



Embracing the "Tiny"

An exploration on the interplay between the concept of home and the cultural meaning of nature in the Dutch tiny house community



Written by Pip

**Master Thesis for the Program -
Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship**

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Words: 20229

July 2022



Utrecht University

> Cover photo taken by Nina on 26 May 2022

Acknowledgements

On this Saturday evening, the 2nd of July 2022, I have arrived at the final stage of my thesis: the acknowledgements. It feels strange and somewhat sad knowing that this six-month project is coming to an end. Where I started the pre-master's degree in Cultural Anthropology at Utrecht University in September 2020, I am now about to hand in my master's thesis. I have experienced the past two years as an inspiring journey that I would have never wanted to miss. This journey, including both ups and downs, have shaped me into the person that I am today. Especially the past six months of conducting ethnographic research in the Dutch tiny house community will stay with me forever. However, this journey would not have been complete without the help of certain people.

My gratitude goes out to all the professors and lecturers within the Department of Anthropology of Utrecht University who have taught me to approach the world through an anthropological lens. Within many different contexts, I have learned how to “make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar.”

I would like to thank my supervisor, Kyra Lenting. Thank you, Kyra, for your support, trust, and valuable feedback over the past six months. It was a pleasure having you as my supervisor.

A special thanks goes out to my parents and my sister. Even though we do not see each other that often, you have supported me unconditionally. Thank you for the encouraging words, the mental support, and the everlasting love you gave me. I would also like to thank my dear boyfriend Reinier. You are my rock. Thank you for always carefully listening to all my anthropological speeches without getting annoyed.

Dear Pleun, Rosalyn, Marlies, and Loes. I would like to thank you for making the long days in the library bearable. Despite breaking our coffee drinking record, I am proud of our journey towards handing in our thesis.

Finally, I want to thank all my participants, who have taught me to appreciate the “small.” Without your inspiring stories, my journey would have been incomplete. A special thanks goes to Ella, my very first participant, who guided me through the field of the Dutch tiny house community. It was a pleasure having you by my side.

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Becoming Familiar with the Field

Tiny House

A tiny house can be referred to once it is smaller than 800 square feet, and when it is either build on a stone foundation or on wheels.

THOW

Tiny house on wheels.

Tiny House Movement

A social and architectural trend that simply promotes to live in small spaces.

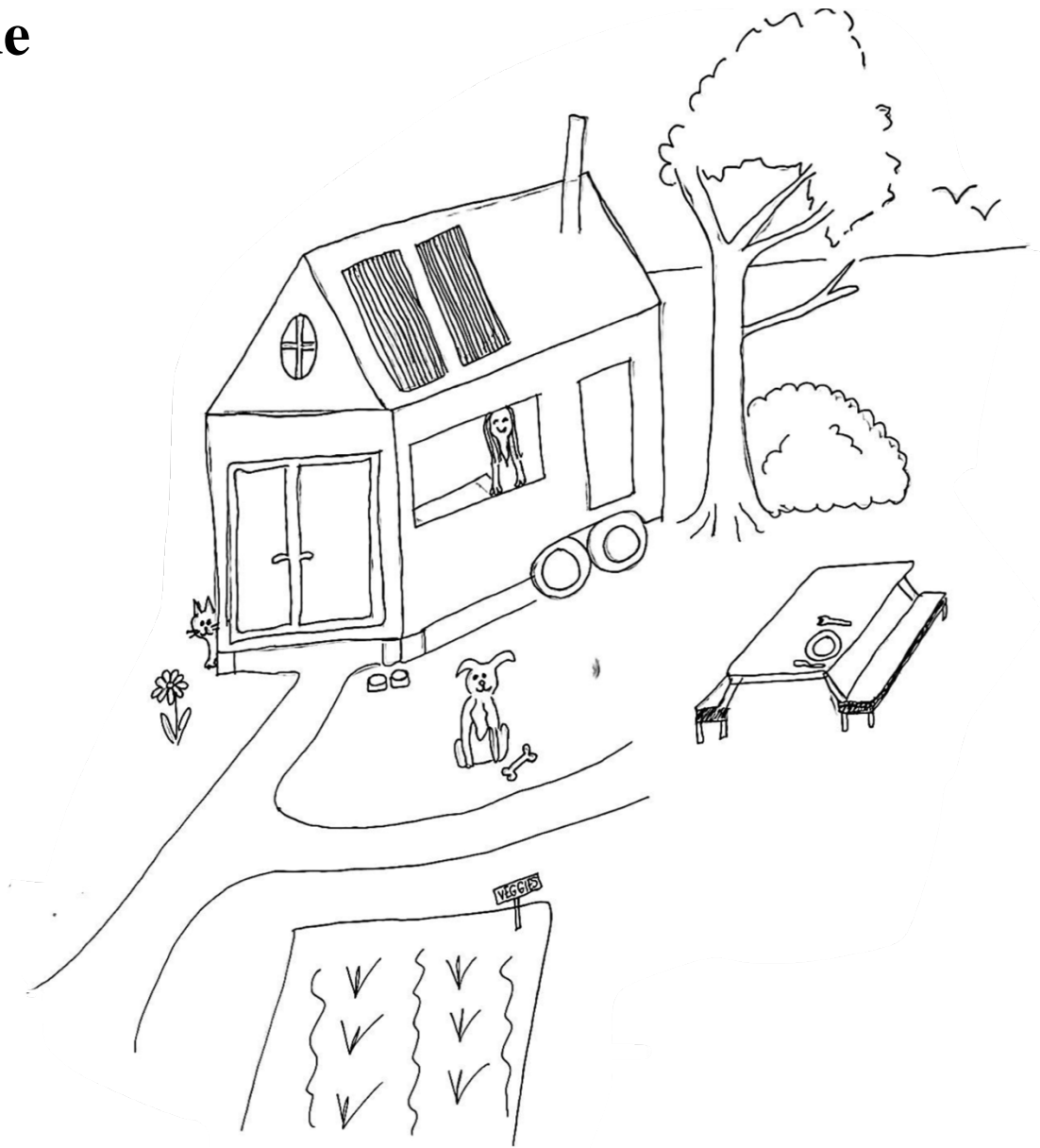
Off-Grid

Not using or relying on public utilities, particularly on the supply of electricity.

Dweller

A person who lives in a tiny house.

Prologue



This drawing was made by myself before I entered the field of the Dutch tiny house community. I thought it would be nice to elaborate on my outsider's perspective before entering the field by making a drawing. As you can see, a tiny house standing in the middle of a natural site. The tiny house's garden includes a vegetable garden, a picnic table, and some cute animals. Inside the tiny house, I drew a woman looking through the window of her tiny house. On top of the tiny house, I drew two massive solar panels, which make the tiny house off-grid. Moreover, this is a THOW, as you can see from the big wheels underneath the house. Looking at this drawing gives me a sort of holiday feeling. I would not mind spending some nights inside this tiny house. As becomes clear, this is my outsider's perspective. Are you curious how my perspective on the Dutch tiny house community changed throughout the past months? Start reading this thesis and the epilogue will illustrate my insider's perspective after spending three months in the field (drawing, 27 February 2022).

Introduction

To introduce you into the topic of this thesis, I would like you to think about your house. What does it look like? Is it made of stone, or does it include natural elements such as wood? More important, how big is your house? I live in a stone-build house located in the city centre of Utrecht. Within this house, I own a private room where I eat, sleep, watch tv, hang my laundry, and now, am writing this thesis. My room is about 215 square feet and is equipped with all comforts. This is also the place where I feel at home. I feel at home because of my roommates, but also because I was able to decorate my own room the way I wanted it. What specific elements make you feel at home?

The concept of home varies from person to person and may travel through space and time (Mallet 2004). As humans, we are therefore able to reimagine home. This is exactly what the Dutch tiny house pioneer Marjolein Jonker decided to do when she was living in her apartment nearby Alkmaar (interview, 16 March 2022). She did not feel at home in her apartment; it was too big for her. Why would she take up so much space if it only cost her extra money? Moreover, owning such a big apartment would only increase her ecological footprint, which she argues to be problematic during times of the climate crisis. Marjolein decided she did not need that much space to make herself comfortable. For her, it was important to get closer to nature and to live a minimalistic life. However, when she decided to look for a house that would meet her wishes, she came standing face to face with the problems of today's housing crisis. There were just a few houses that matched her wishes, but these houses were unaffordable.

This housing crisis is related with a tremendous worldwide population growth between 1800 and 2019 (Roser et al. 2019). Whereas the population used to be 1 billion in 1800, it expanded up 7.7 billion in 2019. Grant (2014) explains how this is related to increased capitalistic developments such as steam power, electricity, and commercial agriculture. These capitalistic developments ensured how, for instance, much more food could be produced in a short period of time which accelerated population growth. This growth is also visible if we look at the population statistics of the Netherlands, where the population grew from 5 million in 1900 to 17 million in 2019 (CBS 2021). This has a great impact if you consider the country's total surface of 41.543 km², which makes the Netherlands the fourth-most densely populated country in the world (CBS 2021; Roser et al. 2019). The result of such population growth affects the demand for housing, especially in the densely populated Dutch environment. Boelhouwer (2019) illustrates how the increased population in the Netherlands accelerated the housing demand, while at the same time, the existing supply could not meet this high demand. Moreover, because of this high demand, housing prices have also risen enormously. De Nederlandsche Bank (2021) demonstrates how housing prices rose 8% per year in the past five years. As a result, it became a challenge to buy or rent a house. This development has ensured that we are currently facing, and which Marjolein also struggled with herself, a housing crisis (Boelhouwer 2019).

As becomes clear, the “population boom” has turned the housing market upside down. Moreover, the increased capitalistic developments of the past hundred years, which have contributed to this crisis, have also ensured how humans increasingly became detached from the natural environment (Schultz 2002). Hough (2004) describes how this has to do with a shift from rural to urban living, where urban living environments are shaped by technologies that rather separate the human from the natural environment. Today, most humans continue living their lives in human-built environments – big houses, malls, office buildings, or gyms (Strong 1995). Moreover, instead of harmoniously living together with the natural environment, Bellamy (2002) describes how the natural environment rather changed into a commodity through man-made capitalistic processes to generate monetary profit. For example, gas extraction which is used to heat houses and buildings. Yet, because of these capitalistic production processes which made it possible to quickly satisfy human demand, it allowed the concept of consumerism to emerge (Miles 1998). Consumerism may be described as an economic phenomenon, but it rather is a “way of life”. People were not only offered with what they needed but would now also be offered with what they desired (Miles 1998). This ever-growing consumer mentality, in combination with increased urbanized environments, resulted in humans having a decreased awareness for the natural environment (Hough 2004; Miles 1998). Instead of harmoniously living with the natural environment, a pre-existing nature/culture dichotomy negatively influences the way how humans interact with the natural environment. This way of living characterizes a dichotomy between nature and culture, where culture became predominant and now violates the capacities of the natural environment (Ehrlich 1986).

However, the tiny house movement rather contests this normative way of living. The tiny house movement can be defined as a social and architectural trend that simply promotes to live in small spaces (Anson 2018). The tiny house movement is argued to be a countermovement against consumerism with a common interest in “minimizing, de-cluttering, and downsizing” (Ford and Gomez-Lanier 2017, 394). Instead of owning a big house, which rather stimulates the inhabitant’s consumption behaviour, a tiny house promotes to live a life guided by minimalism. This minimalistic lifestyle does not just oppose consumerism but also decreases one’s ecological footprint which is an important character of the movement’s mentality (Ford and Gomez-Lanier 2017). Huttel et al. (2020) describe how decluttering practices within this minimalist lifestyle foster pro-environmental behaviours by lowering unnecessary consumption which decrease one’s ecological footprint. Moreover, instead of being detached from nature through an urbanized environment, the tiny house movement is defined by people trying to live closer to nature (Harris 2018). As this movement fulfilled all Marjolein her wishes, she decided to build her own tiny house in 2015, the first of its own in the Netherlands, which made her the Dutch tiny house pioneer. Because she had the opportunity to construct her own tiny house, her problem of finding a suitable house during the times of the housing crisis was also solved. Marjolein’s decision to move into her tiny house has inspired many other people in the Netherlands. Today, the Netherlands includes 18 successfully set up tiny house villages including multiple tiny households. ¹ All

¹ “Geslaagde projecten,” Tiny House Nederland, accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.tinyhousenederland.nl/overheid/geslaagde-projecten/>

these people who might have been living in a big house with multiple rooms have consciously decided to exchange this for a house smaller than 800 square feet. Such a change of the house itself, but also the environment, may affect the concept of home, making it a multidimensional concept (Douglas 1991). Moreover, Mallet (2004) argues that the construction of a home is highly affected by one's identity and social changes. Therefore, the concept of home is argued to be a representation of the inhabitant. In the case of the tiny house movement, this specific construction of home has been pushed by a common interest in rejecting a consumerist lifestyle to decrease the burden on the natural environment (Ford and Gomez-Lanier 2017). Anson (2018) explains how "the bigger, the better" is history and is slowly being replaced by the appreciation for the "small".

Instead of adopting a consumerist lifestyle, the tiny house movement rather supports the mentality of minimalism to decrease the burden on the natural environment. This minimalistic lifestyle fosters pro-environmental behaviours by lowering unnecessary consumption. Given that nature plays a significant role within this movement by both conserving it and living close to it, this thesis will explore the cultural meaning of nature. Moreover, as home is a multidimensional concept, I will explore the interplay between home and the cultural meaning of nature in the tiny house community in the Netherlands. By doing so, the following research question will be answered:

"How is the concept of home influenced by the tiny house communities' cultural meaning of nature in The Netherlands?"

According to Strauss, Quinn, and Meeting (2001, 6), a cultural meaning is "the typical (frequently recurring and widely shared aspects of the) interpretation of some type of object or event evoked in people as a result of their similar life experiences." They explain that a "meaning" in this sense is the interpretation evoked in a person by an object or event given at a specific time and place, whereas "culture" refers to knowledge, beliefs, and habits within a specific group or society influencing this meaning-making process (Kottak 2019). A cultural meaning would therefore suggest that individuals with different life experiences would understand objects or events differently. Within this thesis, the cultural meaning of nature will be elaborated on in the tiny house community in the Netherlands. McKeon and Williams (1977, 219) refer to nature as "perhaps the most complex word in language," as it may be referred to through multiple definitions such as human traits, but also a physical world including landscapes, animals, and plants. Within this thesis, the word nature encompasses "the physical power causing all the phenomena of the material world, these phenomena (including plants, animals, landscapes etc.), uncultivated or wild areas, and the countryside" (Hughes et al. 1995 quoted in Curtis 2020, 4). In some cases, I may use the word "natural environment," which refers to an environment co-created by the facets of nature which is "relatively unchanged or undisturbed by human culture" (Hughes et al. 1995 quoted in Curtis 2020, 4).

This thesis aims to capture the everyday life of the Dutch tiny house community² in order to understand how their cultural meaning of nature influences the concept of “home.” It will become clear how the tiny house movement contests normative ways of living by creating insights into different ways of being on this planet, inspired by a strong connection to nature and, therefore, environmental sustainability. Moreover, it will become clear that home is a multidimensional concept which travels through space and time (Mallet 2004). In the case of the tiny house movement, this thesis will illustrate how the concept of home is highly connected with rejecting a consumerist mentality of “the bigger, the better” (Anson 2014).

² From now on, the ‘Dutch tiny house community’ will be used to refer to the tiny house community in the Netherlands

The Field

The tiny house movement recently arrived in the Netherlands by tiny house pioneer Marjolein Jonker. Where Marjolein came with the idea to build her own tiny house in 2015 due to the alarming housing crisis, she inspired and triggered many to chase the same lifestyle. In November 2016, she established the Tiny House Nederland foundation, where people with the same dream could help each other on their way to a tiny house. Marjolein explains how there is no municipality today that has never heard of a tiny house.³ Together with the Tiny House Nederland foundation, she has submitted

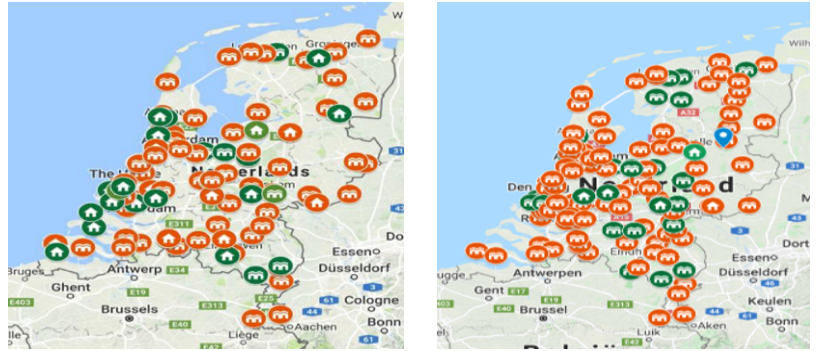


Figure 1: Maps of tiny house initiatives in the Netherlands (source: Tiny House Nederland)

many requests to municipalities to establish tiny house villages as the desire for minimalist life grew more and more every year. Today, the Netherlands includes 18 successfully set up tiny house villages.⁴ This is visible looking at the tiny house map (figure 1). This map illustrates all types of tiny house initiatives in the Netherlands. The left map illustrates tiny house initiatives in 2017, and the right map illustrates tiny house initiatives in 2022. It is visible how the number of tiny houses has drastically increased in the past five years. However, the road towards building a tiny house village is quite difficult in the Netherlands. Therefore, most symbols on both maps are labelled with an orange colour, meaning “in construction” (figure 1). The reason why it is so difficult to get a tiny house location will be explained in the first chapter of this thesis. Luckily, I was able to visit six tiny house villages myself. On the right map (figure 2), I have highlighted the tiny house villages which I have visited throughout my research. I decided to visit multiple tiny house villages in the Netherlands, ranging from location, size, and population, to get a good understanding of today’s Dutch tiny house community. To get you familiar with the tiny house villages I have visited, I will shortly introduce each village.



Figure 2: Visited tiny house villages in the Netherlands (figure created by author)

³ “Over THN,” Tiny House Nederland, accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.tinyhousenederland.nl/tiny-house-nederland/over-thn/>

⁴ “Geslaagde projecten,” Tiny House Nederland, accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.tinyhousenederland.nl/overheid/geslaagde-projecten/>

1. Ten Boer

The first tiny house village I visited was established in 2020 and is located on the farmland of a small village named Ten Boer (figure 2; location 1). In exchange for maintaining the ground and offering monthly activities for local residents to get familiar with the tiny house movement, tiny house dwellers are allowed to live on the site for the upcoming six years. Currently, the tiny house village includes 14 tiny houses, of which most are running off-grid. I was invited to this tiny house village by participant Ella. Ella lives together with her husband and dog in a THOW. Throughout my research, I stayed in contact with Ella, she was one of my key informants.

2. Katwijk

For my second tiny house visit, I went to a village in Katwijk which was established in 2018 (figure 2; location 2). This village is located between a residential area and the beach. The location of the tiny house village is a recreational area where multiple citizen initiatives were able to set up a project for a fixed period. The tiny house village, including eight tiny houses, has been given a fixed contract until 2028. From 2028, they must return the land to the municipality again and they are expected to look for a place somewhere else.

3. Koedijk

On the other hand, the third village I visited was not bounded by a fixed end date yet. This village was established in 2020 and is located on a nature reserve nearby Koedijk (figure 2; location 3). This village requires every tiny house to be sustainably produced. Because this is the core value of the village which they like to share with future tiny house builders, they have established a centre of excellence providing monthly seminars. This tiny house village currently includes ten sustainably produced tiny houses.

4. Den Hoorn

The fourth village I visited was established in 2018 and is located nearby a polder landscape in Den Hoorn (figure 2; location 4). This tiny house village was established by a citizen initiative offering space to discover, develop and transfer the tiny house movement. The municipality offered this project a five-year fixed contract, which will end in 2023. Now, this tiny house village includes nine unique tiny houses.

5. Delft

The fifth tiny house village I visited was established in 2019 and is located next to a train station (figure 2; location 5). There used to be a car garage on the site, but after the company closed its doors, the piece of land was offered to a citizen initiative aiming to build a tiny house village. Today, this tiny house village has grown into a green environment where circularity and sustainability are the community's core values. This tiny house village includes 12 tiny houses that have been given a fixed contract of ten years.

6. Dordrecht

Finally, the sixth tiny house village is located in Dordrecht. This village was recently established in 2021, in the middle of a residential area (figure 2; location 6). The municipality of Dordrecht allowed a citizen initiative to set up a tiny house village with a fixed contract of ten years. The municipality expects the tiny house community to undertake various activities with other residents to contribute to a social connection in the neighbourhood. This village currently includes seven tiny houses but still has three more spots available.

Methodology and Operationalisation

My ultimate aim was, of course, to live in a tiny house village myself. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, I noticed that many dwellers stayed in their tiny houses, making it impossible for me to sub-rent a place. Luckily, there is more than one way to “skin a cat.” Keeping that thought in mind, I entered the field through different “doors.” Considering we live in an online era, especially after COVID-19 hit us, I was used to spending many hours on my laptop. It is, therefore, not surprising that I immediately started conducting online research. I quickly noticed that most tiny house villages in the Netherlands have a website, where contact details can often be found. Consequently, I spent many hours emailing tiny house villages in the Netherlands to ask if they would be willing to participate in my research project. Considering online platforms, I also used Facebook and Instagram to ask whether my direct connections knew people living in a tiny house in the Netherlands.

Moreover, I have visited multiple open days of tiny house communities where I was able to get in contact with the tiny house dwellers themselves. I was thrilled that the open days started again after two years of standing still due to COVID-19. Of course, it is and remains a completely different experience to enter the field physically instead of online. Luckily, by conducting online research and visiting many open days, I soon came into contact with many tiny house dwellers. Additionally, through a so-called “snowball” effect (O’Reilly 2012), I was able to build upon existing contacts to generate further contacts. Because I had the opportunity to speak with many inspiring tiny house dwellers, I was able to get a good understanding of today’s Dutch tiny house community. In the end, I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with Dutch tiny house dwellers. The people I spoke to were between 25 and 60 years old. Some people I spoke to were living in the same tiny house village. To protect their privacy, I have anonymized all my participants’ names (O’Reilly 2012).

Besides conducting semi-structured interviews, I used participant observations. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 1) argue that participant observation is a method of learning the explicit and tacit components of a group of people's daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events by participating in their daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events. During my tiny house visits, for both interviews with my participants, as for scheduled open days, I always made sure to include a participant observation. I would walk around the village and observe what people were doing and listen to what they were talking about. By doing so, I was able to get a good understanding of what a tiny house village looks like, and I came to understand the dwellers’ daily

activities. Moreover, every time I scanned the environment, I took notes of all the thoughts that came into my mind. O'Reilly (2012) argues the importance of rereading your notes, as you might become familiar with details you have not been able to notice before. Fieldnotes, therefore, help you to “make the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (O'Reilly 2012, 92). Moreover, keeping notes will enable me to understand the cultural language of the group (O'Reilly 2012).

Alongside participant observations and semi-structured interviews, I included a subjective research method called auto-ethnography (Ellis 1999). Despite the fact I was not able to live in a tiny house village during my research, I did book a stay in a tiny house for a week. Merging myself in the field is necessary to obtain a deeper understanding of what it is like to live in a tiny house. Even though I have not lived in a tiny house village, this experience has given me valuable insight into what it is like to live in a tiny house. The notes I took during this visit were eventually merged into a vignette presented in the third chapter of this thesis.

Finally, I used a photo-elicitation method. As Collier and Collier (2009) argue, it is through perception, largely visual and auditory, that we respond to the humanness that surrounds us. To elaborate on the multi-dimensional concept of home, I asked my participants to take pictures of things in and around their tiny house which constructs their concept of home. As the statement illustrates: “Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words.” I must acknowledge how this visual data collection method has provided me useful information. By using this visual method, I collected data which helped me to understand the multi-dimensional concept of home. By using a triangulation of the above-described research methods, I was able to fully understand life in the Dutch tiny house community.

Ethics and Role of the Researcher

Madden (2017) describes ethnography as an embodied practice in which we use our ears, eyes, nose, and hands to understand the participants' lives. O'Reilly (2012, 100) argues how “we cannot undertake ethnography without acknowledging the role of our own embodied, sensual, thinking, critical and positioned self.” Gusterson (1997) made me aware of the fact that the collected data may probably be filtered by my own presumptions. Therefore, it is almost impossible to “take the view from above” (Haraway 1991, 196), which makes me aware that my position as a researcher will construct the field. Before you continue reading this thesis, it is important to know who is behind the text. I am a 24-year-old, white, middle-class, Dutch female who previously experienced living in a THOW or camper bus. Together with my parents and sister I used to travel around Europe with our Mercedes 508 bus to explore natural sites and to understand what it is like living in a bus. Even though a camper bus is different compared to a tiny house, where one usually only moves to another place when the contract expires, I did experience to live in a “tiny” space. This might have affected my research by subconsciously filling in what life in a tiny house can be like. This experience, but also the fact that I am a middle-class, white, woman, might have influenced my research. It could be that my female

sex has ensured that I finally spoke to mostly female participants.⁵ As Diphoorn (2021) argues, it is therefore important to always be aware of your positionality throughout the research. I tried to reflect on my positionality as much as possible by taking notes and rereading them once in a while to be aware of possible changes.

Moreover, something which I struggled with throughout my research is that you often find yourself being present in someone's private bubble. I enjoyed visiting many tiny houses, but at the same time, this environment is very intimate and personal. Especially when I entered private spaces such as a bathroom or a bedroom. This demonstrates how ethnographic research is related to making *public* what was argued to be *private* (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). As a researcher, it is important to be aware of what is private or may not be shared to not harm your participants. To avoid inconveniences, I felt it was important to always be open about the expectations of my visit. This way, we would not cross each other's borders, and it would help maintain a safe environment. Therefore, an essential element of maintaining a safe environment is the step of gaining informed consent (O'Reilly 2012). Informed consent is important not only for entering one's tiny house but also for participating in the study itself. Through informed consent, the researcher informs the participants about the purposes and procedures of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Additionally, the participants must know about the benefits and possible risks of the research and how the collected data will be stored and protected. To safeguard my participants privacy, I have anonymized almost all my participants' names. The only participant whom I did not anonymise is the Dutch tiny house pioneer Marjolein Jonker. She plays a significant role in the Dutch tiny house community, which make her statements of great importance. Moreover, Marjolein carries her pioneer title with pride, and my participants often mentioned her name during our conversations. This was another reason to not anonymize her name. I further safeguarded the privacy of my participants by anonymizing the tiny house village its original name. Instead of referring to the village its name, I only referred to the placename. By constantly being aware of my positionality as a researcher and the ethical questions which may arise, I have been able to guarantee a safe environment for both my participants and myself.

Outline

The first chapter of this thesis will elaborate on the emergence of the contemporary Dutch tiny house community. This will be done by first elaborating on the birth of the tiny house movement in the United States and how the movement came to challenge the mentality of the "American Dream." After illustrating the emergence of the tiny house movement, I will demonstrate how the movement became a popular way of life in the Netherlands as it was introduced by tiny house pioneer Marjolein Jonker. Finally, the dwellers' motivational aspects for going tiny will become clear, and how this is closely related to challenging a consumerist lifestyle to decrease the burden on the natural environment. Moreover, it will become clear that

⁵ The word 'female' needs to be nuanced because I did not explicitly discuss one's gender identity during the conversation. When I use the word female, I, therefore, do not refer explicitly to a static female gender identity.

the natural environment is also valued by its presence in the tiny house villages, allowing dwellers to get closer to nature. By doing so, this chapter will oppose to the romanticized image of “the bigger, the better.”

Chapter two describes the human/nature relationship in the Dutch tiny house community. This will be done by first analysing the concept of nature itself and arguing how it is interpreted by the dwellers of the Dutch tiny house community. It will become clear that their interpretation of nature and their human/nature relationship relates with what Ingold (2000, 19) calls an “ecology of life,” in which the organism and the environment are interpreted as an indivisible whole. Finally, it will become clear how this specific human/nature relationship is maintained by place-making activities of which dwelling is an important element (Low 2016). This chapter will clarify that, as the title states, “nature is everything” in the Dutch tiny house community.

Building upon the second chapter, where the human/nature relationship in the Dutch tiny house community was illustrated, this final chapter will elaborate on the concept of home and how it is entangled with the dwellers’ cultural meaning of nature. First, the anthropological approaches of home will be explained (Douglas 1991; Lenhard and Semanani 2020; Mallet 2004). It will become clear that home is a multi-layered concept which may travel through space and time. To clarify this, I will refer to my tiny house participants’ conceptualizations of home by placing their previous house and their tiny house in dialogue. Finally, I will illustrate how the conceptualization of home in the Dutch tiny house community, is entangled with the dwellers’ cultural meanings of nature by analysing pictures collected through a photo-elicitation method.



This cover photo was taken by the author on 14 March 2022

“The Bigger, The Better?”

“A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.” – Henry David Thoreau in *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (1908, 79)

Reading this statement, it becomes clear how Henry David Thoreau (1908) introduces a lifestyle that is not about owning as many goods as possible. Instead, he claims the richness of a person is related to being satisfied with less and owning as few things as possible. This minimalist mentality was a frequently discussed topic throughout my research. What is the added value of having a big house if you only use a few rooms? As Thoreau clarifies (1908, 82), “Our houses are such unwieldy property that we are often imprisoned in them rather than housed in them.” Within the tiny house movement, people also consciously chose for a tiny house instead of a big one. This chapter, will therefore elaborate on the tiny house movement and argue how it challenges the romanticized image of “the bigger the better.”

First, I will introduce the emergence of the contemporary tiny house movement. By doing so, I will draw a brief historical background by introducing the “American Dream,” and how this dream was slowly being challenged by the upcoming tiny house movement. After that, I will elaborate on the tiny house movement and how this became a popular way of life in the Netherlands as it was introduced by the pioneer Marjolein Jonker. Finally, I will elaborate on dwellers’ motivational aspects of going tiny, which challenges a consumerist lifestyle to minimize the burden on the natural environment. Moreover, it will become clear that the natural environment is also valued by its presence in the tiny house villages, as it allows dwellers to get closer to nature. By doing so, this chapter will challenge the romanticized image of “the bigger, the better.”

The Birth of the Tiny House Movement

One of the pioneers in the tiny house movement is the previously introduced American philosopher Henry David Thoreau (1908). As a countermovement against consumerism and being in search for freedom in nature, Thoreau conducted an experiment in which he lived for two years inside a small wooden cabin. During this experiment, Thoreau kept a diary which he eventually turned into the well-known book named “Walden” or “Life in the Woods” (1908). As Thoreau (1908, 24) describes at the beginning of his book “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” Reading this statement, it becomes clear how simplicity is at the heart of his philosophy. By experiencing what was truly essential in life, Thoreau (1908) was an early pioneer in demonstrating that the bigger is not always better. A mentality which opposes the ever-existing “American Dream,” in which the accumulation of commodities is argued to be a key of life satisfaction. However, what if this ever-growing ideal could not be achieved by everyone? Moreover, what if people come to realize that this ideal might also affect the environment in the long-term? This is exactly what happened before the existence of today’s tiny house movement.

The tiny house movement was originally born in the United States of America. It became a countermovement against the ever-existing American Dream. But what is this American Dream and how does it relate with the emergence of the tiny house movement? First, I would like to highlight the American Dream as it was introduced by James Turlow Adams within his book named *Epic of America* (1931, 404). He stated:

The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. [...] It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.

However, Adams (1931, 405) noticed how the American Dream became poisoned by “money making and material improvements,” and how material possession became the basis of human existence. In his book, Adams (1931, 406) argued that “in our struggle to make a living we were neglecting to live.” Through his book, he aimed to save the American heritage and to continue the idea of progress in humane and moral terms instead of materialistic ones. Although Adams’s (1931) call for reimagining the American Dream, material possession continued to grow as an important aspect. The contemporary American Dream is therefore argued to be “a hegemonic project that promoted the accumulation of commodities as a social norm, civic duty, display of individual achievement, and a key source of life-satisfaction” (Ivanova 2011, 329). This is the moment where “the bigger, the better” came to lie at the heart of the American mentality.

This mentality of “the bigger, the better,” highly influenced people’s way of living in which the “best” should always be attained. By cause of this, the accumulation of commodities became a key to life satisfaction which altered a consumerist lifestyle (Ivanova 2011). This lifestyle may be recognized by constantly being occupied with the acquisition of consumer goods. Miles (1998) adds to this that although consumerism may frequently be described as an economic phenomenon, it rather is a way of life. This consumerist lifestyle became also standardized in home ownership, as owning a big house became a symbol of success. Where in 1949, the average house size was calculated at 1,100 square feet, it was doubled in 2008 to 2,500 square feet (Harris 2018). She explains how it slowly became normalized to own a single-family suburban house in which there was plenty of space to accumulate commodities and, thus, maintain a consumerist lifestyle.

However, this ever-growing mentality steadily changed when people came to realize that it was not easily attainable for everyone (Vail 2016). Owning a single-family house, including the newest furniture and gadgets, is not a self-evident way of living. Moreover, Vail (2016) explains how the environmental movement in the 1960s made people aware of how this consumerist lifestyle had an impact on the environment through the release of damaging gases and chemicals during the manufacture of these consumer products. In 1999, the global pioneer of the contemporary tiny house movement, Jay Shafer, decided to reject this lifestyle by building his own tiny house. He wrote an article, “Home Sweet Hut,” about life in his tiny house, which became a leading document for the contemporary tiny house movement. Instead of living the American Dream, which underlies “the bigger, the better,” Jay Shafer changed this philosophy into “less is more” under the guise of the tiny house movement.

The tiny house movement increased in popularity throughout the years. Moreover, the global housing crisis, which caused an alarming shortage of houses, also made people realize that living small might be a possible solution (Anson 2014). This ensured that not only people in the United States came to reimagine the “needed” space in a house, but this mentality was soon transferred to the Netherlands and introduced by tiny house pioneer Marjolein Jonker. As previously described, it was impossible for Marjolein to buy an affordable house that matched her wishes. The housing market in the Netherlands was, and still is, overstrained. Therefore, Marjolein decided to spin the wheel and change the “big” for the “small” by being the first legal tiny house owner in the Netherlands.

The Dutch Tiny House Community

The time of endless economic growth will end; it is no longer tenable. We are encouraged to consume more, to buy bigger and more expensive things and houses and to do that we have to work harder and harder and have less and less free time. When is it enough? What do we really need to live well? What is really enough for us?⁶

⁶ “Over THN,” Tiny House Nederland, accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.tinyhousenederland.nl/tiny-house-nederland/over-thn/>

The above-stated quotation comes from the previously introduced platform Tiny House Nederland. This platform exists five years and was established by previously introduced tiny house pioneer Marjolein Jonker. I got the opportunity to interview her about the emergence of the tiny house movement in the Netherlands during my fieldwork. Marjolein told me that she was not satisfied with her previous house in Alkmaar (interview, 16 March 2022). She lived there with just two cats while having disposal of three bedrooms, an attic, and a shed. Basically, she thought her house was too big. Moreover, she longed for greener environment, being surrounded by nature. After reading about the current environmental challenges, she decided to change her life. In her words, she stated: “I have to contribute to a better world” (interview, 16 March 2022). She already thought about living smaller and having her own vegetable garden to grow food locally. By doing so, her environmental footprint would decrease. Moreover, she also liked the idea of a minimalistic life. Why would she own a house with three bedrooms, an attic, and a shed if she does not need the space to live a comfortable life? Unfortunately, she could not find anything that would match her wishes. Moreover, it was extremely hard for her to find a suitable house in times of the housing crisis.

Listening to Marjolein her story, it becomes clear how she is contesting a mentality of “the bigger, the better.” Instead of owning a lot of space in her big house where she has the ability to accumulate commodities, she rather opposes such a consumerist lifestyle (Ivanova 2011). Moreover, her knowledge of the current environmental challenges made her aware of her ecological footprint. Instead of living a life with the urge to constantly achieve the “best,” Marjolein decided to embrace simplicity. Not only because she was able to reimagine the “needed” space in a house, but also because wanting more and bigger is damaging the natural environment (Anson 2014). This clearly illustrates how her desires interconnect with the philosophy of today’s tiny house movement. Marjolein discovered the tiny house movement by doing research on Pinterest. She discovered that this movement was already visible in the United States, being introduced by pioneer Jay Shafer. Within just a few days, her Pinterest mood board was filled up with images of tiny houses. But what exactly is a tiny house, and what is the philosophy behind the movement?

The question about the concept of a tiny house may sometimes be a bit vague. I remember while conducting fieldwork, I incidentally spoke with a handyman about my research. He had never heard about the tiny house movement, and he was joking, “why don’t you interview me? I live in a room of just 160 square feet.” At first, I thought about how stupid his joke was because tiny houses were popular, right? However, I soon realized that many people did not understand the concept at all. This specific moment confronted me with being too caught up in my insider perspective as a researcher. Therefore, let me clarify the concept of a tiny house and the mentality of the movement. A tiny house can be referred to once it is smaller than 800 square feet and when it is either build on a stone foundation or on wheels (Anson 2018). Most tiny houses in the Netherlands are built on wheels and are often referred to as THOW (tiny house on wheels). The advantage of a THOW is that it is easy to move, given that most tiny house projects are temporary. According to Mitchell (2014), a tiny house could be defined as a home which highlights effective use of space while having the

ability to meet the needs of the residents. Moreover, he describes how it serves as a vehicle for the lifestyle that the dweller wishes to preserve.

While conducting fieldwork, I noticed how dwellers tried to effectively use the amount of space in their tiny house. For example, my tiny house participant Nina, who lives in a tiny house in Katwijk with her husband, included a foldable desk while at the same time being a television table. Also, tiny house participants

Martijn and Ilse, from the same tiny house village in Katwijk, included a foldable kitchen table in their tiny house (picture 1). Mitchell (2014, 14) argues that “a tiny house is not just a house, it is a lifestyle,” as the physical structure of the house promotes a lifestyle which the dweller desires. This specific lifestyle is incorporated into the tiny house movement. Anson (2018) further describes how the tiny house movement is characterized by people adopting a minimalistic lifestyle, reducing consumption, and finding happiness in simplicity.



Picture 1: Foldable kitchen table (picture taken by author on 5 March 2022)

Kilman (2016) adds to this by highlighting four important elements of today’s tiny house movement. First, the tiny house movement ensures the possibility of alternative housing, which fosters strong environmental ethics and promotes community-building practices. Second, the size of a tiny house facilitates environmentalism as if the inhabitant is urged to make more environmentally friendly decisions. Third, living in a tiny house calls for the emergence of a community and facilitates sharing practices. Finally, and as already mentioned, the tiny house movement challenges “the bigger, the better” mindset, which is commonplace in today’s consumer culture. Reading these four important elements, it becomes clear how the tiny house movement is committed to minimising the burden on the natural environment. The tiny house movement provides an alternative framework related to the traditional waste and consumption patterns of large houses (Harris 2018). Bang (2005, 125) adds to this by explaining that “we are what we live in,” as people design a building, they are also preparing a specific society, including its lifestyle. Therefore, while “we make the buildings” they also “make us” (Bang 2005, 125). This mirrors the tiny house movement, which is helping to restructure and refocus this connection by showcasing an alternative to conventional housing and providing aspirational examples of how to live effectively with less. Within the Dutch tiny house community, people are also occupied with restructuring and refocussing this connection by critically thinking about the design of their tiny house and by arguing what they really need to make themselves comfortable. Even when the house

is finished, possible adjustments in the house are still being considered. Tiny house participant Iris, who moved into her tiny house in Delft a year ago, argued that she would like to get rid of her books as she is not using them anymore (interview, 14 March 2022). Moreover, by getting rid of her books, she creates space for stuff which she actually uses.

After Marjolein heard about the tiny house movement for the first time, she decided she wanted her own tiny house. No one had ever built a tiny house in the Netherlands before, but that did not stop Marjolein in achieving her dream. In 2015 she found enthusiastic students from TU-Delft who were willing to help build her tiny house. In the meantime, Marjolein decided to create a Facebook group, “Tiny House Nederland” to ask if there were more people interested in achieving a tiny house. Luckily, she found enough participants to set up a citizen initiative group and look for a piece of land in Alkmaar. Together with the initiative group, she contacted the Alkmaar municipality to discuss whether it would be possible to start a tiny house project. After much discussion, they were finally permitted to start a five-year project in Alkmaar. In 2016, Marjolein was the first legal tiny house dweller in the Netherlands. This was just the beginning because after that many more initiative groups were looking for a piece of land to make their “tiny” dream come true. However, because the movement is relatively unknown, this is often the biggest obstacle into realising a tiny house.

Even though Marjolein succeeded in finding a place for her tiny house, the road towards achieving a tiny house in the Netherlands is not the easiest one. Marjolein wrote about this on her blog named *Marjolein in het Klein*,⁷ where she illustrates the difficulties of finding a piece of land for a tiny house in the Netherlands. First, it is important to keep in mind that the Netherlands is one of the most densely populated countries in the world (CBS 2021; Roser, Ritchie, and Ortiz-Ospina 2019). Moreover, the population keeps on growing which has a great impact if you consider the country’s total surface of 41.543 km² (CBS 2021). Because of this, more and more people are looking for a house or building land, which accelerates the market’s demand. Marjolein argues on her blog how there is too little land intended for housing, which has made building land and housing unaffordable and inaccessible for many people. On top of that, if you do find an affordable piece of land, it is the question whether you can build a tiny house on it. Because a tiny house is relatively new in the Netherlands, it is usually not included in municipal zoning plans as a legal way of living. For the municipalities, it is a challenge to allocate and distribute the scarce land where people can live according to legal frameworks. Marjolein explains that within this decision-making process, an enormous number of parties are entitled, and the municipality also has to earn as much as possible to get the budget in order. Although there are many citizen initiatives who want to live tiny, tiny houses are not financially interesting for municipalities unless they are mass-produced and preferably stacked and connected. Tiny houses are closely related to the wishes of the resident, including off-grid systems, which makes producing a tiny house relatively expensive. For example, if you compare this with an apartment complex, where the resident has no direct influence in the construction’s design, and where all residents are connected to the same electricity network,

⁷ “Tiny wonen – het probleem en de oplossing,” Marjolein in het Klein, accessed on 29 May 2022, <https://www.marjoleininhetklein.com/2022/02/21/tiny-wonen-het-probleem-en-de-oplossing/>

it is a much cheaper alternative. However, this is on the contrary of the tiny house movement, where the construction of one's own house, the environmental decisions made during the construction, and the financial advantages are main pillars within the movement. Vail (2016) argues how the tiny house movement poses a threat to local governments. Even though it requires them to change building codes and bylaws, the benefits for the individuals and the local environment are immeasurable. Marjolein wrote in his blogpost that municipalities should include citizen initiatives in the decision-making process more often. Because now, there is a gap between the wants of citizens and the actions of local municipalities regarding legal housing. Where citizens want to contribute to a better world by living in a tiny house, municipalities rather think about cheaper alternatives to be placed on the scarce piece of land.

Even though more and more people are interested in the tiny house movement, the road towards getting there is unfortunately not always easy. While the aim is to achieve a more sustainable way of living by going tiny, local municipalities are not yet convinced of the benefits. But, where there is a will, there is a way, and just like Marjolein, many other people have made their dream come true despite the many difficulties. The next paragraph will elaborate my participants' motivations for moving into a tiny house.

A Vehicle to What is Important

My motivation to move in has always been... I don't need that much space. I don't need that much to make myself comfortable. I also wanted a smaller footprint because monthly expenses are smaller that way as well. A small footprint on the earth anyway. And yes, being outside more. That also was a main motivation for me. At one point, once I set my mind to it, I never thought about going big at all. I didn't need that space and it makes no sense to have a big house or something at my disposal that I do not use. – (Jos, tiny house dweller, interview, 5 March 2022).

As I have elaborated on the tiny house movement and its upcoming popularity in the Netherlands by pioneer Marjolein Jonker, I will now highlight the multiple motivational aspects of my participants for moving into a tiny house. By doing so, it will become clear how they are committed to reject a consumerist lifestyle to minimize the burden on the natural environment. Moreover, it will become clear that the natural environment is also valued by its presence in the tiny house villages, which is a frequently discussed motivation for going tiny.

The above-stated quotation illustrates Jos's motivation for going tiny. Jos recently moved into his tiny house in Katwijk. During the interview, he explained to me that he always thought about an alternative way of living (interview, 5 March 2022). A way of living where he would be surrounded by a green environment and where he would be able to decrease his ecological footprint. Jos used to be a boy scout when he was

younger, and now he volunteers in organizing scouting camps. He explained to me that experiencing a minimalistic life by travelling with only a tent, he came to the realization that you do not need that much to make yourself comfortable. Moreover, for him, the aspect of being surrounded by nature, is a crucial element in feeling at home. When Jos heard about the tiny house movement by reading one of Marjolein's articles, he knew that this lifestyle would correspond to his wishes. Since the above statement reflects the main motivations for going tiny, Jos's statement will be used as a common thread for this paragraph.

Minimalism

The fact that Jos decided to go tiny because he did not need that much to make himself comfortable is a frequently mentioned motivation. For example, tiny house dwellers Martijn and Ilse also desired such a minimalistic life. The habits of minimalists are defined by decluttering practices, contentment with a modest number of material goods, and cautious contemplation before making any new purchases (Kang, Martinez, and Johnson 2021). Therefore, a minimalistic lifestyle may foster pro-environmental behaviours by lowering unnecessary consumption (Hüttel et al., 2020). On the 5th of March 2022, I interviewed Martijn and Ilse during an open day of a tiny house village in Katwijk. Martijn and Ilse moved into their tiny house a year ago. They explained to me that they wanted to live a minimalistic life because they simply did not need that much space or stuff. Moreover, by doing so, it would decrease their ecological footprint (Anson 2018). Now, 60% of the global greenhouse gas emissions which harm the environment come from the mass-production of products (Ivanova et al. 2015). Thus, by rejecting a consumerist lifestyle which is characterized by excessive consumption (Miles 1998), it would be possible to decrease the burden on the natural environment. Lloyd and Pennington (2020) argue that by adopting a minimalistic lifestyle, the production systems which are designed to fuel consumerism will be challenged.

Even though Martijn and Ilse were convinced that they wanted to live a minimalistic life in their tiny house, they were confronted with a challenge: decluttering. Martijn stated: "When I cleared it out to move here, I was still thinking: What do we all have?! The tiny house movement is just showing that you do not need that much to just live, you know" (interview, 5 March 2022). Harris (2018, 72) describes that this decluttering phase is the start of opposing a consumerist lifestyle. The individual must voluntarily get rid of consumer goods, which is a thought-filled process. Giving things out rather than selling them, for example, goes against conventional cultural and economic practices (Harris 2018). Instead of adopting a materialistic perspective on goods, tiny house dwellers argue the importance of living with what is "really necessary" to decrease the burden on the natural environment.

Previously introduced tiny house participant Iris argued how the minimalist lifestyle, in addition to being better for the planet, also gave her more peace of mind. I interviewed Iris during a tiny house visit in Delft on the 14th of March 2022. She always felt the pressure of cleaning her house, which costed her a lot of time because she used to have so much stuff in and around her house. When she was in the de-cluttering process before going tiny, she came to the realization that she had been collecting so many useless products

the past few years. Almost all tiny house participants argued how the de-cluttering process somewhat made them feel guilty about their previous consumption patterns as it reveals a consumerist lifestyle. Löfgren (2014) elaborates on this feeling of guilt by explaining how it is opposed by de-cluttering and embracing a minimalistic lifestyle. Even when the de-cluttering phase has come to an end, my participants explain how their relationship with products has changed in such a way that they always critically assess whether the product is of added value. Jos, who had only been living in his tiny house for three months, already shared his guilt about possessing multiple spatulas which he does not need (interview, 5 March 2022). It is not that Jos does not care for the value of this item, but rather that it “demonstrates the tiny house's ability to alter its owners' ecological ethics by forcing them to understand the value of what they consume” (Kilman 2016, 5-6). Living in a tiny house is about living simply by getting rid of unnecessary things and rather focussing on things that matter and carry a certain value (Mangold and Zschau 2019).

Economically beneficial

Moreover, as Jos stated in his motivation for going tiny, it is economically beneficial (interview, 5 March 2022). Jos explained me that he was able to decrease his monthly expenses by living in his tiny house as a result of adopting a minimalistic lifestyle. Living in a tiny house, you simply do not have enough place to maintain a consumerist lifestyle; you have to critically consider whether something is useful or not (Kilman 2016). Moreover, because of the size of a tiny house, the monthly amenities are considerably lower (Mitchel 2014). Also, previously introduced tiny house participant Nina, explained to me how she was able to work less because of the economic benefits of living in a tiny house (interview, 5 March 2022). Where she used to be working every day to maintain a life focused on redeeming bills deriving out of their excessive consuming behaviour, she is now able to work less and focus on her hobbies. Whereas big houses are argued to be wasteful, environmentally polluting, and debtors' prisons (Harris 2018), tiny houses not only challenge the environmental crisis by embracing the “small” but also enable you to break the cycle of constantly redeeming bills (Anson 2014; Mangold and Zschau 2019).

Sustainability

Despite the fact that this minimalist living may be economically beneficial, the first and foremost aim of adopting this lifestyle, stated by my participants, is to decrease one's ecological footprint. This has to do with their concerns about the current climate crisis and their care for the natural environment. For example, my participant Eva, who lives together with her girlfriend in a tiny house in Dordrecht stated: “the climate crisis makes me sick, we do everything to save the environment” (interview, 4 April 2022). Therefore, sustainability is another important motivation for dwellers to go tiny. Sustainability is a large concept and has been given many different definitions (Brightman and Lewis 2017). Tsing (2017, 51) argues “sustainability is the dream of passing a liveable earth to future generations, human and nonhuman.” Especially the latter is of great importance within the tiny house movement. Harris (2018) explains how the tiny house movement offers

important examples on how to include sustainable habits in everyday life to decrease one's ecological footprint.⁸ For instance, most tiny house villages include a vegetable garden where dwellers are able to produce their own food. Instead of going to the supermarket to buy their vegetables, they are able to grow it locally. Moreover, people are busy separating their waste, including the waste from the well-known compost toilet. This is a toilet which does not require water to flush, it uses sawdust to create compost which is eventually used to grow flowers and plants. Instead of buying vegetables in a supermarket or purchasing compost from a speciality store, people first consider what can be done locally. These everyday activities allow the tiny house dwellers to decrease their ecological footprints (fieldnotes, 14 March 2022).

As becomes clear, not only de-cluttering, as previously illustrated, is effective in minimizing one's ecological footprint, but also sustainable construction techniques may be used. For example, nowadays, there are many off-grid tiny houses, which is a way of autonomous living by being energy independent.⁹ By living in an off-grid tiny house, dwellers are obligated to be aware of their consumption. One of my tiny house participants named, Mieke, who lives with her boyfriend in a tiny house in Delft, explained to me how she used to be showering for almost 30 minutes when she was on the water net (interview, 14 March 2022). Now, she is dependent on the amount of rain that falls as she uses a water filter system. During winter, she can shower for a long time because of the rainy weather. During the summer, when it is not raining that much, she must be aware on how long she can take a shower. She explained to me that living off-grid made her conscious of the availability of the Earth's natural resources. When she was living in her stone-built house, she was never involved with this. Harris (2018) demonstrates how this has to do with energy, water and waste sources usually being hidden in everyday life. He argues that making these scarce sources visible in everyday life, it challenges our status quo. Thus, living in an off-grid tiny house may have the ability to shift our status quo into a more sustainable one, which is crucial in times of the climate crisis.

Living close to nature

However, the natural environment has not only been deemed valuable by the consequences of the climate crisis but also because dwellers see the value of being able to live close to nature. If we look at the main statement of this paragraph, Jos argues the importance of being outside more. During our conversation, he explained to me that being surrounded by nature is important for him as it makes him feel at home (interview, 5 March 2022). Also, Eva explained to me that she could not live without nature by stating: "Yes, nature. I could not live without it. It really is my life. You should not put me in a flat like with nothing at all. I would be screaming mad. Here I can feel my earth. I must be able to root my fingers in the ground" (interview, 21 April 2022). But what exactly is this connection that dwellers have with nature, and what exactly is nature according to them? The following chapter will elaborate on this matter by clarifying the human/nature relationship in the Dutch tiny house community.

⁸ An ecological footprint is related to monitoring one's environmental performances towards a sustainable future (Rees 1996).

⁹ "Over THN," Tiny House Nederland, accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.tinyhousenederland.nl/tiny-house-nederland/over-thn/>



This cover photo was taken by tiny house participant Nina on 26 May 2022

“Nature is Everything”

The previous chapter illustrated the Dutch tiny house movement and its commitment to rejecting a consumerist lifestyle to minimize the burden on the natural environment. It became clear how “the bigger, the better” is history and now is replaced by appreciating the “small.” As if minimizing the burden on the natural environment is such a crucial element, this second chapter will further elaborate on the cultural meaning of nature, which affects the tiny house dwellers’ motivation for living close to it. Throughout my ten weeks of field research, I have experienced how my participants interact with nature by observing them and asking specific questions. They are aware that in many cases their human agency may affect the natural environment. Life in a tiny house community is therefore designed to deal with the consequences of their human actions. When I asked my participants about the value of nature, multiple times there was stated “nature is everything.” Under the guise of this latter statement, this chapter will elaborate on the human/nature relationship in the Dutch tiny house community.

First, by using a vignette, I will illustrate the relationship that dwellers have with nature in a tiny house village in Ten Boer. After that, I will elaborate on the concept of nature itself by arguing how the concept of nature is interpreted by dwellers of the Dutch tiny house community. It will become clear that their interpretation of nature and their human/nature relationship highly touches upon what Ingold (2000, 19) calls an “ecology of life,” in which the organism and the environment are interpreted as an indivisible whole. Finally, as the concept of nature in the Dutch tiny house community is clarified, I will argue how the nature has transformed from being a “space” into a valuable “place” by attached cultural meanings through the act of “dwelling” (Low 2017; Ingold 2005).

The Human/Nature Relationship in the Dutch Tiny House Community

Here I was, standing in the middle of nowhere in Ten Boer, walking towards my very first interview with participant Ella. It was freezing outside, and I was trying to warm myself up by slowly rubbing both of my hands. The moment my hands were slightly flustered I grabbed my phone and checked Google Maps to see how long it would take to reach my destination: tiny house village Ten Boer. Luckily, it was just a ten-minute walk to the village. At least I would not be an ice cube by the time I would arrive. I placed both of my hands in my jackets' pockets, and I started walking towards the village. I quickly noticed how the pathway towards the village changed from being an asphalt road to rather a muddy one. As fast as the asphalt was replaced by muddy earth, my white sneakers took on the character of a chameleon by immediately adapting to the brown colour of the mud. Oh well, I was thinking, this reflects all too well that as a city girl, I am not used to wild nature anymore. Slightly frustrated with the colour of my shoes, I was checking my phone to see how long I still had to walk. Five more minutes towards the right. Walking towards the tiny house village, I noticed that besides of the changing pathway, I also was surrounded by more and more trees. Some trees even had multiple birds sitting on their branches. While walking down the muddy pathway, surrounded by trees and birds, I ran into a field with several tiny houses. As I continued my way, I came across a sign with a creative drawing including the following quote "The Earth Does Not Belong to Us; We Belong to Earth." While thinking about the quote, I looked around one more time. I quickly came to the realization that the abrupt presence of nature around the tiny house village may demonstrate a specific relationship that dwellers have with the natural environment. Where I first walked on an asphalted road, I now stood in the middle of nature. I was slowly walking towards the tiny houses that were situated next to each other, forming a circle. When I looked to my right, I saw a vegetable garden with a greenhouse. In the back of the garden, there was a young man who was busy making the garden summer ready. With a large wooden shovel, he dug up the sand and removed the excess weeds. It made me think of my childhood, where I used to be assisting my mom in preparing our own vegetable garden. While thinking about our previous vegetable garden, I ran into multiple beehives with an insect hotel built next to it. Luckily it was winter. Otherwise, I would have probably felt stressed knowing that I would be standing next to multiple beehives. The insect hotel was impressive; it contained multiple holes made from stone and wood where the insects would be able to hide. While trying to get a better look at the insect hotel, I heard someone mumble my name in the background... "Pip?" I quickly shot up and when I turned around, I saw a woman standing in front of me. It was Ella, my very first participant whom I would have a conversation with. She looked at me and she said, "oh dear, look at your shoes... I should have told you we always wear boots here." I

somewhat felt like I missed the dress code by arriving in my brand new, but not-so-white anymore sneakers. Ella smiled at me and invited me for a cup of tea in her tiny house. I took off my muddy shoes and moved myself to a chair which was situated next to a rocket stove. Ella handed me a cup of tea and the moment my icy hands touched the hot tea glass; I suddenly remembered the sign again which I ran into stating “The Earth Does Not Belong to Us; We Belong to Earth.” I asked Ella about the sign, and she explained to me that the sign reflects the communities’ mentality of living in harmony with nature. Instead of dominating the Earth’s natural environment, we embrace it and acknowledge that we belong to nature because “nature is everything.” Thinking about my way down here, I realize how this mentality indeed reflects life here. The abundant presence of nature, the activities such as gardening, and providing a safe environment for insects all demonstrate a harmonious life with nature. Moreover, this was also the moment where I realized that I would never again visit a tiny house village on my white sneakers (Fieldnotes, 1 March 2022).



Picture 2: Sign tiny house village Ten Boer (picture taken by author on 1 March 2022)

The vignette illustrates my first tiny house visit to a tiny house village in Ten Boer. Visiting this tiny house village, it became clear how life is constructed around living in harmony¹⁰ with nature. The first chapter of this thesis demonstrated that the fear of the current climate crisis is one reason for living in harmony with the nature. By opposing an anti-consumerist lifestyle, dwellers aim to reduce their ecological footprint. Although people find it important to reduce the burden on the natural environment by going tiny, people also opt for the tiny house life to get closer to nature. Where they previously lived in a petrified environment where life mainly takes place indoors, they consciously choose for a greener environment by going tiny. As the title of this chapter indicates, “nature is everything.” But what does nature mean according to my tiny house participants? To understand their relationship with nature, it is important to first elaborate on the concept of nature.

Williams (1976, 21) states that “nature is perhaps the most complex word in language.” Mimiko (2017) describes how the word may be used to describe a human trait, such as an innate character or quality. However, it may also be used to describe a concept referring to the physical world to which landscapes, plants, animals, and other elements of the Earth belong to, as opposed to humans (Haila 2000). Because language is the vehicle of interpretation and encourages how individuals perceive things, it contributes to the complexity of the word (Mimiko 2017). Tsing (1995) adds to this by describing how the interpretation of nature may also be influenced by one’s cultural knowledge. She describes how cultural understandings of the world shape the way how people define nature. For example, people living in an industrialized world often refer to nature as something that lies outside of the human (Tsing 1995). However, once people are highly dependent on nature, or by living close to it, the conceptualization of nature changes. For instance, in the Dutch tiny house community, many dwellers argue how “nature is everything.” Tiny house participant Ernst, who lives in a tiny house in Delft, referred to nature as: “nature is all of this [Ernst pointing out to his garden, the trees, and the dog walking in front of his house]. It does not feel like we are different from animals, plants, or other beings on this earth” (interview, 14 March 2022). He explained to me that we should not place people at the front, but we should place the world in its totality at the centre. Also, tiny house dweller Jos argued the importance of rejecting such a human-centred perspective. He explained that, especially in times of the climate crisis, such a human-centred perspective rather makes it worse (interview, 30 March 2022). Instead of interpreting nature as something that lies outside of the human, they are rather seen as inseparable. As tiny house pioneer Marjolein stated: “we are nature ourselves” (interview, 16 March 2022). Comparing this with people living in an industrialized world, they often speak about nature as if they are alienated from it (Latour 2017). By using notions such as “culture” or “society,” they reject an existing relationship between humans and the natural world, which constitutes to the emergence of a nature/culture dichotomy. The more humans feel separated from nature, the less they will care about conserving it (Schultz 2002). Consequently, humans live their lives as if they are masters of nature; they consider it as something that needs to be “tamed” (Flint et al., 2013).

¹⁰ By living in harmony with nature, I refer to a way of living which respects life of all forms of nature, instead of dominating it (Chain and Kimball 2019, 106).

Therefore, many humans dominate the land and construct the lives of other species to create space for their human needs.

As becomes clear, the way nature is defined highly influences the human interaction with nature. Building upon the previously described interpretation of nature in the Dutch tiny house community, where the human-centric perspective is rejected, I would like to argue how it touches upon what Ingold (2000) calls: an “ecology of life.” Within this ecology of life, the organism and the environment are interpreted as an indivisible whole (Ingold 2000, 19). Instead of maintaining a nature/culture dichotomy, it is important to include the whole-organism-in-its-environment. As Lewontin and Lewis (1997, 97) state, “there is no organism without an environment, but there is no environment without an organism.” The interpretation of nature through an ecology of life also touches upon the sign which I ran into in the tiny house village in Ten Boer, which stated: “The Earth Does Not Belong to Us; We Belong to Earth” (picture 2). Not only in Ten Boer, it was visible how people harmoniously live with nature, but I also noticed this within other tiny house villages.

For example, in Den Hoorn, tiny house dwellers make use of helophyte filters to purify domestic wastewater. A helophyte is a plant that is able to purify wastewater which is not harmful for the natural environment (picture 3). For dwellers, it is important to not harm the natural environment by their human activities. Moreover, in Delft, dwellers also argue the importance of living in harmony with the natural environment. For example, they find it important to process or cut the plants as little as possible. It must be able to follow a natural life course. Even though this is more difficult when growing vegetables, this mentality is maintained by cultivation through permaculture. As Mollison and Slay (1994) describe, permaculture is a philosophy of working *with* instead of *against* nature. This is done by not looking at plants as being part of a monoculture system, but by acknowledging them in all their functions.



Picture 3: Helophyte filters in Den Hoorn (picture taken by author on 14 March 2022)

During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to prepare Bert’s garden based on the philosophy of permaculture (picture 4). Bert lives in an off-grid tiny house in Delft. Together with a professional in permaculture, we designed and prepared Bert’s garden for summer. When I asked Bert why he decided to incorporate the philosophy of permaculture, he explained me that he believes human beings can help sustain nature by following the natural processes (interview, 19 April 2022). He explained how most people are occupied with rejecting the natural processes by not following the season or the linear process of waste. He believes it is up to humans themselves to start adapting to the natural processes again because they are already circular in the basis. Therefore, Bert decided to incorporate permaculture.

Both examples illustrate how the human/nature relationship in the Dutch tiny house community is based on living together instead of dominating it. This has to do with the dwellers' interpretation of nature, which touches upon Ingold's (2000) ecology of life, within which the organism and the environment are inseparable. Instead of dominating nature, they argue the importance of harmoniously living together with nature.



Picture 4: Bert's permaculture garden (picture taken by participant on 30 March 2022)

Converging the Natural “Space” into a Valuable “Place”

As illustrated, the human/nature relationship in the Dutch tiny house community is related to harmoniously living together with nature instead of dominating it. Based on the work of Setha Low (2016), I would like to demonstrate the importance of nature in the Dutch tiny house community as it was moving from being a “space” into a valuable “place.” Moreover, Ingold (2005) argues how the concept of “dwelling” influences this place-making process as it is a way of being at home in the world. First, I will elaborate on both concepts of space and place and how they are entangled.

Low (2016) argues the importance of visualizing space and place as a continuum of global and intimate relations. Both concepts are closely intertwined and complement each other. Space, as Low (2016) describes, is a social construct which is produced by bodies and groups of people but also by historical and political forces. Place, on the other hand, refers to a physical space that is occupied and claimed through the attribution of personal and collective meanings, sentiments, sensory impressions, and understandings (Low 2016). Subjectivities and identities are spatially located and convert space into places – that is, inhabited locations of

human and nonhuman relevance. While individual or collective experiences can be used to study place phenomenologically, it also receives its meaning from the social, political, and economic factors as well as class relationships that shape its spatial, material, and social form (Low 2016). Casey (1993) adds to this by explaining how place rather is an intimate construct, as it encompasses experiences and meanings in life. Moreover, Gutpa and Ferguson (1997) clarify the concept of space and place by comparing it with the “insider” and the “outsider” perspective. The insider could be connected with the concept of place, and the outsider with the concept of space. Insiders who “dwell” (Ingold 2005) in a specific landscape have attached cultural meanings which is a process of place-making. On the other hand, outsiders only have the ability to understand the landscape based on what they see. For example, the vegetable garden within a tiny house community may be a valuable place for the inhabitants as it provides them to produce their food locally instead of buying it in a supermarket. The attached cultural meaning of the vegetable garden may be related to being able to live an autonomous life. By just seeing the vegetable garden, it is impossible to thoroughly understand this attached cultural meaning. Therefore, the concepts of “space” / “place” and “inside”/ “outside”, are mutually connected as they are both influenced by a cultural context.

Attaching cultural meanings to nature

Based on the statement that “nature is everything” in the Dutch tiny house community, I argue that nature is constructed into a meaningful place through attached cultural meanings by the dwellers themselves. To elaborate on this place-making process of nature in the Dutch tiny house community, I like to refer to my changing positionality as a researcher from being an “outsider” to becoming an “insider.” Before visiting many tiny house villages in the Netherlands, I did not yet understand the added value of nature as I do it now. To clarify, before entering the Dutch tiny house community, I just saw nature as being an important element of the tiny house movement. Just like a farm cannot go without animals, I saw the tiny house community as a place that cannot go without a natural environment. The first time I visited a tiny house village in Ten Boer, I could see the presence of nature and how life was constructed around it, but I did not yet understand the importance of it and how it would influence daily life. After visiting many tiny house villages and interviewing over fifteen dwellers, I was able to set aside my outsider’s perspective. By merging myself into the field, I was able to adopt an insider’s perspective where I came to understand the cultural meaning and the importance of the natural environment in the Dutch tiny house community.

For example, what I could not see as an outsider but now understand as an insider, is that the cultural meaning of nature in the Dutch tiny house community is related to dwellers being able to live a more relaxing life. Previously introduced tiny house participant Mieke explained to me how she used to be busy with being productive all the time. Being surrounded by nature, such as grass, trees, and plants around her tiny house, allow her to her to “come back to the basics” (interview, 14 March 2022). Also, tiny house participant Matthijs, who lives in a tiny house in Delft with his girlfriend and new-born baby, stated: “nature is important to come

back to yourself a bit more” (interview, 19 April 2022). However, the most frequently mentioned cultural meaning of nature is related to being outside more. The “outside,” in this sense, refers to the natural environment around a dweller’s tiny house. Tiny house dweller Iris explained how the presence of nature through the many different plants, the vegetable garden, and the birds around her tiny house, push her to go outside more (interview, 14 March 2022). Likewise, tiny house dweller Ernst, argued how nature became more local by stating: “Now I can literally just work here with my hands in the ground” (interview, 14 March 2022). Finally, tiny house participants Ilse and Martijn explained to me how they spend much more time outdoors by the threshold between the inside and outside being much lower compared with their previous apartment (interview, 5 March 2022). Where they previously lived in a flat in Haarlem, it took them almost five minutes to be outside, which felt like a barrier. Now, they can open the door and step into their green garden within just a few seconds. Because the threshold between inside and outside becomes much smaller in a tiny house, it allows the inhabitant to get closer to nature, which is an important element within the tiny house movement (Anson 2018).

As becomes clear, nature converted from a space into a valuable place by attached cultural meanings through the act of dwelling. I was able to understand the attached cultural meanings of nature by merging myself into the field of the Dutch tiny house community. It became clear how nature is referred to as being an important element which allows dwellers relaxation. Moreover, it became clear how the attached cultural meaning of nature is often related with being outside more. However, Heidegger (1971) further elaborates on how place-making may also include intentional modification of the environment. But how is this specific place-making activity visible in the Dutch tiny house community?

Attaching cultural meanings through intentional modification

For the Dutch tiny house community, it is important to live or “dwell” (Ingold 2005) in a natural environment. Therefore, nature in a tiny house community converted from being a space into a valuable place by attached cultural meanings. However, this may also be done by intentional modification of the environment. Heidegger (1971) adds to this by describing how dwelling involves both building and thinking, where the act of dwelling may also create a place through intentional modification of the environment. In the Dutch tiny house community, this can be related to the artificial construction of nature. Not all tiny house communities were already provided with green landscapes. For example, the tiny house village in Delft used to be a fallow territory where there was no nature at all. The dwellers of the community decided to artificially create nature by planting grass, trees, plants, and flowers. By constructing the space into a place by intentional modification of the environment, they are able to correspond to their wishes of living “in” nature. In addition, they think it is a nice gesture to give nature back to the earth in this way. Tiny house participant Iris stated: “There was no green here at all, we created of this, but on the other hand, we also do that to allow nature to arise. We try to let it run its course” (interview, 14 March 2022). Moreover, another intentional modification of nature may be

related to gardening practices. Tiny house dweller Puck, who lives in a tiny house village in Alkmaar, explained to me how she decided to keep a vegetable garden to be able to eat her own vegetables (interview, 21 April 2022). She argues how these gardening practices allow her to get closer to nature. However, this form of nature did not exist originally, it was a place-making activity through intentional modification of the environment. Thus, it is evident how nature may also be artificially modified within the place-making process, as it carries an important cultural meaning within the Dutch tiny house community.

This second chapter elaborated on the chapter's title "nature is everything" by analysing the concept of nature in the Dutch tiny house community. As became clear, the interpretation of nature and the human/nature relationship in the Dutch tiny house community, touches upon what Ingold (2000, 19) calls an "ecology of life." Moreover, the importance of a nature within a tiny house community became clear and how it moved from being a space into a valuable place through attached cultural meanings. An important factor within these place-making activities is dwelling, as if it is a way of being at home in the world (Ingold 2005). However, as if dwelling is a way of being at home in the world, these place-making activities may also influence the conceptualization of "home." Therefore, in the following chapter, it will become clear how the cultural meaning of nature affects the concept of home.



This cover photo was taken by tiny house participant Nina on 26 May 2022

“My Backyard is my Home”

As became clear in the second chapter, nature may be referred to through different ways which define the human/nature relationship in a specific context. Where in the Dutch tiny house community “nature is everything,” it became clear how nature was moving from being a space into a valuable place by attached cultural meanings. Ingold (2005) argues how dwelling is a crucial element within this place-making process, reflecting a way of being at home in the world. But what specifically make my participants make feel at home? How is home conceptualized? Building upon the second chapter, where “nature is everything” in the Dutch tiny house community, this final chapter will build upon the concept of home and how it is entangled with the dwellers’ cultural meanings of nature.

First, I will elaborate on my tiny house experience by using a vignette. It will become clear how I experienced home by staying in a tiny house for a week. Then, I will elaborate on the anthropological approaches of home (Douglas 1991; Mallet 2004; Lenhard and Semanani 2020). It will become clear that home is a multi-layered concept which may travel through space and time (Douglas 1991; Mallet 2004). To clarify this, I will refer to my tiny house participants’ conceptualizations of home by placing their previous house and their tiny house in dialogue. Finally, I will illustrate how the conceptualization of home in the Dutch tiny house community is entangled the dwellers’ cultural meaning of nature by analysing pictures collected through a photo-elicitation method.

My Tiny House Stay

“Click click,” I heard when my friend, Nienke, touched her automatic car key. She closed off her white Fiat Panda, and we were about to walk towards our tiny house stay located in Mill. Both Nienke and I were carrying an overnight bag which was packed with clothes, sanitary items, our laptops, and some card games. Luckily, it was not so heavy because we still had to walk for a while until we reached our tiny house stay. The grass was still a bit wet from the previous night’s frost, so we carefully moved along the grass so we would not make a fall. While we were slowly walking towards the tiny house, we were chatting about what we would make for dinner tonight. Nienke thought about making her favourite beet wraps including apple, goat cheese and spinach. Since goat cheese is my favourite kind of cheese, I was immediately sold. While we were chatting about the ingredients of the beet wraps, our tiny house slowly came into our sight. Nienke stated “Ahh it looks so cute!” From the outside, the tiny house was completely made from wood, which immediately gave me a cosy feeling. Something which I also noticed were the big windows and the large veranda with a lovely picnic table. Unfortunately, the weather forecast was not so good for the upcoming week. Otherwise, I would have spent many hours outside on the veranda. When we opened the door of our tiny house stay, we were embraced by its simplicity. Even though the inside space was only 322 square feet, it felt quite big. On the left side of the house, there was a living room including a full-size kitchen. The room was filled with light coming in through the large windows. Another surprise was the loft bed which was hidden in the ceiling of the room. I decided that this should be my bed during our stay as if it is common in many tiny houses, and I would be able to understand sleeping in a loft bed. Moving to the right side of the house, we walked past a door which brought us to a luxurious bathroom. I noticed it included a compost toilet and a shower running on rainwater. Luckily, the past weeks it rained a lot, so we did not have to worry. On the right side of the bathroom, an extra bedroom was hidden. Strangely enough, even a double bed fit here. I was amazed at how spacious this house felt. Also, Nienke stated: “Wow I never thought a tiny house would feel so spacious.” After a few hours of chilling in the tiny house and playing card games, we decided to prepare the Nienke’s beet wrap recipe. We prepared the beet wraps on the kitchen table, and it almost felt like we were sitting outside because of the big glass windows. It automatically felt like we were more connected with nature, and we started talking about how we would like to have such large windows in our future houses as well. I asked Nienke whether she would be able to live in a tiny house permanently. She said ‘I do not know, but because of this experience, I do understand more why people would want to live in a tiny house. It becomes clear to me that you do not automatically need a big house to feel at home. I already feel at home here within just a few hours.’ I asked Nienke

what specifically makes her feel at home and she stated: "Because of the big windows it feels like the backyard is my home. It gives a peace of mind and allows me to relax. Now, I realize how much I am detached from the natural environment." I had to agree with Nienke, it became clear to me how the concept of home became extended by the natural environment. Here, in our tiny house stay in Mill, our backyard was part of our home. (fieldnotes, 5 April 2022)

Defining "Home"

Home. When you think of home, what do you think of? Is it strictly bound to a stone-build house, or may it also include thoughts about a specific environment or even certain objects? And, if a house is a home, when is it recognized as a home? First, it is important to understand both the concepts of house and home. According to Lenhard and Semanani (2020), a "house" is something material which may be found in neighbourhoods and streets and takes shape through practices of architects and builders. On the contrary, a "home" is often related to a house, family, gender, and the self. He illustrates how "both 'house' and 'home' exist simultaneously as physical entities, subjective feelings, and as objects of various discourses which seek to shape, reinforce, or contest the forms they take" (Lenhard and Semanani 2020, 2). Mallet (2004) adds to this by explaining how a home may vary from being a space, a place, a feeling, or an active state of being in the world. It becomes clear that whatever a house may look like from the outside, the subjective feelings attached to it propose that a home may be much more than a built construction. Is it related to a physical structure, or may it travel through space and time?

First, the dynamic of an "ordinary" house will be elaborated on. Barone (2019, 2) argues this is "a building intended to provide shelter for human habitation; typically holding possessions as well as persons; decorated and spatially designated in both interior and exterior; by which an otherwise empty space is transformed into a residential one." However, the construction of a house is inhabited in wider surroundings. The spatial layout of a house and the design of the dwelling may be related to a social landscape. For example, Kroeber (1917) argues how some houses may be oriented towards a communal centre to extend connections. On the other hand, the house where I grew up was built in a quiet area without having direct neighbours to ensure privacy. It becomes clear that the construction of a house goes beyond its static walls, making it a multi-layered concept (Douglas 1991). These choices that are made also reflect on how and where we feel at home. Keeping this in mind, what exactly then makes one feel at home?

As becomes clear, home is argued to be a multi-layered concept which goes beyond the static walls of a house. During my fieldwork, I elaborated on the concept of home in the Dutch tiny house community, where it soon became clear how home was linked to a sense of belonging and feeling at home. I asked multiple tiny house participants about the meaning of home. Tiny house participant Martijn stated: "Home is really a matter of feeling" (interview, 5 March 2022). For him, home is a place where you can relax. Moreover, it is a place you look forward to coming back to after a long vacation. Tiny house participant Iris also argued how home

is a place where you feel comfortable and where you come together with your family (interview, 14 March 2022). Tiny house participant Bert added to this by describing how the people in and around the house affect the concept of home (interview, 30 March 2022). All my tiny house participants argued how they had never felt so much at home before. If it was up to them, they would stay in their tiny house as long as possible. However, what exactly makes their tiny house a comfortable home? To understand this, I asked my participants to elaborate on the concept of home by placing their previous house and their tiny house in dialogue.

Tiny house owners Martijn and Ilse told me how the concept of home changed when they moved inside of their tiny house (interview, 5 March 2022). They explained to me how they did not really like their previous apartment in Haarlem. They lived in a stone-built flat that was surrounded by asphalted roads. They had no access to a green garden, and the nearest park was a fifteen-minute walk. Martijn told me that every time he walked through the stone hallway of his apartment, it became more and more clear to him that this house did not make him happy or feel at home. The things which made him feel at home were items carrying emotional value, such as the furniture which he had inherited from his parents. For him, his ideal house would be much smaller and more in touch with the natural environment. Luckily, his dream came true when he decided to move into a tiny house together with his girlfriend. They explained to me how the concept of home changed for them. Where it previously would be characterized by items carrying emotional value, the feeling of home already starts when they walk towards their tiny house's front door. When they see their green yard around their house, they hear the stones beneath their shoes cracking while walking towards the front door; that is what makes them feel at home. Moreover, the way of minimalistic living in their tiny house is more in line with their identity, which also enhances the feeling of home for them. Martijn elaborated on this feeling as follows: "I think it has less to do with the house itself or the items inside it. I would describe a bit fifty-fifty, so internally but especially outside" (interview, 5 March 2022). Also, tiny house dweller Ernst argued how he missed having a garden in his previous house in Delft. For him, too, living close to nature plays a crucial role in feeling at home (interview, 14 March 2022). Many of my participants argued how the concept of home was linked to external factors such as having a green yard, being surrounded by plants, animals, or even a vegetable garden. Where home was previously situated by referring to the inside, it becomes clear how a home in a tiny house is rather situated to external elements. Therefore, the inside/outside dichotomy of home (Cieraad 2010), may be rejected.

To build upon this conceptualization of home being related to external elements, tiny house participant Bert explained me how he felt more at home in his tiny house because of the community (interview, 30 March 2022). In his previous house, he did not really know his neighbours. Every time he would walk down the hallway of his apartment, he came across people he did not know. Since he lives in his tiny house in Delft, he knows everyone in the village. He explained to me how the community feels like a family to him. People care for each other and help each other out in good and bad times. When he looks outside of his window, he feels

at home by just seeing other community members. He stated: “the community is a big part of defining my home” (interview, 30 March 2022).

Finally, previously introduced tiny house participant Matthijs argued how he felt more at home in his tiny house because he was able to build the house himself (interview, 19 April 2022). In his previous house, he did not experience such a strong feeling of home. By constructing his own tiny house, he was able to implement specific wishes such as off-grid systems to live an autonomous and sustainable life. For him, as well for many other dwellers, it is important to minimize the burden on the natural environment through living in a tiny house. Being able to construct one’s own off-grid tiny house, allows you to comply to such wishes. Also, tiny house participant Marieke, who lives with her cat in her tiny house in Dordrecht, stated: “the fact that I was able to figure it out all out on my own, yes, that made a big difference in feeling at home” (interview, 4 April 2022). She explained to me how she used to rent an apartment in Zaandam before she moved into her tiny house. She never felt at home in her apartment because she was not able to make it her own because it had to be returned in its original condition. Both Marieke and Matthijs argued how their previous house did not match with their wishes and thus it was not included in their conceptualization of home. However, by living in their tiny house, they were able to include their personal wishes. As Mallet (2004) argues, a house often reflects the identity of the inhabitant him or herself. In this sense, there could be argued that “you are what you live in.” Implementing your own personal wishes into your house, therefore, has a direct influence on the concept of home.

As demonstrated, the concept of home may change in the transition from a “normal” house to a tiny house. Where external factors first played no role in the concept of home, this soon changed when my participants moved into their tiny house. Moreover, it becomes clear how the construct of the house itself is more often referred to as home. This is related to the fact that dwellers were able to construct their own tiny house, which clearly influences the extent to which my participants feel at home. This illustrates that the concept of home is also closely linked to the identity of the dweller. Thus, the concept of home may travel through space and time, as it may change in a specific context. Moreover, it becomes clear that home is not a static construct, but rather a multi-layered concept.

Visual Representations on the Entanglement of Home and Nature

As the title of this chapter states: “my home is my backyard,” I will now elaborate on the interplay between the concept of home and nature. In the previous chapter, it became clear how nature transformed from space into a valuable place by attached cultural meanings. Now, I will argue how the cultural meaning of nature also affects the concept of home. To illustrate how the concept of home became entangled with nature, I will make use of pictures which I asked my participants to take. The pictures are part of my photo-elicitation method, where I asked my participants to take pictures of things in and around their tiny house that reflect their home.

During the semi-structured interviews, I already asked my participants to already elaborate on what pictures they would take and why. At the end of the interview, I then asked if they would be willing to send me pictures of the discussed objects.



Picture 5: Photo-elicitation picture taken by Melissa

This picture (5) was taken by tiny house participant Melissa on the 21st of April 2022. Melissa lives alone in a tiny house in Dordrecht. She took this picture while standing in front of her tiny house. This picture has a specific focus on her green garden, including many potted plants, herbs, and flowers. Underneath these pots, there is a surface of either grass or sand. There are no stones visible in her garden, everything is kept as ‘natural’ as possible. Melissa told me she took this picture because her garden is very important to her (interview, 21 April 2022). Especially during summer, she enjoys picking fresh herbs from her backyard which she can directly use to prepare her dinner. The fact that she can just step outside of her tiny house to pick her own herbs, affects her feeling of home. Where she previously had to take the bike to the local supermarket to buy herbs, she can step outside into her garden to see what is available to cook with. Melissa explained to me how she became more aware of the natural cycle by producing her own herbs and growing plants and flowers. This place-making activity of actively growing her own herbs, plants, and flowers, reflects the cultural meaning of nature for Melissa, and how it contributed to her conceptualization of home.



Picture 6: Photo-elicitation picture taken by Melissa

This picture (6) was also taken by tiny house participant Melissa on the 21st of April 2022. Where the first picture rather focused on her backyard, including potted plants, herbs, and flowers, this picture presents her wooden tiny house. Her tiny house is completely made of wood, including the four blue window frames. Melissa explained to me that she took this picture of her wooden tiny house, because she enjoys living in a house made of wood (interview, 21 April 2022). Where she first lived in a stone-built apartment, she experiences being more in touch with nature because of her tiny house's wooden construction. Melissa consciously chose a wooden construction for her tiny house, because she enjoys to include as many natural elements in her tiny house as possible. Not only the use of wood that provides a deeper connection with nature creates affects her conceptualization of home, but also the fact that Melissa was able to decide how she wanted to furnish her house influenced this. As Mallet (2004) argues, a house may reflect the inhabitant's identity. Melissa's tiny house reflects how she values the presence of wood in her house's construct, which for her carries the cultural meaning of nature. Melissa explained to me that she would never change her wooden tiny house for anything that is made out of stone. Where before she would not take a picture of her house to illustrate her conceptualization of home, she now proudly takes a picture of her wooden tiny house.



Picture 7: Photo-elicitation picture taken by Puck

This picture (7) was taken by tiny house participant Puck on the 22nd of April 2022. Puck lives alone in her tiny house in Alkmaar. This picture was taken in the community's vegetable garden. As you can see, there are multiple boxes filled with earth and some emerging vegetables. Around the vegetable garden, you can see a lot of wild-growing grass with some fruit trees in the back. Puck explained me that she took this picture because the fact that she can grow her own vegetables and fruit in the community's garden, affects her conceptualization of home (interview, 20 April 2022). For her, being in touch with nature through gardening practices allow her to relax outside of her working days. This reflects her cultural meaning of nature which is part of a place-making process. Moreover, she enjoys producing her own food and being less dependent on polluting food chains. By producing her own food, she knows that it is done in an

environmentally friendly way which does not harm nature. Moreover, she explained to me how this allows her to decrease her ecological footprint by producing her own food locally. For her, it is important to live a life which is conscious about the Earth's natural resources. As already elaborated on in chapter one, decreasing one's ecological footprint to decrease the burden on the natural environment is a well-known motivation for dwellers to go tiny (Ford and Gomez-Lanier 2017). This picture reflects how this mentality is adhered to by tiny house participant Puck by locally producing her own vegetables and herbs. This gardening practice allows Puck to be in touch with nature which makes her feel at home.



Picture 8: Photo-elicitation picture taken by Ella



Picture 9: Photo-elicitation picture taken by Mert

These two pictures were taken by tiny house participants Ella (8) and Mert (9). Ella took the fourth picture on the 3rd of May 2022. Ella lives with her husband and dog in her THOW in Ten Boer. She took this picture while she was lying on her tiny house's couch, enjoying the view. The picture reveals the green landscape around Ella's tiny house, including a wooden picnic table on the left. The fifth picture was taken by Mert on the 29th of March 2022. Mert lives together with his girlfriend in their off-grid tiny house in Den Hoorn. Mert took this picture while he was standing in his kitchen, facing his camera towards the big glass windows in his tiny house. In addition to showing the tiny house's living room, this picture also reveals a green landscape around Mert's tiny house. I have placed both pictures in dialogue because both Mert and Ella took these pictures because they can be in direct contact with the green

landscape around their tiny house. Both participants explained me how being in touch with the green landscape around her tiny house gives them a peace of mind, which reflects the cultural meaning of nature being part of the place-making process. Ella loves spending many hours hanging around the picnic table, or as the picture reveals, from the open windows of her tiny house (interview, 1 March 2022). Mert explained to me how he enjoys playing his piano while directly looking upon his garden (interview, 14 March 2022). Even when he is inside, through the big windows he also experiences the feeling of being outside. Through both pictures, it becomes clear how the boundary between inside and outside is extremely low. Therefore, these pictures clearly represent the well-known motivation to get closer to nature by living in a tiny house (Anson 2014). Through these pictures, it becomes clear that not just the boundary between inside and outside is faded away in a tiny house, but also how home is referred to by the external environment. For both Ella and Mert, the green landscape around their tiny house represents their home.

This picture (10) was taken by tiny house participant Martijn on the 9th of April 2022. This picture was taken in the living room while facing his camera towards four houseplants. Where the previous pictures rather focused on the green landscape outside of the participants' tiny houses, this picture reflects how Martijn loves bringing the green inside of his tiny house. He explained to me that the green landscape around his tiny house is very important to him (interview, 5 March 2022). However, he also likes to bring nature indoors by placing multiple plants inside his tiny house. Martijn stated: "it keeps me aware of the power and beauty of nature, and it gives a pleasant atmosphere in the house, which highly influences my conceptualization of home" (interview, 5 March 2022). This reflects Martijn's cultural meaning of nature, where it is not only linked to the external natural environment but is also gladly brought indoors, affecting Martijn's conceptualization of home.



Picture 10: Photo-elicitation picture taken by Martijn



Picture 11: Photo-elicitation picture taken by Mieke

Finally, this picture (11) was taken by tiny house participant Mieke on the 9th of May 2022. This picture was taken from the tiny house's kitchen. The picture exposes a thick wooden kitchen dresser, which was specially tailored for this kitchen. On the kitchen dresser, you can see kitchen utilities, a coffee machine, and a gas stove. The kitchen looks upon a green yard which surrounds the tiny house. Mieke explained to me that she took this picture because she loves to cook while at the same time looking upon their green yard (interview, 14 March 2022). However, an underlying reason why Mieke took this picture is related to the fact that she cooks on organic propane. Mieke explained to me that propane emits low CO₂, which enables her to cook on a more sustainable way. The fact that Mieke and her boyfriend decided to include this sustainable technique represents their awareness for conserving the natural environment rather than exploiting it. As illustrated in chapter one, Harris (2019) would argue this as a technique challenging our status quo by actively being aware of the available resources. Mieke highly enjoys the presence of her green yard, but she also feels obliged to contribute to the preservation of the green environment. In her previous house, she was not able to implement this sustainable technique of cooking. The fact that she can now enjoy the green yard around her tiny house and at the same time know that her cooking activities have minimized emissions affect her conceptualization

of home. It becomes clear how her conceptualization of home is influenced by her cultural meaning nature, which she believes is a valuable source that should not be harmed.

All these pictures have been taken by my tiny house participants. For all of them, the concept of home has changed since they moved into their tiny house. The pictures reflect a strong presence of nature in the concept of home, as nature carries an important cultural meaning. Where previously pictures would be taken of furniture or items that carried emotional value, this is now linked to external factors such as having a green garden around the house, owning a vegetable garden, or even the wooden construction of a house. Moreover, dwellers explain how the small construction of their tiny house decreases the barrier between the “inside” and the “outside,” which allows them to live closer to nature and influences their conceptualization of home. However, as if nature carries an important cultural meaning, it may also be brought “inside” by owning houseplants or by including sustainable cooking techniques. This contributes to the concept of home because this is a way of cooking harms the natural environment as little as possible, which guarantees the dwellers’ cultural meaning of nature. Arguing this shift of home for the dwellers, it becomes clear how home was reimagined by moving into their tiny house where their “backyard became their home.”

Conclusion

Through this thesis, I have elaborated on the everyday life in the Dutch tiny house community in order to understand how their cultural meaning of nature influenced the concept of home. It all started with Marjolein not being able to find a suitable house that would meet her wishes during times of the housing crisis. In the densely populated Dutch environment, the population grew enormously between 1900 and 2019, which accelerated the housing demand. Because of this high demand, housing prices rose by 8% per year, fuelling the contemporary housing crisis. Consequently, the mainstream idea of owning a big house, originating from the “American Dream” was approached more critically. Like most of my tiny house participants argued, “I don’t need that much space to make myself comfortable.” They rather chose for a minimalistic lifestyle, opposing the consumerist mentality of the “American Dream.” Not only because they were able to critically assess the “needed” space or products in a house, but also because a minimalistic lifestyle fosters pro-environmental behaviours, which allows one to minimize its ecological footprint. Especially in times of the climate and the housing crisis, the ever-growing “American Dream” was critically assessed.

However, Marjolein was not the only one looking for a new way of living. As a countermovement against the “American Dream,” the tiny house movement became more and more popular. The tiny house movement is a social and architectural trend that promotes to live in small spaces. With a common interest in in “minimizing, de-cluttering, and downsizing,” the tiny house movement rejects the consumerist mentality of “the bigger, the better.” Instead of owning a big house, which stimulates the inhabitant’s consumption behaviour and increases one’s ecological footprint, a tiny house encourages to live a life guided by minimalism. Even though the tiny house movement was only introduced in 2015 by pioneer Marjolein, today, the Netherlands counts 18 successfully set up tiny house villages. It became clear how my tiny house participants largely shared the same motivation for going tiny, by being able to: live a minimalistic life, decrease their ecological footprint, live economically beneficial, and get closer to nature. This latter motivation has been further elaborated on in my research to understand why “nature is everything” in the Dutch tiny house community.

By entering the field of the Dutch tiny house community, where I visited six different tiny house villages, I came to understand why “nature is everything.” This was done by examining the interpretation of nature and the human/nature relationship through participant observations and semi-structured interviews. It became clear how their human/nature relationship touched upon what Ingold (2000) calls: an “ecology of life,” in which the organism and the environment are interpreted as an indivisible whole. Moreover, it became clear how nature was moving from being a space into a valuable place by attached cultural meanings. Such as nature providing relaxation or allowing one to go outside more. But, also, cultural meanings were attached by intentional modification of the environment, by planting trees or setting up a vegetable garden. It became evident that living close to nature is important, and when it is not present, it may be intentionally modified as it carries an important cultural meaning. As this place-making process is influenced by the act of dwelling,

referring to a way of being at home in the world, this research further elaborated on the interplay between the cultural meaning of nature and the concept of home.

After researching the cultural meaning of nature, in order to answer the main research question, I explored the dwellers' conceptualization of home by placing their previous house and their tiny house in dialogue. It became clear, as already stated by Douglas (1991) and Mallet (2005), that home is a multi-layered concept and how it may travel through space and time. Consequently, I have connected the conceptualization of home with the cultural meaning of nature by using semi-structured interviews, auto-ethnography, and a photo-elicitation method. In the semi-structured interviews, I found that the conceptualization of home shifted from items carrying an emotional value standing within the house, to the external environment where nature played a major role. After these semi-structured interviews, by staying in a tiny house myself, I experienced what it is like to live tiny and gained a deeper understanding of how nature is experienced when living in a tiny house. As described in the auto-ethnography, I came to experience how the "backyard was part of my home." This became also visible within the photo-elicitation method, where I asked my participants to take pictures of objects that would conceptualize their home. Through the pictures taken by my participants, it became clear how their conceptualization of home was entangled with nature. For instance, the green yard around my participant's tiny house was referred to as home, a vegetable garden, the wooden construction of a house, but also a sustainable cooking technique. The fact that most pictures included elements of nature reflects how the cultural meaning of nature, as described in chapter two, is entangled with the dwellers' conceptualization of home.

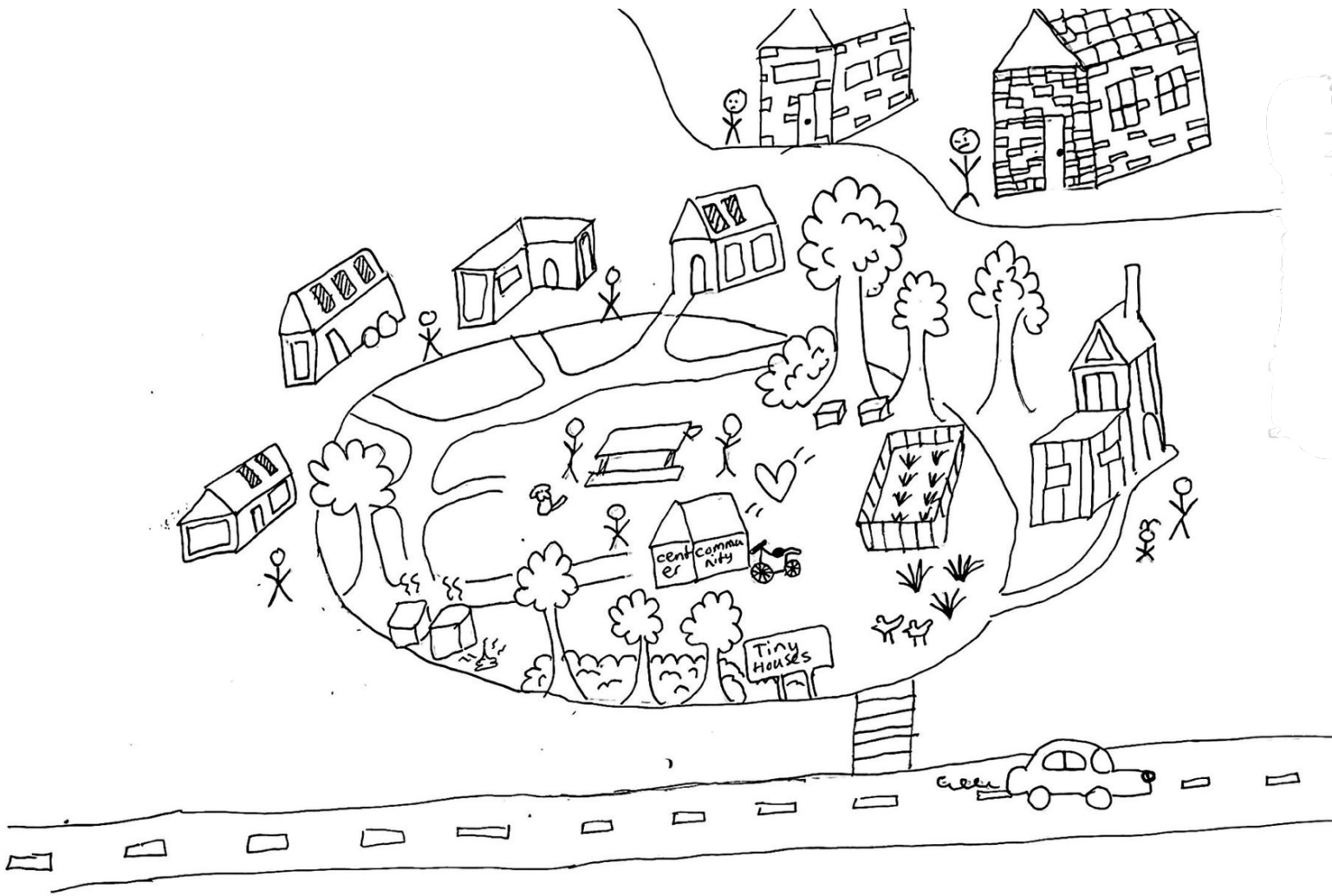
In chapter one, it became clear why my tiny house participants chose to live tiny. In chapter two, I researched the cultural meaning of nature in the Dutch tiny house community. In chapter three, the concept of home was discussed and subsequently linked to the cultural meaning of nature using different research methods. In this way, I answered the following main question:

“How is the concept of home influenced by the tiny house communities' cultural meaning of nature in The Netherlands?”

This ethnographic research demonstrates the reader how the tiny house movement contests normative ways of living by constructing insights into different ways of being on this planet that is encouraged by a deep connection to nature and environmental sustainability. Moreover, this research demonstrates that home is a multi-layered concept which travels through space and time. In the context of the tiny house community, it illustrates how the concept of home relates to rejecting a consumer mentality of “the bigger, the better.” Finally, this research demonstrates how the tiny house movement may be a possible solution to the contemporary housing crisis.

Further research could be elaborated on the restrictions of building a tiny house in the Netherlands as it became clear that many problems are experienced within this process. Moreover, since I have not involved all existing tiny house villages in this research, this research could be expanded by involving the remaining tiny house villages.

Epilogue



This drawing represents my insider's perspective on the Dutch tiny house community. A significant difference is visible if you compare this drawing with my outsider's perspective. Where I first imagined the Dutch tiny house community by drawing a single tiny house in the middle of a natural environment, this changed to drawing an entire tiny house village. As you can see, I drew multiple tiny houses surrounded by a vegetable garden, beehives, helophyte filters, compost containers, and dwellers themselves. After spending 12 weeks in the field, I came to understand what the Dutch tiny house community looks like (drawing, 2 May 2022).

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