

Sense of place in the St. Johannes de Doper church

*Exploring the importance of a religious place for international students of
the Wageningen University & Research*



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September 2022

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MSc Thesis
Wageningen University

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Examiner: JSC (Han) Wiskerke

Master programme: International Development Studies

Specialization: Sociology of Development

Chair group: Rural Sociology Group (RSO)

Course code: RSO80436

Thesis period: November 2021 – September 2022

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Preface

This thesis has been written to fulfill the graduation requirements for my Master's degree in International Development Studies (MID) with the specialization Sociology of Development. This research gave me the opportunity to further explore my interest in the relation between people's religious engagement and societal development. Coming from Suriname and having studied for a few years in Brazil, I have seen within those religious landscapes how people actively contribute to the development of their community, through religious engagement. As my religious identity is Roman Catholic, this research has led me to reflect on my positionality as a researcher and the impact of it on the research process as all of the research participants were Roman Catholic as well.

I am deeply grateful to Bettina Bock and Anke de Vrieze for their careful reading and thoughtful comments during the entire research process. In addition, I wish to thank Henri ten Have, pastoor of the Zalige Titus Brandsma Parish, for allowing me to conduct research within the St. Johannes de Doper church in Wageningen. Lastly, I wish to thank all anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback.

I hope you enjoy reading!

Mitch Busropan

Wageningen, September 2022

Abstract

This thesis explores the importance of the St. Johannes de Doper church as a meeting place and religious driver of development for international students of the Wageningen University & Research. The research makes a turn to *place* and adopts the lens of *sense of place*, which allows the researcher to zoom into four dimensions of the church, namely the *physical*, the *social*, the *religious* and *societal development*. Using qualitative research techniques i.e., participant observation, in-depth and semi-structured interviews, participants tell their stories on the importance of their engagement with different elements within the four dimensions of the place. The findings have shown that the St. Johannes de Doper church is of significant importance for all respondents. However, not all four dimensions were considered equally important by them. Firstly, all of the respondents expressed how the St. Johannes de Doper church awakens a *sense of home* and a *sense of belonging*. Secondly, the majority of the respondents participate in the St. Johannes de Doper church mostly for religious purposes. Their religious experience is to a greater degree intertwined with the social dimension and to a lesser extent with the physical place. Thirdly, the church is a driver of social engagement that international students highly value, especially the international character and the presence of people and social activities that drive social engagement. Fourthly, the participants emphasized the importance of acting as a community, for the benefit of the religious community and for society in general. The participants expressed how the church as a driver of societal development engagement encourages them to actively engage and create new services as a community. This thesis does not only add to the existing amount of literature on the benefits of religion for people's well-being, but it also indicates the importance of studying place from the lens of sense of place. Thus, recognizing the role of people in places.

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1. Introduction

Is religion nowadays still considered important by people? This general initial question triggered me to explore the extent to which religion still holds an important place in people's life and how religious engagement gives people a sense of meaning. A number of researchers discovered that people find a sense of meaning through religious engagement (Krause , Hill, & Ironson , 2019; Hood , Hill, & Spilka , 2018; Flanely , Galek, Ellison , & Siltan , 2015; Krause , Hayward, Bruce, & Woolever , 2013; Steger & Frazier , 2005). However, there is less consensus on how exactly religion carries out this function. Krause, Hill & Ironson (2019) argue that this problem is caused by the fact that religion is a complex phenomenon with multiple dimensions. Different elements of religion can be related to meaning-making e.g., participation in religious services (Schnell & Pali, 2013). Others state that meaning is found in the process of committing oneself to religion (Krause , Hill, & Ironson , 2019; Flanely , Galek, Ellison , & Siltan , 2015). Studies (Colón-Bacó, 2010; Nami, 2016; Rettner, 2015; Behere, Das, Yadav, & Behere, 2013; Cornah, 2006; Feder, 2020; Weber & Pargament, 2014) have shown that religion still holds an important place in people's life. Some scholars claim that religious practices become important for people's subjective well-being including their mental and physical health (Colón-Bacó, 2010; Nami, 2016; Rettner, 2015; Behere, Das, Yadav, & Behere, 2013; Cornah, 2006; Feder, 2020; Weber & Pargament, 2014). Around twelve hundred research studies and reviews (Koenig , McCullough, & Larson, 2001) have shown that religion positively affects the subjective well-being of elderly people and people with physical and mental illnesses in particular (Larson & Larson, 2003; Hsien-Chuan Hsu, Kra`geloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2009). The benefits of religion on other age groups such as young adults have been less explored (Krägeloh, Billington, & Sheperd , 2009). The fewer studies that have been done on the link between religion and well-being on younger adults have shown that religion is associated with engagement in less risky behavior, and improvement in physical health (Wallace & Forman , 1998; Hsien-Chuan Hsu, Kra`geloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2009). Another study shows how religion/spirituality functions as a coping mechanism in stressful times, and as a source of strength particularly for international students who normally cope with more stressors and challenges (Hsien-Chuan Hsu, Kra`geloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2009). More recent research on the link between students and religion has focussed more on the effect of religion on academic motivation and performance (Khalid, Mirza, Bin-Feng, & Saeed, 2020), and the effect of the university on religious faith and practice (Hartley, 2004; Horwitz, 2021). In sum, much research on the

effects of religion on well-being have prioritized a focus on the elderly rather than on younger age groups, resulting in limited insights on the effects (beneficial or disadvantageous) of religion on young adults.

This thesis focusses on a younger age group, namely international students of the Wageningen University & Research (WUR). As discussed earlier, a number of studies show that nowadays religious engagement still gives people a sense of meaning. This thesis makes a turn to *place*, by investigating the importance of a religious place for international students in Wageningen. This religious place, called the St. Johannes de Doper Church, is located in the center of Wageningen and is especially known for its international community that consists of Wageningen University students and expats.

Why a focus on place? Place still holds an important meaning to people their life and remains an important component of social life (Escobar, 2001; van der Schaar, 2013). The St. Johannes de Doper church is a religious place where many young people come together and engage on a regular basis. Significant places like a church, contain emotional meanings, provide stability and security and may become fields of care (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). According to Mazumdar & Mazumdar (2004), the role of religion in the study of place attachment has been pushed to the margins. They argue that religion needs to be reintegrated in studies on place attachment, because religion is still important to people and may influence their private and public lives, but also their relation with places. Closely related to place, is someone's sense of place (van der Schaar, 2013). This study will be done from the lens of sense of place which is about the way people perceive the place and how they give meaning to the experiences in and with the place (Adams, Greenwood, Thomashow, & Russ, 2017; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). According Mazumdar & Mazumdar (2004), there is a lack of research on people's relationship with religious places. While there is a lack of research, there is also a resurgence of interest in the study of people's relations with places (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). This thesis reacts to this lack by zooming into these relations, but within a religious context.

This research is focused on international students. Compared to domestic students, international students may in general be more exposed to stressors relating to acculturation and the absence of family in their nearby surroundings (Hsien-Chuan Hsu, Kraïgeloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2009). Religion is a driver of social and religious engagement and international students that are member of the church may already be aware of this (personal communication, 2021). The church may also be a basis of wellbeing and possibly give a sense of home and belonging to international students. The university focuses on knowledge provision almost exclusively, while not feeding or using religious drivers (personal communication, 2021). The St. Johannes de Doper church has attracted many international students who, according to initial talks

I had with the parish priest, vitalize the community and help the church to survive as a religious community and a place. Also based on initial talks with the parish priest, international students actively engage and create new services.

The St. Johannes de Doper church is surrounded by knowledge-intensive companies and institutes that are active in the field of life sciences. The religious community consists of a Dutch and international community and the context is a real dynamic one with many different members and inhabitants. This study, distinguishes four aspects of the place, namely the (1) physical, (2) social, (3) religious and (4) development aspects. It focusses on the importance international that international students attach to all four aspects of the place. This will be done through studying the meanings that international students attach to the place.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the importance of the St. Johannes de Doper church as meeting place and religious driver of societal development for international students.

Main research question

What is the importance of the St. Johannes de Doper church as a meeting place and religious driver of development engagement, for international students in Wageningen?

Sub-research questions:

1. Why and how are the physical features of the church important to students?
2. To what extent do social motives play a role for them?
3. To what extent do religious motives play a role for them?
4. How is the church as a religious driver of development important to students and how does the church relate to their development engagement?
5. What is the coherence between the physical features, religious and social motives and development engagement?

Relevance and justification of the research

Secular-religious dichotomy

Research has shown that the religious landscape in the Netherlands has changed significantly in recent decades. Where in 1960 around eighty percent of the population was Catholic or Protestant (mainly

Reformed, and a small part Reformed or otherwise), this is now completely different (Centraal Bureau Statistiek, 2020). It is important to note that while secularization may be on the rise in the West, religion is growing in several countries in the world (Flatt, 2017). Flatt (2017) questions secularization as the unavoidable future of religion. He states that it may just be one of the innumerable possible futures. The St. Johannes de Doper church finds itself in a secular setting which makes it interesting to further explore the importance of religion and religious places. The results may provide an idea of how people in a secular setting engage with religion.

Scientific relevance

The benefits of religion on other age groups such as young adults have been less explored (Krägeloh, Billington, & Sheperd, 2009). Firstly, this research adds to the literature on the benefits of religion on younger age groups. Secondly, this research contributes to the understanding of place attachments and place meanings within a religious context. Nowadays, much research is focussed on the 'external' behavior, e.g., institutions (van der Schaar, 2013). My in-depth attention to sense of place in particular, adds to the knowledge of 'internal' individual motives of people within places. In sum, this research contributes to a better understanding of the material and immaterial aspects of a religious place. The research also adds to our knowledge about the role of a church in the lives of international students.

Societal relevance

Policy makers, the parish, and the Wageningen University, may decide to use the results of this research for initiating new projects or activities that concern the well-being of students in general. By zooming into a religious place, valuable information about the relationship between people and their church will be brought to light. This thesis may therefore serve as a tool for the church and policy makers to understand the importance of religious places and the potential of community ties. It also touches upon the aspect of societal development, offering more insight on the role of churches in development and the way people of the church choose to engage with development.

2. Theoretical framework

This part elaborates on the theory and concepts that will be used throughout the research. This thesis makes a turn to *place*, by investigating the importance of a religious place for international students in Wageningen. For the study of place I adopt the lense of *Sense of place* which allows me to zoom into different dimensions of the church, namely the physical, the social, the religious and societal development. Sense of place is considered the main concept around which this research revolves. At the end of this chapter, I will present a table in which I describe how the theory of sense of place with its different dimensions are operationalized in relation to the dimensions of the church (physical, social, religious, societal development). The following paragraphs elaborate on the main concepts of this research namely, place and sense of place.

2.1 Place

This research is done from a relational perspective of place, which means that we look at place as a particular construction of social relations and understandings that stretch out over the wider world and eventually integrates the global and the local (Massey, 1994). Based on this approach, I consider the place within this research as an assemblage of these social relations and understandings (Massey, 1994). These social relations, meanings and understandings come together at a particular locus (Massey, 1994). At the same time, these social relations and understandings are established on a far larger scale than what we would call place itself, meaning that there are external influences and relations that shape the place (Massey, 1994). Graham and Healey (1999) refer to place as different notions, experiences and representations of space-time that keep running into and resonating within individual places. According to the relational approach, a fixed place does not exist (Massey, 1994). This means that while I study different dimensions of a specific place (St. Johannes de Doper church), I am aware that the place is shaped by different external influences and relations. It is therefore relevant to mention that the St. Johannes de Doper church is a church with a large international community of WUR students coming from different countries who in general join the church for approximately two years. **These students come with different ideas and may create, recreate and reform activities, thereby shaping the place.**

Massey (1994) states that real relations exist between the local and the global. In this alternative view on place, these relations are what matter. However, this research does not focus on the stretching of relations between the local and the global, but on how these relations are established *within* the St. Johannes de Doper church. From this perspective of place, I am conscious of how sense of place is constructed in what Massey (1994) calls a 'meeting place'.

"And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local" (Massey 1994, p7).

2.2 Sense of place

Throughout the research I keep in mind that places are linked to other places (Massey, 1994). However, the focus of this research is on the relations *within* the St. Johannes de Doper church and not on how they relate to other places. To zoom into the different dimensions of the church I adopt the sense of place model designed by Jorgensen and Stedman (2006). Their model introduces a multidimensional construct of sense of place in which the cognitive (thinking, reasoning, remembering), affective (feelings, attitudes) and conative (motivations, goal-orientation, will) areas of the human-environmental relations are included (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006). This model addresses the relation between sense of place and the relations with other places as well.

"...sense of place can be viewed as a general attitude toward a spatial setting, and a complex psychosocial structure that organizes self-referent beliefs, emotions, and behavioral commitments (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006)"

Sense of place consists of (1) beliefs about the relationship between self and place, (2) feelings toward the place, (3) the behavioral exclusivity of the place in relation to alternatives (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001) Based on their model, sense of place is structured through three elements, namely *place attachment, place identity* and *place dependency*.

2.2.1 Place attachment

Place attachment is the first element and can be defined as the positive relation that develops between individuals and their environment (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). This is about feelings and emotions that

individuals have towards a place. Jorgensen & Stedman (2001) state that this element sheds light on the interaction between feelings and emotions, knowledge, actions and behaviors regarding a certain place. In general, it is about the affective bond that people have with a place (Giuliani, 2003). Van der Schaar (2013), and Hidalgo & Hernandez (2001), note that individuals do not only get attached to the physical aspects of a place, but also to its social aspects. These two dimensions or areas of studies will be considered in the research, but a third and fourth one will be added. The third one is the religious dimension. As this research is done in a religious setting where people come together to pray, or do service, I find it important to pay attention to the religious aspects of the place as this may also say something about people their attachment to the place. The fourth area of study within the place is that of societal development. This is the more societal dimension of the church in which they act as drivers of development engagement.

2.2.2 Place identity

The second element is 'place identity'. For Jorgensen & Stedman (2001), place identity is about the dimension of the self, the beliefs an individual has on the self in relation to the place. They state that this happens through *"a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioral tendencies and skills closely linked to the environment"* (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). This means that in the case of the St. Johannes de Doper church, I will also consider the construction of a person's identity in relation to the place. Van der Schaar (2013) in her research on sense of place in the Schilderswijk, defines place identity in terms of the unique attributes and meanings of a place and the culture of it at a specific moment. The focus is on ideas that people have about a certain place and what they perceive as unique characteristics of that place. Within this research I will combine the two understandings of place identity. This means that I will look at the ideas and understandings that people have about the St. Johannes de Doper church (unique characteristics they perceive and that are important for them) and the dimension of the self, meaning how a person's identity is constructed in relation to the place.

2.2.3 Place dependence

Place dependence is the third element of sense of place and focusses on the quality of a place which can decide the extent to which a place can facilitate in achieving the behavioral goals of individuals (Jorgensen & Stedman 2001; van der Schaar 2013). So the question is whether the St. Johannes de Doper church (physical, social, religious and societal development) is able to realize the goals of its members. Within the perspective of place as relational, the study will focus on the St. Johannes de Doper church as a place that is connected to other places. This does not mean that the place becomes less unique, on the contrary, this study sheds light on the unique characteristics of the church, but these characteristics are seen as part of something bigger.

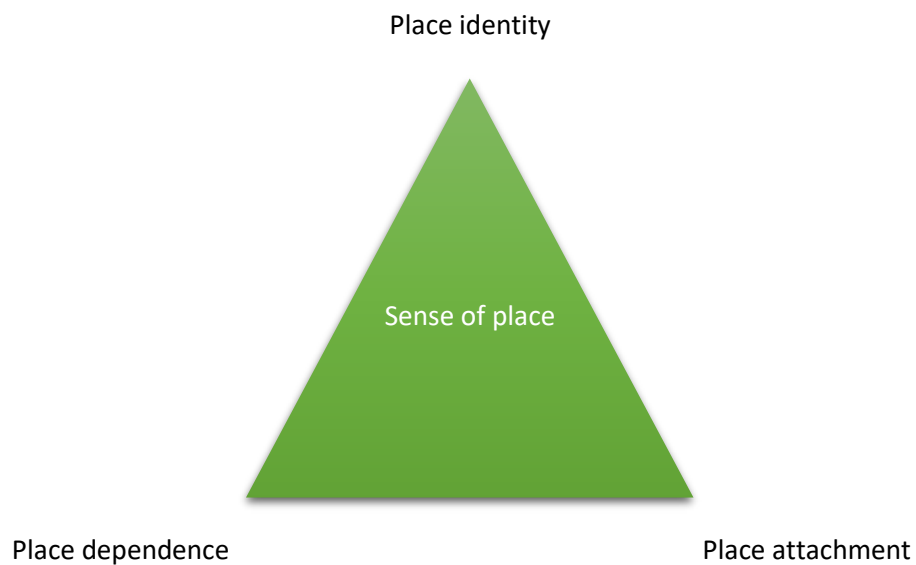


Fig 2: Sense of place (based on sense of place model by Jorgensen & Stedman 2001)

Jorgensen and Stedman (2006) note that scholars often apply measures of place variables that exclude the distinction between the three components of sense of place. Furthermore, this research focusses on a younger age group. Jorgensen and Stedman (2006) state that there is evidence that younger people think differently about places. Moreover, they state that the length of residence has no effect on *attachment* to the place.

2.2.4 The inner dimension

Van der Schaar (2013) states that these theories show that the inner dimensions are an important subject of research, but that in a lot of research it is still insufficiently exposed. Van der Schaar (2013) notes that in the social sciences, the focus is more on the outer dimensions of behaviors, institutions and systems. Grenni et al., (2020), in their study on the inner dimensions of sustainable place-shaping, state that sense of place and values expose the *immaterial aspects* of a place. They show that the inner dimensions shape the physical transformation of places and that the physical transformation of places, in turn, shape local meanings and values. While the focus of this research is only on the inner dimensions of place, I find it important to keep at the forefront how both dimensions affect one another.

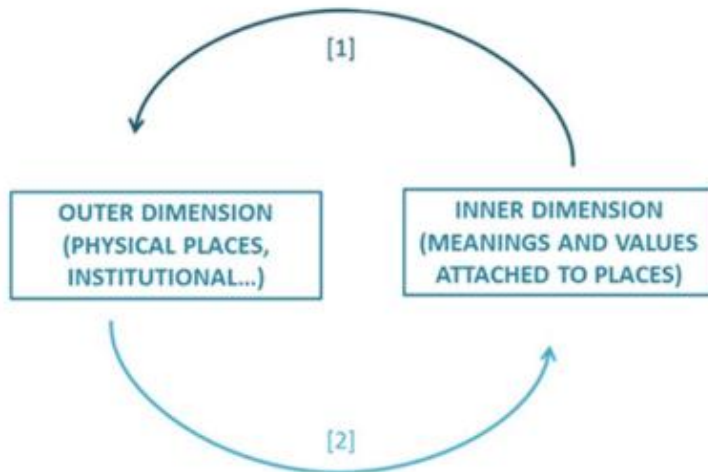


Fig. 3: The double process of sustainable place-shaping (Figure **reproduced** from Grenni, Soini, & Horlings, 2020).

Van der Schaar (2013) states that places are being valued by people and that people shape their place through the expression of agency. This thesis also explores the aspects which international students value and how these aspects causes them to feel attached to the St. Johannes de Doper church.

2.2.5 Place dimensions St. Johannes de Doper church

The sense of place model, as developed by Jorgensen & Stedman (2001), makes a clear distinction between the social and the physical attributes of a place. Therefore, within this research I distinguish a *physical* and *social* dimension as well within the St. Johannes de Doper church. Another prominent area

of research within this church is the *religious dimension* which I believe is important to include, because the St. Johannes de Doper church is a religious institution that contains specific religious teachings, religious values and norms. Furthermore, religion involves bodily and sensual activities which happen in religious places (Harvey & Takhar, 2021). Lastly, this thesis explores another area of the church which is that of *societal development*. An important area of focus of the St. Johannes de Doper church is called “Diaconie”, which is the branch that focuses on the societal work of the church. For the St. Johannes de Doper church, Diaconie is where belief and concern for people in their societal position, and their well-being, come together (RK Wageningen , n.d.). Their aim is to work together on a parish where people support each other in difficult circumstances and where there is a possibility to share concerns and commit themselves into making a positive change for people (RK Wageningen , n.d.).

2.3 Conceptual model

Figure 2 gives an overview of sense of place in relation to the four dimensions of the church that are explored. Furthermore, the figure gives an overview of how the concepts relate to the main and sub-research questions. In the center of the figure the concept of sense of place is positioned. Sense of place touches upon all four dimensions of the church, namely the physical, social, religious and societal development. Furthermore, the figure shows overlap between all four dimensions of the St. Johannes de Doper church. Through sub-research question 5, the coherence between the four dimensions and sense of place are explored. The degree of overlap between each dimension is analyzed in chapter 8.

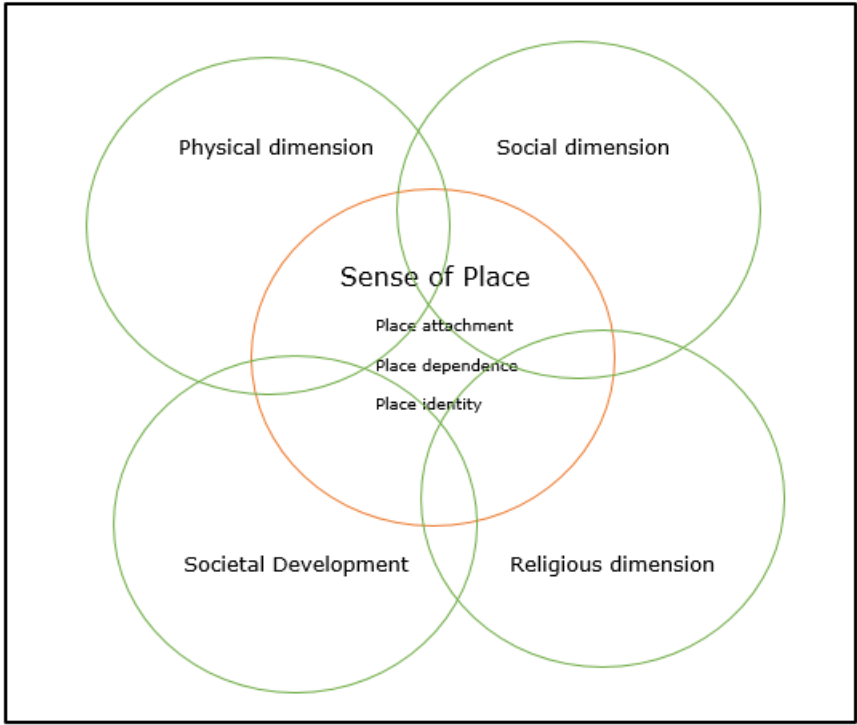


Figure 4: Conceptual model

2.4 Operationalizing the concepts

Table 3 presents an overview of how the different concepts are made more concrete in order to be able to explore them in the research field. The table includes the three elements of sense of place, namely place attachment, place dependence, and place identity. These elements are brought into relation with the four dimensions of the St. Johannes de Doper church. The elements of sense of place are explored within each of these four dimensions. The interview guide has been developed based on this table.

	Place attachment	Place dependence	Place identity
Physical	Positive feelings/emotions towards physical aspects of the church.	Physical aspects helping people reach a goal or perform an activity. Facilities related to the physical environment, considered important by people e.g., location, musical instruments. Organizational structures that enable people to perform activities e.g., community rooms, gardens, availability of sound equipment, etc.	Unique characteristics and meanings of the place (physical) as perceived by the respondents at a given point of time
Social	Positive feelings/emotions towards social interaction and social contacts. Importance and reason of contact/interaction	The extent to which social contacts help people reach a goal or perform an activity.	Unique characteristics and meanings of the social dimension as perceived by the respondents at a given point of time, e.g., multicultural aspects.
Religious	Positive feelings/emotions towards religious practices and activities.	Religious practices that people deem important and which help them fulfill a religious/spiritual need, e.g., catechesis, mass, prayer gatherings.	Uniqueness of religious characteristics of the place.
Societal development	Positive feelings/emotions towards engagement in societal development activities of the church.	The extent to which engagement in societal development activities helps people reach a certain goal or need.	Unique characteristics and meanings of societal development activities.

Table 2: Operationalization

Chapter 3: Research approach and methodology

This chapter explains how the research has been carried out through different research methods. This research aims to understand the inner dimensions of a place, meaning that it includes the study of human experiences, understandings, beliefs and motives. Therefore, a qualitative approach seemed most suitable as it does not assume that just one type of reality exists (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Adopting this approach allows me to consider developing a qualitative sensibility which includes reflecting on the *why* and *how* of things, identifying my own assumptions and not letting them influence the research, developing a way of active listening which may contribute to the production of more reliable, valid and richer data (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

3.1 Case study

The research methodology chosen for this research is a case study. A case study requires an intensive study about an individual or a group of people (Heale & Twycross, 2017). Within this research, the St. Johannes de Doper church and the international students form the case that will be explored in detail. This case will not be representative for the whole catholic population in the Netherlands, but it may or may not represent catholic churches in the Netherlands with a similar setting. With a similar setting I mean a church surrounded by knowledge-intensive companies and institutes active in the field of life science, and in terms of community it consists of Dutch and international members (mostly international students). When studying the uniqueness of a particular place, it becomes difficult to make such a study representative for a whole population or places with or without a similar setting. Regarding the representativeness I would argue that in this research the aim is to apply the results to better understand the importance of the church for international students. Future research may build upon the results of this study, for example by comparing this case with other cases.

Selection of respondents

Through initial talks with the parish priest who is the priest responsible for the Zalige Titus Brandsma parish, I gained permission to interview members of the St. Johannes de Doper church. The majority of

the respondents have been selected by me. I made use of snowball sampling, except at the start when there was a delay in getting the permission to use this sampling method.

The St. Johannes de Doper community consists of two groups, namely the Dutch and international community. It is important to not see these groups as separate communities, but as one community. There are activities in which the Dutch community and the international community join, e.g., picnics, parties, meetings regarding the work of the church). On Sunday there are two masses, namely the Dutch and the International mass (the same mass but in English). Sometimes members of the international community and the Dutch community participate in both masses and on special occasions, combined choirs of both Dutch and international members perform together. I noticed during the fieldwork that the two groups are not as separate as I thought they were since my first visit in August 2021. Within this research I focused on international students. The aim was to interview at least one member from every department of the church. I did not succeed in realizing this as international students are not participating in every department of the church. The parish council, the choir and the pastoral team are examples of departments within the St. Johannes de Doper church (personal communication, August 2021).

3.2 Methods

In order to develop the theoretical framework, I did literature study. Sense of place is the main focus, so through literature study I was able to provide a theoretical basis for sense of place and operationalize the three substructures: place identity, place attachment, place dependence. I also made use of observation while participating in activities of the church and this facilitated in conducting small informal interviews or rather, conversations, regarding the setting. I spoke with some members of the choirs, members of prayer groups and the parish priest.

3.3 Semi structured interviews

In order to answer the research questions, I made use of semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews for which I used a list of questions and topics that I did not strictly follow. It functioned more as a guide during the interviews. As this research is more about the feelings, thoughts and beliefs, open-

ended questions made it possible to dig deeper into the subjective world of individuals (through follow-up queries). These types of interviews created the opportunity for respondents to pursue themes that are of interest to them. During the corona pandemic, it was possible to still have interviews at the church itself. By taking a walk with the respondents, it became easier to ask questions about feelings, memories and beliefs towards specific areas in the place to better understand the members' physical attachment. I also observed and participated in some of the activities the respondent performs. This was useful in order to understand the respondents' story better. Listening to what the respondents say is important, but seeing and to a certain extent feeling what they mean, helped me to grasp their understanding of the place.

3.4 Data analysis

For the data analysis, I made use of 'thematic analysis' in which I followed Claufield's (2019) six-step process: 1. Familiarization, 2. Coding, 3. Generating themes, 4. Reviewing themes, 5. Defining and naming themes, 6. Writing up. I highlighted the different codes in the transcript with different colors in Microsoft Word. I eventually copied the different pieces of texts and pasted them under the right theme. These themes were reviewed and redefined.

3.5 Ethical issues

I clearly stated the purpose of this study and the matter of confidentiality to the respondents. I conducted interviews only if consent was obtained. Signing a document regarding the informed consent was obligatory. As this research is about religion, faith, feelings and other sensitive topics, I made sure that the respondent does not feel offended in any way by my own personal opinions or for example my facial expressions. I took the secular setting into account, meaning that I created the necessary sensitivity during the interviews towards people their openness towards topics concerning their faith, for example by asking them whether they feel comfortable with giving their opinion about a certain situation or expressing a certain feeling towards something. The data gathered will be stored and protected by the WUR. After the research is finished, the results will be shared with the St. Johannes de Doper church.

Chapter 4: 'The building helps me to connect': Students making sense of the church's physical environment

Different students perceive their church in different ways and give meaning to different characteristics of the place. This chapter addresses the first sub-research question which explores the importance of the physical environment of the place, for international students. As mentioned in the conceptual framework, the physical environment refers to the geographical and material aspects of the St. Johannes de Doper church. This chapter leans to a greater extent towards the physical features of the place, which are unique and important for students. The data used for the analysis in this chapter has been gathered through semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, participant observation and to some extent on visual and sensory methods. To explore the participants' relationship with the physical environment, the visual and sensory methods seemed to work best when the interview sessions took place at the church itself. This, because the participants then had the opportunity to make use of touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing. These methods generated narratives mostly reflecting the students' emotional bond, functional and rational aspects, and unique characteristics of the *physical environment* as perceived by them.

4.1 Functional and rational aspects

This chapter focusses on the quality of the place, which can decide the extent to which a place can facilitate in achieving the behavioral goals of students (Jorgensen & Stedman 2001; van der Schaar 2013). The focus is on the extent to which the *physical environment* helps students reach a specific goal or perform a certain activity, e.g., the accessibility of the church in terms of the geographical distance between home and church, and facilities like meeting rooms, lighting and musical instruments. This is less based on feelings and emotions, but more on what is practical and useful.

"I'm very blessed to live very close to the church. It makes it easier to pass by on daily basis. I think that if the nearest church was in another city, in another place, then I think I would not visit it as often as I now do" (respondent A).

The church is located in the center of Wageningen and the majority of respondents find it easily accessible, because of the convenient location. The above mentioned quote illustrates the importance of the church's

location for students their attendance. That it is the only Catholic church in Wageningen, is also one of the factors that influences their decision to participate in this church. Within the church there are several objects and rooms which help respondents to optimally function in activities that they are engaged in. Respondents experience different areas in different ways. This chapter highlights the variety of physical elements that are important by the research participants.

One respondent who is a member of the international choir, does not feel a connection with objects that trigger significant emotions and feelings, but does appreciate the presence of certain objects and rooms such as musical instruments, the sound installation, the acoustic, and the areas where the choir rehearsals take place, i.e., the church balcony, the parish hall and a meeting room in the clergy house called the Johannes Kamer. According to him, these rooms and objects are necessary for the choir to function well. In this case, the objects and spaces act as facilitators on which he depends. A respondent also mentioned that the church facilitates his prayer life, because the door of the smaller chapel within the church is always open. This is important for him, because he then has access to the church at any time during the day. Another respondent stated that the church also tries to stimulate people to donate food and money.

During observation, I noticed a big crate in front of the parish hall where people could place their food products, which would then be distributed to those in need (more on this in chapter 6). Inside the church itself, I also noticed devices where people could donate money directly with their bank card. According to a respondent, these are objects within the church to stimulate people to do good, making it as easy as possible for them.

4.2 Feelings and emotions towards the physical environment

According to the findings, the physical environment arouses a wide range of emotions and feelings in the participants. The majority of the respondents mentioned several areas and objects within the church that enhance their religious, but also social experience. Religious artifacts, architectural components like the ribbed vaults, rooms and gardens where social gatherings take place, are some of the areas and objects that are deemed important. Within the church, there are objects that are considered religious (related to faith), but there are also objects that are not necessarily religious but are nevertheless experienced as such. An example of a strictly religious object is the tabernacle which is considered one of the most sacred objects in the building and is also treated with respect. When people need to walk pass that object, they

kneel or bow their heads. An example of objects that are not necessarily religious, but are experienced as such, are musical instruments or specific benches in the church.

“You are asking me to visualize it, so I'm closing my eyes. [...]. The altar in front of the church. [...]. That this is the place where God truly is, and that's the table of God where he is inviting his children. [...]. I find that perhaps for obvious reasons, the most impressive place in the church” (Respondent B).

“Holy water makes me start and renew the relationship that I have with God prior to the start of the mass. So, it gives me a deeper connection as soon as I enter the church” (Respondent C).

The above-mentioned quotes of two different students shows that an object is considered special or unique not out of aesthetic reasons, but more because of an idea, a feeling, a memory or a story that they relate to it. One of the students further mentions the importance of statues of saints and lighting candles which help him to feel spiritually connected, but also to feel humble and comforted. According to him, these activities and objects also help to recall past childhood memories, which hold an important meaning to him. Another respondent was critical on what he gives meaning to and what gives meaning to the church in general. The mystical presence of Jesus in a church is for him the most important factor and with this presence he refers to the consecrated hosts which are stored in the tabernacle. For him, the tabernacle is the most important artifact and without it being present, the church would be merely a meeting place. Some of the respondents also mentioned the garden and the ‘Verrijzeniszaal’ which is the parish hall, as a place to which they feel connected to. In the parish hall, different activities take place such as choir rehearsals and social gatherings especially after the holy mass on Sunday. Some of the respondents also seem to feel connected to the garden and therefore find it an important place, not only because of aesthetic reasons, but also because of the activities that are being performed there.

“But if there is a place that gives me a sense of ... attachment, I have to say perhaps the outer courtyard or at least the garden outside the ‘Verrijzeniszaal’. The outer garden ... reminds me of when they used to have activities ... some kind of celebration with this feast table or something like that. [...]. I think it's a good opportunity to intermingle. That's when I felt the cohesion. But of course, since I have arrived for my PhD during the Covid-19 pandemic era, it is not something that I've yet experienced currently, so I cannot comment on that now. [...]. But it happened back then, so there are still some good memories about it” (Respondent B).

In this case, the room and the garden are important to the student, because they promote social interaction, and social interaction according to him was one of the main reasons why he was attending

the church. Another student also commented on specific areas within the church grounds that hold an important meaning for him due to the social gatherings happening there.

“So outside it would be either the stairs in front of the main red door, the entrance door. We used to have gatherings with the people at the stairs. They would pick up their food and just start and have a chat” (Respondent C).

The above-mentioned quote illustrates how specific areas are used to stimulate social interaction and how they are therefore valued by people. It might be that the meaning people give to specific areas or objects, depends on what they actually seek at the church. For some, it is more about the spiritual meaning, while for others the social meaning. For instance, the case of the tabernacle. According to the respondent, there was a time when he needed to decide which Christian church to join. He wanted to be part of a church where he could feel the presence of God. When he visited a Catholic church, he instantly felt that presence through the eucharist. In the Catholic church, the consecrated hosts which are considered the body of Christ and also treated as such by the faithful, are stored in the tabernacle according to respondent. This may be a reason why the respondent feels connected to the tabernacle and to what it represents and contains, which is related to what he seeks in a church i.e., the presence of God. In the case of the altar and tabernacle, both respondents felt the need to highlight objects and areas that serve as an instrument in their spiritual development. From the beginning of the interview, they made clear that their connection with God is in fact the main reason for attending the church, while others emphasized the desire for social interaction. For two of the respondents, the spiritual and the social dimension are inseparable and cannot exist in a church without complementing one another. Therefore, both religious artifacts, and spaces of social interaction hold a special meaning for them.

Besides objects or areas, some of the respondents also described elements like the temperature, the smell and the sound.

“However, if I really take the time to enter the church in a very humble way then I really observe the environment, the temperature, and the smell of frankincense which is very much present in the Catholic Church. That gives me a feeling of nostalgia, about my past when I was in a Catholic Church in my hometown or elsewhere as a child. I really go back to that feeling of being in a church as a child. And by reflecting on that nowadays, I realize that back then, I already felt a lot of peace as a child. I could not explain what it was... Now that I reflect on that, I feel something very special. I felt at peace and nowadays I still have it when I enter especially a Catholic church” (Respondent C).

The majority of the respondents feel that certain elements belonging to the physical environment, cause them to recall memories which awaken different feelings like peace and warmth. Some of the respondents feel the need to reconnect with the past through these objects, while the others do not.

Other respondents, clearly stated that they do feel a spiritual connection with some religious artifacts and areas within the church, but that they were not emotionally attached to them. For some of them the physical environment of the St. Johannes de Doper church is not special or unique when compared to other churches they have visited.

“I come from Italy and as you may know we really like to enrich our churches, either with statues with paintings, like the Sistine Chapel or the Duomo di Milano. [...]. This is really a personal thought which maybe is even wrong, but when I entered this church for the first time, I would have expected a little bit more of the Italian style or at least the French. When I entered this church, it was kind of empty, or more than empty. Really simple, very basic. If you're asking me if there is a place in the church that I like, I think it is the balcony where the choir sings because the acoustic is pretty fine. [...]. After that I would say that I am personally not that kind of person that always needs to for example sit at the same place. I'm not devoted to objects” (Respondent D).

For some of the respondents it does matter where they perform a certain activity like singing or praying. The choirs usually sing on the presbytery, but due to the corona restrictions, they had to sing on the balcony upstairs. This was not favored by some of the respondents who are part of the international choir. By singing on the balcony, a respondent felt that she lost the connection with the rest of the people downstairs. The respondent also attaches importance to specific seats during the Eucharistic adoration which is a moment of prayer and contemplation in which Catholics worship Christ.

“... the second or third bench inside the church, because usually when I go for Eucharistic adoration, I feel like since there is the Holy Sacrament exposed, I feel that the closer I am to it, the deeper the connection is” (Respondent C).

The majority of the students showed different levels of attachment towards certain objects and places within the physical environment at the level of the St. Johannes de Doper church. This depends on what they value more, e.g., the social, the religious. The physical attachment concerns the feelings and emotions individuals have towards a place (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, most of the respondents stated that they felt a personal and or spiritual connection to one or more physical characteristics of the church. For most of them, these feelings and emotions were

also connected to childhood memories, past experiences, but also to other places outside the formal boundaries of the church. The St. Johannes de Doper church is connected with all Catholic churches in the world on different levels (e.g., political, religious and social). This chapter is ultimately about the physical environment and the relationship people have with it. Some of the students mentioned that when they arrived for the first time at the St. Johannes de Doper church, they felt instantly at home.

“I travel a lot around the world. When I see a new Catholic church, I immediately feel that as mine, literally mine. So, I feel home. That sentiment like I never left. I'm in another country now, but as soon as I'm here, I feel at home again. I feel super comfortable, protected, and supported” (Respondent D).

During my visits I noticed that the structure of the church and most of the liturgical artifacts (e.g., holy water, missal, bells, incense) were quite similar to those of other Catholic churches I have visited. All of the respondents were already familiar with the liturgical artifacts and physical structure of the church and that could be one of the factors that contributes to that feeling of home. A respondent mentioned that there was not much to get familiar with when arriving at the St. Johannes de Doper church for the first time, except for the people. In the following chapters, the social and religious dimension will also be considered in understanding students their ‘sense of home’. That instant feeling of home, understood from the level of the physical environment, is thus also connected to the physical environment of other Catholic churches around the world. This shows that a fixed place actually does not exist. The more you look beyond the so-called fixed boundaries of the St. Johannes de Doper church and its community, the more you see the different relations between the local and the global (Massey, 1994).

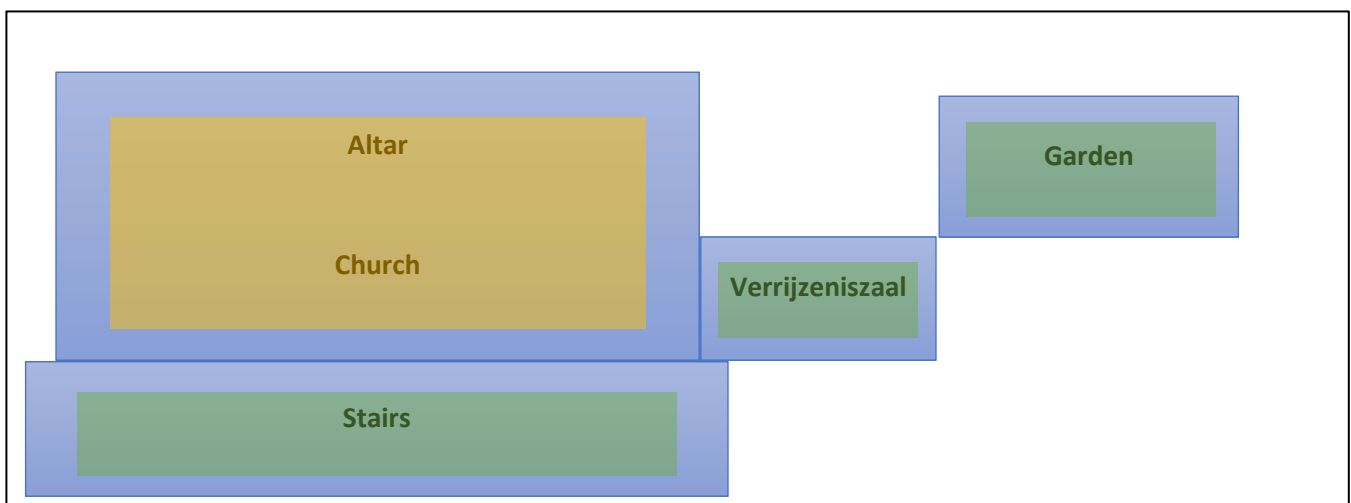


Figure 5: An overview of the physical location and the amount of social engagement (represented by the color green) and religious practices (represented by the color yellow).

Chapter 5: The role of social motives

This chapter discusses the extent to which social motives play a role in the importance of the church for international students. The focus is on different forms of social interaction that may or may not contribute to the production or heightening of a particular feeling or emotion which in some cases may stimulate international students to take action in order to achieve a certain goal. Aside from assigning feelings and emotions to the physical aspects of the church, students assign value to the different social actors within the place. In some of the cases respondents even feel attached to certain social actors, which is what Hidalgo & Hernandez (2001) refer to as social attachment. First, the chapter describes some of the activities and persons that promote social interaction. Second, based on functional and rational aspects, the extent to which social contact helps students reach a specific goal or perform a specific activity will be discussed. Third, based on emotional content, the chapter focusses on why it is important for international students to engage socially.

5.1 Overview of activities and social actors promoting social engagement

During the fieldwork phase I participated in different social gatherings that emerged spontaneously, but also in some that were more structured and formal. The informal meetings usually involved more international students. Below, an overview is given of some of the activities that promote social interaction among international students:

Tea and coffee after the international mass on Sunday

At the end of the international mass, students are invited by the priest for tea and coffee in the verrijzeniszaal.

Easter and Christmas lunch

These types of lunches are organized in the form of a potluck, where everyone is invited to prepare and bring a typical dish from their home country.

Choir rehearsals

The International choir and African choir consist mainly of international students. The International choir rehearses on a weekly basis and is for many members a great opportunity to meet with friends. After the rehearsals on Friday, the students usually have either dinner or go for a beer together.

Pilgrimage organized by the International Catholic Community (ICC)

The pilgrimage is mainly a religious activity, however, international students also use this as a way to socially interact and build friendships.

Courses on Christianity

I have spoken with people that provide or facilitate courses based on Christianity. According to them, some of these courses also promote social engagement among international students. Paragraph 5.2 zooms in on the social motives of international students for joining these courses.

This paragraph also explores the role of the church as a driver of social engagement. The previous chapter showed how certain physical spaces promote social interaction. This paragraph focusses more on people promoting social engagement and the importance of these people for international students their social engagement.

According to a respondent, a separation between the Dutch and International community is quite visible. He believes that there are not enough activities organized to stimulate social contact between international students and the Dutch community. According to the respondent, social activities are an excellent opportunity to engage more with the Dutch community. The respondent also states that he usually does not take the initiative to talk to someone who he does not know. He usually waits for an invitation or for someone coming to talk with him. He believes that it would be helpful if some people in the church were assigned a task which is to socially engage with newcomers, or people that are standing alone while everyone is talking in smaller groups after the international mass. On my question whether the tea and coffee moment after mass promotes social interaction, the respondent puts it like this:

“This gives me this feeling that especially if people are already connected to one another, you kind of feel like it's quite difficult to mix with them because people already know one another. You know, they're like they already have their own social circle and it can be a ‘down thing’ especially if you're not so good with social skills or are a more introverted person or something like that. Oh, or maybe you don't have someone to help you break through that circle. I don't know, maybe there are other ways. Other, better ways to do it. I don't know. But at least that's what I thought back then. You know, when I was not so active with the

church, I think there were also times when I attended the Sunday tea or coffee and just kind of like standing there not knowing what to do except you know, enjoying tea and the free coffee. But now since I'm already a member, maybe not a member, but let's say closer or more engaged with the church, it's not much of a problem now. But yeah, I can imagine that at least for other people, because I've been in their shoes. Maybe that's my only biggest concern" (Respondent E).

All of the respondents mentioned that the parish priest is an important driver of social engagement. I observed that the priest asked everyone to turn around and present themselves to the people they do not know. A second observation is that after the mass the priest usually introduces himself to people that he saw for the first time. He welcomes them and connects them with other people. Respondent E stated that some drivers of social engagement, in this case people and not activities, focus only on the technical side of connecting people and less on the interpersonal side. With interpersonal, respondent E refers to the verbal exchange of knowledge, feelings and meanings.

"Of course, several individuals in the pastoral team also play an important role in promoting social engagement. But unfortunately, because I was not so active in the other aspects of this, I don't know them by name. [...]. I found that engagement is more like a technical systematic thing, you know, like providing a platform opportunity, while father [here, the respondent mentions the name of the priest]. [Name of priest] is not only providing engagement in the sense of technical sides, but more of like the interpersonal side as well. So, I guess that's the thing that maybe put him in a slightly different position compared to other people in the pastoral team. Other people that I consider as driving engagement are of course the international community itself (ICC). Something that I really appreciate is how the international community is spontaneous. They take their own initiatives to be engaged with the church" (Respondent E)

International students usually engage more with other international students. According to the findings, there are two reasons for this. The first is that on Sunday there are two masses. One in Dutch and one in English, meaning that both communities often do not meet each other, except for when the English and Dutch mass are combined for special occasions. The second reason is that some of the international students find it easier to connect with other international students since most of them experience life in the Netherlands as a foreigner and also share in values and understandings.

"I mean, I do not mind engaging with people from different backgrounds or religions. I mean that is why I am here in the Netherlands and not studying in Indonesia. But there is also a nice thing in it to be more engaged with people who kind of also understand how you think and how you feel because of a certain

similarity, background and culture, so yes, in terms of social networking, it is very important. And also, the thing that I noticed is that maybe because many of the people who are active in the church are mostly from the Spanish areas, or at least Latin America or South Europe and Eastern Europe, where there's this I do not know. At least I can feel that they also have this more communal feeling compared to the local Dutch culture or at least the culture from Western North Europe.” (Respondent F)

5.2 The importance of social engagement for international students

Having given an overview of the different social activities and the importance the research participants attach to social actors who, according to the respondents, play an important role in promoting and enhancing social engagement, this paragraph first zooms in on the functional and rational aspects of having social contact, discussing the extent to which social contact and the different forms of it, help students reach a specific goal or perform a specific activity. Jorgensen & Stedman (2001) refer to this as place dependence. Second, it focusses on the emotional importance of having social contact. Most of the respondents agreed that the church helps them to not only connect spiritually with others, but also socially. While the majority agreed that the religious experience is inextricably intertwined with social engagement, there were some respondents that argued that social engagement had no significant effect on their religious experience. Yet, later on in the interviews, it seemed that there were in fact interfaces between the religious and the social sphere. These will be discussed in chapter 7, which concerns the coherence between the different dimensions of the place. This paragraph limits the discussion to the social experience of international students and the importance of it.

5.2.1 Rational and functional aspects behind students' social engagement

This sub-paragraph focusses on the extent to which people help each other in reaching a specific goal. It also discusses the amount and forms of interaction. According to the data, one of the reasons that some of the respondents attend the church is to make friends. They believe that the church is the place that helps them in fulfilling this goal. Related to this, are the international students already part of the church, that usually invite their Catholic and non-Catholic friends to the St. Johannes de Doper church. Several

times, at the end of the mass during tea and coffee, I introduced myself to people that I did not know and I was surprised to see that for many of them, it was their first visit to this church. Most of them were international students and were invited by other international students. The international community is not limited to Catholics and international students, but also expats and Ukrainian refugees. Recently, after a mass, I have met two Muslim international students that were also invited by their friends. One of them said that he keeps coming to the mass because he enjoys the music, and the other was serving tea, coffee and cake which according to her was fun to do, because you get to meet new people every time. During the choir rehearsals I noticed that choir members, mostly students, bring their friends to join the choir. When a new person participates, he or she is asked to introduce him or herself, whereafter all the choir members in turn also introduce themselves. Often, after the choir rehearsals, the participants have dinner or go to a party together. Some of the respondents find this important, because it is a way to continue interacting in a less formal setting like a choir rehearsal. Also, after the tea and coffee moment after the international mass, students usually have lunch at a restaurant nearby. Some of the respondents mentioned that the choir rehearsals on Friday and the international mass on Sunday are two activities which they are looking forward to, because these are the moments in which they can see their friends again after a long week of study or work. That may explain why an hour of mass or two hours of choir rehearsals are usually followed by another social activity that is not related to religion, but for some is still part of their religious experience. So, in general, students are often invited by fellow students to join the church and its activities. The ICC is promoted during the Annual Introduction Days (AID) of the Wageningen University & Research. However, I did not manage to obtain information regarding the number of students that respond to the invitation during the AID. The ICC also has a website and a Facebook page (ICC Wageningen) through which they keep the community updated about the activities of the parish. To recapitulate, the church is also a place where friends are sought and where friendships are established. According to the data, some of these friendships are not always established based on for instance shared religious values or culture, but in general they happen spontaneously. International students, to a certain extent, depend on the church as a place to build friendships. In paragraph 5.2.2, I will discuss why they feel the need to seek friends within the church.

Some of the respondents that engage themselves in activities like organizing courses, the liturgy, the African and International choir, feel a need to include others in these activities. Now, it is not much about making friends, but rather to get the work done and provide opportunities for others to be of service within the church. The alpha course, a ten weeks course, is provided by the parish and is about exploring Christian faith and not necessarily Catholic faith. The parish provides an English and Dutch version of the

course and the English version is mostly attended by international students. According to a course facilitator who is also a student, this course also provides an opportunity to socially interact and establish friendships. After completion of the course, the facilitators keep in touch with the participants either through a WhatsApp group or through meetings in person.

5.2.2 Emotional aspects behind students' social engagement

This sub-paragraph discusses the feelings and emotions behind the social motives of international students. In the previous sub-paragraph, the focus was on the different purposes of students' social engagement, e.g., seeking friends, introducing students to the church, seeking volunteers and socially engage with them through a series of activities within the church. According to the findings, certain emotions, feelings and circumstances, drive students to seek social interaction with people from the church itself. A feeling of wanting to belong to something or a feeling of loneliness are two examples of why students seek social contact.

"It's because of my previous experience during my MSc. During my previous days I remember that when I did my internship, I felt so socially isolated because many of my friends who are in the same year were going abroad to do their own internship, so I felt like totally isolated, so I thought I didn't have anyone else to, you know, engage with. And yes, at that time I felt totally depressed because there was nobody I could share about my hardships during the internship. And it is kind of also like putting me through some traumatic experience for quite a while after I finished my MSc. So, I have decided that if I got the PhD later, that I wanted to be more engaged socially and I think the easiest way to be engaged is through the church activities. At least as a community" (Respondent E)

When asked about what type of activity he would prefer to join, he shared that he was looking for an activity that is more social and less spiritual to avoid interpersonal conflicts. He puts it like this:

"Yes, I think uh, the choir group. I think it is the first thing that came to my mind because I used to be part of a choir group when I was in high school. But other than that, I felt that if I wanted to be more involved in the church, I want to be involved in some activity that I find to be more tangible. You know, like because the thing is that for example like other activities that are more on the spiritual side, I have this like hesitance, not because I do not like it, but because, if you are involved in social interaction, you kind of like also have this kind of personal spiritual aspect in it. I feel that there's some problem that might occur, like

for example an interpersonal conflict. Maybe much later, if I wanted to do it, but for now I think that is why I think I would prefer to be more involved in the choir because it is an activity that is focused on a certain activity... a certain action you know, rather than just more like a personal thing. So, I think that is why I had decided to maybe choose the choir as my main focus” (Respondent E)

Most of the respondents consider social contact as something that complements their religious experience. These respondents clearly stated how important it is to engage in spiritual activities and how social interaction is necessary for spiritual development and growth of the religious community.

“There is also the sense of community, right? And friendships and connections with your brothers and sisters in Christ. [...]. I mean a church, it is like a community, like an association. I would not compare it with sports or music or a theatre association, but definitely there are similar elements in sports associations or what I said, music, or whatever. There's also the sense of connection with your friends, right? On the soccer field or when performing in a band or whatever. In the theater. That's also in the church that connection with fellow human beings. That's also another important aspect of being part of such community. I say also, because more importantly, it is to work on our community with the Lord, with God. To have also fellowship with Him, maybe even more important than this community with your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Although I value that a lot and find it also very important. [...]. Even more importantly is that you have some fellow brothers and sisters, friends. With whom you can interact on a deeper level, if something is going on in your own personal life” (Respondent D).

The research data shows that some students connect easier with each other when they share the same religious values. I have interviewed three respondents who were close friends of one another. They became friends through the church and expressed how they connected easily based on their shared values same values and how they, based on their Christian mission, feel the need to keep connecting with others socially, but also spiritually.

“It brings up lots of energy. Brotherhood and sisterhood. It is what you get from a community. What you get from one another. I think we were created as human beings in such a way that we were not meant to be alone. We were meant to be in relationship and the relationships I have with people from the church or that I met through the church, these are healthy relationships. Or sometimes I also get the chance to help someone that is suffering or that is needing someone that has positive energy, let's say” (Respondent I)

This chapter also discusses the extent to which students are socially attached to others in terms of emotions and feelings (Hidalgo & Hernandez 2001). Most of the respondents have close friends within

the church and expressed that they would feel sad if they or their friends would have to leave the church one day.

“I already lived for quite some time in Wageningen, maybe more than the average student... I have seen a lot of people leaving already in in my whole Wageningen lifespan. And in my first years. That was very sad. You really get a connection with someone and then they have to leave or they choose to go back to their home country or hometown. Yeah, that that made me very sad. [...]. I have seen it many, many times happening, so now I'm a bit hardened in that, so to say. But definitely it is still sad to see people leave with whom you have a good connection and with whom you share very intimate and personal matters. [...]. I find that really hard. I'm a person who really needs personal connection with people. So, if people are leaving back to their home country or hometown, I find it harder to stay in touch with them. Uh, I have a bit of contact with some of them of my previous bible study group, but it's very limited because they build up their lives back where they are and they also have their own friends there. [...]. Although we have social media nowadays, which should make it easier, but for me it is hard” (Respondent B).

Most students leave Wageningen after two years when they have completed their studies and at a certain point, they have to let go of their usual routine within the church. I have spoken with a student that will leave Wageningen in July 2022. He mentioned that it would be emotionally difficult for him to let go of the church, his friends and his responsibilities in the international choir of which he is the director.

The impact of the corona restrictions

In Chapter 3, it has been discussed how physical places within the church grounds are utilized for social activities, e.g., the garden, the stairs, and the Verrijzeniszaal. The data shows that the social activities and social relations established there make these places important for students. However, students expressed that the corona restrictions limited their access to these places and that resulted in a decrease in social interaction. The findings show that the meaning and importance students assign to these places, did not change significantly due to the corona restriction. While they had limited access to these places, they still considered them as important. Some of them mentioned that they still have hope that everything will return back to as it was. At the moment that I am writing this, the situation has changed. All the coronavirus measures have been lifted within the church and all the respondents that I have interviewed during the time of restrictions, are now utilizing these places again for social interaction.

Chapter 6: The role of religious motives

The previous chapters concluded that students assign importance to both the physical and the social aspects of the place. The analysis showed that some of the physical and social aspects can be related to students their religious experience within the St. Johannes de Doper church. This chapter discusses the extent to which religious motives play a role in the importance of the church for international students. It focusses on the different forms of religious practices and experiences of students, and how this may or may not stimulate them to take action in order to achieve a personal or collective goal.

6.1 The importance of religious engagement

This sub-chapter discusses students' religious engagement, which includes actions such as attending religious services and religious courses, but participation in liturgical and pastoral activities as well. The focus is mainly on the activities, practices, feelings and emotions, that the respondents mentioned during the interviews. According to the findings, engagement in religious activities and practices arouses a wide range of emotions and feelings in the participants. During the interviews, the respondents were given a moment to reflect on the religious activity that they deem most important. The majority of the respondents explained that in terms of spiritual development and connectedness, the mass is in general the most important religious activity in which they engage. Some of the respondents specifically mentioned feelings towards both the mass in general and the activities they perform within the mass.

Quote on meaning of the mass - *"A moment to meditate on the scripture... A moment to listen, to trust and to obey. A moment to be in silence and to be connected. [...]"* (Respondent G).

Quote on feelings towards performing an activity within the mass - *"I feel humble and grateful that some people chose me to read and I think you want to [...] bathe in the words that I read and let others also be bathed in the words. So, when I'm there I just ask the holy spirit to guide my word, so that also, especially others would benefit"* (Respondent G).

Four respondents elaborated on the liturgy, which in this case can be understood as the Roman rite according to which the mass is structured and celebrated (The Holy See, 1963). They indicated that they consider it important and thus felt happy having a church service with this particular structure. Below, two quotes from two different respondents that consider the liturgy important:

“And what I really like is the structure of the liturgy in the Church which starts with a confession and giving glory to God, and then the readings and homily, praying together, receiving the holy communion. All this, let's say, what we perceive and all those phases in the mass or in all the sacraments. Nowadays I start to appreciate it more and more. [...]. I still do like all these rituals and sacraments what we have during the holy Mass” (Respondent B).

“The thing is that in the Catholic Church, because you have the liturgy, you have a connection with all the churches around the world. So, all the churches around the world that are Catholic, they have the same readings every day. And they have a very similar rite. [...]. So, for people it is easy to understand if they go to holy mass in a country where they do not even know the language. You can follow, because you know how the rite goes. So even though you do not understand the language. [...]. In a holy mass in Holland, I have no understanding at all of the language, but because I know the rite... I can access in my phone the readings and I can follow and be a part of it. [...]. And most importantly, because of the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. That is the same in every place. So that I think that makes the Catholic Church special and that makes the Catholic Church easier for international people. To just step in and join the holy mass, regardless if you understand the language or not. Regardless, if you know people or not. Regardless, if you have been invited by someone or not” (Respondent A).

In addition, two religious activities that are also considered as part of the liturgy and important according to five of the respondents, are the rehearsals and performances of the international choir. As mentioned in the previous chapter, respondent E did not join the choir for a religious experience, but for having social interaction. This respondent was an exception to the other students that participate in the choir for both religious and social purposes. In this part, the focus is on students who believe that their participation in the choir adds value to their religious experience.

“Oftentimes it is being said singing is double praying, isn't it? Perhaps you have heard that expression before of singing is double worshiping or worshipping twice. So definitely, when I'm singing a Christian song or a spiritual song, in general I definitely feel a broader connection. I definitely start to feel peace within myself. And definitely I am feeling I'm part of something much bigger than myself, or even much bigger than our community. It feels that I'm transcended to something bigger than only just being at that place at that time with my friends from the choir” (Respondent A).

Besides activities like the mass and the choir, respondents also mentioned other activities like cleaning the church, the eucharistic adoration, courses on Christianity, and having specific functions within these

activities, as playing an important role in their religious life. An activity like cleaning the church is not religious per se, but a respondent did ascribe importance to it as it enhances her religious experience.

“To me, the first thing that comes to my heart... It is when I clean the church. So, when I clean the toilets and when I clean the church, so the top side and the place where our pastor has confession together with other people, I feel really good because I think that is also way to serve... also thinking of the other. [...]. ...for everyone to have a clean place and also safe from any germs, not just the virus” (Respondent C).

Some of the respondents emphasized on performing activities as a community. When the respondents were questioned about the way they benefit as individuals from performing activities within the church, three of them instantly made a connection between performing as an individual and performing as a community, for the benefit of the community.

“Because the choir actually is really something as I told before, like all together, not just one and the other... a choir is not just the conductor, the musician and the singers. It is not just like only one that is building, but it is everybody with the help of each other. And again, as I told you before about shaping the community, not only shaping, but reshaping the church itself. The building, the community. And I am really glad when someone after the mass comes and say ‘oh you sang well’. And again, also those words are super important. They say ‘you all’ sang well, so it does not matter, like for example how Carlos played the piano or for example how Tom just sang that part. No, it is about you as a union. A community, acquired all together. Everybody did his part in the best of his capabilities and possibilities... to achieve that a person comes by and says, ‘Hey, I’m thinking about joining the choir’. So yes, that is very important. Building together something” (Respondent D).

All of the respondents mentioned to go to church, because of their catholic identity and the will to continue developing their faith. Most of the respondents could not specifically mention how the St. Johannes de Doper church was unique in helping them to develop their faith, so they rather expressed how the Catholic church in general helped them do that. This could be related to how the Catholic church is organized worldwide, for instance through the religious hierarchy, the similar rites, the church, and the belief that the entire church is one divine body (Respondent A, D). This may be the reason why respondents were inclined to speak of the Catholic church in general, while talking about the religious aspects. In the following quote, a respondent expresses the importance of the church for his religious life and he does that by referring to the entire Catholic church in general and not just the St. Johannes de Doper church:

“Definitely, you know, because the church gives me the spiritual food I need. And the church gives me also the space to live the love of Jesus. Because if you receive the love of Jesus, there is no other way than to share it. [...]. You cannot receive the love of Jesus and keep it to yourself. So, for me, the church also gives me purpose in life, because I can serve and I can love from what I receive. Because it helps me to connect with God and ask him every day ‘what do you want from me?’ And I know that if I’m fulfilling that if I’m being obedient to that, then I’m accomplishing my purpose in life, regardless of what I would think or imagine. [...]. And I think the purpose of every person in life is to be kind and loving to others and for nature” (Respondent A).

Some of the respondents mentioned specific activities and opportunities that make the St. Johannes de Doper church special. These activities and opportunities are related to their religious experience. For instance, the opportunity to get involved with minimal requirements in performing an activity within the liturgy of the church. Also, the sermon of the priest, the invitation to participate in all activities regardless of your talents or knowledge, were considered special. Other special characteristics that specifically enhance the religious experience are the physical and social aspects within the church, which are discussed in chapter four and five. For instance, the incense, music in different languages, the vaults, religious artifacts and the opportunity to enhance the religious experience through social interaction.

“I also like the fact that you can be asked for a specific task, for instance, to do a reading. It’s also very nice to be involved in the whole liturgy, the whole process of a mass... which I haven’t seen in other masses. Then it is all the priests and the acolytes that perhaps assist, or you know who do these things, but never a person of the congregation that is being asked to do these things. But here in Wageningen, that is really the case, you really have the chance to be involved in the different rituals and sacraments during the mass. I like the fact that you have many opportunities to be involved in various kinds of ways in the mass” (Respondent C).

Some of the respondents are more engaged in religious activities than others. Some want to engage more, but are not able to reserve time for it, while for others their level of engagement depends on their purpose for visiting the church. Almost all of the respondents are engaging in different activities within the church, except for one that only attends the mass on Sunday. For this respondent, the mass alone, gives spiritual fulfillment. Others on the other hand, felt a stronger need to engage more intensively in different religious activities.

“The more activities I'm engaged with the more I feel connected with those people and thereby also in a broader sense with the parish. I feel really valued and happy. A satisfied member of our parish in general. So yes, I think that is similar to the daily life where you engage with non-Christians. It goes in a similar way. The more time you spend with someone the deeper” (Respondent A).

Some of the respondents felt the need to engage in religious activities in order to continue doing the work they have started in other churches in other countries. Some, also see their participation as a duty and responsibility as a Catholic. Catholic upbringing, religious teachings and values about love and being of service, were also mentioned by most of the respondents. Students consider the St. Johannes de Doper church important for their religious life, because it offers a space, opportunities and activities to develop their faith either through social interaction, physical places like meeting rooms, and artifacts, but also through faith-based activities and opportunities to be of service to others. The next chapter discusses the relation between the church as a societal development driver and students their engagement in societal development.

Chapter 7: Students' engagement in societal development

The previous chapters showed that students assign importance to the physical, social and religious aspects of the St. Johannes de Doper church. This chapter discusses a fourth and last dimension of the church, which is *engagement in societal development* through the activities proposed by the church. The first paragraph gives an explanation of how the church organizes itself around activities related to societal development. The second paragraph focusses on how the church as a religious driver of development is important for students and how the church relates to their development engagement in society.

7.1 The church as a driver of societal development

The St. Johannes de Doper church develops and coordinates activities with the purpose of bringing positive change in the lives of people and the environment. These activities, also called pastoral activities by the church, are coordinated by the so called "Pastoraatgroep" which can be translated as 'pastoral group'. This group identifies, passes on and deals with questions, wishes, and problems that people may have. It is not required for the people being supported, to be either Catholic or a parishioner¹. According to the publications of the church, the pastoral group becomes the face of the parish - point of contact for all pastoral matters within the Roman Catholic community of Wageningen (RK Wageningen , n.d.). One of the dimensions of the pastoral work of the St. Johannes de Doper church is called "Diaconie" which is the branch that includes the social work of the church. For the St. Johannes de Doper church, Diaconie is where belief and concern for people and their well-being, come together. In the diaconal groups, attention is paid to people and the situations in which they find themselves, usually through no fault of their own, such as illness, poverty and social isolation (RK Wageningen , n.d.). Their aim is to work together on a parish where people support each other in difficult circumstances and where there is a possibility to share concerns and commit themselves into making a positive change for people (RK Wageningen , n.d.).

With this general explanation on how the church organizes itself around activities related to societal development through religious values, volunteers and resources, the focus gradually moves towards the

¹ Parishioner: a member of a particular parish under the care of a priest, especially one who often goes to its church (Cambridge Dictionary , n.d.)

importance of these activities for international students and the way they engage or do not engage with them.

7.2 Students' engagement in societal development

The term "societal development" can be interpreted in different ways and some of the respondents felt the need to ask for clarification. Before I elaborated on the concept, I asked them how they perceive societal development, because it would be relevant to know whether they would include the church in their understanding of societal development or not. Some of them explained the concept based on religious values and activities within the church that have a positive impact on society in general, while others made direct links with for instance, governmental institutions, human rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals set up by the United Nations. Secondly, I asked them how they would describe their ideal world and what would be required or be necessary to create that world. Most of the answers were based on values such as respect, enjoying the right to happiness and to love, protecting and respecting nature. A respondent puts it like this:

"So, poverty is linked to injustice and you also have the exploitation. Exploitation can be not only for natural resources, but also of people. So, for me, an ideal world is a world where there is no exploitation. And that is linked with respect and love for one another" (Respondent G).

After having the respondents reflect on this, all of them understood that it concerns their engagement in activities that they believe will contribute positively to society. Most of the respondents stated that they do contribute through one or more activities within the St. Johannes de Doper church.

Below, are activities mentioned most frequently by the respondents:

- Financial donations
- Food bank
- Alpha course (course on Christian faith)

The majority of respondents support the St. Johannes de Doper church and its work financially. Some of the respondents stated that the financial donations are needed to support people in need of food and

healthcare. A second reason that people donate financially is because they cannot find the time to engage in other projects and activities.

"I think, that you can also choose between two types of collections, of money, and usually the second type is always either destined to refugees or Caritas, or people who are disabled and need our help. So, I think that by money you can always participate" (Respondent F).

When the respondents spoke about the food bank as a development activity, they referred to the crates in front of the parish hall in which people can place food products. The food will eventually be distributed to those in need. One of the respondents also mentioned the involvement of the municipality in this project which means that for the realization of certain projects, the St. Johannes de Doper church and non-religious governing institutions are collaborating.

"So, every Sunday or after every holy mass the priest announces that we are collecting food... Encouraging people to bring some food for those in need. And then we have baskets in the church and people when they come to the church, can bring some food and put it in there. And then, I do not know how many times a week or a month, they bring these baskets to a place where they distribute it. With the food they make baskets of food for people who cannot afford to buy food. And that is something that I also think started with the churches, but now it is more like... also sponsored by the municipality. And then there is a place that collects the food and then distributes it to the people" (Respondent A).

A religious course, in this case the Alpha course, may also be considered a societal development activity according to two respondents. When they were asked to elaborate on this, they both stated that it is a course that can make a difference in the way people think and act as Christians, but also as local citizens or foreign residents. Sometimes, non-Christians also participate in the course and a course facilitator mentioned that the Alpha course is not focused on converting them into Christians, but rather to help them reflect on and experiment with Christian values. One of the two respondents emphasized a positive change that such a course could bring in society if people started spreading the teachings, which are based on Christian faith and values.

"It is not that we in our Alpha course here in Wageningen, with the ten people on average that we have each course, that we are going to solve the food security and food scarcity crisis worldwide, that we are going to eliminate diseases and poverty and war and all of that. I'm not proclaiming that, but definitely an Alpha course, the insights that the people get throughout that course, definitely can change their mind,

their heart, their way of thinking. And we also see that happening in people and small changes start within themselves and then their close environment with their family and closest friends. [...]. Hopefully based on that there will be a snowball effect that will spread the good news to more people. Through the network which everyone has. But you have to start small, it is not that we can solve all the world problems with an Alpha course. Definitely, that's not what I'm proclaiming, but it could be a good start. A seed could be planted in someone to do something with their life, something which God wants them to do" (Respondent L).

Most of the respondents are willing to participate in one or more projects of the St. Johannes de Doper church related to societal development. They stress the importance of performing some of the activities as a community and not on their own, therefore people must be willing to participate. One of the respondents also expressed how important it is to act from the Christian values, and the values assigned by the parents, before engaging in activities that may impact the life of another person. He expresses that from these values comes the willingness to do good. The values that were shared by this student were love and respect towards yourself and others, but also awareness about the right to seek for happiness.

"Again, we are sitting in a church, I am really a believer and I think the word of the lord is, treat the other as you would treat yourself. [...]. It means that you need to love yourself and respect yourself. And that's pretty important, because unfortunately not everybody in the world just respects and love themselves. [...]. I would say 'respect' so really respect for yourself and respect for the others. [...]. And being respectful. Then yes, at this point I think I would just like to cite the human rights conventions of the United Nations. You have the right to seek for happiness. So again, it is not a word, it is a concept. [...]. And unfortunately, in many parts of the world it is not really that you do not have happiness, but you do not even have the right to seek for happiness for ten thousand problems. So, you are really like impeded. You are forbidden to try to reach for happiness... So yes, I would say that, partial respect, seeking for happiness" (Respondent F).

According to this respondent, obstacles may be encountered in the form of a lack of means and a lack of empowerment to realize a certain development or diaconal activity. He expresses how important it is that the environment allows you to act, supports you spiritually and mentally, and helps you to generate the necessary means for the realization of an activity or project. The respondent believes that even if there is no will to be of service, there is must. With this he means an obligation or duty as a Catholic to engage oneself in activities that improve the wellbeing of people in need.

Following this, a case of respondent A will be presented in which feelings of love, respect and concern towards nature and the environment and the position the church takes in this, are expressed. The conversation we had about societal development and the societal work of the church, was mostly about nature and the environment and how according to the respondent, the St. Johannes de Doper church should develop activities to raise environmental awareness among parishioners, citizens and foreign residents. His engagement in development activities started in his home country when he saw people in his surroundings living in poverty. Based on his religious beliefs, he felt the need to support these people and therefore started his studies in agriculture to find ways to utilize the fertile land. He also started activities on social justice within the Catholic church and was inspired by some papal encyclicals, which are official letters from the pope on doctrine or concerns of the church (Free Dictionary , n.d.). The encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967) by Paul VI is according to the respondent, a religious document which is about the progress and development of people. In this document, the pope also expresses what is going wrong in society, and this call for change inspired the respondent to become more active in the field of development.

“And it was basically a call to come and try to help the poor to overcome many things. [...]. So, I was doing that from what I learned and trying to use my understanding and my capacities. [...]. I made mistakes. Goodwill mistakes, I was just following guidelines and knowledge and the mindsets of development of that time. [...]. And then I realized that I needed to really be wiser and this wisdom, I got from God. Nowadays I am more cautious before acting. I try to pray and see what God is asking me to do. So, having divine guidance. And by doing this I am more prudent. And I can do things God is asking me to do. [...]. This has brought me to do things even beyond my expectation or beyond my imagination. Like for instance, I created a social enterprise that is about helping people to improve their life by just doing a very simple thing which is preventing water borne diseases. And this is through an awareness raising campaign where we give information to people. But also, creating the capacity of local production and water filters so that people can treat the water at home and have safe drinking water from any source that they have close by. [...]. So, I think I would not even make it possible if it wouldn't be by asking God first, His inspiration and guidance and endurance” (Respondent A).

This quote, illustrates how religious teachings and values have inspired respondent A to become active in the field of development. The respondent also states that this work can only be done well if God is included in the process. Others have also stated that their decision to contribute to society is mainly inspired by their Christian faith and values. According to the respondent to which the above mentioned

quote belongs to, the St. Johannes de Doper church could do more as a church for the protection of the natural environment. He believes that this church has not done enough on parochial level compared to the parishes in Latin America that he knows. He mentions that in Latin America people feel the consequences of climate change even more than in Europe and some Catholic religious leaders try to raise awareness of the problem, by for instance, talking about it during the time of the homily during the mass. I asked the respondent what the St. Johannes de Doper church should include or change in their societal work. Firstly, the respondent believes that the starting point is to get to know the Holy Spirit and be fulfilled with it. This will eventually lead to love for one another and love for creation, and awareness of the human impact on creation. With creation, the respondent refers to the creation of God, nature with all its living beings. Secondly, the respondent would like to have a more active youth in the St. Johannes de Doper church, who are inspired to work on creating a better and sustainable world. He believes that this youth should go beyond just talking about it. Organizing environmental awareness campaigns which include the promotion of recycling and ethical consumerism. The respondent believes that especially students from the Wageningen University visiting the St. Johannes de Doper church have the necessary knowledge to start these activities. This knowledge should be made easy for people to grasp and to practice. However, according to the respondent, these students have the knowledge but they lack awareness of what they could realize with it within the church.

“You need a few people who will say: Well, first I pray about it, if that is something that God is calling them to do. And if it's something that God is calling them to do yet, so just take this step and organize such a campaign in the parish. And see who joins. And if God is inspiring them, I think it will grow. And you can start little, but the thing is that you need God to be constant and you need God to do it wisely. Because if you don't do that then you might end up doing it in a way that it might be a burden for people. And maybe people will do it the first time, because you asked, but they were not assimilated by themselves. And something that God respects is people their freedom. And this is something we need to also respect. So, we cannot oblige people to say: okay people, if you have eaten meat the last week, you cannot go to church. Things like that” (Respondent A).

Respondent A believes that people should be inspired before engaging themselves in any activity. This inspiration should come directly from God. As mentioned before, some respondents believe that they should engage because it is their duty as a Catholic. Two respondents, could not explain whether participation should be out of inspiration or out of duty. They did mention that making time to participate

is difficult for them, because of their work and studies. Therefore, they would not engage yet if they were not certain whether they would be able to commit themselves to the activity.

None of the respondents could think of an existing activity of the church in which they could apply the skills and knowledge that they develop and acquired at the University. Respondent E believes that the reason that he is not participating in any activity of the church related to societal development, is because he cannot apply his expertise. Respondent E has been involved in social development activities before, but was not satisfied with his involvement, because of a lack of expertise.

“If I can teach people how to process, how to make Indonesian food, especially for maybe for let's say for a certain community here around the church and also in Wageningen or the Netherlands in general. Teaching them how to make certain products to help them in their economic their economic status”
(Respondent E).

He awaits an opportunity to partake in an activity in which he can utilize his expertise. However, he cannot promise to join every opportunity, because of his PhD program in which he invests most of his time.

In terms of place attachment within the area of the societal development activities of the St. Johannes de Doper church, most of the respondents mentioned religious values (which include the social) as drivers of their engagement in societal development activities within the church. The St. Johannes de Doper church was not considered as unique or special with regard to its diaconal or societal work, but international students do consider it a place in which they find inspiration to become more involved in activities aimed at supporting people in need. In terms of place dependency, the Alpha course was the only activity which helped the respondents achieve a goal or need. These goals were related to their Christian faith and their participation gives a feeling of hope, in the sense that the insights of the course would help the participants to think and become active citizens who are inspired to make a difference.

This chapter showed how religious teachings and values inspire most of the respondents to become active in the field of development. Most of the respondents did not mention specific ways in which the St. Johannes de Doper church tries to encourage them to become more actively in social work, for example through the way groups who initiate these activities promote their work. One respondent did mention that the sermons of the parish priest do encourage him to participate in different activities. Most of the respondents reflected more on how the Catholic church, in broader sense, inspires and invites them to engage in the social work of the church.

Chapter 8: Linking the physical, social, religious and societal dimension of the church

This chapter is a continuation of the analysis on the four dimensions, namely the physical, social, religious and societal sphere of the church. The purpose is to present the logical connections between the different elements of the place. So far, the analysis has indicated that the dimensions are all connected to each other to a certain extent. This chapter zooms in on the interrelations between the four dimensions of the place and sense of place, namely place attachment, place dependence and place identity.

8.1 Physical dimension

The findings have shown that the physical dimension of the church is closely linked to the religious and social dimension and to a lesser extent with the dimension of the societal work of the church.

Physical - religious

For most of the students, rooms, gardens and religious artifacts, enhance the religious experience. The physical area and the different elements within it, including sound and smell, cause some of the students to recall childhood memories, and have unique and special religious experiences. In terms of physical attachment, most of the students feel a special connection with statues of saints, the tabernacle, the altar, the crucifix and specific benches within the church. These physical features arouse certain feelings and emotions when understood in relation with the religious dimension of the place. The physical location in terms of accessibility and opening hours, indicates another link between the physical and religious dimension. For instance, the respondent who states that the location and the opening hours facilitate and increase his visits to the church for prayer.

The corona restrictions had significant effect on some of the respondents' religious experience. During these times, visits to the physical location had to be limited and respondents were given the opportunity to attend the religious services online. Mostly through live streams via the YouTube channel of the parish. According to some of the respondents, not being able to pray at the physical place, not having a connection with the religious artifacts and areas, affected their religious experience negatively.

Physical – Social

As shown in chapter two and four, specific areas within the physical location of the church stimulate social interaction. For instance, the students that attach value to the Verrijzeniszaal in particular, because of the social events being held there. Furthermore, the central location of the church in Wageningen and the fact that it is the only Catholic church in Wageningen may be two other reasons that drive international students to engage socially. In terms of the relation between the physical and social attachment, the findings show that most of the students have a higher level of social attachment compared to physical attachment. The social relations transcend the physical location, meaning that the social relations established within the physical place, are maintained not only within and through the physical location of the St. Johannes de Doper church, but also beyond it. This seemed to be important for international students especially during the times when social gatherings were limited at the church, due to the corona restrictions. The corona restrictions affected some of the students their social experience negatively, while others-maintained contact either through social media or physical meetings outside the church.

Physical – Societal development activities

The physical place contains areas and objects which facilitates contribution to the work of the church. The presence of crates for the food bank, the collection baskets used to collect money during mass, and point-of-sale devices to make digital bank payments for donation. The respondents have mentioned no other development activity in which the physical location of the church plays an important role.

8.2 Social dimension

The findings show that the social dimension of the church is closely linked to the physical dimension of the church, which facilitates and makes social interaction happen.

Social – religious

Less linked to the social dimension, but still important for some respondents, is the relation between the religious and social dimension. Social contact is in some of the cases sought for religious reasons. Some of the respondents stated that regular social interaction with people of the church, enhances the religious experience, for instance through praying together, talking about faith related topics or by sharing in a

meal. They state that the religious experience is enhanced by and through the community, which is not only religious, but also social.

Social – societal development

According to some of the respondents, societal development activities are also social and therefore, the work should be done as a community. For that, social interaction is needed to invite people to participate and to raise awareness on social and environmental problems.

8.3 Religious dimension

Similar to the social dimension, the religious dimension is closely connected to the physical dimension and less to the social dimension. The relation “physical-religious” and “social-religious” has been analyzed in paragraph 7.1 and 7.2. Therefore, the focus of this paragraph will be on the link between religion and societal development. Based on the findings, the religious dimension is closely connected to societal development. Most of the respondents feel inspired to engage in societal development activities because of their religious values and faith. At the St. Johannes de Doper church, respondents obtain religious values and teachings that point towards the importance of supporting those in need. On the website of the church there are a range of activities aimed to support people in need. However, donating money and food, and participating in courses on Christianity, were the only activities in which the respondents engage with. The analysis shows that in general, students’ participation in societal development activities of the church is done with the purpose of helping those in need, but the inspiration and or duty is related to the way they experience their religious life. A paragraph on the societal dimension will not follow as the linkages of this dimension with the other dimensions have been analyzed in paragraph 8.1, 8.2, 8.3.

8.4 Physical – social – religious – Societal development

The findings show different relations between the physical, social, religious and societal development dimension of the place. It shows that all dimensions are intertwined and function together to a certain extent. According to the analysis, the religious dimension is the dimension that is considered the most

important for the participants, as this dimension is present in the physical, social and societal dimension of the place. Like the social dimension, the religious dimension is not limited to the physical boundaries of the church, but is also being carried to other places. The second largest dimension within the St. Johannes de Doper church is the social dimension, which is closely linked to the physical place and religious dimension of the place, and to a lesser extent to the religious and societal dimension. Through social interaction, values and teachings are passed on, friendships are established and the community is increasing.

Chapter 9: Conclusion & Discussion

In this chapter, the results will be wrapped up and important insights that came up throughout the research, will be discussed. The purpose of this research was to search for an answer to the main research question:

What is the importance of the St. Johannes de Doper church as a meeting place and religious driver of development engagement, for international students?

Prior to answering the main research question, the five sub-research questions will be revisited:

1. Why and how are the physical features of the church important for students?
2. To what extent do social motives play a role for them?
3. To what extent do religious motives play a role for them?
4. How is the church as a religious driver of development important for students and how does the church relate to their development engagement?
5. What is the coherence between the physical features, religious and social motives and development engagement?

9.1 Revisiting the questions

9.1.1 Why and how are the physical features of the church important for students?

Respondents brought forward several notions of sense of place in relation to different elements within the physical dimension of the church. Therefore, within the physical characterization of the place, I differentiated between the different aspects of sense of place namely, place attachment, place dependence and place identity.

Students pointed to the convenient location of the St. Johannes de Doper church, several rooms inside the church, the garden, and religious artifacts. In terms of physical attachment, the responses were various. Some students attached importance to the religious artifacts in particular, whilst others stated that despite the beauty of the physical elements, it was the combination of different religious and social elements that made the physical place special and in some of the cases also unique, in comparison with other churches. This aspect of uniqueness relates to the dimension of place identity.

In terms of place dependence, most of the students attach importance to the accessibility (in terms of location and utilization of rooms and materials), towards the physical location for the performance of their activities and the realization of personal and or collective needs or wishes. The fact that the St. Johannes de Doper church is the only Catholic church in Wageningen and is also located conveniently (in the city center), determines to a great extent, the importance students attach to the place. This means that in terms of rational and functional aspects (place dependence), this church becomes important for students who do not prefer to travel outside of Wageningen by bike or public transport to attend other Catholic churches. A second factor that determines to a greater extent the importance of the physical place for students, is that certain areas within it, promote social interaction. In sum, the physical place is considered important by students, mostly because of feelings and emotions that are awakened through their relation with certain physical objects, the social interaction the physical place facilitates, and the convenient location in the city center.

9.1.2 To what extent do social motives play a role for them?

In sum, the data has shown that the St. Johannes de Doper church is an important place for international students to socially connect with other international students. The students establish different types of social relationships depending on what they seek or need. In most of the cases, these were about establishing friendships. The majority of students also agreed that the religious experience is inextricably intertwined with social engagement, making the church an even more important place to socially interact, because of the presence of other people who share in the same religious values. Furthermore, the results show that international students find it easier to connect with other international students. According to the research data, this relates to similar circumstances in which students find themselves (being a foreigner), but also shared feelings and understandings. The St. Johannes de Doper church is the only Catholic church in Wageningen that provides an international Catholic community for students to interact with. This can be considered a form of place dependence, meaning that the place provides students with opportunities to socially interact and at a particular moment, students start to rely on that. Overall, even while international students find it important to socially interact with others and establish friendships with people that are already part of the church, they do not only depend on the church when it comes to building relationships. The church may also become a place where existing relations are further developed. In terms of place identity, the place becomes unique and special because of the international

character and the presence of people and social activities that drive social engagement. The analysis also showed a generally lower level of physical attachment towards the church, while towards the social and religious dimensions, the level of attachment is higher.

9.1.3 To what extent do religious motives play a role for them?

In sum, most of the students decide to join the church because of religious motives. They consider the St. Johannes de Doper church important for their religious life, because it offers a space, opportunities and activities to develop their spiritual life. This either through social interaction, physical spaces and artifacts, but also through faith-based activities and other opportunities to be of service to others. The religious experience is to a greater degree intertwined with the social dimension and to a lesser extent with the physical place. This means that the religious experience may be largely built on the amount and quality of the social relationships that international students establish within the church. So, while spiritual development and religious experiences are personal, respondents at all times expressed the important role of others in their spiritual development and spiritual experience.

9.1.4 How is the church as a religious driver of development important for students and how does the church relate to their development engagement?

The fourth sub-research question focusses on the importance of the church as a religious driver of development for students. In sum, students find the church to be a source of inspiration. This enables them to become more involved in activities aimed at supporting people in need. This inspiration is drawn from the religious and social dimension of the church which includes prayer, religious documents, homilies of the priests and social relations. After the respondents described their ideal world, most of the respondents stated that the church is an important institute within the field of societal development. Most of the students are engaged in societal development activities through the church and feel inspired to do even more than just that. Some consider this as a duty, while others engage because they feel inspired to do so. Students also believe that it is important to be able to apply the skills and knowledge that they develop and acquire at the University, in societal development activities of the church.

9.1.5 What is the coherence between the physical features, religious and social motives and development engagement?

The data has shown different relations between the physical, social, religious and societal dimension of the place. The four dimensions are all interrelated to one another, meaning that they function together to a certain extent and in some cases are even interdependent. This interdependency is mostly between the religious and social dimension, in which the religious experience happens through social relations as well. Social relations are established not only through social activities, but religious activities as well. In sum, the religious dimension is considered the most important for students as elements of this dimension touch upon the physical, social and societal development dimension. Elements within the religious and social dimension that were mentioned by the respondents, are not limited to the physical boundaries of the church, but are also being carried to other places. The second most important dimension for students is the social dimension which is closely linked to the physical place, the religious dimension and to a lesser extent, societal development. Through social interaction, values and teachings are passed on, friendships are established and eventually the community keeps growing.

9.2 Main research question - What is the importance of the St. Johannes de Doper church as a meeting place and religious driver of development engagement, for international students?

In sum, I have explored the importance of the St. Johannes de Doper church as a meeting place and religious driver of development engagement for international students. The concept of sense of place has proven to be a practical and useful method in studying the inner dimensions (thoughts, feelings, beliefs) of the church and its community, namely the meaning and attachment to the church, held by international students. All respondents have been able to distinguish elements that hold a special meaning to them. Some of these elements lie in more than one dimension of the church and the analysis has shown that these elements become even more important when they touch upon other dimensions. In general, most of the students do not tend to make a separation between the different place dimensions of the church. For the sake of the analysis, students were invited to reflect on the way they function within each dimension separately. Through reflection, they gained more insight in the way they gave meaning to the place, their level of attachment and dependence towards the place. Firstly, all of the respondents expressed in their own way, how the St. Johannes de Doper church awakens a *sense of home* and a *sense*

of belonging. This includes becoming familiar with the physical place, establishing feelings and emotions towards certain elements within the physical place, the social and religious dimension. Secondly, the religious and social motives of students play an important role in the way they attach or give importance to the church. Due to the religious and social motives, certain elements within the physical, religious, social and societal development sphere of the church, become important for international students. In general, the analysis showed that the majority of the respondents participate in the St. Johannes de Doper church mostly for religious purposes. Therefore, the religious dimension of the church can be considered the most important dimensions for them, however, not all elements of the religious dimensions were considered equally important. Furthermore, the analysis showed that social relationships become an important part of the religious experience and performance of people. Thirdly, the church is a driver of social engagement that international students highly value. The results show that students value invitations for social gatherings, but also the people that personally invite them to join an activity or have a conversation with them. This depends on what students, in terms of social relationships, seek at the church e.g., friendships, volunteers, relationships strictly for the purpose of spiritual development, or a combination of all three. Most of the students desire a feeling of home, a sense of belonging within the St. Johannes de Doper church and the analysis shows that this is a process that happens gradually. This may be the reason why most of the international students seek friends at the church, where there are people who may share for instance, the same values, traditions, and circumstances (being a foreign student). This is what the church offers most of them, a place where they can develop spiritually, where they feel at home as part of a community based on the same religious identity.

Some of the respondents also emphasized the importance of acting as a community, for the benefit of the community and for society in general. This leads to the fourth and last area of this research, which concerns the church as a driver of societal development engagement and the importance students attach to the driver, but also to their own engagement. In general, students find it important that the church is contributing in its own way to society. Students are supporting some of the activities and have the willingness to contribute more to society through the church. The analysis showed that in terms of importance, engagement in societal development activities is not the foremost important area of the church in which international students like to engage with. Students are willing to engage more in societal development through their church, but some of them find it difficult to encounter an activity in which they can apply their knowledge and skills acquired at the university. The church is an important place for students to continue the work they have started in other churches in the past and to even start or implement new activities and projects within the St. Johannes de Doper church. This with the purpose of

continuing the development of their spiritual life and supporting the work of the Catholic church, which includes societal development. In the end, most students, after having finished their study at the university, leave Wageningen and carry with them all they have gained at this particular church i.e., experiences, values, and social relations, to other places.

The findings have shown that the St. Johannes de Doper church is of significant importance for all of the respondents. International students are willing to actively engage and create new services as a community. They do not limit their engagement to the religious and spiritual practices, but also engage in more practical activities, e.g., supporting the foodbank and those in need, through financial donations. This thesis may serve as a tool in future research to understand the importance of religious places. By zooming into a religious place, valuable information about the relationship between people and their church has been brought to light. The findings show that people do find a sense of meaning and a sense of home in religious places. This in turn, creates in them a willingness to engage more with development. Having the will to do something is not enough, according to some respondents. They argue that real change can only happen if action is undertaken as a community. A place like the St. Johannes de Doper church has a strong sense of community and may therefore be one step ahead in initiating and performing activities that are beneficial to society.

9.3 Discussion

9.3.1 Discussion and theoretical reflections

In this part, I will discuss the results in the light of existing scientific research. A theoretical reflection on the sense of place model is given as well. Furthermore, I will reflect on the methodology in which the strengths and limitations are discussed. Lastly, recommendations for future research and practice are given.

As discussed in chapter one, two gaps were identified in literature. The first is that research on the benefits of religion for people tends to focus more on the elderly and less on younger age groups (Larson & Larson, 2003; Hsien-Chuan Hsu, Krageloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2009). Secondly, there is a lack of research on people's relations with religious places and the meaning they attach to religious places (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). While there is a turn to place, the amount of existing literature on sense of place in religious places is still limited. This thesis does not only add to the existing amount of literature on place

meanings and the positive effects of religion for people, but it also indicated to me the importance of studying place from the perspective of sense of place, especially within the religious context. This approach allowed me to zoom into the inner dimensions of the church, relating feelings, thoughts and emotions to different elements of the place. Through sense of place, I was able to look at people as one with the place, intertwined through different dimensions of the place. Different from previous studies, for example psychological or economic studies on religious engagement and well-being, this study teaches us that feelings and emotions of people are to a great extent, influenced by the different material and immaterial aspects of a place. Returning to the great amount of literature on the relation between religion and well-being (Colón-Bacó, 2010; Nami, 2016; Rettner, 2015; Behere, Das, Yadav, & Behere, 2013; Cornah, 2006; Feder, 2020; Weber & Pargament, 2014), this thesis adds to the list of benefits of religion for people as well, but with a focus on a younger age group. While the focus of this thesis was not to explicitly explore benefits, but rather the importance of a religious place for people, some benefits in relation to international students their well-being can be noted. One of the benefits of religion for international students is the church itself, which is conveniently located, and where they can partake in social and religious engagement. Through the lens of sense of place, it becomes clear that not all elements of place are equally important for students. However, this approach tends to focus on the relations that are meaningful for people.

While sense of place zooms in on an individual's feelings, thoughts and emotions, it tries to understand how these inner dimensions are connected to other elements within the place. Through sense of place, I recognized the importance of strong community ties and that the St. Johannes de Doper church mainly functions on a communal level. This approach brings community ties into perspective and shows how the place functions as a community, how place attachment, dependence and identity are expressed at the individual and collective level. I believe that this study shows the complexity of religion and place, that both of them are multidimensional and influence each other. Sense of place allows the researcher to carefully dismantle the place, which is especially useful for the religious context where religion and the geography of the place come together.

9.3.2 Methodological reflection

1. Doing research in a community in which I was an active member as well, was challenging at many times. During the interviews I clearly stated that I adopted for that specific moment the role of a

researcher. Most of the respondents did not succeed in seeing me entirely as a researcher, because during the interviews they mentioned certain words and names, assuming that I would know what and who they were talking about. When this happened, I gently asked for clarification, resulting in a surprised look from the side of the respondent. This was distracting at some points during the interview. On the other hand, respondents felt easily comfortable in my presence and opened up fast, talking about personal topics and experience, because they knew that I was part of the church. Due to the corona measures, some of the interviews had to take place online. As I had to cover many concepts in the interviews, the interviews lasted more than an hour. In some of the cases, respondents needed a break. Something I would have done differently is decreasing the number of concepts to be explored. During the interviews, I was concerned whether I was going sufficiently in-depth in each concept. Because of the limited time during the interviews, I took a different approach in which I focused more on the topics that were considered important by the respondent. When respondents had much to share about a certain topic (in comparison with other topics) and constantly returned to that topic, I then knew that it was considered important by them. While there were many concepts to explore, the purpose was still to find out what topic or concept caught their interest. The interviews that took place at the church itself were less structured and more beneficial, in the sense that respondents felt more at ease as the interview felt more like a spontaneous conversation.

2. During the coding process I found it challenging to organize the codes according to a set of themes derived from sense of place. Many of the quotes overlap with different elements of sense of place, for example, *place attachment* and *place dependence*.
3. The research has been conducted in just one church with a limited number of respondents. So, generalizing the results to a broader context is difficult. In the beginning it was difficult to come in contact with respondents, because I did not know many of the people yet. Snowball sampling accelerated the process of finding respondents, but the number of contacts I got were mostly of people from the same department of the church, for example the choir group or the group that organizes courses on Christianity. At a certain point I took the initiative to search for respondents from other departments of the church.

9.3.3 Recommendations for future research

1. This research distinguishes four aspects of the church, namely the physical, social, religious and development aspects. I would recommend future research to explore other aspects of other religious places as well, to provide a more complete overview of the different elements of religious places. This research was done in a Catholic church, but for example Islamic or Buddhist religious or sacred places may contain different aspects of place.
2. This research touches upon the societal development aspects of the church. Future research can further investigate the role of religious communities within development. The study has shown that the church has a strong sense of community, resulting in the performance of different activities on individual and collective level. Future research can further explore how religious communities are formed and how they benefit the church and in particular society.
3. It would be worthwhile to look further into the importance of religious engagement for the subjective well-being of international students. The research has shown that international students indeed deal with different challenges like being away from home and family for a longer period. They believe that the church provides them with a sense of home, a sense of belonging.

9.3.4 Recommendations for practice

1. I would recommend the church to develop societal development activities where students can also apply knowledge and skills they acquire at the university. This is about creating the possibility for students to initiate new projects.

9.3.5 Positionality

I am writing this part in order to present the issues of positionality that I encountered during the research process. I am an international student, male, coming from South-America with a background in the social sciences and philosophy. I joined the St. Johannes de Doper church in August 2021 as organist of the international choir. One month after joining this church, I started to further develop the research idea.

The topic of the research had Catholic international WUR students as its focus. Throughout the entire research process, I tried to keep reflecting on my positionality, being a Catholic myself, and the impact it

could have on the research. My aim was to have this thesis reflect the voices of the research participants as accurately as possible. I was considered an insider (this happened surprisingly fast) which aided me in searching for and connecting with participants. This had several implications. Most of the participants assumed that I had knowledge about the structure, the history and religious practices of the church, because we share in the same Catholic identity. This was not entirely the case, as I was not aware of many of the Catholic religious teachings myself and I was still in the process of getting familiar with the new church I had joined. So, while others from the early start saw me as an insider, I did not feel as an insider at many times. Interviews, with respondents assuming that I knew much about the church, resulted in them using Christian jargon, and other technical terms like 'liturgy' or sayings such as 'feeling renewed by the Holy Spirit'. While I had an idea what they meant, I still asked for clarification. As a researcher, being considered an insider made it easier for respondents to get more comfortable during the interviews, as they knew who I was. Having some knowledge about the Catholic church in general, also allowed me to ask more specific follow up questions, aiming to better understand the religious experience of respondents in relation to the place. As a researcher, I tried to clearly communicate my motivations for the collection of data. I noticed that talking with participants about my motivations for this research, helped in fostering greater openness from the side of the participants. While talking about my motivations, I was not stating my own opinions on things as it is about the participants' story. I made an effort to be mindful about my positionality and the effect it had on the research process and I recognized that transparency of positionality should be central throughout the entire process.

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Appendix 1: Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Wageningen University & Research

Master International Development Studies (MID), February 2022

Research to explore the importance of the St. Johannes de Doper church as a meeting place and religious driver of societal development engagement, for international students in Wageningen

Dear Sir, Madam,

You are asked to take part in this research. In line with the Wageningen Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice, I ask your consent for collecting data during an interview. In the following part I will introduce you to the research and inform you what you can expect from it before you decide to join in. Thank you for taking the time to read the following information carefully, and if you have any questions, please ask for an explanation: mitch.busropan@wur.nl

About this study

The aim of this master thesis is to investigate the meaning of the St. Johannes de Doper church for international students in Wageningen. The research focuses on the role of the church as a meeting place and (potential) driver of engagement and explores social, spatial and religious dimensions of the church as a meaningful place for international students. In particular, this research aims to shed light on the church's identity, based on the meaning people give to it, and the values underlying them.

Your participation

If you decide to partake in this research, the data you provide will be collected, processed and used to compose a master thesis report which will be publicly available. Your name will be omitted, meaning that the data will be processed and published anonymously. At a later stage, the thesis report may be used for a scientific publication. Only Mitch Busropan has access to the raw data which includes your name. The anonymized data is safely stored for ten years on the password-protected w-drive of Wageningen University and Research.

If you decide to participate, you agree that the interview will be **audio-recorded** through a device. This recording is held confidential and will only be used for the purpose of research that is in accordance with the Wageningen Code of Conduct of Scientific Practice. Withdrawing from this consent is possible at any time and also your participation from the research.

1.

- I declare to be informed about the nature, method and purpose of this study.
- I am not sufficiently informed

2. Name

3. Email

4. I agree voluntarily to take part in this study

- Yes
- No

5. I keep the right to withdraw from this study without giving any reason. I may request to delete the data I have provided

- Yes
- No

6. The data I provide will be anonymized and will be used only for the purpose of this study. In its publications, they may be used as a data source, still in an anonymized form.

- I consent
- I do not consent

7. Do you allow the researcher to anonymously quote your verbal expressions in his thesis report? These are processed and published in an anonymized form.

- I consent
- I do not consent

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Introduction

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I would like to talk to you about your experiences participating in the St. Johannes de Doper church. This research is for my study at the University. I am part of this church and I may know several things, but to get a clear overview, detailed knowledge, I will ask follow-up questions. My understanding of things may be different than yours, and to ensure that I have understood correctly what you mean, I may ask you to further clarify or explain something.

The duration of the interview is approximately one hour. I will be recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down. All responses will be kept confidential. I will ensure that any information I include in the report does not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to.

Age:

Gender:

Nationality:

When and why did you decide to join this church?

How often do you participate in this church?

What activities do you perform? (Also ask about the different functions they fulfill if there are any)

Do you have any expectation from this church? Do you expect the church to do something for you? Or is it the other way around? Or both?

Component 1: Ruimtelijk

1. What do you feel or sense the moment you have arrived at the church? (Consider touch, sight, hearing, smell, taste. Physical attachment)
2. Can you show me a place(s) inside or outside the church that has a special meaning for you? Can you explain how and why this place is special for you? (Emotional content, functional & rational aspects, how that specific place fulfills a need, unique characteristics – Place identity, place attachment)
3. How do you feel towards this place in general? (Feelings towards the special place the respondent showed, but also about feelings towards the church in general)
4. If you look at the physical structures and facilities of this church. Does it fit with that what you want to do? (Would you say that it is in some way useful for you?)
5. How important is it for you? (Place dependency)

6. Why do you go to this church and not another one? (Place dependency if it is for practical reasons, place identity if a unique characteristic is mentioned, place attachment if feelings are expressed)

Component 2: Social

1. With whom of this church are you frequently in contact with? Friends, pastoral workers, etc.
2. Why do you have contact with them and how important are they for you? (Place dependency if it is for practical reasons, place identity if a unique characteristic is mentioned, place attachment if feelings are expressed)
3. What activities are you performing together with them? (Only inside or also outside the church. Consider the relationality of place. Some church activities are entirely online and some activities stretch across the physical location.
4. How do you feel about their involvement in these activities?
5. To what extent is this the place where you find or build your social network? Is this the only place? (If this is the only place, then there is an element of dependency present)
6. How important is your engagement with the church for your contact with people?

Component 3: Religious

1. In what religious activities are you participating?
2. What does this mean for your relationship with the church?
(Place dependency if it is for practical reasons, place identity if a unique characteristic is mentioned, place attachment if feelings are expressed)
3. Is the mass in this specific church special for you?
4. During the lockdown, when the mass was online, how different was it for you to participate online? How have you experienced it? What have you missed? What is replaceable and what not?
5. Beside the mass, are there more religious activities/practices in which you engage?
If yes, in what and why? How do you feel towards it/them?
If not, why?
6. Have you participated in other catholic churches in the Netherlands? Do you recognize regarding the spiritual practices, something unique or special that the St. Johannes de Doper church has which the other churches do not have?

Component 4: Societal engagement

1. Are you currently participating in any program or activity of the church that is related to development? Why or why not?
2. To what extent are you engaged in these activities?
3. How does the church play a role in your engagement with it?
4. How do you feel about performing these activities?
5. How important is it to perform your activities/fulfill your functions in this specific church? (Place dependence).
6. Are you currently participating in any development program or activity that is not related to the church? If yes, does the church play a role in this? (For example, the church that functions as a source of inspiration) If yes, how?

Appendix 3: Themes & Sub-themes

	Place attachment	Place dependency	Place identity	Coherence
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Emotion towards physical features -Feeling toward physical feature -attachment to physical place -Feeling toward church in general -Recalling memory - Effect of Covid-19 - Level of engagement with place - Attachment towards place - Feeling toward activity - Effect of facilities on person - Importance of church - Level of Attachment to the place - Feelings toward the church - Shared experiences - feeling towards pandemic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effect of Covid-19 - Activities of International community - impact of Facilities and organization on activity - Importance of church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -physical feature -Unique aspect of the church - comparison with other churches - Unique characteristic of the church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overlap physical-social
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Longing for social interaction Emotional support -Church activity -Separation social and spiritual engagement -Participation in activity regarding social engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Social engagement as reason for church attendance -Church activity - Effect of Covid-19 -- perception of frequency of social engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Community - comparison with other places - Church facilitating social contact - Cultural differences - comparison with other churches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Effect of Covid-19 - Overlap Social-religion

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Emotion toward social engagement -Feelings towards activity - Sense of community -Blend of physical and social – Coherence - Effect of Covid-19 - perception of church community - international community and local Dutch community -Level of engagement with place - Attachment towards place - feeling of cohesion - Sense of community - Importance of church - Level of Attachment to the place - Social engagement - Feelings toward the church - Shared experiences - Sense of belonging - Level of social interaction - Driver of social contact - Types of drivers of social interaction -Dimensions of social interaction - Importance of social engagement - Reasons for limited social contact - Desire for social contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - international community and local Dutch community - Activities of International community -Level of engagement with place - impact of Facilities and organization on activity - Importance of church - Sense of belonging - Driver of social contact -Church facilitating social contact - Type of people to interact with - Importance of the place for building social network -Activity as an opportunity to engage socially - Activity - Priest as driving force of social engagement - Other possible driving forces - Being introduced - Church meeting expectancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unique characteristic of the church 	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reason for social contact - Cultural differences - Lack of opportunity to express - Doubt whether activity is only social and not religious - Expectation to have social contact at the place - Experience of social interaction - culture and background - Identity - Perception on Social connectedness of people - Social skills - Feeling of not being involved - feeling towards pandemic 			
Religious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Church activity -Feelings towards activity -Blend of physical and social – Coherence - Effect of Covid-19 - international community and local Dutch community - Attachment towards place - Activity - impact of Facilities and organization on activity - Importance of church - Level of Attachment to the place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Church activity - Effect of Covid-19 - Activities of International community - Impact of Facilities and organization on activity - Importance of church - Reasons for limited social contact - Activity for spiritual needs - Religious Activity - Activity as an opportunity for religious experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Unique characteristic of religious activity - Unique characteristics of the church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Social and religion belong together

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shared experiences - Importance of social engagement -Difference in religious experience - Lack of opportunity to express -Doubt whether activity is only social and not religious - Perception about members participation - Lack of religious fulfillment in activity -reason for partaking in religious activity - Identity - feeling towards pandemic 			
Societal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Church activity -Feelings towards activity - Effect of Covid-19 - Activity - Effect of facilities on person - Importance of church - Shared experiences - Participation in non-church related societal development activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Church activity -Level of engagement with place - Importance of church - Participation in development activity - Opportunity to partake in development activity - involvement in societal development activities - Availability for development activity - Church as facilitator in participation in development activities 		-Societal development based on religion

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