>Interview file n°:</b> 3	<b>Date:</b> 20.04.2017
	<b>Time:</b> 3 p.m.
<b>Main Topic:</b> Company Insights	<b>Duration:</b> 54 min.
<b>Primary research question</b>	
<b>Place:</b> Winschoten	
<b>Name of interviewer:</b> Benedikt Wieferig	
<b>Name of interviewee:</b> Joost Smits	
<b>Role of interviewee:</b> Director Pander & Lier	
<b>Sub-topics:</b> Region insights	
<b>Reason for interviewing:</b> Member of De Compagnons, industry	
<b>Interview nexus</b>	
<p><b>Main topic:</b> Corporate Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incorporation of innovation into organizational culture</li> <li>- Corporate values</li> </ul> <p><b>Main topic 2:</b> Market</p> <p><b>Main topic 3:</b> Innovation</p> <p><b>Main topic 4 :</b> Labour market</p> <p><b>Main topic 5 :</b> Internationalisation</p> <p><b>Main topic 6 :</b> Internship possibilities</p> <p><b>Main topic 7 :</b> The region</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AFS. 2006</p>	
<b>Transcript</b>	
[OPENING]	
<p><b>The core values of NEDMAG are “we bring the best to the surface”. This, considering NEDMAG is a mining company, can be taken quite literally. But does that also mean the best in people?</b></p> <p>Well, that’s our ambition of course. Yes, we bring the best to the surface if you look at the physical aspect, the magnesium that is won here is the purest and cleanest worldwide. That makes it very</p>	

special. That's one of the 'bests' that we bring to the surface. This magnesium is processed into the products that we offer, like our fireproof bricks. That also is a top segment of what you can get, a really unique product. Now, and what you also see now is that we use this unique base to add other products with the same quality standards. That's it product-wise. Next to that, we are a rather flat organisation, a small organisation, and that means that everyone needs to be hands-on with little room for people to be absent. Therefore, you have to take care that everyone has the same well-meaning purpose in an organised fashion in order to keep the people working actively towards the future.

**So also develop themselves.**

Exactly, and therefore bring out the best of the people.

**There are multiple ways to bring out the best. Is there any active support for people in the company to keep improving and developing?**

Yes, we work closely with educational institutions. There are lower-schooled people working at production level, e.g. producing the fireproof bricks, while people with a background in applied sciences work on the office floors. You will also find some people with academic backgrounds here and there. So, we have a relatively high level of education amongst our employees and that has to be maintained since technology is advancing quickly, changing what we know and keeping us on our toes.

**And this level is maintained also by hiring new, young employees?**

Yes, we just took somebody on board. I think she still has to finish her thesis but she is already working here. We also have another job opening where we are looking for somebody who, ideally, has no work experience at all. We like that because these people can still be shaped. People with more experience can often only be kept for a couple of years because the flat hierarchy also results in low chances of promotion. On the other hand, this allows you to get a heap of new ideas and energy every 3 years if everything works out well.

**So, young people are an important part of this company.**

Yes, absolutely.

**Then I would like to continue with the set of questions and proceed to asking about the competition. On the way here, I realized that there is a company right next door who, from the outside, seems to be doing something similar to NEDMAG.**

Kisuma is actually a customer. We create the basic resource for their products which we deliver to them via pipeline. That resource can be used directly to make their products. Behind my back [points backwards] we have a magnesium hub shared by all different kinds of companies. Kisuma is in the market of health products, security, and road security [magnesium to reduce slipperiness in winter]. We [NEDMAG] are also busy in the farming industry. Since recently there is research being conducted (that we finance) into the influence on the human body that magnesium has. But our main pillar of work remains the production of basic resources.

**During the written pre-interview round, I had asked how the company can be and stay ahead of its competition. The answer here was 'different markets than the ones we are in today'. Which ones?**

So, what you see at the moment is that branded products in relation to sustainability are coming up. With our product, you could e.g. clear the ground water of phosphates. This solves the issue of increased phosphate levels in our ground due to the overuse of liquid manure on the fields while extracting phosphate as a nutrient for reuse. There are many applications for magnesium which can be adapted in many different ways. Magnesium is also being used in the food industry, like in beer and cheese.

But there are also applications for magnesium in the cleaning industry. Our magnesium is for example being used to clean the exhausts of big container ships to remove the remainders of the emitted sulphur. Magnesium hydroxide even intercepts sulphur and prevents it from being released into the environment. What you can see is that there are many chances in the sustainability sector for adaptations of our product. We started with the fireproof bricks but can see a decrease in the market now. The demand is decreasing because e.g. China's growth is slowing down and the whole world has a decreased need for concrete and steel. So, this market is declining.

**So, there are new solutions for cleaning in order to preserve the environment.**

Yes, exactly. And if you have a good look at the adaptations then you'll see that magnesium stays for quite a while. If you would add magnesium to the liquid manure, the magnesium would be ingested again by the cattle - and cattle, just like humans, have a need for magnesium in their bodies - who

would then again produce manure rich of magnesium. That way you can reach a sort of cycle, a micro-cycle per company. This way, you can be very sustainable and the product would be in use for a long time.

**So, there are still development chances in the farming industry?**

Yes, of course.

**Great! Next, I would like to ask you something about interns, since it is the goal to, at the end, find internship opportunities within companies of the region. In the previous interview round, I had already asked you what kind of intern in terms of personality and education could add value to the company. The answer was 'diverse study programmes, hands-on'. We already spoke about the hands-on part for a bit and that the interns should show initiative for self-improvement and development. But where do you see the most urgent need for interns in the company at the moment?**

Well, we have a lot of interns and more will start soon. From May 2<sup>nd</sup> onwards there will be a group of 8 international Master's students from the business school of the Hanze[hogeschool Groningen] who will be researching into our business model for a month. But we also have regular interns working in the technical task areas, we have interns in commerce and sales but also in communication. Pretty much every department has one or two interns or students who are working on their final projects before graduating. We make a lot of use of interns. Logistics, technical fields, we even have one running around in HR. So we have a lot of use for interns.

**I also already asked whether innovation is incorporated into the corporate culture and how that can be seen. The answer was 'not enough'. How can the corporate culture be steered to incorporate innovation more?**

You have to make everyone aware that continuous improvement, which innovation essentially is, is everybody's task and not just the task of the guys in the white coats. Therefore, as teams and individuals, you have to set goals for yourself concerning what you want to improve or renew this year. If there is no focus on that and if you do not actually take this with you into your daily actions, then you have to change that. Then you probably also have had a very busy day, everything went wrong and you still have to fix that, oh no, you still wanted to do something with that renewal. So it does not happen. That means you really have to give it a certain priority. You could do that by saying "ok, we are meeting every Monday morning or every Monday from 2-4 p.m. and at that time you

are not allowed to follow your regular work but you then have to focus on innovation and renewal". This way you make it technically possible for it to happen in your schedule. But you do not usually do it that organised. If you sit in your office and if you did not even bring your phone, then you have a chance for innovation and renewal to happen.

**There just needs to be room and time dedicated to it next to the regular work so that something can happen on top of that.**

Yes, and you need quite something for that. If it is only a little, nothing will result from it.

**Is this put onto paper in some way? Maybe in the company guidelines?**

We are very busy to add more shape to it. A change in culture has to be organised. We have innovation-development day every Monday now. If somebody wants to propose something, it has to happen on that day. There is typically a chance that 9 of 10 meetings will happen since there are exceptions e.g. if somebody is on holiday or ill or whatever. But everybody needs to have an empty schedule on Mondays and it costs time to do just that.

**So, there is something happening to really incorporate innovation as a part of the corporate culture. I'd like to leave it at that for now. I had however asked you what past experiences with innovation have been, to which you responded 'good'. Are there any examples of innovations by Nedmag that jump your mind?**

We are of course very unique [stands up to get a booklet]. This [booklet] is about Groningen. The healthy salt is so special; a lot of good things can be done with that. That is unique. That is something the rest of the Netherlands does not have, and what the rest of Groningen does not have. That is just this part of East Groningen (province) where this is coming from.

**And that is also what Nedmag is doing?**

Yes, we are trying to market the unique aspects of the magnesium salt that can only be found here as well and as sustainable as possible. What we also do a lot and receive a lot of attention for is that we finance research projects, e.g. from the UMCG [Groningen University Hospital]. We operate under the principle that if we can get something from the region, then that is what we do. We want to be anchored in the region. We are unique in that.

**So, these ‘Groningen Magnesium Chloride Flakes’ [small article in the afore mentioned booklet, can be used as bath salt]. Are they being sold as bath salts?**

Yes. We have a company in which we are shareholders, Zechstein and Zechsal. Zechstein is the wholesale business and Zechsal is the commercial business. They market the salts for the health market, not for the supplement market but specifically the health market. They sell oils, bath salts, shampoos, lotions and those kinds of things and they are used a lot by top athletes since the magnesium oil has a positive effect on the recreation of their muscles after e.g. training. These two companies are now seven years old and are positioned as the market leader in the Netherlands with exports growing quickly, also to Germany and the rest of Europe. So that is going well. That is where the idea for the hub came from. We help companies to get going but we are and always have been suppliers for their basic resource and assisting material, magnesium, in different forms that they can then process to make them into the final product.

It is just like in the farming industry, where there are over 15.000 farmers in the Netherlands who have cattle. And we only have three travelling salespeople who cover the whole world. So, I cannot just send them around 15.000 farms in the Netherlands. There is a whole new logistics and distribution channel behind it that you cannot build up just like that. So, we come up with ideas for products and then we look for partners to join us in that endeavour who are strong in logistics, distribution and sales who are willing to offer and produce the product on our behalf. That is the strategy behind it.

**So, you create a win-win situation for both parties involved, while Nedmag takes the role of the supplier as well as the initiator or inventor.**

Yes, exactly. We think of new products and concepts and look for a partner to actually do it for us.

**Alright. Then I would like to continue on to the next question which leads us back to the competition. In the previous round, it was mentioned that the competition is growing. Do you see a threat for Nedmag or is Nedmag’s position fortified enough?**

Well, I think we will make it. But it’s not to be underestimated. Transitioning to a new product delivers a wholly new set of problems and challenges for the organisation, swallows up a lot of time, energy and money, and raises expectations for the outcome. On the other hand; we do not have a choice. The products we launched in the 80s have, in the meantime, developed to be world markets. The Chinese have big companies and big influence on that and we are just a small company

competing in that market. We have the best product but the market is really slim. So, yes, doing nothing is not an option.

**And it was said that new collaboration enables the development of new products.**

Collaboration is crucial.

**Are there any opportunities at the moment that may not be ready enough yet to approach a partner with them?**

Yes, our supplement market still requires research into how the market is constructed, who is active in it. We are now starting all the commercial activities. That is a grey area for me where I would like to introduce applications to regain magnesium e.g. through using other minerals. There are a lot of chances in that direction.

And I have the dream of having batteries with magnesium instead of lithium, which is an annoying, dangerous, and scarce product that can barely be recycled. You can also build batteries using magnesium. It is more complex but well within what is achievable and there is already a lot of money being invested into it. But would that not be great? To be able to offer Groninger batteries next to Groninger Cake? Made from magnesium from Groninger soil. But these projects may still take 15 years of development. We are already seeking out how the market is constructed, who the players are and who owns the technology to actually make these batteries. We will not make the batteries ourselves, we supply the resources. It would be great to build a factory close by, tough. And I do not care if that is our Tesla-man or whoever, I do not care much about that. It could also be Daimler or Volkswagen. I would just like to see where the chances are. And Volkswagen is not too far away, giving them a chance to join in.

**Tesla was considering building a factory in the region, right?**

Well, they wanted to come to Europe and then everybody wants them to come into their area.

**But is there something happening there? Is the market being researched already?**

For the batteries? No, not yet. I want to be through with the supplements first. If we are ready, we will add some more ideas that will then have to go through specific phases. Something can be added in the next phase. We are quite limited in that. But after we're done with supplements we will try ourselves with energy, meaning the batteries or other means of storing energy. You can also use magnesium chloride in salt-form to store energy. You can also use magnesium chloride in salt-form

as PCM-material ['phase change material'], that is a sort of salt with which heat can be stored and kept. That could be another application. There are also other means of energy storing possibilities that we have not yet explored but that we do find interesting.

We are very far with the cleansing of water and gas. We are looking for more adaptations to use in bleaching paper and pulp cardboard in a sustainable way. And then we are on to the next chapter.

**So, it could be up to an intern to conduct the research?**

Yes, exactly, yes. They could research 'who is active', 'what are the advantages', 'is it complex', 'what do we need for it', 'who can do it and who cannot'. Toyota is doing a lot of research into that direction, I know that, so another question could be 'are there other parties interested and working on it'. You could probably look that up on YouTube, there is a lot of information but it is quite unstructured.

**You have to seek out the information that may be crucial.**

Yes, you would have to focus that.

**We already talked about export and distribution and it was said that 90% of the customers of Nedmag are in Germany. Why are there so few in the Netherlands?**

My base is the resource and stone industry. And in cement and steel, at least in Europe, Germany is a very important player. There are many companies there that work in the industry which is why a big part of our [business] automatically takes place in Germany. In the Netherlands there are a lot of melting furnaces, and that is it. You do not need a new melting furnace every week which makes the market relatively small and that is how that came to be. Our customers have always been predominantly in Germany, that is how it all started. And then came England, and Spain, then we started to grow outside of Europe. Now we are in America, India, and Russia, too.

**In the role of the supplier or are there perhaps other sources of magnesium there, too?**

No, no sources. There are different ways to create magnesium, e.g. close to the Dead Sea, but they are all less pure and clean than our magnesium. There are all kinds of impurities that we do not have. We have the purest source in the entire world. There appears to be another source somewhere high up in the mountains of Ethiopia, somewhere in a war-ridden area. So that is not going to happen any time soon.

**So, you are staying with your source and the known quality of it.**

Yes. This is my source. It just happens to be where it is.

**It was also said that there is an interest for international employees. For what tasks could they be used?**

There is a wide area where they could be used. It could be market researchers but also technical researchers. See, language is no problem for us. If there is a good set of brains, we will make use of that.

**The language probably resembles the terminology of the mining industry a lot.**

Yes, and the language within the mining industry is often just English. That comes from the gas and oil industry. We do it the same way. Well, ok, not exactly but they have drilling towers to retrieve the liquid from the soil [just like we do]. So, there is a lot of English involved.

**So, the language within the company is English?**

Yes, we are a big exporter where all customers speak either English, German, French or whatever. And by now, everybody speaks decent English.

**Let us head on to the last section, in which I would like to talk about the region for a bit since it is the goal to present the region in order to make it more attractive for young people to reduce the crimping population. I had asked 'what makes you proud of the region?' and the answer was 'with the feet in the clay' [down to earth]. How does this trait show?**

Through the partial sobriety of the company. You need to be able to persuade the employees to get them going but once they are doing it they keep doing it. The living climate in the region is great. You have good facilities in the cities like Winschoten, Stadskanaal, or Veendam and also in the villages. The infrastructure is good and there are good sporting facilities and e.g. theatres. And, of course, you are also near to the city of Groningen that has a lot to offer, too. Also, you have a large variety of different companies that do not only offer services but also big industry and a lot of companies in the field of logistics. So, I think there is really something for everyone. Next to that, I think that the cost of living is also relatively low.

**Lower than in the city of Groningen I imagine.**

Or look at Amsterdam. Groningen is relatively cheap compared to that. The situation in Amsterdam is dramatic. It may be fun when you are young but when you get older in one of those apartments you think to yourself “damn it, I have to work that hard and cannot do anything with it”. And the houses for families are developing over here. We as a company can still get good people, also from other parts of the country and from other countries within Europe because we have something to offer. Even the city of Groningen is affordable for most people, especially if they live in the suburbs and not the city centre. There are houses there that are great. Here in the region, you can live comfortably. You have a lot of nature around you and within two hours of driving you will be in Amsterdam. If you live in Amsterdam, you will probably be stuck in traffic for two hours every day.

**What do you think would be the most impressive for people who are not from the region or from the city of Groningen that come here to live?**

The balance. On one hand, you have many good high-tech companies. You can find challenging work and within one hour of driving you can be in a completely different environment. You can feel how that becomes more important for the younger generations. And we can offer that. Also, it is better for children here than in the city.

**If you look around in the environment here, what do you find the most beautiful? Maybe something I can take a photo of. Or maybe something like how it smells etc.**

You can do water-sports here, I like to do that, e.g. in Blauwestad. And I think what is also nice is the old centre, the old core. If you are in Winschoten, for example, the old centre is really nice. It’s peaceful but does serve a specific function for the region. They have been renovating and cleaning up the city a lot recently.

**The Culture House Klinker is a nice building, I find.**

Yes, that is a very good example for a rural city that says “alright, we have a crimping population. We could cry because of it but instead we invest. Through that investment we can make the region more attractive”. That may take a few years but then something will happen. It is important that we persist and keep investing, then the crimp may be reduced. For example, there are many Germans coming to Winschoten on Sundays [when stores in the Netherlands are open but stores in Germany are closed]. A city like that is very inviting for young people. We have a great airport very close to us with the Airport Bremen but you still do not have the feeling of sitting under the planes’ wings. We

also have Airport Eelde but the train connection is not good enough yet, also not to Hamburg. The Dutch and the German governments need to pay more attention to the countryside.

[CLOSING]

Description: summary of transcript and comments

**1. Corporate Culture / Market**

- wish to “bring up the best”
- proud to have a unique source of raw material

**2. Market**

- Little competition

**3. Innovation**

- 4. dissatisfied with the extent to which innovation is incorporated as part of the corporate culture

**5. Internationalisation**

- 90% of customers are not Dutch.
- Always eager to hire interns and employees from abroad

**6. USP of SEG**

- Balance
- Location
- Infrastructure

**7. Internship Possibilities**

- E.g. energy storage solutions based on magnesium

**8. The Region**

- Biggest impact as an important employer
- Values that the people are hands-on hard workers

AFS, 2006

D. NOVARIET / POLYTECH

<b>Interview file n°:</b> 4	<b>Date:</b> 05.05.2017
	<b>Time:</b> 3 p.m.
<b>Main Topic:</b> Company Insights, region insights	<b>Duration:</b> 54 min.
<b>Primary research question</b>	
<b>Place:</b> Veendam	
<b>Name of interviewer:</b> Benedikt Wieferig	
<b>Name of interviewee:</b> Leon Eikens	
<b>Role of interviewee:</b> Director Novariet	
<b>Sub-topics:</b> Internships	
<b>Reason for interviewing:</b> Podium guest, industry	
<b>Interview nexus</b>	
<b>Main topic:</b> Corporate Culture	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incorporation of innovation into organizational culture</li> <li>- Corporate values</li> </ul>	
<b>Main topic 2:</b> Market	
<b>Main topic 3:</b> Innovation	
<b>Main topic 4 :</b> Labour market	
<b>Main topic 5 :</b> Internationalisation	
<b>Main topic 6 :</b> Internship possibilities	
<b>Main topic 7 :</b> The region	
AFS. 2006	
<b>Interview Transcript</b>	
<p><b>I want to start with the core values of the company. "From plastic granules to result, for and with the construction sector in Europe". The values are therefore are particularly cooperation, innovation, and international orientation. Is that the case or are there are other values which must be added?</b></p> <p>No, co-creation I think is different from cooperation. We also do that financially. And technological innovation and social innovation, the two differ. These are actually the eye-openers where we are right now. We are a manufacturing company, so granules, a technical product, is not a problem but the market, clients, adaptations and the end-users and social innovation is the main part of how you end up with the need for my idea of co-creation.</p>	

**So there's a difference to cooperation.**

I see a difference because in cooperation, it is actually more going after a goal together and co-creation has the same goal but different roads can lead there. And the supervision of co-creation is not there, and you also can formulate the power of control in a cooperative way of who does what and how we do it. And with co-creation you cooperate and work together, I think it's the new 'competition'.

**How?**

Through working together. Because you don't only look for a good product but also look at 'what is the purpose?' and 'how will it be processed?' and then you invite all the parties to look at it together and decide what product we want and then we all get something out of it. And that was previously not like that. Philips made the best TVs. And what you do with it, that's up to you. But that is now no longer the case, you want to offer solutions through products. But then you need groups of people.

**So that's a bit like Apple and Samsung. Each iPhone has quite a lot of components made by Samsung.**

Yes.

**So, we just talked about co-creation, and that was mentioned also as a something important in regard to sustainability.**

Sustainability surfaces through the circular economy, but what is sustainable? On one hand, you want a durable plastic knee but you do not want a sustainable package for your fries. You want that one biobased.

**You want that to degrade quickly.**

Yes. And so each application, and that is important when it comes to co-creation, every application has the need for other material properties. It is not enough that plastic is plastic. It is really the product and its applications that will soon determine the material properties. And you will see that soon with 3D printing. You have different materials for different applications. A shoe made of plastic needs to last two years, while the surgeon needs his 3D printer [to produce a product to last the coming] 10 years [...] or 100 years. These are different material properties and they will soon to go into the core values of the manufacturing industry as we know it from the plastics industry.

[conversation]

**Another question I had regarding innovation were the possibilities of how to improve your product or production. The answer was "*I like to be surprised every day.*" What exactly is meant by that? Who should surprise you? Or with what?**

We innovate every day, that is just in our DNA. So we do not innovate in a way that we think of an idea and that's it. No, the feedback, the back-loops to of our staff or of our customers in each call, from you right now, that is all included into innovation in half an hour. I am not saying that they all have to be big production processes as they can also be very small steps. But coming from the feedback loop of the environment, everyone, that is the innovation. And that can come from the newspaper or from the industry. Or the market. You don't know. But if you do not think about it for too long and just do it, then you get to new ideas and new products naturally.

**So, those are the daily surprises that you encounter.**

Yes, if you have trouble with everyday things go you innovate or invent something smarter, you do that yourself, too. You do that at home. We do this at the commercial level and we do it at home. But Darwin, he is who invented this. He said that those species or the people that remain are those which deal with the environmental changes. Someone holding onto what already exists and who does not change will eventually cease to exist. And those who innovate, they still go through and also adapt, and survive. I don't know the title of the book but you can go look that up from Darwin. You should know it as a student.

**But I study something slightly different [laughs]. Let's go on to the next question. I asked you what you are proud of. The answer was "innovative power through 'learning by doing' of the staff".**

**How is this achieved? Is that something initiated by the business?**

Yes, the DNA of the management. Motivating people, enthusiasm. Yes, nice quote recently was that 'if there is no way, we will make a way'. So we must always continue forward and not sit in "it does not exist, it can't be." It is always possible. Everything is possible. Only it may not be within a year or within ten years. You don't know.

**And it is also important to the company that the people continue developing not only when the company tells them to but also through self-study?**

No, we do not give the instruction for the innovation. The enthusiasm and motivation, which is what we supply as the management but the people themselves come up with solutions. We don't even know. There are meetings and that is also daily innovation that you sit together. And that also explains the hierarchy of all circles in the canteen and offices [round tables]. We sit together at a table and that results in that you put problem in the center and go around thinking about how you can solve it.

**Literally, yes.**

And that happened at each table at each different level. You have to imagine that the people who work with gutters that have another issue on their table as the people who work with the cane. But it's the same game.

**But just a different solution is needed.**

Yes.

**I want to come back to sustainability once more, but rather regarding the environment, so it's about biobased materials. Initiatives to make the product more durable are already being investigated, such as Stenden PRE. Is some contact Stenden PRE associated with their biobased plastics?**

Yes we are already connected with Stenden. Yes. And there's just nothing wrong with that but the problem that arises is that politics are too viscous, opposing it and it not supporting it, particularly in financial terms [which would be needed] to ultimately ensure a boost. Because the already existing basic home kitchen material is still so much cheaper than the biobased plastics. And on the contrary, you want both as a consumer durable product with 100 years guarantee while on the other hand have a bio-based plastic that

can't give you that. So you have to look a little at what product you have. And our products are not suitable for bio-based plastics at the moment because if I sell a thatched roof that will last 10 years, what would be the difference between natural reeds?

**It is still incombustible, that's the only difference, but that's probably a lot more expensive than natural cane.**

Yes, so therefore, it collides. That makes no sense. If I have products - we also have shoe racks and serving trays made of bio-based plastic from corn. That's not a problem because they only have to last 10 years. Then it's possible. But in addition, you have to find the right material property for the application.

**But if the roof than is sustainable in terms that it lasts long, then is it not important that it is degradable, right?**

Well, you don't want to have it biobased. But it is cradle-to-cradle. That's something else. That's something we already do, we make everything from one basic substance. No additives, no additions that may become problematic with new knowledge that become separated waste. Well, we don't want that. So we now have a chain molecular structure devised for this polymer. So in 100 years you can still say "that's NovaReed's DNA." And that's not a combination of different substances.

**So this so the substances don't turn out to be harmful or something. So it doesn't turn into a story like with asbestos.**

No, exactly. Because the asbestos, during the production they didn't know that this was wrong. Only 30 years later. And we want to avoid that with the knowledge we have now, so we've already thought of so we make a polymer without additives. And that's what Polytech has in all its products. Because with that, we are cradle-to-cradle. And this attribute is only given to you if you abide to it, too. And show it. That is not just an idle thought.

**Yes, people need to know it, too. So, that's also something that makes the product unique than you?**

Yes.

**Because I asked what makes the product unique and then the reply was that the products from "granulate to result". I thought that, with this explanation, that is not entirely unique because plastic is almost always made from granules to result, right? Or at least often.**

I don't know, that doesn't have to be the case. But what is unique at Polytech is that they all happened under one roof. And what you often see is that companies make granules out of powder or dry blend, and then comes another company which makes a product from the granulate and then there's another company that makes the product as wholesale logistics story. Then, others will use it in the construction sector and assembly and yes, use. So you have 6-7 companies.

**And you do it in a company.**

And here it's done in one [company], there are only two of those in the Netherlands.

**Okay, now it's clear what was meant by it.**

Alright, good.

**And I also asked if NovaRiet was the only substitute product for cane, which I do not mean alternatives like tiles ...**

Roof tiles are not an alternative to cane, it is a very different market. An alternative for reed would be ley stone. But it does have a different feel than cane.

**Yes, I mean really. That there is a kind of plastic reeds on the market or something. So that at all.**

No.

**Because that is a point that it is completely unique.**

Yes, that's a patent, valid for only one product. And that has to do with the niche market because the product is no market leader. It is not only the product whatever it brings success but also the co-creation with the thatchers and Polytech Experience Center where we are now and the factory. So everything under one roof. And that is the unique granule result, you will find anywhere at a production location.

**And then you have less transportation and anything.**

Nothing, very environmentally friendly.

**I would like to talk about the competition a bit more. The story on your website now is much about the safety, durability and appearance of NovaRiet compared to conventional reed. When I asked how NovaRiet can stay ahead of the competition, the answer was "to improve the thought process for building roofs through communication and through the story and roof management". What exactly does that mean?**

Solution selling. The product is subject to the service, the solution. You need a product for that but that already exists. Lying there. But it is not enough anymore to promote the product. You must have to move the applications and communication, and by that I mean the story, the narrative, the product, you need to bring that into the spotlight and if the people understand, then they need the product. Look, I don't have Apple or Samsung. What phone do I need to make a call? This obviously does not matter much, but it's a different feel, a different picture image, another atmosphere, another app store, you name it. It's basically the same. The story and the communication and the 8 dollar phone next to each other. It's brands.

**What I also found interesting was that even you can see that "the production of NovaRiet will eventually be executed by the thatchers at the project site as roof contractors on the spot, plug and play."**

Yes, look, what we are doing now is that we have a production and local politics and especially this region, doesn't promote the manufacturing industry and would rather be rid of it than have a lot. So eventually, I see it emerge that we will be working on the

brand and the product and its promotion but the production will happen on the site, so the thatchers do it. Then you spread the production location, you provide the recipe, and the Thatcher does what it takes. Through 3D printing. And it is still too early, it will take another 20 years. But it will happen on the long run I think.

**And Nova Reed is then supplying the basic material ..**

Yes, and knowledge. Because there is obviously not with the thatchers and which will then have to come, and that is the plug-and-play story. I did not know phones but I buy an Apple and I do [inaudible]. So I think you will soon be the new forms of production where not so much will happened in one location for it to then be distributed to the builder, but that just happened at home. And Thatcher is a craft which can really only be done in summer, so in winter they sit by the stove. And that is not working in our social system. So I foresee that, in the winter, the thatchers will make the reed in the barn and put it on the roof in summer. Then you have a closed yearly income cycle for the Thatcher, only if you tell them now then they laugh at you and tell you that you are crazy. But I think it will come on a 20-year term. It also went so with the gutters so that come on the car. And engineer who made those rails per meter, and later with the bike and later by car and in the past by bus to the construction site. So there went to the same. We are doing it with 3D printing. That's still pretty new but everyone has such a printer at home in 10 years.

**These are fairly inexpensive to get for home-use. They are not as good of course, they are not for the industry.**

But full-color print was also a disaster. They cost also 8,000 euros back then. And now nothing. It goes on like that. And I think that will soon be the next stage in the manufacturing industry. That's all consumer behavior that we see now but the business model and the manufacturing industry follows that.

**I would like to take a step back here and return to co-creation. The latest trend in the sector is becoming an "all-round producer, supplier, processor, under one roof. 1 point of contact. P2C "and this is done by" co-creation in project form". Do you have an example of such a project? Is NovaRiet such a project?**

Yes, it is a product project. Actually, all brands are different markets but through the stock exchange, WhatsApp groups, social media, you name it, it is, yes inbound and outbound, very significant, is linked with one another using the new forms of communication. And that is no longer "we do it once a month"-thing but that's 24/7. So, well, and communications companies that go out there and follow Darwin who survive, but those who only occasionally make a folder or an ad, this does not suffice. Because they are no longer snapshots, it is continuous. I see a business model but also a challenge in the new apps. And the app store. Because now, we are being provided by a lot of information but not yet addressed directly to right people. And the groups are increasingly diverse. So how do you create an overview in order to gather the correct community. Yes, and it's not sufficient to do this once or twice a month but you really need to come up with a process for it. For the new generation - or our generation, you are a little younger than me - we think in processes. We can not create anymore using our gut feeling. We are constantly thinking in step one, step two, step three and we come to a conclusion like that. And the process-thinking is ingrained in our generation and feeling is getting further away. And

that comes through technological progress and technical new economy. We will do everything with the thumb soon. And less communication and more "just google it", but who says this is right? So, you'll still convince people of a different process of communication. Because I foresee that what we do now, it stops. That is not going in the right direction.

[conversation]

**Then I'd like to ask something about being "international".**

Inside or outside of Europe? I see Europe as a national, ok?

**Okay, then internationally as in both within Europe and outside of Europe.**

Because we talk about national as well and the Netherlands is no longer a national matter. So we are in Europe and if you think national, I think that the next generation must think European. We won't go back. I don't think the Euro is going away, and the Eurozone. These are all people who are in the tradition, but it is a change that took effect no longer go back.

[conversation]

**So then nationally and internationally in Europe [laughs].**

**What chances does it give NovaRiet to be visible on the international market is that "research and procurement of sustainable materials and applications overseas moves much faster. Netherlands and especially the construction industry is quite traditional and conservative". So there are few durable materials available in the Netherlands from the Netherlands?**

Netherlands is not really ready. Still holding a lot of traditional ancient and our innovative thought and that is not open to many innovations. In construction, right?

**In construction, yes. Because I think differently Netherlands there is innovative stand.**

Yes, but Germany for example is much more innovative in construction.

**Yes, I see that at almost every house here.**

Yes!

[conversation]

**Are there any partnerships with companies abroad who are able to supply these materials?**

Internet, Google. That is the best partner, internationally.

**So then you look at Google how it can be done and where it is available?**

Yes. We now provide a thatched roof to Madagascar, Seychelles, Canada, New Caledonia. All via the internet.

**And how many customers NovaRiet has abroad has been "subject to the committed bet".**

**What exactly is meant by this?**

Well, if I go on the market in Germany I will have success in Germany. If I would be on the market in the Netherlands, I would have success in the Netherlands. So it depends on how much you invest in a particular area.

**And Nova Cane so much to invest in Germany?**

Right now, yes.

**So that's just the thatchers?**

Yes, they are more open to innovation than the Dutch.

**Okay, because I was honestly a bit surprised because the website is only available in Dutch.**

NovaRiet(dot)nl. And Novareet(dot)de? Did you look at that?

**No, I didn't know that.**

Why didn't you type in 'NovaReet' in German on Google?

**Because I thought .nl is the website.**

That is the culture difference. We cannot sell anything in Germany as a Dutch company. So we are a German company in Germany and a Dutch company in the Netherlands. And no crossover. It does not work. The photos for the Dutch customers are different from those for the German customer.

**So this is all adapted?**

Each country has its own website, yes. And its own marketing agency. Because you can not use it as the same. We're Europeans but there is no one European way of thinking. Danes think differently than Germans or Dutch.

**So no Novariet.eu? [laughs]**

No. Has no use.

**[conversation]**

**I quickly want to ask something about interns.**

I don't like the word 'interns' and would rather call it scientists or researchers. What is an intern? Explain that.

**Yes, an intern is someone who is a student or someone from school ...**

Yes a person, I understand that. But what is the function? I have an opening, what is now function of an intern?

**You can't say that because it depends on whether that person is in higher education or not.**

We assume excellent talent. I think the word intern is no longer suitable in 2017 or 2018. I think of it as an inferior word, not challenging, meaningless. It does not invite to come and see in East Groningen.

**So that will be something more like "student researcher" or something?**

I will not make that up. But I think for the research assignment I find it important that there is a persona to be conceived more as an innovation consultant. Someone who stands between the parties, has a non-commercial purpose. But who can say something on the level of content and can help and support.

**So not one who has to be taken by the hand and led through the company.**

There's no one waiting for something like that. Nobody wants a baby. I see interns as babies. But you go above level 4 then they are not interns. It is not an internship to try something out. Then they are also not babies. Then they're just people who know what they want for the future and how they want it. And who also select companies who just like that. And no diapers.

**Yeah okay. And the idea here is that the interns - I'll call it that for the moment - so that they can bring added value to the company. So that they can add to the company and not only learn something from the company, but also that also ..**

He must sell his passion and what he wants to investigate. We give him the tools and the knowledge and expertise we have, that's nice, that's easy. But he will first have to convince us of the goal and the idea of what he has in mind. He knows the generation to which he belongs. He also knows what he wants to investigate. And if a company says "I want him to investigate this" it is actually something for the archive. Because every business should have done this already and they actually do that because otherwise they are no business.

**So it is rather that someone will come and then "look what you can do and if you have an idea then say it and then see if we continue to do so." That's an interesting proposal.**

**[conversation]**

But people are too lazy, the students. They look for models and boxes. Anyway, that's not what it is to be a student. A student searches new ideas exactly between these boxes and they survive. Otherwise he stands still and a student may not stand still, that's why he is a student. A student must do just crazy things and land on his face and thus learn. Because if he doesn't do "learning by doing", so what does he get out of the internship? Then you have written a report.

**[conversation]**

**Then we go to the last question which is mostly about the region and the life in the region which is to be made attractive, too. For this question it is good to consider a little**

**bit. So, what would be something to take a picture of? What is a good aspect of the region which may have an impact on young people such as "there is something to do here" or "it's beautiful here," or "great nature."**

I only see the space. An aerial photo or so. The best thing about the region is the space it provides.

**So the space to grow?**

Yes, you can use that. That space is what the region offers. But it is true that the space, you can explain technically, socially, environmentally, economically, whatever. But what do you do with the space? That is from the space to the space here. But you can only imagine with a picture of a bird's eye view of the Ems-Dollard region. And not so much that this is a picture but I would want to see a video of it.

**It also involves the idea to have a visual way to the region a bit ..**

Yes, everyone likes it, I don't know if you know it from TV Noord that there are now driving down the street with a car and show the daily life in several villages. And so you can quickly fly with plane, you are in in Groningen 10 minutes and there you have an airport. Then you fly over that area in no time. And those are things that aren't possible everywhere in the Netherlands and that gives you a different perspective.

[conversation]

But what makes this area? I think that's the people who are here. You can just walk in any pub or shop and you will just be helped in Dutch. And there are other areas such as Budapest or Shanghai or any city that is not all safe. So safely walking across the street, playing safely in the street, the oxygen in the air, which is also different in Shanghai. So in what context do you look at this area? Well, this area is quite special.

[closing]

Description: summary of transcript and comments

1. **Corporate Culture**
2. **Market**
3. **Innovation**
4. **Labour Market**
5. **Internationalisation**
6. **USP of SEG**
7. **Internship Possibilities**
8. **The Region**

AFS, 2006

E. WASTE PAPER TRADE (WPT)

<b>Interview file n°:</b> 3	<b>Date:</b> 20.04.2017
	<b>Time:</b> 9 a.m.
<b>Main Topic:</b> Company Insights	<b>Duration:</b> 16 min.
<b>Primary research question</b>	
<b>Place:</b> Winschoten	
<b>Name of interviewer:</b> Benedikt Wieferig	
<b>Name of interviewee:</b> Harm Siebring	
<b>Role of interviewee:</b> Sales Director WPT	
<b>Sub-topics:</b> Region insights	
<b>Reason for interviewing:</b> Member of De Compagnons, industry	
<b>Interview nexus</b>	
<b>Main topic:</b> Corporate Culture	
<b>Main topic 2:</b> Market	
<b>Main topic 3:</b> Innovation	
<b>Main topic 4 :</b> Internationalisation	
<b>Main topic 5 :</b> Internship possibilities	
<b>Main topic 6 :</b> The region	
AFS. 2006	

**Interview Transcript**

(Siebring): I would first like to briefly explain who WPT is and what we do.

WPT (Waste Paper Trade) is a trade organisation, so it only buys and re-sells directly to the client. It does not come in to storage with us. At the moment when we close a deal we already know “oh yes, it goes there”. So, the product is never in our storage. It is bought, sold. Well, that’s what we do in all of Europe. We have 45 employees and somewhat around 10 nationalities, I think. From Russians to Croatians and Spaniards, Germans, Poles. Well, everything. French. So, in all those countries, we buy and sell. That’s our business. Mainly, that is paper but also plastics and also metal and other products. That’s the quick outlines of what we as WPT do. And of that, we do something around 1.5 tonnes per year in waste paper, roughly. That goes from one hand to another. We are a trade organisation, so the people are our mean.

**(Wieferig): And all of those employees are here [in the office]?**

(Siebring): No, we have around 45 employees of which around 30 are here. And there are 15 running around in the market. Those are all native people, so we have a Czech running around in the Czech Republic, in Croatia we have a Croat, in Russia a Russian. But all those people have a counterpart here [in the office]. If there is somebody running around in Russia, a field sales force, then we have a Russian lady sitting here for that. They can then communicate well. But they of course also have to know English or German.

**I just wanted to ask that. So, the language within the company is English?**

No, German. But it's changing to English more. Look, originally, we are Benelux, Germany, back then Poland. We're still 60% Germany. So, German, you know, that is a lot of German. But because we expand more it becomes more English of course. We are busy with a vacancy in Italy, well you cannot expect German there. Then it's Italian and English or German.

**And the people who work here, do they live in Winschoten? Or do they live e.g. in Germany?**

No, the Czech really lives in the Czech Republic. The field sales forces come to this office once every six weeks. So that we can talk.

**And the people who work here at the office?**

Yes, they live here in the area. We just took on a Russian lady, she lives in Assen, that's a half-hour drive.

[Conversation]

**Then I'd like to begin with the actual questions, if that's ok. Thank you for the insights into what is happening here.**

**I had already asked "What are the possibilities to become more sustainable?". The answer was "even more efficient focus on the gathering of waste and a good separation of waste". What would be necessary for that?**

That's very difficult for us because we are a trade company. We don't really ever see our product, yes? That's why I said that we think that we buy paper so the client puts the paper on the lorry and we bring it to the shipping address. But then the shipping address says, "that is not the quality we had agreed on". But we don't see it. That's why we have people in the field, our field sales forces. If that happens too often then he will talk to a buying address and will say something like "you are not delivering sustainable material", "you are delivering the wrong material", and then "if you want to keep doing business with us then you shouldn't throw bad material in there, it has to be a good product". That's what we can do. We are not the gatherer, ok? We buy off the gatherers. For example, such a "Landkreis" (County, administrative district in Germany), we do that often. We have agreements with such "Landkreise" that we buy everything they collect. And how should you deliver that? That's very difficult. But that is indeed the way that we go and for the rest I don't know. With sustainability, we can look at transport and think as efficiently as possible.

**So, import is a large part and maybe more quality controls, alright. I have also already asked what type of intern in terms of personality and education could add value to the company. The answer was "at least HBO ('higher work education') and who is able to do market research for us in areas in which we are not active yet". Which areas would be interesting, if you look at where you are not active yet?**

Well, we have Katrin, which is a nice example, she is doing the Bulgarian market for us. We didn't have anything there before that. But I had spoken to Trienke Drijfhout about Romania. But then they didn't have any students from Romania. And then I asked "well, what can you offer us then?" [laughs]. Well, she said Bulgaria so we said "Oh, we're not in Bulgaria yet. Well then we'll go for the Bulgarian market". Well, and now she is very active here which is also just nice to see. So, basically, we are just like with Italy. But we have already done research and are busy employing a field sales force. And Europe is not the limit so we always want to go further. It's basically unlimited, you could almost say, all the countries we are not active in yet. So, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Greece, we keep going further east, so to say.

**So, there are unlimited opportunities, nice. Then let's go on to the next question. I asked whether or not innovation plays a role in the corporate culture and how that comes to expression. "Not really a thing here" was the answer. Now, do you see the possibility of that becoming a thing? I know it may be difficult for you as a trade organisation but innovation does not always mean a new product or process.**

No, that can be working in new ways, or thinking about things from a different perspective. I have to say that, honestly, because we are a trade company, we have a focus on earning as much money as possible [laughter]. That's not very innovative. We are more innovative when looking "how can we tie more customers to our company, in different countries". So, we are in Russia but how can we get that Russian paper to buyers in Germany, for example. That was not possible in the past. So, then we look, that's also a kind of innovation.

**Of course, it is.**

Next to that we are also looking when trading. But we also now buy, and I don't know if you know what this is, baling presses? You stuff paper into it and then a bale of paper comes out. A lot of our clients have one but then they break or something is wrong with them. We now buy baling presses second-hand, repair them and offer them to our clients. Then we say "You know, you don't have to pay directly. Pay half of it now and pay us the other half in form of paper". That means that we tie the customers to us. Then they get the press and have to deliver paper to us. That's actually also a kind of innovation, we've only been doing that for a year now. That's how we try to think more creatively about "hey, how can we offer more service to the clients so that the client keeps buying from us".

**This press is being offered directly via WPT or, for example, by Virol in this area?**

They are also in the business but don't offer these presses. Sometimes Virol buys them for another company but we deliver them since we have the client contact. So, if the clients want to deliver paper to us to pay their bill, the press has to be from us, you know?

**Yes, I get that.**

Well, that's a little bit what we think is innovation and we are always looking for that. Also for other players in the market with whom we could work together. And, well, it's a family company so if there's business to get out of it, and even if it may be a bit different, we still do it, you know?

**So, it's not just restricted to ...**

No, we have just started also with metal. Our waste paper clients, our buyers, they often come by companies where there's also a lot of metal lying around. Then we say "hey, can we not just take a little ..." we are only talking about cans right now, the "Dosen" (German for cans), "can't we also buy those? Can they be traded?", yes we also look into that.

**There should probably be some money in that business, I think**

Yes, that is our kind of innovation, that we constantly think “how can we expand our business?”.

**But this may be more difficult in Germany, with aluminium cans e.g. for soft drinks, with the can deposit [enforced by law].**

Yes, that is difficult again. But look, we are now looking into Denmark for example, we just bought something there. And that’s how we always keep looking.

**Then let’s head to the last question, which will be about the region since it is the goal to also make the region more attractive and not just the companies. So, I asked “what is your favourite aspect of life in the region?”, to which the answer was “the space in the region in its widest form”. What exactly is meant by that?**

Just the space and that people here think in a specific way. You don’t sit right on top of each other so you also have some opportunities to develop and to take initiative and that is what we are looking for. We look for people who are creative and active and yes, there’s space in the region and you are given space within our company. And we keep saying that it is wonderful to live here because it’s not expensive, it’s a nice environment. For example, I would like to go to Amsterdam but I would not want to live there, right? [Laughs]

**And you can get there within a two-hour drive**

Yes, exactly, and we like to promote that. So, we always say it’s a nice surrounding to live in, in the wide sense. If that may be private or business, you can develop. We are also not, you know, in the west in Amsterdam its often a lot more stressful and we are much more relaxed here.

**So, you also mean the mentality**

Yes, exactly.

**Of what should I take a photo in order to express what the region stands for?**

Of the region? So, it doesn’t have to be as a company?

**No, it doesn’t. But it could.**

[Laughs] that’s pretty difficult

[Conversation]

But if would say that a combination with the region, we have a really nice building, right? So, when you get here you see the building positioned in the region and then you say “look, a company in full bloom in the region. A nice company, nice to see. Great to work for”, something like that.

**So, growing companies and nice buildings?**

Yes, and if you look we have took on 6-7 employees in the last years, so always more labour opportunities. We have given 3 young people from HBO a job last year so in the case of company-economic direction and in the sales service, we are busy with getting new talent. A dynamic business. So, a photo of our company, “a dynamic business”, that’s what we are looking for. That’s what we want to be and that’s we want to express.

And when young people come into the company they, I guess, also get a chance to improve, develop themselves. And maybe some workshops are being offered?

Yes, yes, exactly. We try to accompany them, are busy giving them training. We want to be a company where young talent can grow. It is well possible that, after two years, they say "I've been here for two years and don't have anything tangible" so then you may leave again but then we take on new talent until they do get something from it, then we get a trained person.

So, this is also to give people first working experiences in the work-life, so to say.

Yes. Above [storey above] we just took somebody on, the boy did have HBO but didn't get the diploma and was struggling to find a job. I happen to know him and knew that he is a serious guy and said "ok". We are not that strict that you have to have your diploma. Look, if you want to go to a big company, you need a diploma to get there, you know? And here is much more about "who is the person".

So, if you realize that the person, even without a diploma, can deliver value ...

Yes, then the diploma is less interesting to us. It is important but not everything.

And you never know. Maybe something went wrong or something like that so it does not automatically mean "he didn't pass, he was too stupid" or whatever, that doesn't have to be it.

Exactly.

[Closing]

Description: summary of transcript and comments

### 1. Corporate Culture

- trade organisation
- 30 employees work in the office in Winschoten
- 15 are field sales forces that work in the respective countries
- Family business
- Busy giving training
- Company where young talent can grow

### 2. Market

- only buy and sell products, do not see the product

### **3. Innovation**

- Innovation: looking for new ways to expand business and tie customers to the business
- Open for engaging into new areas e.g. selling metal and plastics and not only paper.

### **4. Internationalisation**

- highly international: 60% of the business takes place in Germany
- main language in office: German
- English is becoming stronger, too
- Expands to whatever country
- Expansion into any country could be possible (also outside of Europe)

### **5. USP of SEG**

- space to grow, privately and in business

### **6. Internship Possibilities**

- Expanding into any market by having interns from a country such as Romania, where the business is not active yet

### **7. The Region**

- The buildings in the area, such as their own building, show that there are companies in full blossom
- Not expensive
- Nice environment / nice surrounding to live in

**AFS, 2006**

F. Bruning (personal communication, 2017) explained that the company is currently busy exploring new usage opportunities for magnesium. Then, they will look for companies with which to start a partnership in order to produce the products. As of now, the next big project will be to create energy storage solutions using magnesium. This could be via storing heat or by creating batteries similar to lithium batteries. These could find applications e.g. in the automobile industry to replace the mentioned lithium batteries, since lithium is a scarce and dangerous resource (Bruning, personal communication, 2017).

An internship possibility could therefore be to find out how these batteries could be made and who could be a partner that has the know-how and technology to build these batteries (Bruning, personal communication, 2017).

G. The recruitment agency Pander & Lier, sees a need for a digital matching platform for their clients and candidates (Rotman, personal communication, 2017). However, the company does not have the personnel with the specific knowledge required to gather and analyse data about those searching for a job and the companies looking for employees and then utilize that data in script or programme (Rotman, 2017). Therefore, a potential internship could be for an IT student, perhaps in cooperation with an intern from human resources, to establish such a platform.

H. Pander & Lier see further need for interns in the organisation. As of now, the marketing of the company is handled by a partner organisation that is also affiliated with Mr Rotman (Rotman, personal communication, 2017). The company, however, is a one-person operation that has its priorities set to work for external companies that generate a different level of exposure and profit for the marketing company. Therefore, an intern in marketing could help Pander & Lier and also the other three companies affiliated with Rotman to expand their marketing efforts while receiving professional guidance from a marketing professional (Rotman, personal communication, 2017).

I. RSE Telecom would like to know whether or not they would have a chance to establish themselves on the German market. For that, market research would be needed to be conducted by an intern (Smits, personal communication, 2017).

- J. Waste Paper Trade (WPT) is always expanding to new countries and could therefore always use new interns from different countries to explore the opportunities and then to build up a network in their respective home countries (Siebring, personal communication, 2017).
- K. Novariet has a somewhat unusual idea for what they could use an intern, or much more a student researcher. The idea is to have a student first explore the company in order to then find new possibilities for how to innovate and find e.g. new products. The student researcher would work on his/her own project (Eikens, personal communication, 2017).

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

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1. At what kind of educational institution are you currently enrolled as a student?
  - a. Academic University
  - b. University of Applied Sciences
  - c. High School (or equivalent)
2. Does your study programme include room for internships?
  - a. Yes, for 1-3 weeks
  - b. Yes, for 1-3 months
  - c. Yes, for 4-6 months
  - d. Yes, for up to 12 months
  - e. Yes, indefinitely / more than 12 months
  - f. No
3. When looking for an internship, what do you find most important? Please rank from 1 to 5, 1 being the least important and 5 being most important.
  - Salary
  - Size of company
  - Location
  - Specific assignment
  - Culture within the company
4. Which traits do you look for when searching for a company to work for? Please rank from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important to you and 1 being the least important to you.
  - Drive towards innovation
  - Sustainability
  - Flat hierarchy
  - Success
  - Relaxed atmosphere
  - Profit orientation
  - Social responsibility
  - Location
  - International orientation
  - Multicultural teams
  - Being challenged
5. When finding a new location where to live and work, what do you typically look out for? Please rank (5 being the most important, 1 being the least important)
  - Nature
  - Nightlife
  - Housing prices / cost of living
  - Past-time activities (e.g. sport facilities)
  - Work opportunities
  - Chances for personal growth (e.g. education, development of skills, ...)
  - Quality of air
  - Student atmosphere
  - Culture (e.g. theatres, concerts, ...)
  - History of the area
  - Political parties strong in the area

- Family suitability (e.g. safety, education, health care, ... )
6. How likely are you to live in a rural area in the next 5 years?  
Not likely at all → Very likely
  7. How likely are you to work in the Netherlands in the future?  
Not likely at all → Very likely
  8. How important are grades to you?  
Not important at all → I want to be the best student of the course
  9. Do you consider yourself to be an excellent student?
    - a. Yes
    - b. No
  10. Do you participate in an excellence programme of some sort offered by your university or school? This could be any academic extracurricular programme offered by the educational institution (such as 'Honours Programme')
    - a. Yes, I participate in an excellence programme
    - b. No, I do not since no such programme is offered
    - c. No, I do not since I am not interested in participating
    - d. No, I do not since I was not chosen to participate
    - e. No, I do not since I do not see myself qualified to participate
    - f. No, I do not since I have no time to participate
    - g. Other
  11. What is your age?
    - a. 16-20
    - b. 21-25
    - c. 26-30
    - d. 30 or older
  12. What is your gender?
    - a. Female
    - b. Male
  13. What is your nationality? (If multiple, please choose the one you identify most with)
  14. Which country do you live in?
  15. What is your political orientation?
    - a. Left-wing
    - b. Centre-wing
    - c. Right-Wing
  16. Which languages do you speak fluently?
    - a. Dutch
    - b. English
    - c. German
    - d. Spanish
    - e. Arabic
    - f. Russian
    - g. French

- h. Italian
  - i. Chinese
  - j. Japanese
17. What kind of environment do you live in at the moment?
- a. Rural environment / Village (less than 5,000 inhabitants)
  - b. Town (5,001 - 40,000 inhabitants)
  - c. Small city (40,001 - 100,000 inhabitants)
  - d. City (100,001 - 500,000 inhabitants)
  - e. Large city (500,001 - 1,000,000 inhabitants)
  - f. Metropolitan environment (1,000,001 or more inhabitants)

**Question 1:** At what kind of educational institution are you currently enrolled in as a student?

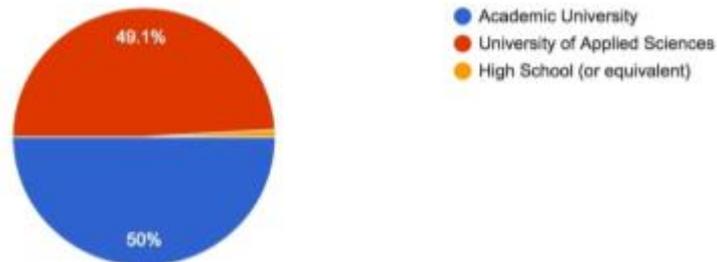


FIGURE 11: EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

### Justification

The question over which educational institution the students are enrolled at was asked in order to deliver a sense of which people were reached with this survey. This is necessary for the analysis of the following questions. This question does not deliver quantifiable data. Furthermore, it may answer what students from which kind of educational institution consider important and link this to the preferences mentioned by the interviewed company, if any when regarding the individual responses if need be.

### Results

The outcome is very balanced since half of the students filling out the survey are currently studying at an academic university. 49.1% are studying at a university of applied sciences. 0,9% are students at school with High School level.

**Question 2:** Does your study programme include room for internships?

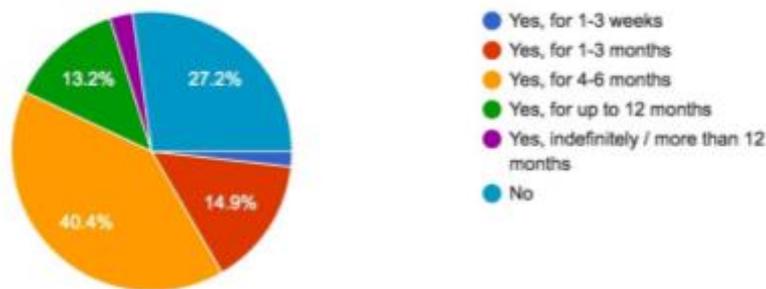


FIGURE 12 INTERNSHIP LENGTH

### Justification

This question is set to deliver general data over whether or not students are given space or obliged to do an internship during the course of the studies. Furthermore, it allows to get a rough idea to how long these internships usually last.

### Results

It is quite obvious, when regarding the pie chart above (Figure 12), that most students have room for 4-6 months of internship. Around 27%, however, are not provided with any time at all. Internships that are less than a month long are rare since only 2 of the respondents (1.8%) indicated that their study programme includes room for 1-3 weeks of internship.

**Question 3:** When looking for an internship, what do you find most important?

### Justification

This question was asked in order to deliver insight into what students seek for when looking for internships. The knowledge acquired may assist in creating the message of the online place branding platform.

The participants were requested to grade from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). In order to precisely analyse the outcome of this question, a scoring system has been developed. For example, 16 people indicated that salary was the least important to them, 28 said it was 2/5, 26 indicated 3/5, 10

said 4/5 and 5 said 5/5 in terms of importance, the amount of respondents was multiplied with the weight (most important = 5, least important = 1). Then, the scores were added to each other to generate the overall score of each aspect (e.g. salary). A complete list of the scores can be found below (Table 5, below).

**Results**

According to these scores, students mostly look for a specific assignment when looking for an internship (score: 332), followed by location (score: 328). Ranked third is the culture within the company (score: 322). The size of the company is rated as least important (score: 209) with the salary being only slightly more important to the students (score: 215). However, 10 people who had marked their answers for the other categories have not marked any answers for the possibility of ‘size of company’.

	Number of respondents					Score
	1	2	3	4	5	
Salary	16	28	26	10	5	215
Size of company	16	19	13	19	8	209
Location	1	4	21	39	20	328
Specific assignment	1	5	22	30	27	332
Culture within the company	1	5	26	32	21	322
	1	2	3	4	5	
	Weight					

TABLE 5: IMPORTANCE OF COMPANY TRAITS WHEN LOOKING FOR INTERNSHIP

**Question 4:** Which traits do you look for when searching for a company to work for?

### Justification

This question was asked in order to get insight into what traits in a company students look for when searching for a job. Again, the participants were asked to rank the answers from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). As was done for question 3, this question will be analysed following the same scoring system. The scores can be read in the table on the following page (Table 6, p. 140).

The difference between question 3 and 4 is mostly that question 3 is about internships in general while question 4 narrows the answers down additionally, mostly regarding corporate culture.

### Results

The results from this question show, that students value being challenged the most (score: 438), followed by a relaxed atmosphere (score: 424). Remarkably, not a single respondent indicated that a relaxed atmosphere was the least important for him/her in a company.

The third most important trait is international orientation (score: 410) with the fourth most important trait being the location (score: 406). Drive toward innovation (score: 397) scores as the fifth most valuable trait in a company, followed by success (score: 395).

The social responsibility of a company (score: 392) is the fourth least valuable trait in a company that students look for in a company. Multicultural teams (score: 377) and sustainability (score: 373) follow. Having a flat hierarchy in the company scored 335 points and is therefore the second least important trait. The respondents of this survey in total valued profit orientation in companies the least, despite 7 people having answered that it is the most important trait to them.

	Number of respondents					Score
	1	2	3	4	5	
Drive towards innovation	3	9	26	52	18	397
Sustainability	3	19	29	40	17	373
Flat hierarchy	10	22	36	27	13	335
Success	2	12	31	39	24	395
Relaxed atmosphere	0	5	23	50	29	424
Profit orientation	19	28	31	23	7	295
Social responsibility	3	12	28	44	21	392
Location	2	9	24	51	22	406
International orientation	2	17	18	35	36	410
Multicultural teams	7	16	26	35	24	377
Being challenged	2	7	12	44	42	438
	1	2	3	4	5	
	Weight					

TABLE 6: TRAITS LOOKED FOR IN COMPANIES

**Question 5:** When finding a new location where to live and work, what do you typically look out for?

### Justification

The fifth question follows a similar scheme like questions 3 and 4. Therefore, the scoring system will be applied once again.

This question was phrased to deliver insight into what students typically look for in a location where they wish to live and work. Again, they were asked to rank the traits from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important).

### Results

The scores per answer and how they are constructed can be found in the Table 7 (below).

	Number of respondents					Score
	1	2	3	4	5	
Nature	5	21	32	35	15	358
Nightlife	13	21	34	31	9	326
Housing prices	1	5	24	43	35	430
Past-time activities	2	6	23	50	27	418
Work opportunities	2	8	14	46	38	434
Chances for personal growth	3	6	21	46	32	422
Quality of air	12	28	36	23	9	313
Student atmosphere	6	23	29	39	11	350
History of the area	17	39	32	15	5	276
Political parties strong in the area	33	36	23	13	3	241
Family suitability	4	18	27	37	12	329
	1	2	3	4	5	
	Weight					

TABLE 7: IMPORTANCE OF ASPECTS WITHIN A LOCATION

As can be seen, the work opportunities (score: 434) found in a location are the number one factor that students look for when searching for a place to live and work, followed by the housing prices (score:

430), the chances for personal growth (score: 422), and past-time activities (score: 418). These four appear to be by far the most important aspects.

Next comes the nature (score: 358), a student atmosphere (score: 350), family suitability (score: 329) quickly followed by nightlife (score: 326). It has to be noted at this point that the aspect of 'family suitability' was ranked by 10 people less than the remaining aspects. The quality of air (score: 313) also plays a role for students looking for a place where to live and work.

More unimportant to the students are the history of the area (score: 276) and which political parties are strong in the area (score: 241).

As can be seen, the focus of communication efforts regarding the location itself could focus on the work opportunities given in the area. Since the businesses were focused on throughout the interviews, this finding resonates well with the clients wish. Furthermore, also the housing prices could play an important role in making the region attractive to students.

Chances for personal growth, meaning the possibility to further develop one's own skills e.g. through the educational institutions and past-time activities are the three most important aspects within the region for students. Therefore, communication efforts to display SEG could focus on these points. The development of one's own skills could potentially be linked to the possibilities provided by the companies of the region.

The messages, however, should not particularly focus on the political parties strong in the region and the history since that does not seem to interest students to a large extent.

**Question 6:** How likely are you to live in a rural area in the next 5 years?

### Justification

The question on how likely the students see themselves living in a rural environment in the next 5 years was phrased in order to gain knowledge about how desirable rural areas in general are to the general student demographic. The answers have been visualized in a bar graph (Figure 13, below).

### Results

The possible answers range from 1 (not likely at all) to 5 (very likely). It is noteworthy that only 16.8% of the students who responded to this survey see it as very likely or fairly likely to live in a rural area in the future. 26.5% seem to be undecided, since they marked the middle answer.

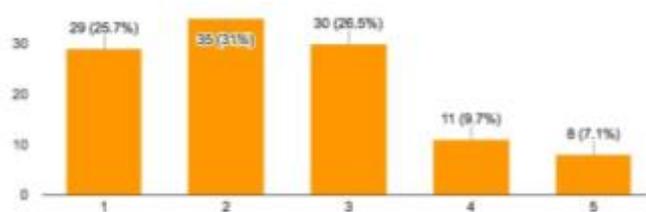


FIGURE 13: LIKELINESS OF LIVING IN A RURAL AREA (IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS)

However, 56.7% indicated that it is not likely at all or not likely for them to live in a rural area within the next 5 years.

The responses show that majority of students does not find it appealing to live in a rural environment. Therefore, the cities within the area such as Winschoten, Stadskanaal or Blauwestad could be highlighted.

**Question 7:** How likely are you to work in the Netherlands in the future?

Justification

To ask whether or not students could imagine working in the Netherlands, it was the purpose to identify whether or not there was a general wish for people to live in the Netherlands, regardless of whether they are Dutch or not.

Results

When asking how likely the students perceive it to be for them to work in the Netherlands in the future, the answers spread rather evenly between 1 (not likely at all) and 5 (very likely). As can be seen in Figure 14 (below), 22.8% of the respondents have marked the middle option and thus not seeing it as particularly likely or unlikely to work in the Netherlands in the future. 38.6% find it either somewhat or very likely that they will work in the Netherlands. The same percentage consider it not likely at all or somewhat unlikely. Interestingly, each 17.5% have marked not likely at all and very likely, while each 21.1% have marked somewhat likely / somewhat unlikely.

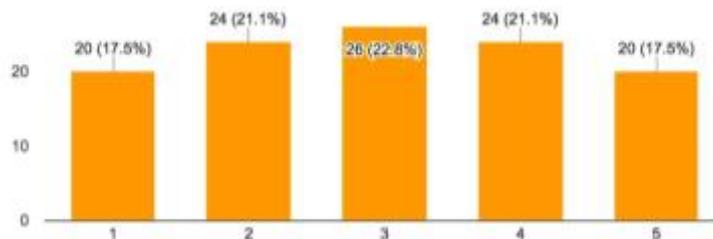


FIGURE 14: LIKELINESS OF WORKING IN THE NETHERLANDS IN THE FUTURE

## Question 8: How important are grades to you?

### Justification

Asking students how important grades are to them was to serve the purpose of finding out how driven the demographic of students are towards receiving high grades. For that, the participants were asked to rank how important grades are to them from 1 (not important at all) to 7 (I want to be the best student of the course). The results are presented in Figure 15 (below).

### Results

Remarkably, well over 50% (54.4%) indicated that grades do matter to them but they do not have the drive to be the best student in their courses. Only 12.3% said that they do have that drive.

However, a combined 19.3% also indicated to find grades not important at all or not very important. That is just slightly more than people who appear to find grades neither important nor unimportant (14%).

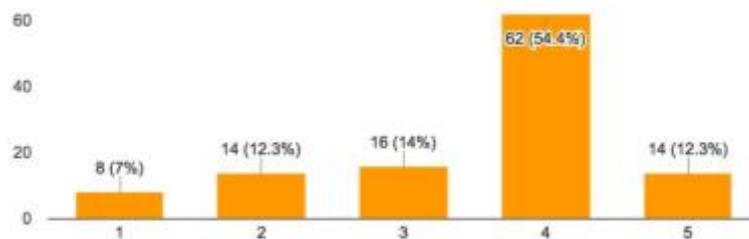


FIGURE 15: IMPORTANCE OF GRADES TO THE STUDENTS

As the responses indicate, there seems to be no dominant drive to be the highest achieving student. However, more than half of the students indicated that grades to play a role. Nonetheless, it may be difficult to categorise these students as 'excellent students' which brings up the question whether or not only excellent students should be targeted.

**Question 9:** Do you consider yourself to be an excellent student?

### Justification

The question whether or not the students see themselves as excellent students had the purpose of finding whether or not these students would feel spoken to when addressed as 'excellent students'.

### Results

It showed that slightly more than half (51.8%), would not. This can be seen in the pie chart below (Figure 16).

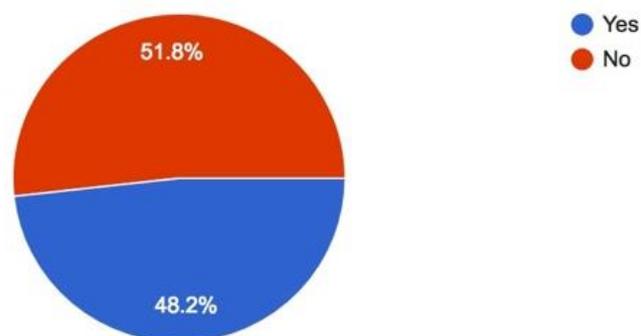


FIGURE 16: SELF-CONSIDERATION AS 'EXCELLENT STUDENT'

Building on the previously asked question, it appears that nearly half of the students do perceive themselves as excellent students. That means that of the 66,7% of students who value grades or even wish to be the best students in their programme, 18,5% still do not consider themselves as excellent students.

**Question 10:** Do you participate in an excellence programme of some sort offered by your university or school?

### Justification

To follow up on the questions before, the students were asked whether or not they participate in an excellence programme offered by their university or school.

### Results

As can be seen in Figure 17 (below), of all 114 students who responded to this survey, over one fifth (22.8%) are participating in an excellence programme. Another 18.4% do not since none is offered at their educational institution.

However, nearly a quarter (24.6%) mention their lack of interest in participating in such programme as reason for not participating, while 13.2% indicated that they do not participate simply because they do not see themselves as qualified to participate.

More reasons for not participating in an excellence programme is no time (12.3%) and that they were simply not chosen to participate (5.3%). Of the four respondents who marked 'other', one had previously participated in an excellence programme during a Bachelor's course and 3 others do not participate in a programme.

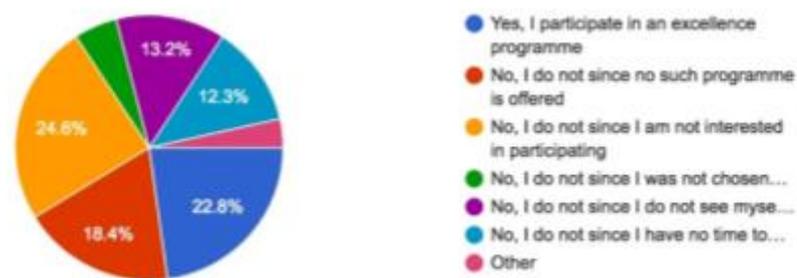


FIGURE 17: PARTICIPATION IN EXCELLENCE PROGRAMMES

The previous two questions showed that it may not ultimately be possible to define as excellent students by the extent to which they value grades or wish to be the best student of the course. The participation in an excellence programme also does not seem to help define the term 'excellent students' since only 22.8% participate in such a programme. Since 18.4% indicated that no excellence programme is offered at their educational institution, it is potentially possible that roughly 40% would like to participate in such programme.

In general, it could be said that excellent students are those interested in extracurricular activities of academic nature. In terms of communication channels, it could therefore make sense to include excellence programmes to further spread the information among their students.

### Question 11: What is your age?

#### Justification

Since the survey was only filled out by students, this question serves as additional proof that mainly young people were asked.

#### Results

The fact that only one student (0.9%) who filled out the survey was aged 30 or above, it can be said that the survey shows opinions of people belonging to the younger generations.

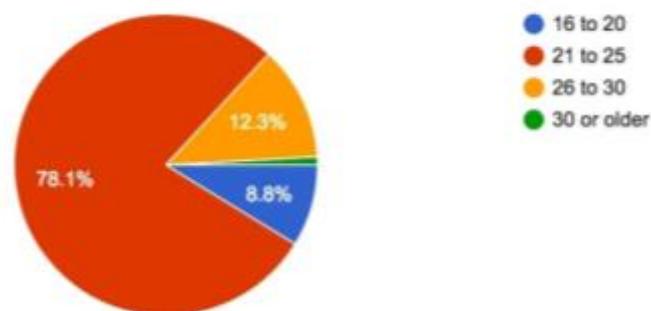


FIGURE 18: AGE

**Question 12:** What is your gender?

Justification

The question for the participants' gender was, again, a formality so that the survey serves the general group of students and not exclusively female or male students.

Results

Due to the fact that 62.3% percent of the respondents are female, it could be argued that the survey primarily depicts the opinions of female students.

One respondent indicated not to believe in the importance of gender.

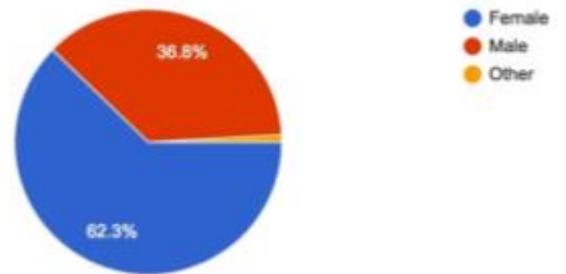


FIGURE 19: GENDER

### Question 13: What is your nationality?

#### Justification

Asking the participants for their nationality (or the one they primarily identify with) serves the purpose of getting an idea of the reach of the survey and therefore whether or not the survey offers the general opinions of students from everywhere around the world. Next to that, knowing where the students who answered the survey are from is crucial for answering the research questions regarding Dutch and international students, especially German students.

#### Results

The outcomes of this question can be viewed in the table (Table 8, right).

Interestingly, most students who answered the survey are German (47 respondents, 42%), followed by Dutch students (33 respondents, 29,5%). The third biggest group of students is American (5 respondents, 4,5%). The remainder of respondents are from various nationalities.

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>American</i>	5	4,46%
<i>Belgian</i>	1	0,89%
<i>British</i>	2	1,79%
<i>Bulgarian</i>	2	1,79%
<i>Czech</i>	3	2,68%
<i>Danish</i>	1	0,89%
<i>Dutch</i>	33	29,46%
<i>Estonian</i>	1	0,89%
<i>Finnish</i>	1	0,89%
<i>French</i>	2	1,79%
<i>German</i>	47	41,96%
<i>Ghanaian</i>	1	0,89%
<i>Greek</i>	1	0,89%
<i>Indian</i>	1	0,89%
<i>Irish</i>	2	1,79%
<i>Malaysian</i>	1	0,89%
<i>Peruvian</i>	1	0,89%
<i>Portuguese</i>	1	0,89%
<i>Spanish</i>	1	0,89%
<i>Swiss</i>	1	0,89%
<i>Taiwanese</i>	3	2,68%
<i>Ukrainian</i>	1	0,89%

TABLE 8: NATIONALITY OF RESPONDENTS

**Question 14:** Which country do you live in?

Justification

Asking in which country the participants live delivers insight over how widely the audience is spread. The different countries of residence of the students who replied to the survey can be found in Figure 20 (below).

Results

It could be observed that 55 of the students who responded to the survey currently reside in the Netherlands. Another 30 live in Germany. Third place is held by Portugal and fourth is shared by Czech Republic, France, Taiwan, and the USA.

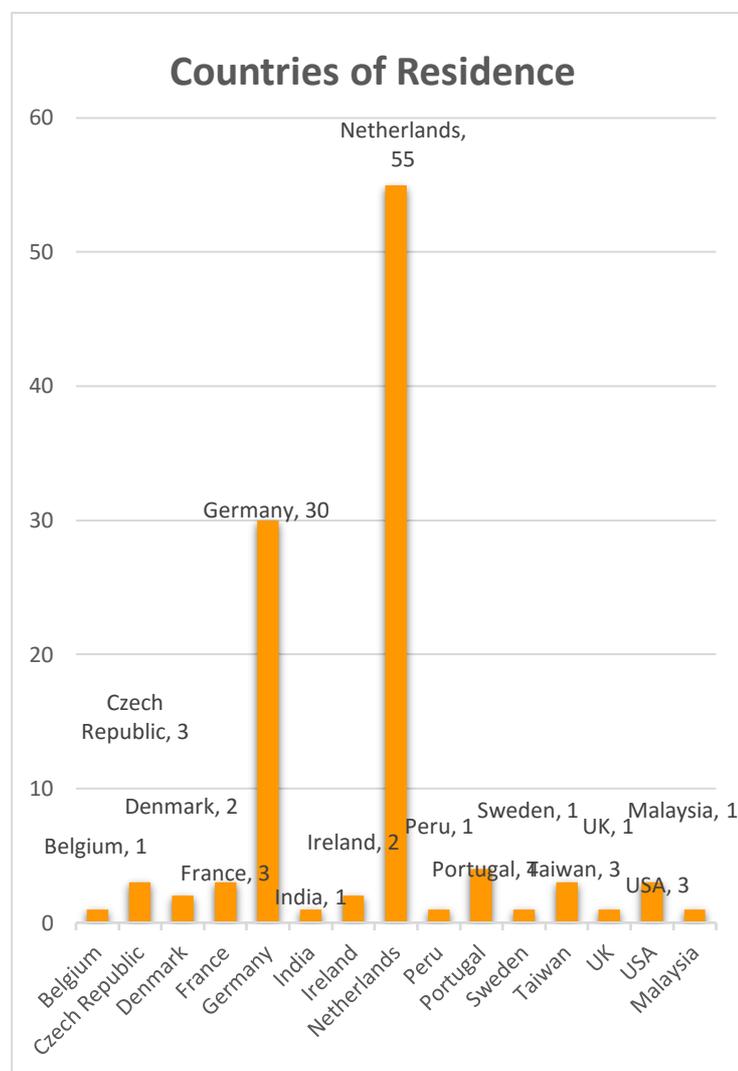


FIGURE 20: COUNTRIES OF RESIDENCE

**Question 15:** What is your political orientation?

Justification

Asking the sample group for their political orientation may deliver insights into how compatible the people are and, if applicable, whether or not students are interested in politics in general. This question can be linked to question 5 where it is asked how the students would rank the importance of the political parties strong within the region.

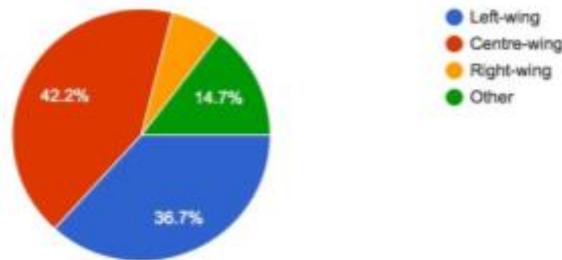


FIGURE 21: POLITICAL OPINIONS

Results

Some of the students who replied 'other' do not have a formed political opinion at all or do not wish to identify with either due to the strongpoints and weaknesses of each wing. Others used the option to add specifications to the field like "left-wing moderate", "middle right". Another fraction used the option to add their opinion if they felt it was not represented, like "liberal" (or also "libertarian"). These outcomes are presented in Figure 21 (above). Five people decided not to answer this question.

However, since which political parties are strong in the area in general does not seem to play a major role, the outcomes of this questions serve a decreased significance than it would have been the case if the political sphere of the environment was deemed more important by the students.

## Question 16: Which language(s) do you speak fluently?

### Justification

Asking which languages are spoken fluently was to generate an overview over e.g. how many people speak English, German and Dutch as an addition to the secondary research conducted.

### Results

As it shows in Figure 22 (below), 96.5% of the respondents indicated that they speak fluent English. This, as may be argued, may be distorted due to the fact that the survey was in English which may have inhibited anyone who does not speak fluent English to participate.

However, seeing that more than half of the respondents (53.1%) say to be fluent in German and over a third (35.4%) consider themselves fluent in Dutch shows that these three languages may be the most important among the audience reached.

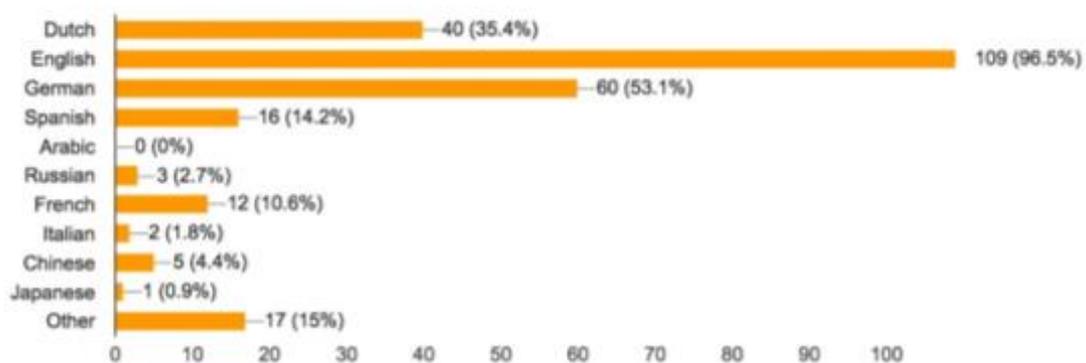


FIGURE 22: FLUENT LANGUAGES

Insignificantly, 14.2% of the students speak Spanish and 10.6% speak French. The 'other' section, marked by a total of 15%, includes a fair amount of more central / eastern European languages such as Czech, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Estonian, and Greek. Individually, however, the individual languages here were not often indicated by more than one respondent each.

The extent to which students speak English fluently shows, that communication in English is likely to be eligible by nearly every student, no matter where they come from. Perhaps

**Question 17:** What kind of environment do you live in at the moment?

Justification

Finding out in which kind of environment students typically live at the moment may indicate how opinions were formed.

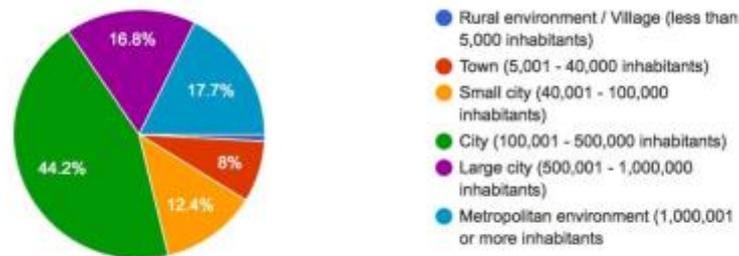


FIGURE 23: STUDENT LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

Results

As the results show, 44.2% of students who answered this poll live in a city with 100,001 – 500,000 inhabitants. 17.7% live in a metropolitan environment with more than one million inhabitants. 16.8% live in a large city with 500,001 – 1,000,000 inhabitants, 8% live in towns with 5,001 – 40,000 inhabitants and only one respondent (0.95%) lives in a rural environment or village with less than 5,000 inhabitants.

Since so few people who now live in a rural environment - which can possibly be attributed to the locations of the educational institutions which tend to exist in cities - answered the survey, this may show why most of the students indicate that they do not see themselves living in a rural area within the coming 5 years.

## ABILITY TO INTERNATIONALISE AT THIS POINT

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### UNABLE TO INTERNATIONALISE AT THIS POINT

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RSE Telecom, a telecommunication company from Winschoten, operates in a way of avoiding the risk of going into unestablished terrain where they would perhaps be unable to benefit from the strong network that they have built in the Netherlands (Smits, 2017).

Pander & Lier, a recruitment agency from the same city, operates in similar fashion. Instead of e.g. expanding to international markets and labour markets, the company prefers to operate in the area of which they are well accustomed to the culture, competition, and laws (Rotman, personal communication, 2017). However, Rotman also said that he does see the company going international once it is more established. He mentions to see the company go abroad in 10-15 years.

### ABLE TO INTERNATIONALISE AT THIS POINT

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On the other hand, Nedmag, Waste Paper Trade (WPT) and Novariet show to be very much able to internationalise and have already done so effectively.

Nedmag is a company that operates mostly internationally (Bruning, personal communication, 2017). The strong international orientation has established itself from the beginning onwards when the company started producing fire-proof bricks that especially found buyers outside of the Netherlands and it can surely be said that it has become a part of the corporate culture.

Next to that, the company has a large number of international employees and interns working at their company in various different departments. Furthermore, they are always looking for additions to their team from abroad (Bruning, personal communication, 2017). Bert Jan Bruning, the director of Nedmag, explained that the language barrier is less evident in the mining business due to its international nature, resulting in the language of business being English (Bruning, personal communication, 2017). Therefore, it can be said that some companies in the region adapt their recruiting strategy well to the market as well as the corporate culture but that often depends on the terminology of the industry and how international the industry is.

Waste Paper Trade (WPT) from Winschoten is a highly international company, trading recycling material, mostly paper. The company mind-set seems to be to expand to wherever. Recently, the company wanted to expand to Romania and therefore looked for an intern to assist them in doing that. Since only an intern from Bulgaria was found, the company decided to expand to Bulgaria instead

(Siebring, personal communication, 2017). This kind of flexible attitude towards innovation is something quite unique among the businesses interviewed in the region since most show a kind of reserved behaviour into entering new markets. Possibly, this can be attributed to the industry WPT is active in. The strategy of WPT is to employ people from the countries in which they wish to expand. Typically, there is also one employee in each country at all times. Since the company is active in many different countries, this shows how international the team that WPT has gathered is (Siebring, personal communication, 2017).

Novariet, a company subordinate to Polytech Kunststoffen (English: Polytech Plastics), is the inventor and producer of an innovative artificial reed for roofing (Eikens, personal communication, 2017). They also operate internationally but with the mentality to act as a company from whichever country in which they are active. Therefore, there is not only [www.novariet.nl](http://www.novariet.nl) but also [www.novareet.de](http://www.novareet.de) (Eikens, personal communication, 2017).

#### INNOVATION AS PART OF CORPORATE CULTURE: LACK OF INCORPORATION

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Nedmag, a large company known for mining minerals such as magnesium, is an example for that since the director, Bert Jan Bruning, stressed that he is dissatisfied with the extent to which innovation is included in their corporate values (Bruning, personal communication, 2017).

Jorg Rotman of Pander & Lier, a recruitment agency, says that the wish to have innovation as part of the corporate culture is definitely given but fails on the level of execution (Rotman, personal communication, 2017). Rotman further mentions that it is tough for small companies to face the multinational corporations in terms of innovation due to a lack in workforce and perhaps most crucially in budget. In some cases, like the case of Nedmag, it sometimes simply lacks the focus and the perseverance in making time to brainstorm about innovation (Bruning, personal communication, 2017).

According to Rotman (2017), Pander & Lier is lacking in power to execute innovation which can be countered by employing more people, taking on interns and applying the concept of 'lean thinking'. By that he means the facilitation of processes to make them as uncomplicated and therefore as time-saving as possible. So far, innovation is something that is rather left to start-up companies (Rotman, personal communication, 2017).



ANTI-PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

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I herewith certify that I am the sole author of the attached paper without having used any other primary and/or secondary sources other than those indicated and referenced appropriately.

All passages in the paper used from published and/or unpublished texts have been acknowledged by source references and are included in the attached bibliography/reference list.

This paper has not previously been submitted in its present, or similar form.

Signature: .....

Signed by

Student name: .....

Student number: .....

Town: .....

Date: .....