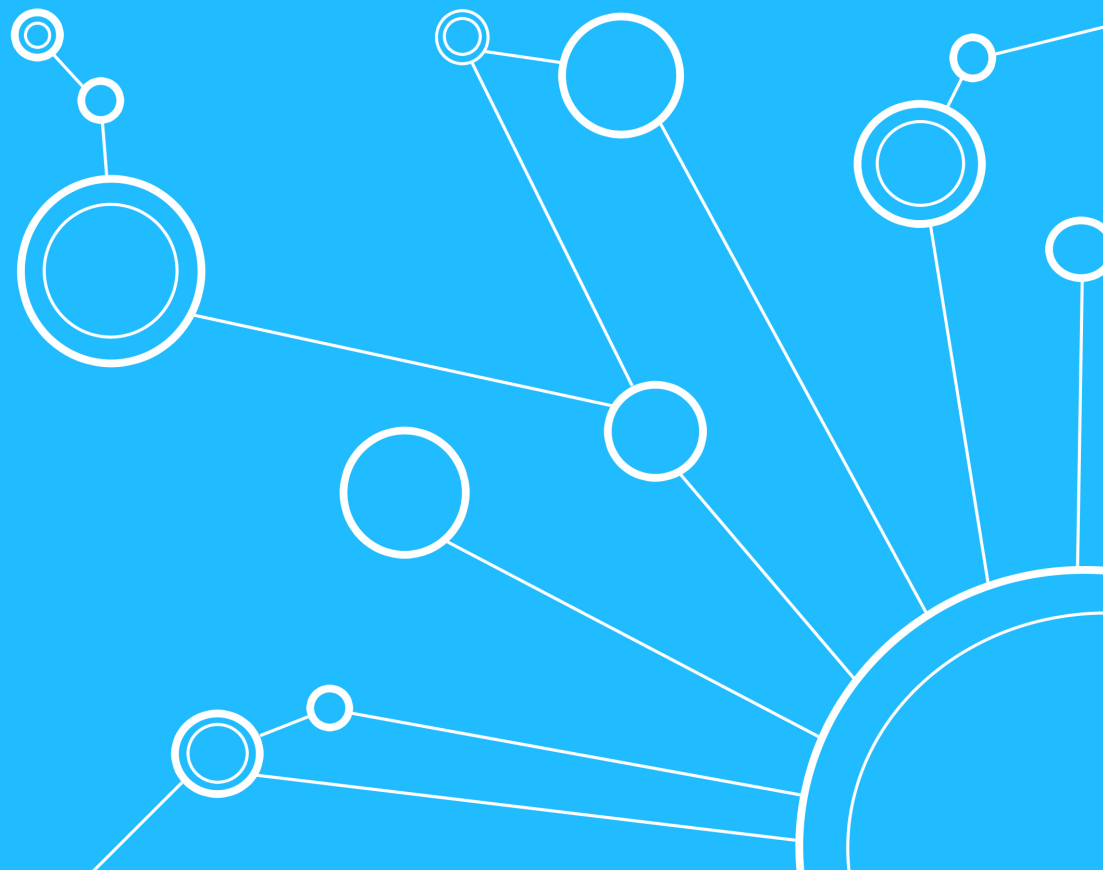


Ruby van den Hoff  
September 4, 2010

# *Places Created Together*

The social interaction and place attachment of professional migrants





# Places created together

The social interaction and place attachment of  
professional migrants

Master Thesis (MSc)

Ruby van den Hoff

Email:	rubyvandenhoff@gmail.com
Student number:	3328694
Educational institution:	Universiteit Utrecht
Faculty:	Faculty of Geosciences
Thesis supervisor:	Prof. Dr. R. van Kempen
Date:	04-09-2010





## Abstract

This study explores the differences in social interaction and place attachment of international professionals in Houston (USA) and The Hague (The Netherlands). Key factors such as the background of the international professional and the physical location are analyzed to investigate to what extent these factors are affecting their social interaction and their place attachment. The following research question is central to this study: *To what extent does the degree of social interaction and place attachment to the host country differ for international professional migrants in the American city of Houston, and the European city of The Hague?* In this study, research and literature on social interaction, social capital, place attachment and transnationalization is applied to international professional migrants.

This study encompasses 48 qualitative interviews with international professional migrants who have temporarily relocated to Houston and The Hague for professional purposes. The semi-structured interviews in this study present insights on the expatriate experience. The choice for Houston and The Hague was motivated by the differences and similarities of these locations. Both Houston and The Hague are secondary cities in their countries, with international companies' headquarters in the oil and gas sector and other international organizations. The cities' layouts and physical environment are very different. The variety of contextual variables in this cross-cultural research allows for analysis of the key factors that can impact social interaction and place attachment of professional migrants. Literature on concepts such as social capital, social interaction, and place attachment frame the empirical research in order to understand how the transnational activities of international professionals affect their experience.

Interesting findings are presented with regards to the social interaction and place attachment of international professionals. Social interaction varies particularly between different categories of international professionals within each city. Professionals with families are more likely to establish a larger local social network and interact less with their friends and family back home because of the ongoing local activities of family and children. International professionals in Houston tend to have more social interaction in the neighborhood and as a result of their professional environment than international professionals in The Hague. The extent and frequency of social interactions for international professionals can be mainly contributed to the length of residence, family composition and the built environment.

For place attachment, the extent to which international professionals become attached to their local area (street, neighborhood, city) varies with age, family composition, gender, purpose and length of stay. Attachment to the *home and neighborhood* often differs from attachment to the *city* as an entity. In The Hague, more international professionals indicated that they were attached to the city, while professionals in Houston indicated they were more attached to their local area such as their street or neighborhood. For both cities, the built environment plays an important role in the perceptions of international professionals of places to become attached to, but social attachment seems to be the primary determinant for place attachment.

The places that international professional migrants experience are a result of interactions with locals, the support of friends and family back home and the setting in which these interactions take place. Future research should not only concern the experience of professional migrants, but the *places that are created together* as a result of it. Future research could also further explore the impact of new technologies their social interaction. Another suggestion for future research is focusing on the differences between international individuals with different types of professions with regards to their social interaction and place attachment.

## Preface

Writing this thesis has been quite a journey and an adventure. It has not only resulted in one big stack of papers, but has also led to interesting experiences and meeting many great people. This study gave me the opportunity to visit interesting locations, great events, and learn the expat life lessons from an experienced crew. Many of the international professionals that I interviewed had very interesting stories to share with me. First, I would like to acknowledge the interviewees; without the international professionals who were part of this study my research would have not been possible.

I would like to thank Professor Ronald van Kempen for his patience, suggestions and constructive feedback over the course of many months. His guidance has helped me to place this study in a larger context, reflecting on the urban environment. I would like to thank my parents, Loes and Victor, for all their support and for the opportunity to complete my undergraduate degree in Canada. It has not only resulted in a worldly academic experience, but also in great global friendships and love. In addition, I would also like to thank Victor for his reflections on my study. Thanks to my colleagues at Mindz.com, especially Susanne, who always understood the time I needed to take off for the empirical research in North America.

Many thanks also to my brother Philip for bringing me many cups of tea during the course of writing. And my last words of gratitude are for Jesse: Thank you so much for proof reading, commenting on my work, inspiring me, and motivating me to always see the bright side!

Ruby van den Hoff – September 4, 2010

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# 1 Introduction

## 1. 1 PROBLEM BACKGROUND

The increase in communication and transportation, and intelligent technologies has globally resulted in a boost for the migration of high-skilled workers. Human mobility can be seen as a vehicle for the development of human capital, necessary for constructing a progressive global economy (Faist, 2000). Some of these professional migrants move temporarily, while others establish themselves permanently in another society. The decision to move for a job is often based on important push and pull factors (Bretell, 2006), such as available employment opportunities, family in other countries, better health care, or more chances for a better life (Dahl, Sorenson, 2008). These push and pull factors may also include their social interaction and attachment to their new local environment. How these migrants become attached to their new local environment and how many social contacts they have often depends on the environment of the relocation, and on how the host society is able to welcome and adopt these people in their social system.

Even though causes can be very determining for the adaptation to the new society, this study merely focuses on the impact of migration. The migrants in this study belong to a very specific category of professional migrants. Professional migrants are high-skilled workers that have completed at least an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree at college- or university level (Mahroum, 1999) and are looking for international employment opportunities. It has been claimed that in recent decades the research on high-skilled migration has exponentially increased, partially due to development of new and better transportation and communication modes (Metcalf, 1995). Every year, The Netherlands receives a vast amount of high skilled international workers from North America, Australasia and Eastern Europe. Similarly, the United States welcomes many Europeans, other North Americans, Asians and high skilled migrants from other parts of the world (Department of Homeland Security, United States, 2010).

Reasons why people migrate differ, and so does their socio-economic background. In doing so they are leaving behind valuable *social capital*, the network of friends and family that can help them sustain or succeed within their society. But high-skilled professionals could also be leaving their country for better professional experience and more advantageous assignments for their profession. Because knowledge and technology related industries are growing significantly worldwide, the pull-factor is ever increasing for the countries that specialize in these sectors. Although the migration of high-skilled migrants can be a result of their own ambitions, moving around the skilled work force allows multinationals to effectively distribute international professionals where they are required the most (Faist, 2000). In

addition to immigration legislation, other factors such as taxation, studying abroad, quality of work, openness in communication, business expansion overseas, labor market supply and demand signals etc. play an important role in the choice of high-skilled migrations to relocate overseas (Mahroum, 1999). This makes research in international migration sensitive to global trends (Economist, 2009) and necessary.

Besides social capital, it is important to identify several additional relevant terms for discussing international professional migration: social interaction, place attachment and transnationalization. *Social interaction* is a dynamic and changing sequence of social actions between individuals or groups, who modify their actions and reactions (Davies, 1993). *Place attachment*, often simply mentioned as attachment, refers to the process where people become connected to a place for emotional or functional reasons (Dahl, Sorenson, 2008). *Transnationalization* refers to the cross-border activities and ties of migrants (Faist, 2000). The migration of high-skilled professionals can no longer be seen without considering the increasing transnationalization that has been observed worldwide (Faist, 2000). Transnationalization affects the professional migrant's time allocation, communication methods and dedication to friends and family. International professional migrants face many challenges and opportunities when it comes to their social interactions. Emotional barriers such as foreign language, cultural differences and social structure, or physical barriers such as the physical environment or their residential environment may affect their social interactions positively or negatively. In addition, the temporality of their stay as well as the city's built environment may affect how accessible a city is for partaking in local social interaction. An area's social and physical environment and local social interaction can thus have a tremendous impact on attachment to place. The interplay of these concepts can be fundamentally important for the experience of all international professional migrants. The abundance of advanced communication technologies presently available may make it much easier for many international migrants to stay in touch with their home country.

Although research in this field has substantially increased, little is known about the impact of the migration for these high-skilled migrants and their social behavior (Mahroum, 2005). Of this relatively homogeneous group of mostly western, higher educated international migrants, many are employees of international organizations and companies, who are on a temporary assignment (HSBC, 2010). Analyzing their social interaction and attachment in Houston and The Hague permits a comparison of the experiences of professional migrants **under** similar circumstances in a very different social and environmental setting. Their host environment may supply push and pull factors involved in their migration affects their experience and retention for the duration of their assignment.

## 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study reflects on the social interaction and place attachment of international professionals in Houston and The Hague. By comparing international professional migrants in two different cities, with a very different city layout (often referred to as city structure), built environment and culture, it is possible to identify factors that play a key role in establishing social interaction that may lead to place attachment for these international professional migrants. This leads to the main question of this study:

*To what extent does the degree of social interaction and place attachment to the host country differ for international professional migrants in the American city of Houston (USA), and a European city, The Hague (The Netherlands)?*

### SUB-QUESTIONS

In order to answer the above question, a few sub-questions are relevant. The sub-questions below are ranked in macro to micro level order. The first sub-question is on society (macro-level), while the others are on a more individual (micro) level. In order to study the local international professional migrants in Houston and The Hague it is important to know what global developments can be observed

that may affect the international professionals of this study. For example, the current economic climate may have an impact on the duration of the stay of a professional migrant in a city. Because some circumstances may be similar for both cities, but others may differ it is also interesting to see what consequences these global trends have on each research city. The first sub-question of this study is therefore:

*1. What developments can be observed in the global migration of high-skilled human capital, and what effect do these developments have for assignments of the international professionals at the research locations?*

It is important to get a general idea of what types of social interaction international professional migrants in these cities have. Their living environment may play a role, but the structure of the local society may also be very determining for new interaction. Given the international nature of both cities, it is interesting to see just to what extent both cities have established ways for international migrants to feel welcome and accepted. Day-to-day activities may differ very much between the two cities, The Hague being very public-transit oriented and fairly dense and interknitted, Houston being much more automobile dependent, large and suburbanized. This may imply that international professional migrants may have more opportunities to talk to their neighbors, or feel less inclined to talk to a local shop owner or a supermarket clerk. The second sub-question is:

*2. How does social interaction for international professional migrants in Houston compare to the social interaction of their counterparts in The Hague experience and what can this be attributed to?*

Dahl & Sorenson (2008) have determined that social interaction is very important for people's place attachment. A network of close friends and family may deter people from moving to different locations, despite the abundance of employment opportunities that may be available elsewhere. When people have moved to a different place, social interaction may be fundamental for them to feel satisfied about their lives, and to feel established and 'at home' in an area. Cultural differences may for example affect their experience, because international migrants may feel that they are impacted by a lack of privacy and space. Or they may feel very isolated in a sparsely populated, wooded suburb. The social environment can thus impact the experience of the international professional migrant and may affect their place attachment. The third sub-question is thus formulated as follows:

*3. How does social interaction of international professional migrants affect their place attachment and vice versa?*

Lastly, the fourth sub-question attempts to find an answer to the environmental factors that may play a key role for the experience of an international professional migrant. Crime rates, density, and climate are all (social and physical) environmental factors that may be affecting the place attachment of a professional migrant. The type of neighborhood and type of house may impact this experience as well as the setting of their migration (i.e. individually or with family). The fourth sub-question that is asked is:

*4. To what extent does the degree of place attachment to the host city and neighborhood differ between Houston and The Hague and how can this be explained?*

### **1.3 RESEARCH RELEVANCE**

Why is it so important to get to know more about the lives of international professional migrants in Houston and The Hague? Apart from other aspects, studying international migration of professionals is interesting various reasons.

Firstly, most countries in the western world have a lagging supply of those knowledge workers and try to attract them from other countries. There is also severe competition among various developed countries, most notably between the United States and Western Europe to attract high-skilled workers



from other countries. On a longer term, the extent of migration of high-skilled migrants to new urban environments and the extent to which they become attached to the new environment may affect and even alter the larger migration patterns. It is therefore important to gain greater understanding of the social processes that concern these professional migrants to find out what may prompt their stay or departure.

Secondly, studying the lives of these international professional migrants can provide important insight on international migration trends. Small details about their social interaction and how they feel in their local environment may provide interesting insights on a higher level and when compared with other professional migrants and especially with other professional migrants in another city. The type of neighborhood and dwelling may impact their experience of a city, as well as the urban structure of the city and the amount of social services that are provided. A city may have more places and opportunities for meeting others such as green spaces and squares. But even if there are opportunities it may not necessarily mean international professionals will take advantage of it. The personal stories of international professionals in an environment draw a picture about their lives but also about the urban environment they live in and their experience of the city. A collection of these stories may provide important insights and contributes to the analysis of the impact of their move.

Lastly, this study is interesting because it focuses on the impact of rather than causes for migration. In the research field of international migration most of the weight was put on searching for the causes of migration to the expense of the impacts (Thieme, 2006). Much of the existing research attempts to provide a systematic analysis of the various mechanisms that influence the mobility of distinct groups of international professional migrants. In addition, little research has been dedicated to the social processes of professional migrants in their new environment (Mahroum, 2005). Professional migrants may or may not retain a connection with their home country, but have new communication technologies available to aid this. Advanced technology and increased traveling have made it much easier to migrate. It is also easier to maintain ties while integrating into the new society at the same time. The effects of new technologies will on the social interaction and place attachment therefore need to be considered.

#### **1.4 THESIS STRUCTURE**

The structure of this thesis is as follows: In chapter 2 the research approach and methodology of this study will be discussed. The theoretical foundation of this study can be found in Chapter 3. The main concepts of this study are social capital, social interaction, place attachment and transnationalization. In Chapter 4, a description of the research cities, Houston and The Hague, will be provided and their urban structure will be explored. It is important to sketch an image of the research cities and what these cities are like to live in, and analyze the chances for meetings and social interaction, in order to determine how these particular urban environments may impact the participants of this study.

The collected data from the qualitative interviews will be described and discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. Chapter 5 focuses on the discussion of social interaction, and chapter 6 discusses empirical data on place attachment. The concepts of *social capital* and *transnationalization* are interweaved with the social interaction and place attachment in these chapters in order to analyze the extent and location of their local networks and activities.

Chapter 7 contains conclusions and reflections of this study. The main research question of this study will be answered in the conclusion based on the theoretical foundation of chapter 3 and 4 and the empirical evidence of chapter 5 and 6. Chapter 7 is also meant to further tie in the theoretical parts with the empirical parts of this study and conclude on the research.

## 2. Research Approach and Methodology

This chapter will justify the pragmatic and methodological approach of the research. The study focuses on a comparative analysis of international professional migrants in two urban environments, Houston and The Hague. It is attempted to identify what personal background factors and what environmental factors are impacting the social interaction and place attachment of professional migrants by using qualitative interviews.

### 2.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY

This study encompassed a qualitative study of semi-structured interviews with 48 international professional migrants with a variety of backgrounds, 23 located in Houston and 25 located in The Hague. This is an important group of international migrants whose impact and experience has not been studied much yet (Thieme, 2000). The choice of Houston and The Hague was motivated by the differences and similarities of these locations. The variety of contextual variables, some of which are similar for both locations, others different due to dissimilarities in culture and policies.

During the interviews, participants were interviewed at a location of their choice, some preferring their professional environment, others their home environment or a public place such as a coffee house. The semi-structured interview method was chosen to elicit a vivid picture of a participant's perspective on their migration experience. This study was meant to interpret the personal experiences and stories in attempt to understand the meanings attached to them (Bryman, 2004). The expanded interview notes were occasionally used to go back to after the interview and some participants were contacted again in order to clarify contextual details. The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding and insight into the personal migration experiences of the international professional migrants in this study, and how this may impact their social interaction and place attachment.

#### COMPARATIVE DESIGN WITH TWO CASE STUDIES

Bryman (2007) defines comparative research design as "studying two contrasting cases using more or less identical methods". In order to gather the data for the experiences of international professional migrants, this study uses semi-structured in-depth interviews in both Houston and The Hague. Hantrais (1996) has suggested that such qualitative research is often aimed at seeking explanations for similarities or differences or to gain a greater awareness and a deeper understanding of a social reality in different national contexts. Bryman (2007) warns that cross-cultural research is not without problems such as: ensuring that the data are comparable in terms of categories and data-collection methods; ensuring when new data are being collected, that the need to translate data-collection instruments do not undermine the comparability. Cross-cultural research can show however that

research findings on the experience of this type of international migrants are not necessarily culturally specific or country specific.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews provide the opportunity to ask additional follow-up questions in order to provide an as extensive as possible view of the experiences and considerations of the participant (Bryman, 2007). The interview questions were prepared in advance of the interviews. Suggested revisions by others contributed to the final version of the interview questions. The main themes of the research as well as essential information such as age, gender, nationality, marital status and children were included in the questions. The interview questions (see Appendix I) were organized covering the four main themes of this research in sections, where within a section the questions are posed in a logical order, one question often leading to the next. The interview questions therefore were meant to facilitate the flow of a participant's personal story to maximize the amount of data comes forth out of an interview. It needs to be said that no participant was asked precisely the same set of interview questions because additional questions were asked based on the participant's responses and because not all questions were applicable to the situation of every participant.

As most previous studies in this field have focused on merely one location, cross-cultural comparisons of international professional migrants are scarce. Studying the situation of international professional migrants in their natural setting facilitates a better understanding of the nature and complexity of micro processes of international migration that affect attachment, through for example social interaction. In addition to the independent search for participants through contacting HR Departments, Expat Clubs and other organized social environments, it was necessary to employ a snowball method for selecting additional participants. One of disadvantages of using this approach is that it becomes much more difficult to justify a generalization to larger populations. This is a disadvantage that is also associated with qualitative studies (Bryman, 2007), but given the desire to gather more data with personal experiences of more participants it was a compromise that was worth making despite the drawbacks.

#### SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants were selected based on various different criteria. Of the 48 interviewees selected, 23 of them were internationals located in Houston, and 25 of them were internationals located in The Hague. With a qualitative study such as this one, there is no fixed or recommended amount of interviews in order to satisfy the criteria. The aim was to at least be able to interview at least 20 international migrants per location. In addition Bryman (2007) points out it is important to be able to answer the research questions with the interviews.

In order to be eligible to participate the following set of selection of criteria was employed for both research locations:

- participant cannot be in the possession of a permanent residency or green card
- sample meant to reflect a variety of nationalities
- between 25 and 55 years of age
- even male and female ratio
- employment

The participants were selected through advertisements and postings on local forums and local magazines and newsletters for internationals. In addition, through access in a small group of international migrants, as a snowball method other international migrants were referred or could be approached by email and telephone in order to see if they wanted to participate. It proved to be fairly a challenging and arduous activity to obtain potential participants through corporations and organizations. Therefore the network of participants involved was essential for attracting more participants. In addition, the process of setting up interviews was very lengthy due to the correspondences in advance as well as the demanding schedules of many participants.

It is important to note that some modern methods of recruiting participants were employed as well. Through social media, such as twitter and forums the posting was spread. Expat organizations such as The Hague Online (THO) and Families in Global Transition (FIGT) collaborated, and communicated the study to their members in order to recruit more participants. Some locally organized events by these organizations were also attended, in order to increase the amount and diversity of the participants of this study. Attending these events and personally distributing the posting, along with the organizers of these clubs proved to be very rewarding.

## 2.2 EMPLOYED RESEARCH METHODS

During the research, data was collected through the use of multiple sources, most importantly the semi-structured in-depth interviews. These interviews lasted between 60 minutes to an hour and a half, depending on the availability of the participant and the willingness to share and confide personal details about a participant's migration experience. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed. Additional notes were also taken to add to the transcriptions. Following the interviews some participants were contacted again for further clarification or additional questions. Before commencing the interview it was announced that the interview was recorded for transcription purposes. In addition, participants were told that all information would be kept anonymous, and that they could request to skip any question without explanation or discontinue the interview if they wished to do so at any time (Bryman, 2007; Stueve et.al, 1975).

The transcribed interviews were coded, in order to classify the answers to specific questions and coded words that related to the research question under a certain category or topic. With the research questions considered, patterns, relationships and other findings could be recognized and grouped. All data, including quotes that can help supporting the results, pertaining to a specific category or topic were gathered in a table. First the tables were separated the two research locations for contrast, later combining the transcribed data of both of the locations to comparison. The tables also allowed for the data to be more easily accessed per topic, such as 'neighbor relationships'. These compilations made it possible to assess the data as well. All direct quotes used in this study are meant to support results, add meaning to claims or statements made and make the findings more comprehensible through real examples.

In addition to the semi-structured in-depth interviews with professional migrants, other agents were also contacted such as region specific relocation assistants and HR departments of larger corporations. These provided additional information about the situation of professional migrants as well as additional documentation that was given to professional migrants prior to their departure. The new local environment (i.e. residential location, office location) was important for the analysis as well as it provided important insights on how the built and social environment can affect these professionals. During the course of this study some important economic developments resulted in a permanent relocation and decrease in international professional migrants worldwide. This has, amongst other effects, resulted less work permits being issued and less relocations (Economist, 2009). Therefore it was important to also consider media such as newspaper and international affairs magazines in order to closely monitor developments that could have impacted the research question pertaining to trends in international migration, which this study attempted to address also. Table 2.1 provides an overview of the data and materials analyzed for this study.

Source	Topic	Method
<b>Individual participants</b>	Professional migrants	Qualitative interviews
<b>Agents</b>	Local agents, recruiters, HR professionals Transfer documentation company Local Urban Governance	Phone/Correspondence Interviews Content Analysis Content Analysis
<b>Literature</b>	Research on international migration Research on transnationalization Research on social interaction and place attachment Research on social capital	Content Analysis
<b>Media</b>	News International affairs magazines Internet resources (e.g. Forums, social media)	Content Analysis
<b>Situation</b>	Participant professional or private environment (interview location) Urban structure	Observation Observation/Analysis

### 2.3 CHOICE OF RESEARCH LOCATIONS

As previously mentioned, this study focuses on two cities with their greater area, Houston and The Hague. It is important to note that by choosing for these two locations, it may leave out different contextual factors that other locations may have that were not selected for this study. The choice of Houston and The Hague however is based on the assumption that their very different urban structure and physical environment. They also are thought to have a different social settings provide a good basis for analyzing contextual factors that may affect social interactions and place attachment of migrants.



Figure 2.1 World map with Houston and The Hague

Not only the different social setting and the environment complement the fact that this entails a Euro-American comparison. But not only differences make up this choice of location, because numerous similarities can be found between Houston and The Hague. For example, both cities have a significant

amount of temporary foreign population. In the city of Houston there are approximately 400.000 international temporary residents (City of Houston, 2008), on a total population of 2.2 million (City of Houston). This means nearly 18 percent of the residents of Houston is of foreign descent temporarily residing in the city. The Hague has an estimated 63.000 international temporary residents living and working in the city, on a population of 489.000 (CBS, 2010). In The Hague international temporary residents thus make up a little less than 10 percent of the population.

One of the attributing factors to the large percentage of foreign nationals working in these to cities is their economic importance. Houston and The Hague are both host many international corporations and headquarters (Fortune 500, 2010). For example, Royal Dutch Shell is headquartered in The Hague, and ConocoPhillips is headquartered in Houston. This illustrates the important economic position of both locations. Headquarters establishing themselves in an area can be one of the greatest sources of foreign direct investment and tends to create many direct and indirect jobs (Straus-Kahn et al, 2006). Both cities are also a designated location for many other international organizations including embassies and consulates. Apart from the national political nature and all the embassies, The Hague is also seen as one of the most important cities for the United Nations as a result of the location International Court of Justice (ICJ, 2010) and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Because it is assumed that contextual factors such as the built environment can play a key role in the opportunities for social interaction and attachment, the limited zoning regulations in Houston in

contrast with the perhaps over-regulated (Van den Berg, 1997) urban area around The Hague allow for a very convincing comparison of these two research locations. The local environment may affect the way that professional migrants may or may not build up or sustain their social capital. However the physical environment is obviously not the only factor affecting social interaction and place attachment; the social structure of an urban environment is very important for the development of social interactions too (Low, 2000; Goheen, 1998).

## 2.4 ETHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study is designed and undertaken to ensure integrity and quality. It is important to realize that all research is to some extent affected by the values of the researcher (Bryman, 2007). Awareness of this can help reduce the bias of the research. Because this study directly involves human participants, it is important to consider ethical issues regarding the subjects of research as well (ESRC, 2010). This study is designed, reviewed and undertaken with integrity, and all subjects are fully informed about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses. Confidentiality of the information supplied by the participants and anonymity of the participants is respected. In addition, it is important to note that there are a few methodological considerations that are important when conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews. Bryman (2007) mentions issues regarding interview techniques, interviewer effects and the potential of language barriers when interviewing participants with a variety of cultural backgrounds. In order to remain as consistent as possible the interview questions are followed and asked in the same order for all interviews. Gender differences may also impact the responses of interviewees. By allowing participants to choose their own time and interview location is hoped keep interviewer effects to a minimum.

All interviews were conducted in English, including the interviews with Dutch international migrants, to maintain consistency in language. Although not all participants had the same level of command of English, all of them frequently or always used English as their professional language. Therefore, it can be assumed that most participants always understood the question before answering, incidentally after a clarification. And although this may affect the answer of some participants to a certain extent, language is not thought to have impacted the results of this study significantly. There may be a bias associated with the non-random selection of participants for this qualitative study. The development of online social media for example may not be as widely used by all international migrants, so finding participants through social media may result in only reaching a certain type of international migrants; those who are very technologically aware or savvy. In order to limit the effect of the bias on this study, corporate HR specialists and international relocation consultants were also consulted for obtaining participants.

Lastly, the contextual factors may differ for other areas in both countries, and even more so for different countries or continents. International migrants working in Asia for example, may be affected by very different contextual factors than the international migrants in this study. But researching how the urban structure, built environment and local culture are affecting individuals contributes to a better understanding of the international professional expatriate experience. It also provides relevant insights that can be useful for future research in other cities and other regions of the world.

## 3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical foundation of this study. Several theories and concepts have been identified as important themes for international professional migrants. These concepts *social interaction* and *place attachment* will be further discussed in this chapter. In addition, it has been identified in the previous chapters that *transnationalization* and *social capital* are also important concepts. Both of these concepts are necessary to include in this study, in order to be able to answer the research questions. This chapter will discuss these concepts and explain what relations will be further analyzed in this study. Before going into these concepts however it is important to briefly mention some existing theories in migration that are relevant for this study, that is what this chapter starts with.

Section 3.1 provides a brief overview of dominant theories in international migration. Subsequently, section 3.2 discusses the relevant theories of perpetuation of migration research relevant for this study. The relevant concepts and themes for the conceptual model are discussed in section 3.4. Consecutively, section 3.5 presents a conceptual model upon which this study is based. This model shows the relations that are being analyzed. The conceptual model of this chapter will subsequently be used for theoretical reflection in the case studies of chapter 5 and 6 of this study.

### 3.1 BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Causes and impacts of external migration are diverse. This diversity is not only reflected in empirical analyses but also in different theories and models of migration. At present there is no single, coherent theory of international migration, but rather a fragmented set of theories, sometimes segmented by disciplinary boundaries (Portes & DeWind, 2008; Thieme, 2006; Massey et al., 1993; Mahroum, 1999). A major distinction can be drawn between theories explaining the initiation and the consequences of international migration, often summarized as 'classical migration research' (Thieme, 2006) in the literature and theories explaining the perpetuation of migration. However, all theoretical concepts aim to better understand migration processes. Since this study does not focus on the causes of migration as much as it does on the impact, the brief overview of influential theories below is limited to and focused on impact-based theories. In order to provide context for these impacts however, it is necessary to review some traditionally prominent migration theories that also emphasize causes of migration. Reviewing the existing literature also conveys the absence of shows impact-based studies and explains the direction of this study.

#### MIGRATION STUDIES AND THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION CAUSES

It was Ravenstein (1889), who did the first leading research the field of migration and who formulated the so-called 'laws of migration'. Ravenstein developed the concepts of absorption and dispersion,



early versions of push and pull factors, explaining the attraction of people to towns and the inverse process where people are pushed away (dispersed) from an area. Ravenstein also discovered that each migration flow produces a compensating counter flow and that most of the migration occurring is stimulated by economic forces such as employment opportunities in major commerce centers and areas of industry. Although his theories focused on migration flows within England, his research provided the framework for the foundations of international migration research.

Post-Ravenstein, most of the researchers attempted to explain how international migration is initiated and what social, cultural, economic and political consequences it has for the receiving country. It can be recognized that the idea of 'push and pull' factors plays a key role in these approaches. The subsequent attempts to explain migration in the context of economical systems were done by neoclassical economists. They described migration as a result of differential wages and employment conditions between different countries, and on migration costs basing movement on individual decision to maximize income (Lewis, 1952). New economics of migration consider, in addition to the labor market, also capital markets and unemployment insurance risk to the factors that can determine migration. Stark (1991) argued that migration was seen as a strategy to minimize family income risks or to overcome capital constraints on the family production activities. "Dual labor market theory and world systems theory generally ignore such micro-level decision processes, focusing instead on forces operating at much higher levels of aggregation" (Massey, 1993, p. 432). Decision-making models for migration consider a variety of factors that can influence the decision to migrate, but remain in the push-pull framework according to Thieme (2006). This again displays the importance of the framework that Ravenstein provided with his initial analysis of migration.

But given the fact that international migration may begin for a variety of reasons, the conditions that initiate international movement may be quite different from those that perpetuate it across time and space. Although wage differentials, relative risks, recruitment efforts, and market penetration may continue to cause people to move, new conditions that arise in the course of migration may act as independent causes. This may result in very different causes of migration than the initial cause. An example of this could be high-skilled international migrants moving for their well-paid job to the United States. Their example may prompt a larger group of people with a different educational background to move to the United States, expecting similar well-paid employment conditions, which the host country – the US – may live up to or not. The reasons or causes for migration may also have a distinct impact on their adjustment to the host country. Social aspects such as their socio-economic status, educational background, cultural background or even ethnicity may result in very different adjustment conditions. Typically, persons with a cultural background that is relatively close to that of the host-society have less problems adapting to the host-society (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Portes and Walton, 1981).

#### SOCIAL ASPECTS OF MIGRATION

Therefore, it is important to look at the theories that also focus on the social aspects of migration. And since this study focuses on the consequences and impacts of migration rather than causes, the following section discusses some of the theories that explain causes of migration from a more social perspective. This helps to understand how the social processes, that are associated with developing social capital in new environment, are impacted. Important aspects are how migrant networks are spreading, how institutions supporting transnational movement develop, and how "social meaning of work changes" (Massey, 1993, p. 448) in receiving societies. Massey argues that the "general thrust of these transformations" is to make additional movement more likely, a process known as *cumulative causation* (Massey, 1993). Before cumulative causation can occur however, it is important that networks and linkages, essentially a part of social capital, are established locally to support this cumulative causation. The next section therefore explains the significance of networks.



Migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin” (Massey, 1993). These processes facilitate international movement by providing a network of support. Massey argues that network connections constitute a form of social capital that people can draw upon to gain access to foreign employment. The theory argues that once a threshold number of migrants has been reached, expansion of the networks reduces the cost and risks of movement. This causes the probability of migration to rise, which in itself causes additional movement and further expansion of the networks over time. The migratory behavior spreads outward to encompass broader segments of the sending society (Hugo, 1981; Taylor, 1986, Massey & García España, 1987; Massey 1990a, 1990b; Gurak & Caces, 1992).

Once the first migrants have settled in a new area the risks and costs of such a move are substantially lowered (Massey, 1993). These substantially reduced costs result from the nature of the kinship and friendship structures that each migrant creates through a set of people with social ties to the destination area. Once a certain threshold has been reached, migration becomes self-perpetuating and then creates a social structure in itself (Massey, 1990). The established networks make international migration an attractive strategy for diversification of risk. The larger the network in the host society, the easier it is for a new migrant to find employment. Perhaps the chances of attaining employment are not the most interesting part of this theory. More importantly, the network created affects the successful survival of a new migrant in a host environment.

This study mostly looks at participants who have moved because of employment opportunities often through their professional network in the home country. Though this theory may not be applicable to the reason for relocation, it certainly can help to explain the establishment of social interactions for new professional migrants in their new environment. The larger network the professional migrant has in the new environment, the higher the chances of successful social interactions and place attachment.

#### CUMULATIVE CAUSATION

Not only the growth of networks and the development of migrant-supporting institutions contribute to additional flows of migrants, so does cumulative causation. Cumulative causation refers to the understanding that every time a migrant moves to a different location, that migration alters the social context that makes a following migration more likely. Social scientists have discussed six socioeconomic factors that are “potentially affected by migration in this cumulative fashion” (Massey, 1993, p. 451): the distribution of income, the distribution of land, the organization of agriculture, culture, the regional distribution of human capital, and the social meaning of work. Feedbacks through other variables are also possible, but have not been systematically treated (Stark et al., 1986; Taylor, 1992). An important and relevant feedback in the cumulative causation theory for international professional migrants is for example culture; the culture of the host country as well as the culture of the home country, migrant may transfer elements of the host country’s culture back to the home country such as fashion, food, clothes, music or films that may inspire others. Another feedback of cumulative causation can be that the social meaning of work differs between host country and home country. An individual’s home culture’s meaning of work is brought to the host country, the same way as other ‘emotional baggage’ (i.e. cultural heritage, fashion sense, cuisine, knowledge).

In addition, cumulative causation can be seen as to having an effect on migration in two ways: Firstly, moving a professional migrant sets a standard for their social environment and secondly, may inspire others to do the same. This can make the acceptance of international migration more likely in their specific social group (Thieme, 2006). In addition, once these professional migrants have moved once, given their positive experience they may be inclined to take on another assignment in a foreign country.

## MIGRATION SYSTEMS THEORY

Most of the abovementioned theories suggest that migration flows acquire a measure of stability and structure over space and time, allowing for the identification of stable international migration systems (Massey, 1993). According to Fawcett (1989), these systems are characterized by relatively intense flows and exchanges of goods, capital and people between certain countries. A good example would currently be the exchange of goods, capital and people between North America and China. An international migration system generally includes a core-receiving region, for example western countries, and a set of specific sending countries linked to it by unusually large flows of immigrants (Faist, 2000).

Migration systems theory is useful for this study in order to understand larger migration flow patterns such as South-North migration, where people migrate from poorer countries to rich western countries such as from Mexico to the United States, driven by both push factors from their home country and pull factors from the receiving country (Portes, 2003). The flow of international professional migrants however, is relatively small and stable already for this theory to be very well applicable. Perhaps the best application is by understanding that political and economic conditions change as the system evolves. The United States for example has, as a result of the NAFTA trade agreement, made it easier since the 1990s for other North Americans to obtain a TN-visa for temporary employment (up to three years) in the United States.

However, these larger schemes and macro theories are not able to explain the social interaction and local place attachment of these professional migrants on a personal scale (Eherkamp, 2005). And although these theories do contribute to the understanding of just how international migration of professionals can be affected by the importance networks, cumulative causation and migration systems theory, it is important to also consider the micro-level structures of migration. Social network theory can be seen as a leading theory to explain those micro-level structures of network building, social networks and its significance for migrants.

## SOCIAL NETWORK THEORY

It has become evident that the micro-level structures of networks are essential for understanding migration patterns and behavior. Social network theory identifies the importance of such micro-level connections that can be determining for social interactions and place attachment of international professional migrants. Social network theory defines a network as a set of relationships (Davies, 1993). More formally: a network contains a set of objects or nodes and a mapping or description of relations between the objects or nodes (Kadushin, 2004, p. 3). The simplest network contains two objects or nodes and one relationship that link them. Relationships can be unilateral or bilateral depending on whether or not the nodes are interacting or simply connected reciprocally or mutually. It has been identified that there are three types of egocentric, socio-centric, and open-system networks (Kadushin, 2010). Egocentric networks are those networks that are connected with a single node or individual, for example my good friends or all the companies that do business with a company. Social interaction is often created in a setting with connections. Connections between people in a classroom, or between executives and workers in an organization can all be part of social networks and are called open system networks. Open system networks are networks in which the boundaries are not necessarily clear, for example corporate connections. These connections are particularly important for international professionals moving to a different location because of their occupation.

One of the most famous propositions in geography refers to spatial dependence of nodes and objects. Sometimes also called the 'First Law of Geography' from Tobler (2002) it states that: "All things are related, but nearby things are more related than distant things". Given this proposition one would assume that individuals are more likely to be friends if they live in close spatial proximity of one another. This proposition suggests that newly migrated international professionals need to establish a

new local network for themselves in order to 'replace' their existing local network in their home country. Despite the theoretical views that space no longer plays an important role in structuring patterns of interactions, many studies nevertheless have shown that distance can still play a role, although not the determining one of the past (Davies, 1993). Traditionally, even the residential location of a person or family -on a corner of the street or locked between other homes- can make a social difference (Kadusluin, 2010).

Yet the assertion that 'distance matters' has also led to increasing criticism on the social network approach. The theory relies heavily upon strong ties within the local network, with for example a large number of daily meetings, as among colleagues. It has been argued that 'weak ties' or "acquaintanceships among neighbors or community members can lead to a false impression of their potential" (Davies, 1993, p. 73). Their existence can provide the basis of a strong cohesion, a strong sense of belonging together (Portes & Rumbaut, 1998). But the increasing use of telecommunications and other technologies allow for communities to miss that 'physicality' of the network. Networks can now stretch longer distances and still involve 'meeting' or connecting on a daily basis (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2006; Wellman et al., 1996;). The disappearance of this physicality has led to some extent to a decrease in local and an increase in global network connections for individuals, but the latter has not completely replaced the former.

### **3.2 ESSENTIAL THEORETICAL CONCEPTS FOR INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONALS**

Now that important concepts for international migration have been identified, it becomes necessary to cover concepts that are essential for the social networks of international professional migrants. Often, part of their network is local (stretching over the extent of their daily life path), but a significant amount of relationships for international professionals remain on a global level (a larger scale than their daily life path extending across larger distances than their city limits, even worldwide) (Cresswell, 2006). Both their global and local networks contribute to the personal social capital of international professionals. Social interaction contributes significantly to the social capital of individuals (Portes, 1994), including the social capital of professional migrants. Identification of the various sections of the behavioral paths of international migrants is only part of the issue. It is necessary to investigate their interaction in a "local place or community context" (Davies, 1993, p. 66). The type and nature of daily social interaction directly impacts the place attachment of international professional migrants (Wang & Nayir, 2006; Carrasco et al., 2008). This section investigates the concepts that are seen as particularly important for the international professionals of this study.

#### **SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Several relations have previously been identified; social interaction directly impacts place attachment, causes of migration can result in different impacts of migration depending on the (cultural) background of the professional migrant and above all micro-level structures of networks are key to understanding migration. These micro-level networks make up the social capital of an international migrant. As soon as an international migrant relocates to a new location (city, country), the existing social capital has a chance of being extended with new local networks. But this may also be to the expense of local networks and social capital in the home country or previous location of the international migrant. Both social interaction and place attachment can play a significant role in contributing to the composition of personal social capital of international migrants.

The main idea of social capital in relation to social interaction and place attachment is that social networks have value, and that social contacts can affect the productivity of individuals and groups. The most important authors in the social capital research field are Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam. Putnam defines social capital as follows:

"Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of

individuals, social capital refers to the connections among individuals - the social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000, 19)

Social capital can provide bonding or bridging between very diverse people due to the shared norms of reciprocity. Of all the dimensions along which forms of social capital can vary, perhaps the most important is the distinction between bridging (or inclusive) and bonding (exclusive) (Putnam, 2000). “Some forms of social capital are by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups (Putnam, 2000, 22). Examples of such *bonding* social capital, are for example country clubs, church-based women’s reading groups but also a local expat community. Other networks are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages. Examples of such *bridging* capital include the civil rights movement, sport clubs and perhaps to a certain extent also the expat community.

Interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other and to knit a denser social fabric. A sense of belonging and the concrete experience of social networks through relationships build on trust and tolerance can lead to great benefits for all people involved. Positive aspects of social capital include lower crime rates, lower unemployment rates, better health, higher educational achievement and better economic growth (Halpern, 2009). Social capital is thus important because it allows a community to collectively solve problems, cooperate on projects. In addition, social capital is sometimes seen as the grease that makes society advance more smoothly (Infed, 2010). Trust and reciprocity makes economic benefits greater and more ample. This makes it evident why it is crucial for international professional migrants to develop some local social capital. A third way in which social capital improves a community is the connections, which facilitate testing the veracity of viewpoints, casual conversations or formal deliberations (Infed, 2010). Often coming from a different cultural background, in order to ‘function’ better in a host society it becomes necessary to have a local network where casual conversations and testing viewpoints for international professional migrants.

The networks that constitute social capital also serve as conduits for the flow of helpful information that facilitates achieving goals. “Social capital also operates through psychological and biological processes to improve individual’s lives. Community connectedness is not just about warm fuzzy tales of civic triumph. In measureable and well documented ways social capital makes an enormous difference to our lives” (Putnam, 2000, 288). This can also contribute significantly to transnational activities, where international migrants take some of the locally acquired knowledge and transfer it to their country of origin. Thus, having some local social capital may benefit the global social capital of the international migrant, for example in their home country.

Figure 3.1 shows important aspects of social capital such as trust and reciprocity, participation and volunteerism, social interaction, diversity and group characteristics, generalized values and norms and outlook in life, sense of belonging. Putnam refers to these aspects of local social capital as neighborhood connections (1998). Connections with neighbors, membership to local associations and local norms of helping one another and reciprocity are all easy to see from a local standpoint. It is important to note that it is easy to consider social capital merely a local matter, but for international professionals the non-local social capital and social connections are just as important (Faist, 2000).

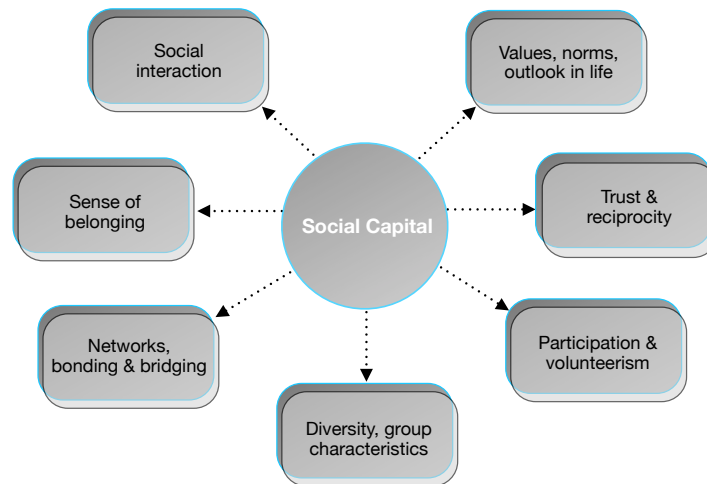


Fig. 3.1 Aspects of Social Capital (based on Putnam, 1998)

Both place attachment and social interaction play an important role in the development of social capital. Social interaction is directly seen in Figure 3.1 as an aspect of social capital. Aspects associated with place attachment are for example sense of belonging, participation, volunteerism and (local) networks). International migrants who feel a strong attachment to place will be more likely to be involved in local activities, local networks and will feel ‘at home’ in a community or residentially in a neighborhood. A lot of the physical ‘help’ and assistance, such as watching over a sick child, borrowing sugar, cleaning the street together are all aspects of social capital on a local level which requires a physical community. But more and more societies are going towards a trend where communities no longer have that physical level and people are connecting and helping each other over distance. The networks and connections that individuals, including international migrants, have over larger distances are now a vital part of their social capital.

It is important to note however that not everything is positive about social capital; the negative aspects of social capital were first documented by Portes (1996) but are now synonymous with our understanding of social capital theory. “A stock of social capital is simultaneously productive and perverse” (Aldridge, 2010). The same characteristics of social capital that enable beneficial, productive benefits have the potential to cause negative externalities. Potential downsides of social capital may include: “fostering behavior that worsens rather than improves economic performance; acting as a barrier to social inclusion and social mobility; dividing rather than uniting communities or societies; facilitating rather than reducing crime, education underachievement and health-damaging behavior” (Aldridge, 2010). International migrants may also be excluded from a community or a neighborhood as a result of this or they may have difficulty accessing the local network, especially when they have limited institutional involvement as will be discussed in the next chapter.

International professional migrants can often be in a situation where they have both local and global social capital (Faist, 2000). Because they often are temporarily in a new environment the investment in building local social capital does not seem worth it. Migrants with children, are perhaps the ones who are most tied down to the local social and physical community and will need their local network much sooner than professional migrants in a different stage of their life-cycle who can be much more footloose (Portes, 2001). A balance between maintaining social interaction with friends, family and colleagues back home as well as building up a strong local network is perhaps difficult to define. Many local social interactions can lead to a greater local place attachment (Dahl & Sorenson, 2008). Oppositely, the greater the place attachment of an individual is, the more it is worth it to invest in local social capital or if the place attachment to the home country is greater, the more it is worth it to continue the connections that build up social capital away from the current residence. One of the prime determinants for the creation and sustainment of social capital is social interaction (Dahl &

Sorenson, 2008). Without communication it is impossible to build up social capital, no matter if the social capital is mainly local or global (Faist, 2000).

## SOCIAL INTERACTION

From the previous section it becomes evident how important the role social capital can be in the lives of international professional migrants. In order to establish social capital, social interactions are a necessity (Putnam, 1998). Social interaction facilitates the ties and the connections that individuals need in order to build up their social capital and benefit from it. In addition, Cairns states that the key idea of social interaction is that “social acts and personality cannot be understood independently of the social context in which they are embedded because of the ongoing ‘dialectic’ or interchange between the person and his surrounds” (Cairns, 1979). Baldwin was the first to capture the ideas on social interaction. Baldwin stated the importance of social interaction because it affects an individual as a result of its environment through the idea of “we are members of one another” (Baldwin, 1902, 37). An influential sociologist Cairns (1979) has cited Baldwin with his concept of social interactions and how they develop. Cairns claimed that Baldwin’s ideas appear to have been “most influential in the theoretical formulations of symbolic interactionism” (Cairns, 1979, 4). Symbolic interactionism follows the theoretical perspective that “social interaction as taking place in terms of the meaning actors attach to action and things” (Bryman, 2008, 699). This stream has been particularly important in urban sociology (Hiller, 2004).

In addition, Leonard Cottrell (1942, 1969) in turn, elaborated these concepts of interactional analysis in sociology. Essential ideas on the study of social interactions were further developed in the 1960s. However, Cairns indicates a chasm between theory and research partly as a result of the difficulty of interactional approaches in order to “bring about significant changes in our understanding of social and personality processes” (Cairns, 1979, 5). Cairns also warns for the pitfalls of interactional methods as they have proven to often be either too molecular or too molar, in which they destroy the inherent integrity and organization of the behavior to be explained or oppositely interactional methods have set for themselves an impossible task because everything interacts with everything else” (Cairns, 1979, 5). This leads to inevitable confusion between social effects and social determinants and requires research at multiple levels of analysis, not merely molar or molecular (Cairns, 1979, 7). It also brings up the consequence that research concerning interactions is an orientation to social phenomena, rather than a theory about them (Cairns, 1979). Research on social interactions does “permit the development of models that take into account the dynamics of interchanges and reciprocal controls” (Cairns, 1979, 8).

Research on social interaction has produced several different types of classification. These classifications can also be applied to international migrants (Carrasco et al., 2008). Social interaction can create bonds and unmake bonds such as ties with friends, but some ties or bonds are already existent and cannot be unmade such as family (Davies, 1993). “Whereas the cultural norms of amity encourage the provision of support to kin without an expectation of strict reciprocity, friendship is but the exploitation of an implicit right to reciprocity” (Davies, 1993, 72). There are individuals who indulge in very high levels of social interaction and those who participate very little. Like in any group of individuals, this is also the case for international migrants; some have a lot of social interaction, others not so much. In table 3.1 below several classifications of social interactions are displayed including Irving (1978) who referred to those as ‘social lions’ and ‘social recluses’ respectively. Within any personal network the strength of the friendship tie will vary and attempts to classify these (see table 3.1), invoke criteria such as frequency and nature of contact (Davies, 1993). These criteria are used in the empirical part of the study during the interviews to characterize the interaction of the interviewees (see appendix B).

Table 3.1 Classifications of social interaction (as adapted from Davies, 1993.)

Indication interaction type		Frequency features
<b>A. Irving (1978)</b>		
Interaction types	Duration features	Frequency features
1. Low intensity	Half-day or less	Less often than once a week
2. Long frequent	Whole day or more	Less often than once a week
3. Middle Range	One hour or more Half-day or less	Once or twice a week
4. Short Frequent		More often than twice a week
<b>B. Raine (1976)</b>		
Type of relationship	Form of social interaction	
1. Acquaintance	Pass time of day if we meet, but never been in house	n.a.
2. Quite Friendly	Chat in street if we meet, but rarely, if ever, go in house	n.a.
3. Friendly	Always chat when we meet, only occasionally go in house	once per month (1/m.)
4. Very friendly	Chat regularly in street, frequently visit home	once or twice per week (1-2/w.)
5. Close friend	Chat daily, regularly visit home	4 times per week (4/w)
<b>C. Abrahams (Bulmer, 1986)</b>		
Type of relationship	Form of social interaction	
1. Acquaintance	Awareness of neighbors, casual greeting	
2. Sociable	Chatting, visiting, shopping, together	
3. Communication	Exchange of information, gossip	
4. Participation	Invite to family occasion	
5. Collective Involvement	Local neighborhood events	

The way individuals go about their social interactions, means they are affected by their environment. This so-called concept of ‘embeddedness of behavior’ in a social context has been independently discovered in other areas of research such as anthropology, including those stimulated by Darwin and Freud (Cairns, 1979). The concept of social interaction thus points attention to the properties of feedback process by which organisms, including humans, influence each other. As Cairns states “One does not merely act in a social relationship; one reacts” (Cairns, 1979,4). This points to the importance of social context and the repercussions that an environment, both social and physical may have upon an individual.

An individual’s behavior and attitudes become gradually formed by the dominant social influences to which he is exposed in a given social system: he or she both becomes a factor and a product of social organization. The reciprocity of interaction and the ways that individuals mutually regulate each other during the course of interaction has become the most important focus of interactional studies (Parke, 1976). The local as well as the global (or home) environment influences an international professional migrant. The most important influences and persons in each setting need to be described (Parke, 1976); for example family, friends and other potential interactive agents that are part of the local home environment, as well as colleagues and other work relations that provide the social scene of the professional setting. The starker the contrast is between the host and home country the more obvious it may seem to measure to what extent individuals are impacted by local versus global connections. Both the physical and social environment can vary in terms of the degree of naturalness. It is important that the variations in naturalness of the physical setting, the immediate stimulus field, and the social agents are recognized and described (Cairns, 1979, 20)

The mobility of international professional migrants is typically very high. They frequently travel for work and often also to visit family back in the home country. Another point of relevance to the discussion of social interaction that has been briefly touched upon in the previous section is the spatial relationships of the networks. The logic of social network approach is that spatial relationships need not be confined to locality, place or neighborhood. In fact, the example of international professional migrants explicitly shows the occurrence of social interactions above the locality level. In fact, Wellman (1987) acknowledged that even though most ties are non-local, it did not imply the disappearance of neighborhood ties. “Most people engage in selective neighboring and by maintaining friendly relations they achieve a sense of security and belonging” (Davies, 1993, 72). This sense of belonging could be



particularly important for the very mobile international professional migrants. With most of their family living at greater distance, local contacts become more necessary and reassuring. Wellman (1987) has also argued that whereas most people have a close relatives living nearby, most local contacts are neighbors and friends who provide support and companionship. In his observations, Wellman has concluded that in the western world, networks are primarily used for personal, friendship relationships, due to the fact that nepotism or favoritism is usually unacceptable in western societies. Although the primary use of those relationships may be of personal nature, those networks established through frequent social interactions, can often become important networks for local integration when the professional migrant is moving back to their home country or to another host society.

Given the fact that the mobility of the international professional migrant is increasing and the accessibility to technology facilitates staying in touch with friends and family further away, it would seem like the sense of belonging is no longer tied to a physical environment. Even more so, it seems that because social interactions can take anywhere, with anyone, in any location, the local (and often temporary) environment will decrease in significance. Next, the concept of place attachment and how it does (or does not) affect international professional migrants will be discussed.

#### PLACE ATTACHMENT

It is important to formulate a definition of place attachment. This definition however can vary depending on the interpretation of attachment as it varies with the conceptual approach taken. Attachment refers to an individual's voluntary (emotional) commitment to his or her residential location and its population (Dahl & Sorenson, 2008). A range of thoughts, attitudes, behavior and feelings are evoked through attachment to place (Ponzetti, 2003; Dahl & Sorenson, 2008). Place attachment involves an elaborate interplay of emotion, cognition, and behavior in reference to place attachment needs to be seen as multidimensional. Stueve et al. (1975) have remarked that place attachment is not unitary but multidimensional, made up out of four key dimensions; institutional ties such as attendance at local schools and churches, local activities, including informal socializing with neighbors and participation in neighborhood organization; intimate ties having relatives and or friends in the neighborhood; and affective attachment feelings about the locality and leaving it. The last is seen as a different form of attachment, and is considered largely a consequence of other dimensions (Stueve et al., 1975; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Furthermore, Stueve et al. suggested that some of these key dimensions are highly associated such that families, which maintain voluntary and informal involvements of one type, are likely to maintain other such commitments. Given this multidimensionality, the predictors of place attachment can vary. Stueve et al. conclude that years in residence are consistently correlated with all forms of attachment. Individual and contextual variables predict some dimensions, but not others and few may have opposite effects on different dimensions of attachment.

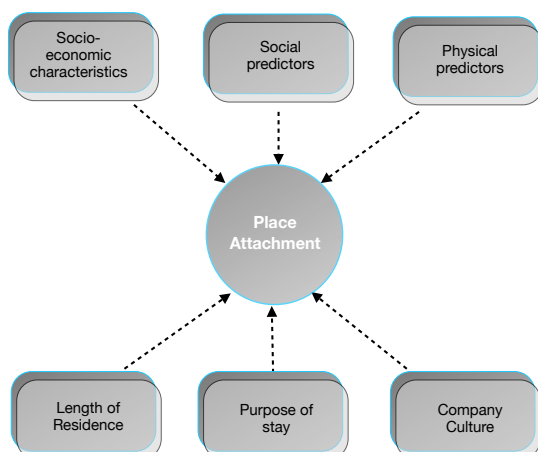


Fig. 3.2. Predictors of place attachment (Based on Stueve et al. 1975; Dahl & Sorenson, 2008)

Figure 3.2 on the left shows some of the predictors of place attachment. Some predictors relate to the household level such as socio-economic characteristics of the household: income, children, and lifecycle stage. Other household level predictors of place attachment can be extent of local ties and access to institutions that are also associated with children. Other predictors of place attachment relate to length of residence in the area



or location. Social area characteristics such as the socio-economic characteristics of the residents in the area, racial characteristics, the homogeneity of an area play an important role. More homogeneity and less racial differences promote a common sense of belonging and shared identity, which fosters trust and reciprocity and builds social capital. Thirdly, not to be underestimated are the physical aspects that can predict place attachment as well; mainly access to an area and the level of urbanity.

Dahl & Sorenson claim that understanding geographic mobility is important to a wide range of topics including (but not limited to) inequality and stratification, identity and culture, and the evolution of ethnicities, industries and economies." (Dahl & Sorenson, 2008). And even though the most common driver of geographic mobility is the search for better employment opportunities, economic motivations are the main stimulus for international and within country migration. But knowing the causes of migration does not provide an opportunity to determine what it exactly is that makes migrants feel attached to a new location and what makes migrants return home. Research in this area (Stueve et al., 1975; Ponzetti, 2004; Hernandez et al., 2007; Brown et al.; 2003, Trentelman, 2009; Lewicka, 2010) suggests that predictors of place attachment can be grouped in three categories: Socio-demographic predictors, social predictors, and physical predictors.

#### *Socio-demographic predictors*

According to Dahl and Sorenson (2008) it can be assumed that individuals rationally compare the pros and cons of working in one region against those of other regions and then choose the one that offers the greatest net benefit. This principle is assuming that change of location or change of residence is voluntarily, leaving out forced relocation due to job obligations. Some of the research is very focused on neighborhood level analysis, suggesting that local friends and neighbors are an extremely important link to general neighborhood attachment (Stueve et al, 1975). But not all families or households can be seen as similar. Critical family characteristics may be important determinants for place attachments such as life-cycle stage, economic level; location may affect community ties differently.

Children, for example, connect their parents to the neighborhood in a variety of ways: they demand local supervision and promote informal contact with other residents and attend formalized institutions such as school, which require parents to a certain level of local commitment and involvement. Income, may be another factor which may affect the life style of high status groups seems to foster voluntary local attachments such as local wining and dining with neighborhoods and participation in local organizations. Stueve et al (1975) also suggest that individuals in later stages of the life cycle have less strong attachments, young families are more bound to local social interactions, resulting in higher place attachment of these families. Place attachment is most affected by the length of residence and the stage in life cycle. In addition other factors that may affect the place attachment levels of individuals are: homeownership versus rental, and the social class (higher social classes tend to be less tied to the neighborhood as a result of spatially extended networks). Furthermore, families where both partners are employed are also less tied to their local neighborhood (other than formal ties where the woman works nearby) (Stueve et al, 1975).

#### *Social predictors*

Social connections to family and friends can explain hesitance of people to relocate to a different place. People derive satisfaction from their interactions with and propinquity to their loved ones, then they should only move for professional purposes that far exceed the direct costs of moving, as the loss of time with family and friends imposes an added indirect cost, sometimes referred to as 'psychic' costs (Dahl and Sorenson, 2008). After moving, some international professional migrants may decide that those costs exceed the professional or potentially financial reward and may return to their hometowns. Further evidence of this social dimension appears in the long-lasting links between places: Migration creates social connections between regions, which results into migration patterns between regions over time.

Data displaying the trade off between the economic and the social in location choice is scarce, because it requires individual-level data with information not only on the characteristics of individuals and the locations they may choose, but also measuring where their social connections reside. Dahl claims that so far social scientists have not succeeded have not developed a methodology for addressing those issues (Dahl & Sorenson, 2008). This is due to the fact that often the counterfactual information is lacking: when data is gathered of income and location it is particularly difficult to determine what the individual's income would be in a different location. The social connections that keep migrants bound to reside in a location are very difficult to measure and can vary widely from person to person. For one individual, his or her daily contacts at the gym and the occasional communication with friends and family back home, may be sufficient to establish themselves and enjoy residing in a particular location. For another individual however, it may be necessary to establish deep and meaningful ties in the location of residence for which proximity of family and close friends could be essential. Family composition may be an important factor also. Typically, individuals with children value proximity to family and friends more than individuals without children, while those with spouses place less importance on being near to family in friends. "Married individuals nonetheless appear much more sensitive to the distance between their homes and jobs; spouses' jobs appear to act as anchors when married individuals choose new employers" (Dahl & Sorenson, 2008:6).

Kraimer et al. (2009) have indicated that the company culture is particularly important for some international professionals working at larger organizations and corporations, which tend to have a defined company culture. This could make a professional migrant feel a sense of belonging in a new area. For the locals of the new environment there could also be a bit of hesitation in becoming friends with transnational migrants: they will leave at some point again, so the time invested in those ties may not always be able to create value for the invested time when friendships or other formal relationships with the transnational migrants are lost after their departure.

#### *Physical predictors*

But place attachment is not only affected on the individual or family level. The homogeneity of an area (in social make up) may significantly determine levels of place attachment. Fairly homogenous areas, where the ethnic background as well as the income of the residents is relatively similar, the social interactions may be more frequent, and social cohesion may be larger. This results in a relatively stronger place attachment for most of those residing in the area. More affluent neighborhoods tend to also be more satisfied, but their affluence does not mean local social interactions are more frequent also because they like living in their neighborhood. On the contrary, more affluent neighborhoods tend to display less local ties and less frequent interactions. The increased mobility as a result of their elite position in society may be one explanation for this. In addition, more affluent individuals in North American cities tend to live in sparsely populated areas with lots of grounds around the property. This decreases the chance for spontaneous social interaction with neighbors.

Stueve et al. (1975) have identified a few key factors that may contribute to a weaker place attachment of individuals; Urbanism, poor access and racial change have been identified to significantly weaken place attachment. Individuals in rural areas tend to be more dependent on their local social network. Suburban areas may be expected to result in the same pattern although these areas seemed to be trapped between the personable rural areas and anonymity of the urban environment. The more isolated an urban area, the tougher it is for its residents to have social interactions and feel more attached to the location. This could also be the case in relatively suburbanized urban areas in Houston, where there is limited access to public transportation while the amount of persons per square kilometers is relatively low. In addition, a common or shared identity has a significant impact on the kinship felt, the ties and connections in an area and as a result the place attachment. Very ethnically diverse areas tend to have less 'in common' and therefore lead to weaker place attachment, because individuals cannot identify themselves with an area and find their sense of place or belonging specifically in the area.

Place attachment as a result of neighborhood quality is thus predominantly social. Whether the area is very green or has nice squares contributes relatively little to the place attachment of individuals in an area. However, it may have an effect on their social interactions, which may indirectly affect their place attachment also. The difficulty with international professional migrants is that a commonly mentioned factor for place attachment is length of residence. Due to the temporality of their stay it may often be difficult for international professional migrants to become attached to a place due to both the length of their stay as well as the time it takes to establish a network and sustain local ties. Ties have to grow and reciprocity takes time, precious time that international professional migrants often do not have. In addition, not only does their time constraint impact their local relations, their relations with their global networks (back home) may often demand a significant amount of time in order to keep them functioning and in place. The time for example spent calling family on Skype (internet calling and chatting) or writing an email, will as a result often not be invested in establishing local ties. In their local environment, physical areas where professional migrants could thus become attached tend to be on different levels of the urban environment (Ponzetti, 2003). These different levels are: Home and neighborhood, public spaces, city districts and city (Ponzetti, 2003).

## TRANSNATIONALIZATION

Although transnationalization is by no means a new concept, the concept of transnational social spaces and assimilation for contemporary international migrants is still an underdeveloped area of research (Portes, 2003). Transnationalization has gained renewed interest by the advent of new technologies in transportation and telecommunications, which greatly facilitate rapid communication across national borders and long distances. “No matter how strong the motivations of earlier migrants to sustain ties – economic, political or cultural – with their countries of origin, the means at their disposal to accomplish this goal were quite meager in comparison to those available today.” (Portes, 2003, p. 83) As a result the density and complexity achieved by contemporary migrant transnationalism has increased the scholarly attention tremendously.

Research however has indicated that not all migrants are transnationals. The large intellectual enthusiasm for transnationalism that has been expressed over the past decade could have led to exaggeration of its scope. Important pioneering research in Transnationalism has been conducted by Glick-Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc (1992), who have referred to transnationalism as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain relations that link together their societies or origin and settlement. These processes are called transnational to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders” (Glick-Schiller et. al, 1992).

Case study methods (Smith, 2003; Portes, 2001) have shown the absence of transnationalism in the every day lives of many migrants (Portes, 2003). “Subsequent research has indicated that regular involvement in transnational activities characterizes only a minority of migrants and that even occasional involvement is not a universal practice” (Portes, 2003). Due to the temporality of the nature of their stay, international professional migrants could be expected to make up a significant number of the migrants that do practice transnational activities on a large scale. These transnational activities however, can result in macro spatial consequences. Portes (2003) states that while from an individual perspective the act of sending a remittance, buying (or retaining) a house in the home country or traveling there on occasion have purely personal consequences, the aggregation of these activities may modify the fortunes and cultures of these countries. Portes (2003) argues that this is the “primary reason why sending country governments have taken such a keen interest in their expatriates in recent years, rushing to pass dual nationality and dual citizenship legislation and granting migrants’ representation in national legislatures”. While this may suggest that because governments promote and sustain transnational ties (particularly in the economic field) policies may be the main cause of these activities, the opposite is true. Transnational activities are due to the initiatives of migrants themselves, who have mobilized for this purpose their long distance networks (Portes, 2001). Vertovec (2003) has noted that the concepts of social networks, established partially through social interactions,

find in the field of transnational studies a fruitful application.

Some findings have suggested that migrants who are leaving a negative situation in their home country, for example violence, tend to seek rapid integration in the host society and avoid active involvement in their home country. On the other hand, migrants leaving a peaceful and often small town or rural setting in their home country are more likely to engage in transnational political and civic support of their home communities (Landolt et al., 1999) Portes (2003) argues that the ways immigrants are incorporated in the host society affect their propensity to engage in transnational initiatives. Since international professional migrants gain relatively few legal rights upon temporarily entering a country and due to the temporality of their stay, they may be more inclined to engage in transnational activities because their location is temporary and place attachment and too much local involvement may make it difficult to depart. Sustaining ties with the home country may thus be a serious objective upon arrival in the host country.

In addition, research (Glick Schiller and Fouron; 1999, Stepick, 1998) has indicated that transnational activities flourish in highly concentrated communities, especially those that have been subjected to a hostile reception by the host society's authorities and citizenry, whether intentionally or not. International professional migrants may form such a concentrated community for example through the establishment of local expat organizations. Those communities do not necessarily have to be neighborhoods but are rather networks of international professional migrants who are in the same situation. Patricia Ehrkamp (2005), suggests that transnational ties enable immigrants to forge local attachments through the production of place. Vertovec (2004) has proven that many migrants now attempt to maintain activities and orientations that ensure they retain the connection with family, friends, and political or social comrades who are residing in a different nation. In addition, many migrants are known to send back remittances to their kin in order to remain engaged in their lives and in the home country's system. Continuous flows of people, goods, money and ideas between the home country of the migrant and the host country, facilitate engagement in both societies.

Table 3.2 below identifies durable transnational social spaces as outlined by Faist (2000). Reciprocity is seen as the primary foundation of transnational kinship groups. These send for example remittances to one another in order to sustain ties and uphold a social norm. Transnational circuits are mainly seen as a form of exchange, such as a trading network requiring instrumental ties such as language or social ties. Transnational communities are founded on the bases of solidarity, ideas, and beliefs are shared and express a collective identity regardless of physical location. Faist classifies these transnational activities and social spaces and strengths in networks that exist within these transnational social spaces. Global flows and networks of activity and interaction take place within the realm of transnational social spaces. International professionals with transnational activities embed themselves in local and global networks and have the creativity to combine those networks in order to facilitate the flow of knowledge, products or other types of exchanges. Some of the international professional migrants are part of these transnational communities, while others merely participate in reciprocity through remittances. Portes (2003) believes that international migration depends on social networks, as can be seen in for example chain migration, where people move to an area or location due to their ties and kins in that area who have already established local social capital and can help them succeed).

Oppositely, social networks are also created by international migration, for example through transnational activities that foster the exchange of ideas and products in addition to enlarging the network to a greater scope. Both social interaction and place attachment are necessary for successful transnational activities. Social interaction, because the exchange of thoughts, ideas, beliefs, knowledge and products needs to occur at least partially through communication and interaction. Place attachment is also necessary for transnationalization, because if the international professional migrant does not care for the local or global location with which the transnational activities take place, it will be much more difficult to sustain such transnational ties. Transnationalization, the transnational activities of an individual, can limit or facilitate local interaction and time allocation. Perhaps the stronger the

local place attachment the less time allocation and chance there is for global social interaction and transnational activities (Portes, 2003).

Table 3.2 Three types of transnational social spaces arising from international migration (Faist, 2000, 195)

Types of transnational social spaces	Primary resources in ties	Main characteristics	Typical Examples
Transnational kinship groups	<i>Reciprocity</i> – What one party receives from the other, requires some return	Upholding the social norm of equivalence	<i>Remittances</i>
Transnational circuits	<i>Exchange</i> – Mutual obligations and expectations of the actors	Exploration of insider advantages: language, strong and weak social ties in peer networks	<i>Trading networks</i>
Transnational communities	<i>Solidarity</i> – shared ideas, beliefs, evaluations, and symbols expressed in some sort of collective identity.	Mobilization of collective representations within (abstract) symbolic ties, religion, nationality and ethnicity	<i>Diasporas</i>

#### COMPRESSION OF TIME AND SPACE

Improved modes of transportation and communication have resulted in compressing the principles of distance and time. This has resulted in a change of experiencing local and global (Dijst & Vidakovic, 2000). In recent years the tremendous amount of technological developments have resulted in drastic changes for the lives of individuals. New theories have attempted to incorporate those technological changes and tried to explain the effects these changes have on the way individuals shape their lives. The increasing physical as well as virtual mobility is facilitating some communication, while it is limiting other forms of communication such as social interactions with neighbors. This section mentions a few of the recent theories that are trying to account for those changes.

It was primarily the availability of means of fast travel and transportation that triggered the modern processes of eroding and undermining all locally entrenched social and cultural ‘totalities’; the process first captured by Tönnies’ theorization of modernity as the passage from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. (Davies, 1993, p. 10) Among all technical factors of mobility, a particularly great role was played by the transport of information – the kind of communication that barely involves movement of physical bodies. Bauman states that the overall result of this development in communication has been enormous. Its impact on the interplay of social/association/disassociation has been widely noted and described in great detail (Bauman, 1998, p.15).

The ‘new mobilities paradigm’ has sought to challenge both ‘sedentarist’ and ‘nomadic’ production of knowledge (Cresswell, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006) where sedentarism treats stability, meaning and place as normal and distance, change and placelessness as abnormal, and oppositely nomadic treats place as ever changing and never the same, which decreases the significance of neighborhoods (Sheller, Urry, 2006). The new mobilities paradigm of course changes also the role of the neighborhoods for international migrants. It has been argued that concepts of space and time are integral to much of the recent theorizing about migration (for example Cresswell, 2006). Sheller and Urry argue that mobility and the control over mobility both reflect and reinforce power. “Mobility is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship (Sheller, Urry, 2006, p. 211). This is crucial for children because they are both affected by the power reinforced by others (for example parents) as well as limited by an access to mobility as a result of their limited spatial autonomy. Children can play an important role in the location and travel of their parents, as well as their social interactions. International professional migrants with children will thus be more likely to not only have more institutional ties, but also be more bound to their neighborhood and neighborhood involvement due to their children.

The new mobilities paradigm reflects the increasing convergence between “transport and communication, ‘mobilizing’ the requirements and characteristics of co-presence (sharing time with friends, relatives, colleagues). Yet at the same time the increased dependence on machines has resulted in a more sedentary life even if people are on the go” (Sheller, Urry, 2006, 221). This paradox seems to imply that the more mobile the city the more obesity occurs due to the change in the physical nature of mobility. It becomes increasingly difficult to manage and coordinate social life and social networks as a result of the increase in complexity of networks as a result of ICT’s, including social networks and social interaction. Social interaction now takes place over much larger distances through Internet and telecommunications. It also facilitates a different kind of social interaction, a kind which always needs to be facilitated through an object or device such as a telephone, a computer or for a visit to friends and family; a plane.

In a way the spatial autonomy of an individual at the beginning of the last century was greater as the result of smaller networks (virtual networks, large distance travels were all not possible) and a limited means of transportation to facilitate spatial mobility. Networks were generally stretching over smaller distances, so the difference between individuals and persons in their networks were not as large. New mobilities have not only increased the complexity of networks, it has also facilitated the vast array of networks presently available. Public spaces such as online forums are places where individuals alike or in the same situation can be found, similar to the role of a local social network and its social capital opinions are formed online, can be tested and confirmed with others. Online public spaces have allowed many international professional migrants to cut loose their local anchors: they are first to de-territorialize and move far beyond the reach of local communities (Bauman, 1993). Unlike its important role in place attachment, the physical location or area of an international migrant has also lost part of its importance as a result of new communication and transportation technologies. International migrants are now able to reach their global network with much more ease allowing for disinvestment of their time in local activities and local social interaction.

### 3.3 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Figure 3.3 (following page) displays what aspects can affect the social interaction and place attachment of international professionals. The relations with aspects that have been indicated through the arrows are the main focus of this study. The dashed arrows indicate other contextual factors can impact the social interaction and place attachment of international professional migrants. In the empirical part of this study, interview questions for the interviewees mainly pertain to social interaction and place attachment and the aspects with primary relations to the two concepts.

For the social interaction, an individual’s background (i.e. personal interests, life-cycle stage, family composition, gender, age) will be determining for his or her social interactions. As previously mentioned, children may also have a large impact because they reinforce the need to connect with the community and local institutions (Stueve et al, 1975; Dahl & Sorenson, 2008). If an individual has lived in a different (foreign) location before, his or her experiences may contribute to a different approach for establishing social interaction. Therefore, culture is a determinant also: if the home-culture is very similar to the host-culture it will be easier to establish social interaction because manners are the same and the individual will feel more confident in his or her interactions. The level of communication abilities can be very determining in the social interaction that is established. Social interaction takes place on very different levels, and can range from a day-to-day chat with a neighbor and a telephone conversation with an old friend, to complex tax auditing appointments. Background factors are internal factors that contribute to an individual’s social interaction, reinforcing or creating social capital. The social capital of the international professional determines how frequent and with whom they interact. In turn, social interaction facilitates the establishment of social capital. Similarly the stronger the *local* place attachment is, the more likely for local social capital to be developed. Of course such relations can also negatively enforce each other. When local social interaction is virtually non-existent, place attachment is also likely to be weaker (Dahl & Sorenson, 2008). When individuals are not attached to a

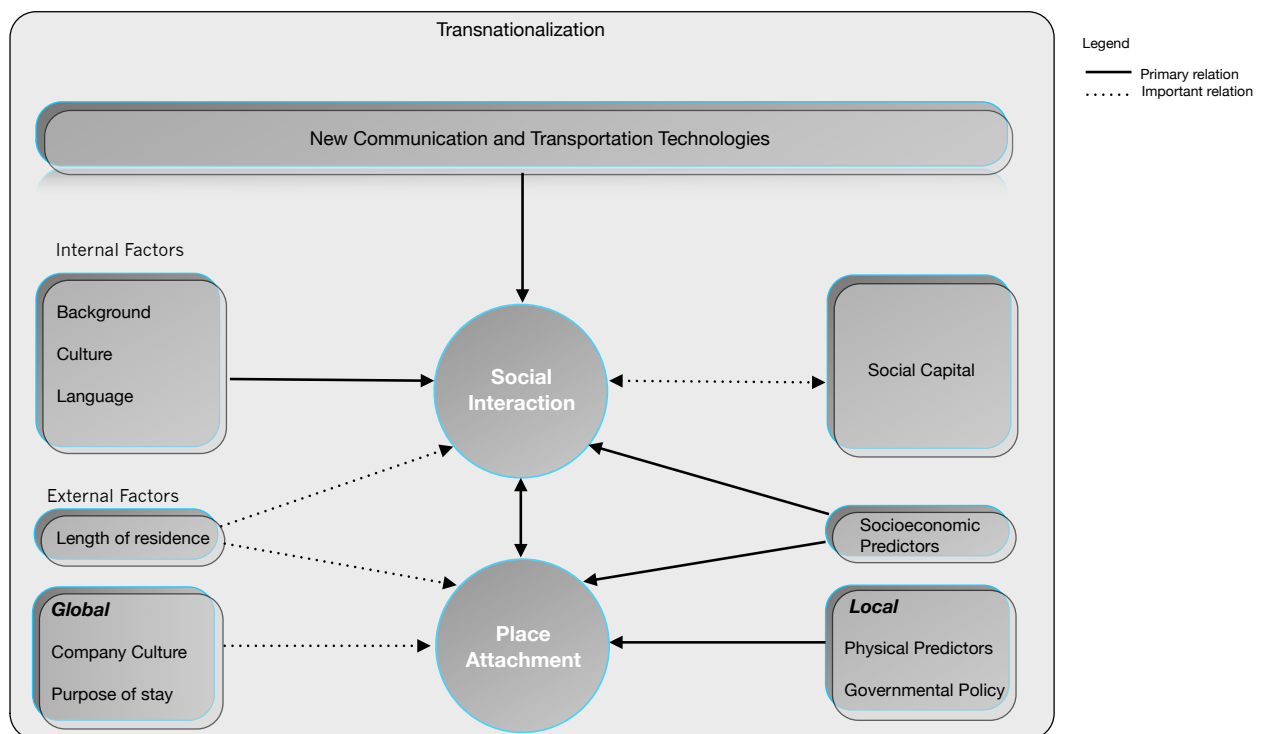


place this will often result in very little local social interaction (Portes, 2003), and vice versa place attachment will impact the social interaction (local and global).

Aspects such as company culture, length of stay and purpose of stay may affect the way in which individuals attempt to become attached to the new local environment. These factors are seen as *global* because wherever the assignment of the professional migrant is; these components will be present and variable with the company and assignment. The company culture can prepare individuals very well and assist them in the process to settle and become more tied down to a place. The longer an international professional migrant stays at a given location, the more time there is to become attached to a place (Dahl & Sorenson). But this may be counteracted by *local* variables such as the physical environment, the social environment (i.e. how open and hospitable the culture is, and how easy it is to make friends and establish ties) and governmental policies, in this case in Houston and The Hague. Visas and permits for example may only be provided for a short period of time. The climate or built environment may impact place attachment also (see section 3.4.3). This rectangle accounts for the differences between Houston and The Hague when compared in sub-question 4.

On top, Figure 3.3 displays the macro-level influences of this study; transnationalization as discussed in 3.4.4 and new technologies as discussed in 3.4.5. New technologies affect social interaction from a society level. New ICT technologies and more readily available transportation means have provided ample opportunity for international migrants to practice transnational activities and impact their social interactions. Transnationalization impacts all concepts and aspects of this conceptual model. Transnationalization helps international professionals to sustain transnational ties, but this may also impede them from becoming very attached to their temporary location.

Fig. 3.3 Conceptual model international professional's social interaction and place attachment



## 4. Characterization of the Research Cities

Before going into the results of this study, it is necessary to elaborate a bit more on the research locations. This is the main purpose of Chapter 4. The role of physical spaces and location has both been reaffirmed by its role in place attachment as well as reduced by new communication and transportation technologies. Both physical and social space can be prime determinants of social interaction and place attachment. This chapter examines the research cities and the opportunities for social interaction that they offer.

Section 4.2 describes how the urban environment can play a role in facilitating social interaction. Section 4.3 describes American society, section 4.4 Houston's urban environment, and section 4.5 the urban environment of The Hague. By looking at their societies, social and physical structure, it will become evident that some contextual factors greatly differ between The Hague and Houston. These two very different urban areas provide a different urban context. An overview of key contextual factors that could have an effect on the chances for social interaction will be presented in section 4.5. This helps to understand the circumstances that international professional migrants face when they move to the research cities, and as a result their chances and opportunity for social interaction.

### 4.1 THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT AS CONTEXT

Before going into both research cities it is important to outline why and how an urban area can have such a major impact on social interaction. The physical environment entails the built environment and landscape such as the urban structure, its buildings, the setup of residential areas, the scenery, the climate, but also access to public spaces. The social environment relates to the social structure in the urban environment such as societal norms, segregation, and organized events (Low, 2000). Recent fragmentation of the city space as a result of the societal developments that have been described in the previous chapter, has led to the inexorable decline of place-based communities in contemporary western cities. Fragmentation can be a result of societal and governmental changes. But this does not mean local neighborhoods or communities are no longer important at all. Research seems to show that personal communities are being transformed, so that people are embedded in contact fields and social support systems that extended across the metropolitan area (Fischer, 1976) and to global relationships (Webber, 1964). Nevertheless, it has become obvious that these trends have not eradicated communities (Davies, 1993), merely transformed their nature.

Canadian sociologist Wellman (1979; 1988) has produced perhaps the most ordered discussion of the changing nature of local communities in cities with the triad of terms: community lost, community saved, and community liberated. Not surprisingly the relationships found in these various communities varied considerably, which Wellman has described meticulously (Davies, 1993). Wellman as described the community lost, community saved, community liberated concept. First, community lost represented the school of thought as 'urbanism as a way of life' (Davies, 1993, p.27). Larger, denser



and more heterogeneous cities led to the breakdown of locality based community life. Local, face-to-face relationships associated with residence were replaced with secondary linkages based on workplace and interests. Ties to locality were eroded and individuals were assumed to be submerged in the anonymity of urban life (Davies, 1993). Community saved was the counter argument that represented the idea that neighborhood and kinship networks continue to flourish in the city. Writers such as Jacobs (1961), Suttles (1968) and Fischer (1981) provided empirical examples of the continuing reality of localities and primary ties.

“Urban populations were sifted and sorted out into the mosaic of more homogeneous residential areas where the communal desire for informal social control exerted itself” (Davies, 1993, p. 28). Wellman argued that the community-saved school did demonstrate convincingly that primary relationships were not lost within the large city. The third idea, a compromise position was posed with community liberated, which affirmed the importance of community ties -mainly interest associations- although it did not see them as necessarily tightly bounded and contained within territorial limits as in the past. Rather than an unambiguous membership in a single, concrete solidarity community, city residents’ lives are now divided among multiple networks. Davies states: “not one single solidarity can readily make or enforce general claims on a member” (Davies, 1993, 73). Urbanites have not lost their communal access to people and resources, and indeed may have increased their reach. But for those who seek solidarity in simple hierarchical group structures, there may now be a lost sense of community (Davies, 1993).

Wellman found also that the wide spatial scale of intimate networks is facilitated by the telephone. Telephone contact among intimates proved to be more frequent than face-to-face contact. Sheller and Urry (2001) have also emphasized this role of telecommunication. But Wellman (1988) also found that intimate ties cannot be sustained only through telecommunications. Internet has only increased this type of communication but has not replaced face-to-face social interactions and personal contact. Wellman et al. (2007) conducted another study in 2007, to examine whether Internet had changed the notion of distance. The research showed that email contact is generally insensitive to distance, but tends to increase for transoceanic relationships greater than 5000 kilometers apart. Face-to-face contact remains strongly related to short distances (within 10 kilometers), while distance has little impact on how often people phone each other at the regional level (within 200 kilometers). The study concluded that email has only somewhat altered the way people maintain their relationships. The frequency of face-to-face contact among socially close friends and relatives has hardly changed between the 1970s and the 2000s, although the frequency of phone contact has slightly increased. Moreover, the sensitivity of these relationships to distance has remained similar. Research (Wellman, 2007; Sheller & Urry, 2001; Faist, 2001) has shown that people prefer to live close to the friends and family they feel close to, despite the availability of communication affordances of the Internet and low-cost telephony.

But of course the situation for international professional migrants is somewhat different as they (temporarily) reside much further away from the people in their most immediate network: immediate kin, extended kin, and long-term friends. New communication technologies arguably alter and diversify the relationship with ties over larger distances, possibly decreasing the importance of locality. But with a lack of immediate network ties readily available, international migrants may be forced to find new local ties. One way of finding those new local ties has been facilitated by the establishment of Internet and online communities as well; finding local people alike was never easier.

#### **4.2 THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT IN THE UNITED STATES**

Being the fourth largest city in the United States, Houston is impacted by societal trends that can be observed in most major cities of the US. Over the past few decades both physical and social changes have been observed that impact the social interactions in US cities. Before going into the details of the

city of Houston it is important to first look at these physical and social factors of American society. Houston, like many other large American cities, is highly influenced by general social and physical trends in American society. This impacts the way the city is built and the way residents live with each other in the city. Aside from the general American influences, Houston, situated in Texas, also has specific influences that will be discussed in section 4.3 such as its cultural and ethnic composition, its economic dependence on the oil and gas sector and its specific urban planning strategy. First, a physical and social description of cities in American society will help to illustrate the context in which this research city was built.

### *Physical factors*

With the immigration, occupation and the industrialization of the United States, urbanization was a parallel in these processes. Most North American cities grew as a result of increased industrialization and the increase of unskilled labor. As a result of the transportation technologies and an increase in wealth most cities grew concentrically after the Second World War. The suburbanization of North American cities has led to the dispersion of urban activities and cultural affairs (Veldman, 1977). An increasing segregation of the population in Houston is thought to be a consequence of suburbanization, but also a result of institutional factors, discrimination and racism (Portes & Rumbaut 1996). Professional and residential locations are most commonly separated; inducing long commutes from homes to offices (Davies, 1993).

The development of cities and towns to metropolitan areas was dominated by these economic and technological developments, rather than by meticulous urban planning (Veldman, 1977). Federal and municipal governments generally had a laissez-faire attitude towards the development of greater urban areas and its surrounding metropolitan region. The decentralization initially did not lead to a decrease in importance of the city center and often the Central Business District (CBD). But as the decentralization increased the need for nodes of business activities such as shops and retail increased and led to the creation of decentralized business centers and activity nodes (Veldman, 1977). As a result, the importance of the downtown city center has lost some of its importance and weight. Downtown areas in North American cities tended to lose population between 1950s and 2000s (Davies, 1993).

The growth of the urban area fosters residential development of sparsely populated suburban areas with cul-de-sacs and other inefficient urban planning options that provide limited access as well as limited opportunities for interactions. As a response to the American suburbanization the New Urbanism movement has promoted more pedestrian friendly, transit oriented urban design. Planning of urban areas that fostered the idea of neighborhoods and social interaction.

The New Urbanism Charter (1993) states that:

*New Urbanism advocates the restructuring of public policy and development practices to support the following principles: neighborhoods should be diverse in use and population; communities should be designed for the pedestrian and transit as well as the car; cities and towns should be shaped by physically defined and universally accessible public spaces and community institutions; urban places should be framed by architecture and landscape design that celebrate local history, climate, ecology and building practice.*

John Norquist of the Charter of New Urbanism (CNU) claims that streets serve transportation, social, and economic functions, but state and federal Departments of Transportation have focused all of their money on the transportation aspect. The primary goal of governments was to eliminate congestion. "But congestion in itself, its crowds of people, economic activity, and excitement - is not a problem. The very goal of American transportation policy has been wrong, not just the wrong actions." (CNU, Norquist Interview, 2006) Off-street parking requirements also attempted to relieve congestion but

had a horrible effect on urbanism, he suggest that perhaps most Americans don't really care about place making.

The Americans are a mobile society, the average American moves every six years or so (Putnam, 2000). That discourages investment in exterior, neighborhood amenities and encourages investment in interior amenities. Perhaps Americans do not value spending much time with their neighbors, but they are able to choose the class of their neighbors. This however does not guarantee social interaction with those in close proximity to the residential address (Putnam, 2000). Furthermore, cities, residential neighborhoods and their spatial structure do not guarantee that people interact with others or become attached to a place. Therefore, it is important to consider the societal social factors below, to get a sense of how cities in American society function socially.

### *Social factors*

Social factors on a societal level are important in personal and local social interaction. The nature of the American society and as a result, its people interacting with each other, has changed tremendously over the last few decades similar to what is seen in other western countries. At the end of the 1960s, various sociologists such as Bell and Held (1969) reported that there was “more participation than ever before in America... and more opportunity for the active interested person to express his personal and political concerns”(Bell & Held, 1969). Even active political participation such as voting became more common. And although Putnam (2000, p.17) states that “the fifties and sixties hardly were a golden age, especially for those Americans who were marginalized because of their race, gender, social class or sexual orientation”, segregation was declining somewhat. But segregation remained the norm and intolerance was still disturbingly high (Portes, 1994).

The development of metropolitan areas also provided opportunity for an increasing spatial segregation not only of activities but also of ethnic populations. The aim of the United States to assimilate new migrants into the society became much more difficult as a result of these spatially segregated residential areas that fostered diversity and ethnic enclaves (Portes, 1998). Due to the vast availability of land there was no physical need for limits or containment. Many metropolitan areas grew concentrically resulting in decentralization, but also in segregation of classes and ethnicities in society. The car dependent urban design also fostered segregation and isolation (Putnam, 2000). Middle-class white Americans preferred the relatively homogeneous suburban neighborhoods, where cars where a necessity – and not attainable for everyone.

Many Hispanic and African-Americans remained close to the urban core, in areas around the city center, whereas white middle class American families moved out of the city (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). The presence of ethnic enclaves is not only a result of chain migration - newcomers with a similar ethnic background often settled in a residential area with people from the same ethnicity so that they could use the local network and social capital and surround themselves with familiarity (Massey & Denton, 1989). Ethnic enclaves are also a result of the physical development within large urban areas of the United States (Bickford & Massey, 1977). Bickford and Massey (1977) indicate that ethnic segregation is very high in large U.S. cities. They primarily attribute the ethnic segregation to the rate of black population growth and the unavailability of social housing for larger families in certain districts and areas of large cities. As a result, social housing for white Americans tended to be in different areas than the social housing for African-Americans. Research suggests that high level segregation can be problematic because it isolates a minority group from amenities, opportunities and resources that affect social and economic wellbeing (Massey & Denton, 1989; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Portes, 2003). In the suburban areas on the other hand, many homemaking women felt socially isolated due to the larger distances and breakdown of primary group relations (Tallman, 1969; Saeger, 1980; Jacobs, 1981).

Similar to many other societies, over the past decade large metropolitan areas in the United States

have seen a redevelopment of many inner city areas. This has often forced ethnic minorities outward, where they become more isolated and dependent on cars (Smith, 2002; Zukin, 1987; Slater, 2002). Middle-class families and individuals are moving 'back into' the inner core of the city to the expense of lower income groups such as ethnic minorities. This process is called *gentrification*: the conversion of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city to middle-class residential use. Gentrification is thought to be the result of a shift in corporate investment, and a "corresponding expansion of the urban service economy" (Zukin, 1987:129). In addition, gentrification was seen more immediately in architectural restoration of deteriorating housing and the clustering of new cultural amenities in the urban core (Zukin, 1987). These patterns affect where most international professional migrants decide to reside in an area, depending on the life cycle-stage and family composition, they tend to surround themselves with people in a similar setting either residential areas with many other internationals or locals with the same lifestyle and life-cycle stage (Wang & Nayir, 2006).

The above trends considered, for this study it is furthermore important to analyze some city-specific aspects and the urban structure in order to define the chances of social interaction and other aspects of the city that participants of this study may experience in Houston. The next section discusses Houston focusing on several aspects: general information, neighborhood and residential living, family life in Houston with children, Houston's economic structure, public spaces and cultural life. The focus on these aspects is based on the theoretical framework of the previous chapter that has shown that family structure (i.e. children in a family) and neighborhood networks and composition are important for local social interactions. In addition, the economic information provides the important basis upon which international professional migrants come to Houston. In addition, the aspect of public spaces and cultural life is included to get a sense of where and how many opportunities there are for social interaction citywide and the chances for spontaneous contact outside of the international professional migrant's network.

#### **4.3 RESEARCH CITY I: HOUSTON**

Houston is the 4th largest city within the United States, with about 2,2 million residents and over 596 square miles of land. Houston is the largest city within the state of Texas, the largest southern state in the United States. The city is located approximately 30-35 miles north from the coastal city of Galveston (bordering the Gulf of Mexico) and 180 miles south of Dallas. The city of Houston borders the ship harbor with the Port of Houston, one of the largest in the world and an important component to the city's economic make up, as it is a focal point of domestic and international trade. In addition, Houston is home to the NASA Johnson Space Center, just located just south of downtown, which is the mission control center of all US lead human space missions (NASA, 2010). Houston is one of a handful of American cities to house professional theater companies for each of the major arts disciplines, and sports fans can rally behind Houston's professional sports teams: the Astros for the baseball league, Rockets for the basketball league, and Texans for the football league.

The city is considered to be highly multi-cultural with a diverse residential population who speak over 90 languages (City of Houston, 2010). The current ethnic breakdown of the city is 49% Caucasian, 38% Hispanic, 25% African American and 5% Asian (City of Houston, 2010). Due to its cultural make-up with constant newcomers to the city, Houstonians tend to be accustomed to foreigners and expats (Lee & Larwood, 1983; Mercer, COL Report, 2009). Compared to other larger cities in the United States, Houston is a relatively inexpensive city to live in and allows a standard of living that is only achieved with much higher income in other cities (Mercer, COL Report, 2009). In addition, the thriving economic state of the city, being the oil and gas capital of the United States, attracts many new residents as well as the weather with very warm temperatures.

Houston has been growing steadily and expected to reach a population of about 4 million by the year 2025 (City of Houston, 2009), with many areas expanding in the westward of Houston and density

increasing within the city limits. Houston has major urban sprawl and suburbanization has impacted the social environment of the city, but also the physical environment, where the radial roads to the center facilitates commuters from outer suburbs who commute hours daily over the concrete arterial roads that are congested by the daily commutes.

#### LIVING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SPACES

Houston has a very spread out physical nature and a lot of open spaces. As a result of gentrification, the increasing popularity of living near downtown has resulted in many new town homes and apartments closer to the CBD. Often, new buildings are also constructed by tearing down older ones; hence, many districts and streets have an interesting combination of historic, old, small homes and modern complexes. In general, the more popular residential areas are located on the west side of town and offer nice neighborhoods with a higher quality of living.

Homeowners in Houston tend to upgrade to larger homes on a regular basis and there are always plenty of good homes of any size in any area on the market (Mieszkowski & Smith, 1991). Compared to other cities in the United States, the housing market in Houston remains stronger than average because home prices have not fallen as much as in other metropolitan areas (US Census Bureau, 2010) during the economic crisis that started in 2008. Due to the fact that US citizens tend to move relatively often, resale in Houston is generally not a problem (City of Houston, Residential Survey, 2009). There are many real estate agencies that can assist in home searching and all larger agencies have websites that also include district and neighborhood information, school information. Due to the large variety in neighborhood districts and for example school quality, the location of the residency is very important in Houston (HSBC Expat Explorer Survey, 2009).

Houston has a low cost of living as a result of the fact that its residents pay no state or local income tax (Greater Houston Partnership, 2010) The relatively low cost of living is also reflected in home prices. Homes and apartments are very affordable compared to the rest of the country. Prices of new homes can be quite high compared to older ones (Greater Houston Partnership, 2010). An apartment 5 minutes from downtown in a quite charming historical house can be as low as \$650 a month while an apartment in a newly constructed, fully featured apartment complex can average \$1,500 (Greater Houston Partnership, 2010). Families generally prefer the outskirts of Houston where most of the single-family homes are located that cost around \$150,000 to 300,000 (Federal Housing Financing Agency, 2009). Types of residences vary from large single-family homes in suburban areas to condominiums and town homes, typically more situated in the areas close to downtown.



## HOUSTON

### IMPRESSION OF HOUSTON

Downtown Houston (left) has one light rail connection that runs through Mainstreet to the football stadium in the southwest of the city.

Below and bottom right images show various types of homes and residential areas. All locations below are situated in areas where international professionals mainly reside, west and southwest of the city center.

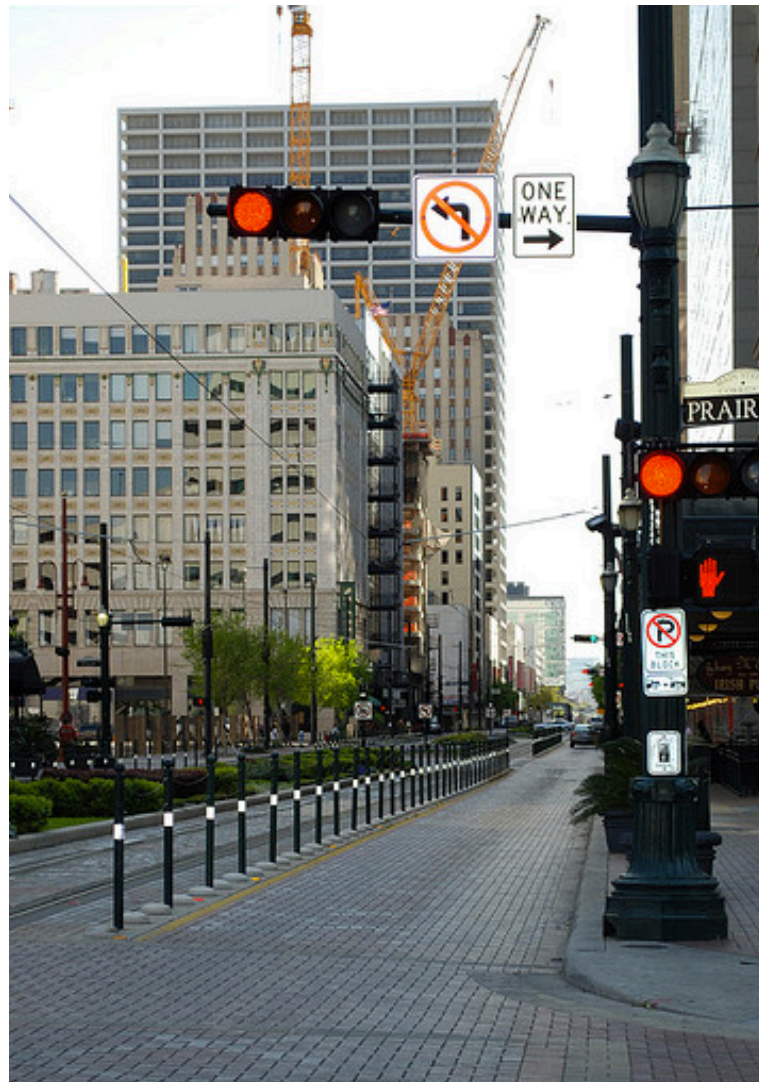


Fig. 4.1 Impression of Houston residential areas (Ruby van den Hoff; Getty Images)

Table 4.1 below shows the housing cost index and the average cost of a new 2400 square foot home in major metropolitan areas of the United States. Houston has both the lowest housing cost index. The housing cost index in table 4.1 is a measure of the housing prices in individual areas, in comparison to the average housing price taken over 309 urban areas in the United States. Houston is the metropolitan area with the lowest housing cost index. In addition, Houston has the lowest average cost for a 2400 square-foot new home. Home appreciation rates in Houston have remained relatively stable over the past decade, which encourages buyers (Federal Housing Finance Agency, Focus4Q06, 2009). The median income for a household in 2009 was \$52,568; this is well above the national median income of \$44,389 (US Census Bureau via City of Houston, 2010). Residents of Houston have a higher income, while their cost of living is thus lower than in most other large U.S. cities.

Table 4.1 Housing cost index and average home price for selected metropolitan areas in the United States (adapted from the City of Houston, 2010)

Metropolitan Statistical Area	ACCRA Housing Cost Index* (Average 309 urban areas = 100)	Average Cost of New 2,400-Square-Foot House**
Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown TX	74.0	\$204,623
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington TX	77.0	217,559
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta GA	87.1	256,957
Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale AZ	90.1	274,238
Denver-Aurora CO	106.6	333,468
Chicago-Naperville-Joliet IL-IN-WI	112.7	318,533
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington MN-WI	119.8	326,031
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach FL	136.5	365,956
Seattle-Bellevue-Everett WA	140.2	422,964
Philadelphia PA	146.7	404,083
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy MA-NH	199.1	420,600
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria DC-VA-MD	232.2	594,682
New York-Newark-Edison NY-NJ-PA	232.2	691,608
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale CA	236.1	693,630
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont CA	271.1	799,417

\*Index is based 84.11 percent on homeownership costs and 15.89 percent on apartment rent.  
 \*\*Total purchase price for a new house with 2,400 sq. ft. living area - 4 bedrooms, 2 baths on an 8,000 sq. ft. lot

One of the most important social aspects of Houston affecting the residential areas of the city is ethnic segregation. Ethnic segregation is very high in Houston (Portes, 1998). No governmental policies are in place in order to spatially distribute different ethnic groups. Suburban areas in the western part of the city tend to be very 'white'. Hispanic and African-American residents of Houston remain more in the core of the city and the eastern parts of Houston. Not only social policies for urban development are lacking, the hesitance in the intervention of urban development (with the absence zoning laws) in Houston has much to do with the political nature of the state. The prevalent political philosophy in Texas is generally both social and fiscal conservatism (Texas Politics, 2010). The majority of Texans believes that both state and federal government should intervene as little as possible in their daily lives. The hesitance to governmental intervention stems from the historical basis upon which Texas was found and the premise upon which Texas became part of the United States (Roberts and Olson, 2001) and is reflected in Houston's physical and social urban policies.

#### CHILDREN IN HOUSTON

As was indicated in the theoretical section of this study, children can be an important link to local institutions and can, as a result, foster social interaction for their parents. International migrants who move to Houston with children will be more likely to establish local connections for social interaction because their children are attending a school or are part of a sports team and given the spread out nature parents are very involved in their children's lives and have ample opportunity for social interaction as a result of it. The situation for children in Houston may be very different than the situation in their home country. Houston is a large city spatially but also in crime rates, so parents

frequently have to drive their children around to get from one place to the other, or children will have to take a school bus. Younger children are mostly seen in the presence of their parents or guardians. Older children, not of driving age, generally rely on their parents to drive them from place to place, activity to activity (Nathan-Garner, 2009). This is a result of the large distances within the city, but also a result of safety concerns that parents in a large city may have for their children. Many places in the city often lack sidewalks, even in neighborhoods as well as no designated bicycle paths and not an abundance of playgrounds. As a result of this, families generally result to quieter family-friendly suburbs. Many of those suburbs also include a community pool and play ground areas within the neighborhood (City of Houston, Parks and Recreation, 2010).

Due to the great distances in Houston and the limited public transportation system (Mieszkowski & Smith, 1991), children are often driven by their parents to the mall, after-school activities, boy scouts, sports, etc. until they are able to get a driver's permit or driver license at the age of 16. Overall, Houston is quite family-oriented and there are many activities for families and their children. There are many youth events, leagues, entertainment opportunities, and play activities in Houston (Houston Kids Directory, 2010). And the City of Houston has large public parks with playgrounds and walk-ways for strollers, opportunities to play soccer, football, baseball, many after-school day care services offering sports, fun and educational help, as well as after-school programs organized by the schools (City of Houston, Parks and Recreation, 2010). There are also many attractions for families in the Houston area to entertain children on the weekends, such as zoos, shopping malls with activities, and museums with special programs for children (Houston Kids Directory).

All these activities with children create opportunities for international professional migrants to engage in social interactions. This does not mean that in every park they will go to with their children they will talk to others, but parents do have something in common with other parents and this could create an opportunity for social interaction. In addition, through institutions such as schools or arranged free-time activities such as sport teams parents are compelled to engage in social interaction. Sharing responsibility with other parents, such as watching over each other's children or driving the children to a free-time activity together will more likely strengthen local social capital and place attachment. Because of children, parents are visiting locations that provide opportunities for social interaction and they are required to engage in social interactions as a result of it. In addition, the social interactions may result in international migrants to feel more 'at home' in a community and parents have less time to interact with friends and family back home because their children demand that time, this could also strengthen their local place attachment.

## HOUSTON'S ECONOMY

Like many other North-American cities, Houston's urban spatial structure was initially created mono-centrally. Most of the economic activities of the service industry are centralized in the Central Business District (CBD). The CBD has regained some of its importance in recent years as a result of two main reasons. Firstly, many new headquarters have been established or relocated to Houston in- or near the CBD or in the Uptown/Galleria area. In addition, redeveloped areas close to the CBD and in the CBD have resulted in a livelier atmosphere in the city center during non-office hours (Greater Houston Partnership, Accredited Economic Development Association, 2010). With many large corporations headquartered in Houston, their large revenues directly result in employment gains and extra expenditures in the city as a result of the employment (Strauss-Kahn & Vive, 2006). In addition, Houston ranks third among metropolitan statistical areas in terms of Fortune 500 headquarters, and many other companies have their U.S. administrative headquarters based out of Houston (Fortune, 2009). Of the world's largest non-US based corporations half of them have headquarters in the greater Houston area (Greater Houston Partnership, 2010). This also creates a lot of spin-off employment. As a result unemployment levels are typically low in Houston, with less than 6.5% unemployment on average over the last decade (Greater Houston Partnership, 2010). The median family income of



\$76,893 is also higher than the national median family income of \$45,016 (Greater Houston Partnership, 2010).

Figure 4.5 shows the radial roads that create the mono-centric structure of the city. In the radial road structure, highway 610 has a special significance (seen in the center of the figure). Highway 610 is also called the border of the 'inner loop'. The inner loop includes the City of Houston inner city and the areas surrounding the core as well as the former cities of Bellaire and West University. The area is a mixture of historical landmarks, museums, arts, sports arenas (Astrodome, MinuteMaid Park), and medical facilities at the medical district, fine restaurants, and first-class shopping (City of Houston, 2010; Nathan-Garner, 2009). Just outside the loop, on Westheimer, is the Uptown/Galleria area, another major business district with office towers and shopping centers. The further away from the CBD the more suburbanized Houston becomes, with areas such as Baytown, Sugar Land, Pearland and the Woodlands (Mieszkowski & Smith, 1991).

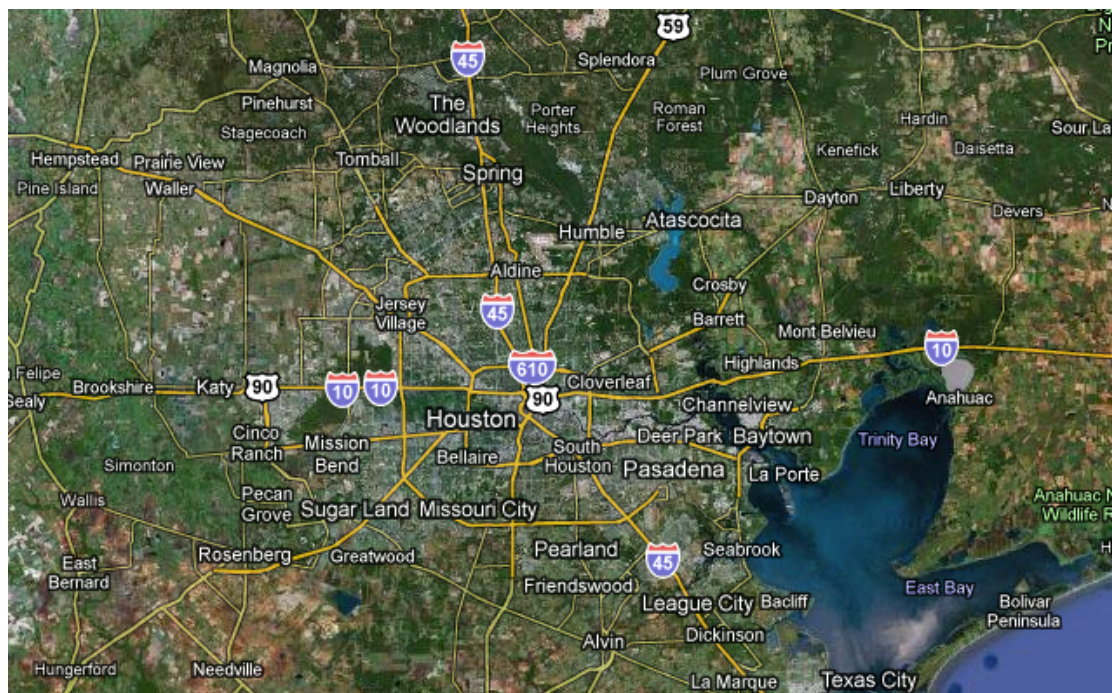


Figure 4.2 Map of Houston with radial roads (Scale 1:2,000,000, Google images)

As a result of the growing city the infrastructure supporting the connectivity to the CBD lacked capacity, resulting into major traffic congestion. Even today, the most severe congestion continues to occur on radial travel to and from the CBD (Anas et al., 1998). Downtown crowding along with the excessive residential decentralization caused by underpriced transport congestion - cars are generally more readily available and cheaper than public transportation- gave rise to excessive employment decentralization resulting in large secondary agglomerations (Anas et al., 1998), most notably west of the CBD and downtown core in for example the previously mentioned Galleria/Uptown area.

Besides the large amount of corporate headquarters that is located in Houston, there are also some diplomatic offices (most countries have consulates in Houston) and other organizations and institutions (City of Houston, 2010). Houston has two public universities, University of Houston and Texas Southern University, and several private colleges and university such as Rice University, Saint Thomas University amongst others. The city of Houston also has the world's largest medical district, with the highest density of clinical facilities for patient care and research (Texas Medical Center, 2010) located in the Southeast of Houston. Another major player is NASA in the Clear Lake area with the LB Johnson Space Center, where research and training take place. The Johnson Space Center is also the mission control center for all of NASA's space missions (Johnson Space Center, 2010).

“Agglomeration economies tend to create clusters of economic activity within a city and such clusters influence surrounding residential densities. Within an urban area such clusters may play roles similar to the regional hierarchy of cities derived in the central place theories of Christaller” (Anas et al., 1998, p. 1430). Zoning is typically the principal tool used by governments to influence the urban spatial structure. In Houston however, due to the absence of zoning laws and an all too regulatory planning department, the redefinition of property rights in the form of the use of restrictive covenants, is one of the only tools the municipal government can use in affecting the urban spatial structure (Anas et al. 1998). Even though zoning has the advantage that it entails relative low transaction costs and is widely practiced worldwide, it is not practiced in Houston. Zoning is “inflexible and unresponsive to market signals, and private gains from rezoning invite rent-seeking behavior and corruption” (Anas et al, 1998, p. 1436), and this is seen as a very important aspect of all business and development in the state Texas, and thus in the city of Houston.

Table 4.2 Corporate Headquarters located in Houston

Al’s Formal Wear	Fiesta Mart	Oceaneering International Services
American Bureau of Shipping	First Texas Energy Corporation	Omega Protein Corp.
Anadarko Petroleum	Fit Couture	Pappas Restaurants
Apache Corp.	FlightAware	Parker Drilling Company
Archimage	FMC Technologies	Pennzoil
Apache Corp.	Foodarama	Pi Studios
Archimage	Frontier Oil	Plains All American Pipeline
BJ Services	Fulbright & Jaworksi	Playnormous
BMC Software	Enron (defunct)	Powell Industries
BP American Headquarters	Gelb Consulting Group	Prisma Energy International
Bracewell and Giuliani	Geokinetics	Randall’s Food Markets
Burlington Resources	Gexa Energy	Reliant Energy
Bracewell and Giuliani	Group 1 Automotive	Rice Epicurean Markets
Burlington Services	Gulf South Pipeline	Shell Oil U.S. Division
Cabot Oil	Halliburton	Salvage Sale
Calpine	HCC Insurance Holdings	Schlumberger Americas Division
Cameron International	Horizon Wind Energy	Seaboard International
CB & I	Ingrain Inc.	Service Corporation International
Centerpoint Energy	Integrated Electrical Services	Shipley Donuts
Champions Energy Services	James Coney Island	Simmons & Company International
Citgo	KBR Inc.	Smith International
ConocoPhillips	Kelsey-Seybold Clinic	Southwestern National Bank
Consolidated Graphics	Landry’s Restaurants	Spectra Energy
Cooper Industries	Law Offices of Marshall Taheri	Stage Stores Inc.
Cornell Companies	Leisure Learning Unlimited	Stewart & Stevenson
Diamond Offshore Drilling	Luby’s	Sysco
Dynergy	Kinder Morgan Energy	Transamerica Energy Corporation
El Paso Corporation	Marathon Oil	Transocean
EOG Resources	Metrocorp Bancshares	United Space Alliance
Enterprise Products	Men’s Wearhouse	Vinson & Elkins
ExpressJet Airlines	Mexican Restaurants Inc.	Walter P Moore Engineers & Consultants
FamilyTreeDNA	National Oilwell Varco	Waste Management Inc.

## PUBLIC SPACES AND CULTURAL LIFE

Public spaces foster meeting of people and social interaction through a variety of activities that can be clustered or spread all over the city depending on the type of public space. Public spaces are areas all residents of a city freely have access to (Orum, Neal, 2010). Public spaces often facilitate social interaction and activities such as parks, malls, squares and beaches. Semi-public spaces are those spaces that are publicly accessible for a financial contribution, cafes and restaurants for example, or theaters, museums and many other cultural activities. Depending on where people live, they tend to make use of different public spaces (Low, 2000). Someone living on the west side of a town may be much more unlikely to go to a park in the east side of town than someone who lives there. The size of the city and the density of course can determine the location and the frequency of such public spaces.

The creation of new concert halls, theaters and bowling alleys, cafes and restaurants have resulted in busier streets and more lively public places downtown Houston (called Houston Pavilion) through the Houston Small Business Development Corporation (HSBDC), a non-profit organization that was founded by the City of Houston in order to stop deterioration of the downtown area by granting small businesses micro-loans, providing consulting services, and stimulating business revitalization in the CBD (City of Houston, 2010). In addition, the City of Houston organizes many public activities such as street painting and music festivals in- and around downtown, which can be organized year round due to the warm climate. The City of Houston provides an interactive calendar that displays all ongoing events per day in the city arranged by the type of activity and the location. (City of Houston, Events & Activities, 2010) Besides cultural activities most stores in Houston have very lenient opening hours usually from 10 to 10 (Greater Houston Partnership, 2010).

The North American prototype of spending free time and meeting other people, is facilitated by public malls; large (often covered) shopping areas where consumerism is fostered and stimulated (Putnam, 1999, p. 182). Restaurants, ice-skating rinks and theaters can often be found in addition to the vast array of shopping facilities (Mieszkowski, Smith, 1991). Houston has many of those malls where residents can spend an afternoon or even a day. During the weekends the activities for children attract families to the malls. The Galleria Mall (Houston Galleria, 2010) has acquired world fame as the largest mall of Texas and seventh largest mall in the United States with over 375 stores, 2 hotels, several office towers and many restaurants, and ice rink all under one glass atrium roof. The mall annually attracts over 24 million visitors per year. The mixed use of this public space is quite unique in the United States, although there is no residential use. Economic booms spur the real estate development in Houston due to the economic strength of the oil and gas sector (Mieszkowski, Smith, 1991). Besides Galleria mall, there are 12 other large malls in the greater area.

Other shopping areas are outdoor usually in the form of the so-called 'strip mall', a mall without a unifying roof. Recently, especially in more upscale public places and malls of Houston, it has been attempted to make the areas around those malls much more appealing to the public. The urban lifestyle, with residential towers relatively close to retail locations, is connected through larger avenues that exert grandeur through lighter stones, larger sidewalks and decorative lighting. These areas can mostly be found in central west areas of Houston such as Kirby and Uptown. Although some smaller stores can be found in these areas most of the stores are larger chains with large amounts of retail space per store, including grocery stores. Those stores tend to have a higher turnover in staff so the chances of getting to know 'your' retailer are fairly limited.

As a result of the suburban nature of most of Houston's area, most public spaces tend to be more neighborhood-community defined, that is, more local residents of an area tend to visit public spaces in their own area rather than branching out to other public spaces further away from the residence. The vast amount of space in the city of Houston provides ample room for public and recreational places. Parks are very popular, freely accessible and often quite large in size, including recreational facilities such as golf courses and running tracks. In these areas there are also opportunities for activities with others such as the running clubs. Each public park typically has its own running club, tennis club, golf club etc. The advantage of this is that residents can more easily meet other residents in their area, the disadvantage is that this again fosters segregation and people from different areas of town will not mix or meet as easily.

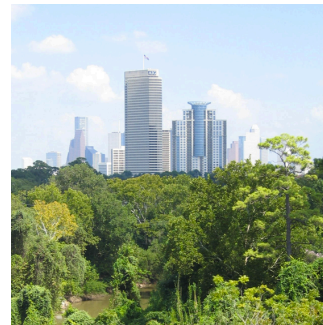




## HOUSTON

### PUBLIC SPACES

On the left, **Discovery Green**, where besides recreational space many events and activities are organized year round. **River Oaks** golf course, a private course only accessible upon invitation (Under). Downtown Houston seen from the **Buffalo Bayou**, a protected area with recreation facilities (below).



#### Strip Mall

One of North America's famous car friendly designs is the strip mall, an easily accessible shopping area with plenty of parking space. Usually these strip malls are located in highly decentralized areas as a result of low land prices. The image above is a strip mall in Pearland one of the annexed suburban areas in Houston.



#### Buffalo Bayou Festival

Year round, many events and activities are organized in the city. The above image shows a street festival named after Buffalo Bayou. International professionals are also able to visit all these freely accessible events in order to experience the city and interact with locals.



#### Minute Maid Park

This stadium is home to the Astros, Houston's major league baseball team. The stadium has over 43,000 seats. Many larger corporations rent or own seats in the stadium. This is a popular business networking activity. Major sports and stadiums are popular in the US, prior to football games, crowds gather in front of the stadium for 'tailgating' barbecuing at in front of the stadium (City of Houston, 2010)

Fig. 4.3 Public Spaces in Houston (Ruby van den Hoff; Getty Images)

Large parks such as Memorial Park (1455 acres) and Hermann Park (455 acres) often have organized activities and events such as the Japan festival (yearly, the second weekend of April in Hermann park) (City of Houston, Parks and Recreation, 2010). And little cafes in the park are meant to attract more visitors to the park for a stroll and a drink. Conservation of those parks depends much on citizen initiatives such as volunteer gardeners and conservation fundraisers where \$500 dollar tickets are sold for an annual dinner in the park, where all proceeds are going to conservation of the park (Hermann Park Conservancy, 2010). Zoos, botanical gardens and science museums are often located in or next to those parks as well. Recreational activities tend to be fairly clustered around the parks. It is worth noting that most of the public parks tend to be west of downtown Houston, where typically more affluent neighborhoods are located. Poorer socioeconomic classes do not only live further away from those public areas, but also have limited means (no car or limited public transportation) to get to these places. Accessibility for socio-economic groups to these public spaces may thus vary.

As a result of the warm climate, the outdoor community pools in Houston are another public space, where people can spend their free time to recreate. The Houston Parks and Recreation Department operates and maintains 39 swimming pools and 13 water playgrounds. Community pools can be found throughout the city of Houston. However, more community pools can be found in the area close to but southeast of the center, where typically lower socio-economic classes reside. Much more evenly spread out are the public golf courses, 8 of them in total, evenly distributed throughout the city. Private golf courses however, are not included. These golf courses are of course semi-public spaces but often membership fees determine the accessibility of those private golf courses. The elite Houstonians are often member of country clubs, which include a golf course. The nature of a golf course can thus determine what kind of fellow residents of the city one is likely to encounter.

Other semi-public spaces of course are the restaurants and cafes. Houston has plenty of them, hundreds of different restaurants with all kinds of cuisines and for all types of budgets. Generally eating out in Houston is inexpensive, especially in comparison to other larger US cities. The Tex-Mex Americanized Mexican cuisine is quite popular and typically very affordable, also due to the large Hispanic population that is residing in Houston. Of course restaurants may not be as good of a facilitator in meeting new people, when seated at a table with friends or family, the accessibility of eating out fosters the opportunity to reconnect with (newly acquired) friends. Some smaller coffee houses and cafes are much more facilitating in meeting new people and connecting with other residents, although many of those types of cafes are generally located in more trendy or artsy districts of Houston such as Montrose and less in suburban areas.

Key aspects of Houston and their effect on the opportunity for social interaction will be summarized and compared with The Hague in section 4.6.

#### **4.4 THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS**

Similar to the North American description above, it is important to describe the contextual factors in Europe that may be determining for Dutch society. By providing a brief introduction on the Dutch society it should become more evident in what context international professional migrants live in The Netherlands and what may affect their social interaction and place attachment. After briefly describing the societal factors, The Hague will be described similarly as Houston.

##### *Physical Factors*

After the Second World War, The Netherlands faced urban problems similar to those of many other developed nations (Priemus, 1996). The economic boom combined with a tremendous post-war population increase resulted in a shortage of homes and increased economic development resulting in a high demand for workers. The urban structure in the Netherlands has always been highly dependent

on efficiency and planning (Scheffer, 2004) due to the lack of space and limited availability of land. As a result, the Dutch have become very innovative in land- and water management (Scheffer). The urban landscape is as a result highly organized, planned and regulated. The fact that Dutch urban development has been greatly influenced by urban planning and zoning laws thus came mainly out of necessity.

Traditionally the west of the country -with access to the sea as well as the hinterland- has had an important role in trading and distribution of goods. The Netherlands has two large European river deltas from the Meuse and the Rhine. These deltas have provided an excellent location for a mainport harbour, Rotterdam, where goods can be received and shipped to the hinterland. In addition, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol is an important European mainport for airtraffic. Most of the economic activity takes place in this part of The Netherlands (Delta Metropool, 2010). This urban agglomeration in the west of The Netherlands is called the *Randstad*. Two wings can be distinguished in this area; the northern wing is formed by the city-regions of Amsterdam and Utrecht, while the southern ring comprises the city-regions of Rotterdam and The Hague (Priemus & Spaans, 1992). Most spatial issues tend to emerge in the Randstad, where international business activity is concentrated and residential density is the highest. Most of the major employment sources are as a result located in this area. 7.1 Million people reside here; almost half of the total Dutch population of over 16 million (CBS, 2010). Furthermore, similar to other western countries, globalization and restructuring of urban spaces are also becoming increasingly influential on the urban areas of the Netherlands (Forrest & Kearns, 2001).

Although this dense urban network offers many economic benefits, there are also some problems associated with such agglomerations. The increasingly urban population of the Netherlands is mostly residing in the Randstad. This creates large housing shortages and relatively high home prices in comparison to other parts of the country. But living in the highly urbanized areas enables people to easily travel around between cities as a result of the well-established public transportation network (Van Andel, 1989). Many people reside in a different city than the city they are employed in; commuting with public transit is a common option due to the major congestion around larger cities in The Netherlands (Schwanen et al., 2004).

#### *Social Factors*

But there are also social factors that play an important role in the Dutch urban environment. The post-war increase in industrialized processes required more laborers for heavy industries in western European countries (Priemus, 1996). Initially, these laborers came from Eastern Europe and the Balkan countries, but in order to increase production national government aided programs recruited people from southern Europe, Northern Africa and Turkey (Treibel, 2003). While this was only meant as a temporary migration, after recruitment for labour ended in 1973, many of the labourers remained (Treibel, 2003). Instead of returning to their country of origin, many of them moved their families to The Netherlands (NiDi Rapport, 2006).

The diverse make-up of The Netherlands makes it a very multicultural society (Scheffer, 2007). For international professional migrants this may make it easier to immerse in the local population. However, the ethnic diversity also causes friction in Dutch society (Scheffer, 2007). New immigrants of non-western origin tend to cluster and concentrate strongly in larger cities (Bolt et al., 2002), and even in specific neighborhoods of larger cities, that were typically built between 1945 and 1975 (Bolt et al., 2002). "The unfortunate thing is that it is precisely the cities that tend to be centers of housing shortage" (Priemus, 1996), which may present problems to both immigrants and the native population. When neighborhoods and districts degenerate foreigners often get the blame (Portes, 2003). Priemus (1996) suggests that the sooner the distinction between 'native' and 'immigrant' is eliminated in policy, the better.

Yet, policy cannot be completely seen without practice. Most 'native' residents mention 'non-western

foreigners' as a principal cause of complaints about the social environment (Priemus et al., 1995). Housing allocation policies are not always efficiently tackling these problems (Priemus, 1996) because people tend to concentrate with people of an ethnic or socio-economic background similar to them (Portes, 2002). However, international professional migrants tend to reside in areas that do not necessarily reflect their ethnic background as much as their socio-economic background (Wang & Nayir, 2006). The social environment of the Netherlands is thus very ethnically diverse and generally tolerating.

The same city-specific aspects and the urban structure will be explored now for The Hague. This can help to define opportunities for social interaction and other aspects of the city that participants of this study may experience in The Hague. The next section discusses The Hague focusing on the same aspects as Houston was analyzed on: general information, residential and neighborhood information, economic aspects of the city, public spaces and cultural life and aspects of living with children in The Hague.

#### 4.5 RESEARCH CITY II: THE HAGUE



The Hague is centrally located in the western part of the Netherlands, bordering the North Sea in the west. The Hague has a population of 489,000 (CBS, 2010). However, in the area surrounding the city, there are approximately 650,000 (Gemeente Den Haag, 2010) residents living in adjoining municipalities. The Hague is estimated to have 68,000 western international professional migrants and 219,000 non-western foreigners (Gemeente Den Haag, 2010). Due to its international nature with embassies, international corporations and other organizations there are many higher educated international workers in the city. The Hague is the third largest city in the Netherlands and is situated in the south-wing of the previously described Randstad agglomeration.

Fig. 4.4 Map of The Netherlands with The Hague (VAV, 2010)

The Hague is also the 'governing' city of the Netherlands; the parliament and crown both reside there. There are 8 city-subdivisions in The Hague with their own local governing office. The Hague is considered to be highly multi-cultural. Besides non-western immigrants from Arabic countries that are located in The Hague, there is also a relatively high percentage of Hindu, Indonesian and Surinamese residents (Choenni & Adhin, 2003). This is due to the fact that The Hague used to be the governing city in The Netherlands for former Dutch colonies as well. It has been noted (Bolt et al, 2002) that there is a large ethnic segregation in The Hague for the different neighborhoods. Existing concentrations of ethnic migrants are strengthened through immigration being strongly directed to the big cities of The Netherlands, although reportedly concentrations have remained relatively stable for The Hague but also spread to some pre-war (built before 1945) neighborhoods (Bolt et al., 2002). As previously mentioned The Hague exhibits a large ethnic segregation, especially with those of non-western backgrounds. East and southeast of the centre (centrum) there are a few neighborhoods with high concentrations of non-western migrants. These areas display a large dependence on social provisions and higher unemployment rates (Van Marringing et al., 2004).

The total population of The Hague has decreased a bit after the 1960s as a result of suburbanization (Bolt et al., 2002) As a result of non-western international migration to larger urban centers and the higher birthrates among these groups, the growth of the population in The Hague has been steadily



picking up over the past decade (Treibel, 2003; NiDi Rapport, 2006). There are more than 11 international schools for primary and secondary education in The Hague. As The Hague is located in the Randstad, it is not a very cheap city to live in. Especially compared to the United States, The Hague has a higher cost of living (HSBC Expat Survey, 2009), especially housing and gas are indicated to be a lot more costly. Many international migrants however are being compensated for this, and get their cost of living increase factored into their expat agreement (HSBC Expat Survey, 2009).

## LIVING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SPACES

The City of The Hague has a lengthier history than the City of Houston. Between 1850 and 1940 a lot of architectural and urban development took place in The Hague. Along with residential development, the first train stations, office buildings, warehouses and shopping centers were being developed through modern techniques. Residential areas that were being developed around this time were Zeeheldenkwartier and the Schilderswijk, which both referred back to the Golden Age in The Netherlands when the nation was trading, exploring in great prosperity (Den Haag, 2010). Residential areas such as Van Stolkpark and Zorgvliet for upper class families were also developed around this time.

Just before World War II in the 1930s the Archipelbuurt, Duinoord and Statenkwartier were built. A characteristic of these areas is that there is no high-rise development in these areas (Den Haag, 2010). There is also a great architectural variety from Art Nouveau to the famous Dutch architect Berlage (Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 2010). In World War II a lot of buildings and neighborhoods were destroyed. After the war, it was important to swiftly resurrect new neighborhoods. These new neighborhoods have been developed in accordance with a greater area development plan developed by Dudok (Den Haag, 2010). The areas that were being developed were mostly situated in the southwestern part of The Hague. The presupposition was that demographic, economic and traffic information should be given consideration in urban development plans. Nevertheless, rebuilding did not go as smooth as planned due to the lack of materials and labor (Den Haag, 2010). Many of the postwar neighborhoods tend to look similar as a result of the industrialized building processes. There are a few characteristics such as statues on the squares or benches or garden areas that add to the design of these neighborhoods because public housing associations were obligated to allocate part of their expenditures to artistic practices (Den Haag, 2010).

As a result of the diversity in housing styles and ages, there are a lot of different homes available for rent or purchase in The Hague and vicinity. The price of housing often determines the socio-economic background of an area's residents (Priemus, 2004). Areas in high-demand, for example those in close proximity to the city center, built between 1920 and 1940, will mostly house people of higher socio-economic classes (Priemus, 2004). In The Hague these are areas such as: Statenkwartier, Archipelbuurt and Benoordenhout. Most international professional migrants on an expat assignment tend to be part of this socio-economic class (Wang & Nayir, 2006), and may choose to live in areas with other residents who share their level of income. Figure 4.6 below gives an impression of The Hague.

It is important to note that there is a large public housing and rental sector in The Netherlands (Priemus, 2004). The Hague, like many other cities in the Randstad, is densely populated and highly organized through spatial planning, and this results in very little unused space (Priemus, 2004). The areas just west of the center, are in high demand and relatively expensive. The average single-family home price in 2009 was € 414,000 (Kadaster, 2010). Graph 4.6 on the next page displays the average single-family home price over the past decade. The average home price in The Hague is about € 100,000 more than in the rest of The Netherlands (Kadaster, 2010). The recent economic trend is visible in this graph as well with decreasing home prices from late 2008 to 2010. The average rental price in The Hague has also recently lowered; from € 750,00 per month in 2008, to € 715,00 per month in 2009 (Direct Wonen, 2010).



## THE HAGUE

### IMPRESSION OF THE HAGUE

The Hague is also the political capital of The Netherlands. Many historic political buildings have been preserved in this stately city. These buildings still have a political function today, such as 'Binnenhof' (top right).

### NEIGHBORHOODS

Residential architecture and unique architectural features can be found in many residential areas of The Hague, such as 'Statenkwartier', bottom right. Many international professionals are located in these areas. (bottom right)

### GREEN SPACES

Many parks in The Hague such as 'Zuiderpark' do not only provide an opportunity for recreation and sports, but also for expositions, events and concerts. International professionals can visit these areas as they are publicly accessible for free year round. (below)



Fig. 4.6 Impression of The Hague residential areas of international professionals (Ruby van den Hoff)

Similar to Houston, children can have a great significance for the frequency of local social interactions for international migrants in The Hague. Many of the children of international professional migrants attend international schools, mainly due to the language barrier with the Dutch language (Holstrom, 1998). International style primary and secondary education makes it better possible for these children to move back to their home country or continue their schooling in a different country once their parents finish the assignment in The Hague (Holstrom, 1998). The international nature of these children's education makes them less susceptible for local (Dutch) interaction, and more likely to befriend other international children (Families in Global Transition Conference, 2010). In Houston of course English is the primary language of instruction in most schools, therefore it is not as necessary for the language to attend international schools but it may very well be necessary for the curriculum. The parents will thus be more likely to encounter other international professional migrants than local parents. Furthermore, much research has been done to measure the extent to which temporary migrations affect children.

The educational school system is very diverse; there are many international schools, but also special public schools such as Waldorf or Montessori (Den Haag, 2010). But free time activities such as sports teams and music lessons tend to be organized without school involvement. The international schools form an exception, children can attend school including extracurricular activities until 6.30 p.m. (Zein Child Care, 2010). Children in the Netherlands often attend daycare or after school programs too; but free time activities are mostly the responsibility of the parents (Cool, 2001). Children of higher educated professionals in The Netherlands often have a busy schedule with homework, tests, and practice for sports (Cool, 2001). Due to the parental involvement in these activities this offers a great opportunity for parents to have social interaction with other parents. However, parents whose children are attending international schools may not experience the same degree of involvement with their children's free time activities due to the extra-curricular schedule that is offered under school and child care program supervision.

The built environment in many Northern European cities allows for children to have a relatively high degree of spatial independence from an early age, because they are able to get around independently in their neighborhood on their bicycle or they can walk to friends (Holstrom, 2008). It is very important for children to be provided with settings and opportunities for children to enjoy a range of interactions and engagements with people and places (Gill, 1999). The neighborhood mobility of children – how and where children move around spatially - is relatively high in The Netherlands due to the pedestrian friendly roads and biking paths (Gill, 1999). Children in the higher grades of primary school are able to go to school independently. Because after school activities may take place outside of the immediate neighborhood community, parents are often more involved in taking children to and from free time activities (Gill, 1999). Regardless of their higher independent mobility the life of children does require parental involvement and social interaction is likely to result from it (Davies, 1993).

#### THE HAGUE'S ECONOMY

The Hague is one of the most international cities of the Netherlands. Being the government city of The Netherlands, there are many civil servants and diplomats working in the city. Furthermore, there are many large international businesses that are headquartered in The Hague or have at least one office in The Hague. These offices and organizations are not necessarily clustered in The Hague, but rather spread out over different parts of the city (Den Haag, 2010). The Hague is more a service sector city than an industry city; most jobs are in professional services (Den Haag, 2010). Table 4.3 below displays the top 10 international corporations in the region. The location of international organizations in The Hague creates 63.000 jobs, and 14.000 jobs are additionally created as a result of the direct jobs (Decisio Report, 2009). Other important corporations are Schlumberger with one of their 3 worldwide

major corporate offices in The Hague, as well as APM Terminals, one of the world's largest terminal operators (Den Haag, 2010; Decisio Report, 2009). These international companies provide opportunities for meeting other international professionals for internationals in The Hague. The abundance of international professionals in the area of The Hague should provide ample opportunity for social interaction.

Table 4.3 – Top international corporations in The Hague (organized on revenues, based on Decisio Report, 2009)

Company	Location	Country of Origin	Number of employees
Shell International	Den Haag	The Netherlands	12,000
ABB Lummus Global	Den Haag	United States	5000
APM Terminals	Den Haag	The Netherlands	18,000
Schlumberger	Den Haag	The Netherlands	8000
KPN Telecom	Den Haag	The Netherlands	10,000
Logica Public Sector	Rijswijk	England	9000
TNT Post B.V.	Den Haag	The Netherlands	20.000
ING Real Estate	Den Haag	The Netherlands	12,000
Siemens Nederland	Den Haag/Zoetermeer	Germany	4000
T-Mobile	Den Haag	Germany	1500

Besides the headquarters of international corporations The Hague has another important characteristic: legal organizations. The Hague markets itself as the City of Peace and Justice (Decisio, 2009). Not only the national parliament is seated in The Hague, it is also diplomatically the most important city in The Netherlands. In addition, many international organizations such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and International Court of Justice (ICJ) are located in The Hague. Table 4.4 shows the international organizations that are located in The Hague, including embassies and consulates. There are also many international educational institutions (i.e. British School) located in The Hague, and research institutes (listed under 'knowledge' in Table 4.4) such as the Clingendael Institute for International Relations and Foreign Policy. The prevalence of all these international corporations and organizations results in an estimated 15.000 international professionals in this sector in The Hague (Den Haag, 2010) and an estimated € 1.733 billion of expenditures in the greater area.

Table 4.4 International organizations in The Hague

Type	Organizations
Intergovernmental/ UN	12
Europe	19
Knowledge	18
NGO	66
Education	16
<b>Total International Organizations</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Embassies and Consulates</b>	<b>107</b>

## PUBLIC SPACES AND CULTURAL LIFE

Public spaces that foster meeting of people and social interaction may be very different in The Hague in comparison to Houston as a result of the different built environment and city structure. The town center plays a very important role in the experience of the city (Den Haag, 2010). The main shopping areas such as 'De Passage' are in the center of The Hague. The international atmosphere and the large international market have resulted in many international stores to be located in The Hague as well (Tienbee, 2008). For internationals it may thus not be very difficult to find items that match their taste, because of the large variety of international stores. Many terraces can be found on squares and streets in the center, such as 'Het Plein' that was developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as one of the first public squares to simply function as a public space rather than a market ground (Plein Den Haag, 2010).

Besides 'Het Plein' there are many other smaller squares or simply streets close to the political areas in the town center such as the Binnenhof, where the Dutch house of parliament is located. Some of the central streets in The Hague have been designed very stately. This can give a green and spacious impression in the town center (Den Haag, 2010). Most of the nightlife also takes place in this area; cinemas, clubs and wine bars tend to be located in the trendy districts of the center such as the 'Denneweg' and 'Grote Markt'.

There are many opportunities for meeting others and socializing in the center of The Hague for international professionals, but a few kilometers west of the center is the North Sea coastline with the beach. This area is called 'Scheveningen' and includes a boulevard, and a pier, where internationals can stroll or enjoy a drink on a terrace. There is a large casino and there are many beach clubs along the boulevard. This area has a vast array of events year round and is a popular tourist destination (Den Haag, 2010). To name a few: every year, on New Year's day there is a Winter Swim to welcome the new year, and in the spring when the first new herring of the year is auctioned Scheveningen hosts 'Flags day' (Scheveningen, 2010). Scheveningen is also an alternative residential location for those who do not want to live east of the center, yet require affordability of housing (Kadaster, 2010).

Recreational opportunities in the surrounding dunes such as biking and running as well as relaxing on the beach are all amongst the opportunities in this area of The Hague. For almost every sport there are sport clubs and teams such as soccer, badminton, volleyball, baseball, ice hockey in The Hague (Den Haag, 2010). Moreover, The Hague has many parks and recreational areas such as 'Zuiderpark' and 'Haagse Bos' (120 hectares). Within the city center there are also some small parks, often called gardens such as the 'Paleistuinen' (Palace gardens). All of these parks are publicly accessible and most are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Den Haag, 2010). The Hague has due to its long cultural history and tradition, many museums. These range from art museums to political museums and there is even a children's books museum (The Hague Tourist Office, 2010) Family entertainment is also available; there are two theme parks Drievliet and Madurodam in the The Hague area. In addition, many other major theme parks and zoos are only about an hour away ('Diergaarde Blijdorp' zoo or theme park 'De Efteling' for example).

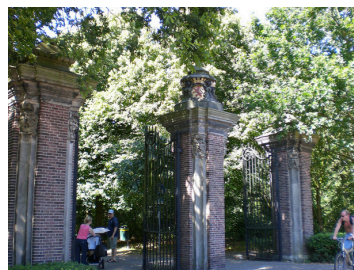
The City of The Hague also prides itself for the many organized events and cultural festivals that the city hosts yearly (Den Haag, 2010). The Hague is known as the jazz-city of the Netherlands and hosts 'The Hague Jazz Festival' every year in the spring (The Hague Online, 2010). Other events include 'Parkpop' a yearly music festival organized in the Zuiderpark. Every summer 'De Parade' comes to The Hague for one week in July in the 'Westerbroekpark'. This is a cultural theater festival that travels through the largest Dutch cities and remains one week in each city. Besides the festivals The Hague has many theaters offering programming in different languages such as English and French and concert halls such as 'Paard van Troje' where international artist appear on the podium. As an international migrant with a limited command of Dutch it is not impossible to visit a theater or concert.





## THE HAGUE PUBLIC SPACES

These pictures provide an impression of the urban environment of The Hague's expats. The image on the left shows one of the squares in The Hague: **Plein**. The classical architecture on the square is surrounded by modern architecture. Such elements provide landmarks for internationals. Below are the **Grote Markt** square and **Scheveningen** beach, where terraces are amply available when the sun shines in the summer.



### Indoor shopping facility De Passage

Besides outdoor shopping facilities Den Haag has a few smaller stately indoor shopping areas, where internationals can spend rainy afternoons on the weekend. Due to the fact that a lot of internationals reside here, many international stores are also located in the city.

### Public Park Entrance Zuiderpark

The public parks in The Hague provide a lush, green environment for free time activities, such as walking, jogging and picnics. The parks are open year round and in winter the small ponds are sometimes used for ice-skating. Once per year this park also hosts a large music festival.

### Street in Archipel Buurt

Older neighborhoods of The Hague have stately streets with high homes that have many original details and architecture in tree lined streets. These older areas are popular for internationals to reside in because they are central and have original architecture.

Fig. 4.7 The Hague Public Spaces (Ruby van den Hoff; Getty Images)

#### 4.6 COMPARISON OF THE RESEARCH CITIES

Although public spaces are amply available, their availability does not guarantee social interaction. The research cities provide a very different setting for facilitating social interaction nonetheless. From the theoretical framework it has become evident that the environment both socially and physically can be determining for establishing social interaction. From this brief overview in Table 4.5, there are a few conclusions that can be made about aspects of the physical environment in the research cities:

Table 4.5 Differences between Houston and The Hague

	Houston	The Hague
City structure	Concentric city structure: radial roads, highly suburbanized. Difficult to spontaneously encounter people. Lengthy vehicle commutes to work often necessary as a result of the extensive usage of space.	Smaller spatial scale than Houston. Historic city center with urban development around the core, including regenerated areas. City center can easily be reached from all areas.
Residential	Many neighborhoods suburban in nature. Very spread out and low density. Community associations and organized activities may facilitate meeting people in the local area.	Neighborhoods with very distinct character and social make up. Potentially difficult to encounter people with a very different background from other parts of the city.
Children	Children are particularly important for international professionals in Houston, since their links to institutions such as schools contribute considerably to establishing local social interaction.	Many children of international professionals attend international schools. Although children increase the chances of social interaction. Children may be less determining for local social interaction in The Hague in comparison to Houston.
Economy	The city's economy is relatively stable, as a result of the large amount of international companies primarily in oil and gas. Unemployment rates are lower than in other areas of the US. There is a smaller percentage of international professionals than in The Hague: more opportunity for local social interaction.	The Hague is economically quite diverse, especially in comparison to Houston. Many large international organizations such as ICJ and embassies are located in The Hague. This increases the chances for international contacts and networking.
Public spaces	Squares are not very common in the city, with the exception of some empty 'plazas'. Parks are a very popular public space for many activities. Shopping malls are also a (semi-)public space that can function as a location for social interaction.	Abundance of public squares with terraces provides many opportunities for social interaction. Public parks with organized and unorganized activities. Beaches and boulevards facilitate a place for social interaction in The Hague in the summer.
Cultural life	The size of the city of Houston has an impact on the amount of events that are organized. As a result there is a great variety of cultural events and activities, such as fairs, events and concerts. There are a few museums in the city. Most of the fine art options such as opera and ballet are also available in this city.	Diverse cultural scene due to international atmosphere and public. Music and theater festivals in the summer, several museums and concert venues and the opportunity to visit other towns nearby to attend a show or concert as well.
Climate	Humid subtropical climate. Often too hot in summers to sit outside on terraces. Most activities take place indoors during the hottest months. In winter fairly mild, outdoor activities such as sports possible in the parks. Climate is not likely to facilitate social interaction outdoors, unless extreme weather events such as a hurricane create an opportunity for interaction.	Moderate climate with mild summers. In winter it is too cold for many outdoor activities except for sports. In summer, it is possible to sit outside on terraces. The climate in The Hague is not very extreme, therefore potentially facilitating social interaction.
Conclusion	Aspects that are most affecting the development of social interaction in Houston are: children, the low-density urban environment and the subtropical climate.	Aspects that are most affecting the development of social interaction in The Hague are: City structure and spatial scale, abundance of public squares and the large percentage of internationals.

For both cities the **social segregation** in neighborhoods can affect the type of social interaction of professionals in the cities may have.

The spread out nature of the City of Houston and the suburban residential style makes it more difficult to encounter people while commuting in a car to and from work. One fact being that most people drive their car out of their garage or driveway without even needing to talk to a neighbor, pulling into their office parking garage and directly walking into their office without again encountering many people. Social interaction needs thus be sought more in public areas during free time and at work. Social interaction at work can be a fundamental foundation of the social network of residents of Houston, including international professional migrants, due to the importance of the professional life. Social places of many Houstonians are thus mostly made up of their own home, their office and its network, homes of friends. Public spaces are of less relevance, unless they participate in activities in the public spaces or simply spend time there for example with their children.

Furthermore, professional migrants with children tend to be more bound by institutions that foster meeting others, interacting with them and extending their social network. Children can thus play a vital role in social networks of people in urban areas, especially in Houston, where the chances for contact in the neighborhood out on the street while taking out the garbage, are very slim. The more international professional migrants have created and built such a local network, the more likely they are to become attached to the location. In The Hague, the situation is very different. The highly planned and organized city actually designates areas for recreational purposes and dictates what can or cannot happen in those areas (Den Haag, 2010). In addition, there are many public spaces such as squares and parks that are always accessible and that could provide great locations for meeting other individuals. The international nature of the city provides a very international environment with different schools, a variety of cuisines and cultural activities that are offered in different languages. In addition, the high prevalence of international organizations and corporations make the professional world very global and culturally diverse.

Children of international professional migrants have a higher spatial autonomy and independence in their mobility in The Hague in comparison to Houston. The fact that they often attend international schools however, limits their ability to connect with local children. As a result, it will be less likely that the parents of these children will foster social interactions with local parents. Rather, the international schools will result in international contacts. Extracurricular activities are organized mostly through schools in the United States, especially when children are attending a private school. In The Netherlands, since Dutch is the primary language of instruction, most children from international professionals attend international schools that organize their own extracurricular activities. This decreases the chance for the connections of those children to extend beyond their international school network.

Both cities experience a relatively high level of segregation, when compared to other cities in their countries. This means that the choice of neighborhood or residential location can make a large difference in their experience of the neighborhood and ultimately their social interaction. In The Hague, western international professional migrants are most likely to live in areas where the socio-economic background of the residents is similar to their own socio-economic background rather than ethnicity. In Houston, the lifestyle-choice or phase in life cycle (i.e. with or without children) can play a key role in the decision process for a residential location. International professional migrants with children or young families typically tend to reside in more suburban areas. Professional migrants without children often find themselves in communities around the urban center, where town homes and condominiums are amply available and where they are closer to bars and restaurants, activities and organized events.

The type of public spaces differs too. The Hague has many squares: some deliberately planned, others historically present. Houston does not have as many public squares, apart from some 'plazas' (small paved courtyards between buildings) in the CBD. Public spaces in Houston can be found in and around areas with shops such as the Galleria, Uptown and the recently redeveloped downtown area, Houston Pavilions. Most of these public spaces do not really contain squares, but are more open areas with

some terraces or food courts. Due to the larger layout of Houston, parks and recreational areas are typically larger than they are in The Hague. More organized activities such as running clubs, tennis lessons and driving ranges for golf, take place in the parks. Parks in The Hague are more used to unorganized leisure activities such as a picnic, throwing a Frisbee or simply a stroll in the park. Important to note is that the parks in Houston are mainly being used by people with children unless there is an organized activity or people use the park to jog, whereas parks in The Hague are also used a lot by people with out children in their 20s and 30s, just to sit on a blanket and read a book or have a drink with some friends.

There is another factor that deserves special consideration when comparing Houston and The Hague: the climate. The climate can have a considerable impact on the usage of public spaces and the opportunity for social interaction. Houston has a humid subtropical climate with temperatures rising to over 40°C during the summer. As a result much of the 'public life' takes place indoors, in air-conditioned areas. Therefore shopping malls for example take up a more prominent place in public life. The winters are a bit cooler, but warm enough for many activities to take place outside. An example is the 'tail-gate' barbeques in front of the sports stadiums in advance of an important game. The Hague has a maritime climate with cool summers and mild winters. Although it never gets extremely cold, most of the social life in winter takes place inside in The Netherlands. In the summers however, squares, parks and beaches become very important public spaces in The Hague. Apart from the physical features of the built environment and the social characteristics (i.e. language, culture, ethnicities) of a city, the climate may also affect the social interaction and place attachment of an international professional migrant. Lastly, it needs to be said that without taking personal characteristics such as ethnic or cultural background and family composition into consideration, it is impossible to analyze how exactly the (built-) environment of an international professional migrant affects their social interaction and ultimately their place attachment.



## 5. Social Interaction

This chapter focuses on the social interaction of international professional migrants. The qualitative interviews will be used to analyze how personal background of interviewees impacts their social interaction and to what extent social interaction is a result of the physical space. This chapter also deals with how new communication and transportation technologies have an impact on the social interactions of these individuals. In this chapter, the international professional migrants of this study will be separated into three groups; single professionals, professionals with partner, and professionals with families.

The theory in chapter 4 has suggested that several factors can have an impact on the social interaction and the place attachment of international professional migrants:

- ☑ personal background
- ☑ social capital
- ☑ local external factors (i.e. physical and social environment)
- ☑ global external factors (company culture, length and purpose of stay)
- ☑ new communication and transportation technologies

It should be noted that it is difficult to encompass all forms of social interaction in this study. Social interactions can take place on a physical location or virtually and can be between family, friends, acquaintances or even strangers. "Social interaction has been demonstrated to be a main predictor of expatriate adjustment" (Wang & Nayir, 2006). The next chapter, Chapter 6, will therefore discuss the place attachment of international professional migrants (as a outcome of their social interaction) and their transnational activities.

### 5.1 INTERVIEWEES

Personal characteristics such as gender, age, marital status, family composition, first language, nationality and length of residence at the research location are all important for social interaction (Faist, 2002). Participants in this study came from western countries all over the world. In the sample it was attempted to reflect a variety of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds among international professional migrants. In addition, it was aimed to account as much as possible for both genders. Participants in The Hague were relatively equally divided with thirteen (13) men and twelve (12) women. However, in Houston many of the women are trailing spouses (joining their husband or partner on their assignment) and it was a lot more difficult to make the sample equally reflect men and women. Therefore, the sample of Houston contains seventeen (17) men and six (6) women. Although distinctions in the analysis will be made between men and women, they are considered collectively in both of the samples based on location.

Of all the participants for The Hague, nineteen (19) of the twenty-five (25) participants were living in the City of The Hague. The other six (6) participants were living in the greater area of The Hague and

surrounding municipalities. For Houston, all participants lived in the City of Houston, though (seven) 7 of them were residing in subdivisions that have been annexed by the City of Houston. These subdivisions used to be independent municipalities such as Bellaire and Clear Lake.

The age distribution is about the same for both samples. In Table 5.1 the age distribution and length of residence in the research city have been indexed in three categories. The largest group of participants is between 35 and 50 years old. As for the length of residence in the research city, both cities display the largest category of participants to be in Houston or The Hague for 3 years or less. In The Hague there are a few more participants that are staying a lot longer, but due to the uneven samples (25) and (23) it is difficult to compare those numbers. Length of residence and age are considered to be potentially important aspects in this study because length of residence and life-cycle stage can be important indicators of place attachment and the extent of an individual's local social interaction, as was indicated in chapter 4 of this study.

Table 5.1 – Overview Participants (age and length of residence in research cities)

<i>Participants The Hague (N=25)</i>			
# of participants	Age	# of participants	Length of residence
10	20-35	12	0 – 3 years
12	35-50	7	4 – 7 years
3	50+	6	8 years +
Total		25	
<i>Participants Houston (N=23)</i>			
8	20-35	12	0 – 3 years
14	35-50	7	4 – 7 years
2	50+	4	8 years +
Total		23	

## BACKGROUND OF INTERVIEWEES

As previously mentioned, background characteristics of international migrants can play an important role in their social interaction and place attachment (Wang & Nayir, 2008). If an international migrant has a culture that is relatively close culturally to the host country culture it will be easier to have social interactions. An example of this could be a Canadian in the U.S. For David for example, a 47-year-old professional from Canada; it was not very difficult to make the transition to Houston.

*“Many things are the same, we can even get the same groceries here in Houston. And because Houston is such a large city there is even more available at the stores... We speak the same language, we wear the same clothes, perhaps our neighborhood is more spread out... and of course the climate is a lot warmer here than back home, especially the winters.”*

For international migrants from English speaking countries it may be easier to adjust due to the language similarity. And although Canada and the U.S. in no way can be seen as identical, for international migrants the cultures are relatively similar and provide a relatively easier adjustment process. In the samples there were only a few international professional migrants from Asia; in the sample of The Hague there is one Japanese interviewee, and in Houston there were two Indian participants. Furthermore, The Hague has a Nigerian participant and a participant from Trinidad in the sample. Many of the participants for this study came from Europe. Due to the lifted restrictions on mobility of persons in the European Union, it is now relatively easy for higher educated Eastern Europeans to move to Western Europe for work (EU Migration Research Group, 2004), this may explain why the background of quite a few participants in The Hague's sample is Eastern European. In the Houston sample there are quite a few British or participants from other Anglo-Saxon countries such as Australia and Canada. Perhaps language is a factor that may impact the ease of moving a professional migrant from an office in one country to another. In addition, countries such as Canada have special trade and labor agreements (NAFTA, 2010) and potentially more organizations with offices in the United States. It needs to be said that due to the small size of this sample the background and data in

general, only gives an impression of the international professional migrants and their experiences in Houston and The Hague and are by no means the 'standard' for international professional migrants.

### Language

Language is one of the main features of communication and a necessity for most social interactions (Portes, 2002). A language barrier can create all sorts of difficulties, such as misunderstandings. Some of the participants were natives of a country where English is also spoken as the main language (or as one of the main languages). In the case of Houston, language was not a "*significant roadblock*" for those participants whose native language is English. It was reported that many residents of Houston do have a Hispanic background. These residents of Houston themselves, do not speak English as their first language. Becci, a 48-year-old British expat in Houston noted "*it sometimes seems like Houston is bilingual because many signs are in both English and Spanish. And instead of expats having difficulties to speak English, it is communicating with locals that has proven to be tough occasionally.*" As previously mentioned Houston has a large Hispanic population (Portes, 1998), who are mostly residing southeastern areas of Houston.

Other participants of this study, whose native language is not English, do have experienced some difficulties with the language. Jérémie, a 44-year old French professional migrant found especially the working language to be tough to get a grip of. "*In the beginning they would use phrases and words that I wasn't familiar with, incidentally there would be a miscommunication because of it, but I think I understood the English enough to be able to get the job done properly.*" Language comprehension is difficult to measure, because sometimes although it may seem that an international migrant understands what is meant, it is proven later that something different was meant. This is also a result of a personal background of an individual. The context in which a message is placed often rests on a foundation that has resulted from an individual's history and background (Wellman & Leighton, 1978).

Most international professional migrants who participated in this study did not speak Dutch upon arriving in The Hague. Agnes, a 28-year-old Polish international migrant who works at a distribution center in Westland (just south of The Hague). She is responsible for the distribution of goods to the UK and Ireland, where she was previously based. Although she has a good command of English and the company uses English as the main language, there are often moments where all the Dutch workers (a definite majority) will switch over to Dutch.

*"Often I am the only one who is not able to understand what they are talking about and it makes me feel very isolated and lonely. Although I get along with them well, I find it very hard to become friends with them or feel supported by my colleagues. I think the situation would be different if I was not the only foreigner in the company."*

But Agnes is one of the very few participants who had this experience. Most other participants in The Hague who are employed by international organizations work with people in their office with a variety of backgrounds. In addition, most participants indicated that English was the official language most spoken around the office. Tanisha, a 36-year-old female international migrant, says no one working in her office is actually Dutch.

*"It is very nice to be able to speak English with all my colleagues, none of them are from Holland. But sometimes we jokingly say to each other we will never be able to speak Dutch because we don't have anyone to practice with around the office."*

Language has the ability to transfer emotions and communication fosters a bond between individuals. Similarly to how social capital can work, language can also work the opposite; isolating and decisive in social interaction. Individuals like Agnes are less likely to increase the intensity of the social interactions that she has with her colleagues. She may be afraid to be confronted with a language barrier or a misunderstanding. Language remains one of the most important features that function very differently for the two research cities.

The effect of a specific culture on the social interaction can be very different. International professional migrants experience this cultural difference in social interaction from the moment they arrive to their departure. International professional migrants in Turkey for example are shy to interact with women because they do not want to offend the males of the society and respect their standards with regards to social interaction (Wang & Nayir, 2006). Even though the gender gap is not as large in Houston or The Hague, there may be other cultural aspects that may impact the social interaction. Dutch people for example are known to be very direct (Vossestein, 2004). Although this may be encountered as rude or offending, many of the participants described this as one of the features they liked in The Hague because there are “no hidden messages”. Others do not notice this directness at work, simply because their work environment is too international to display any Dutch features.

Generally The Netherlands is seen as a tolerant and welcoming nation (Vossestein, 2004), although some international migrants experience this very differently.

*“One of the things I find very odd about Dutch people is the way they celebrate birthdays. They sit on chairs in a circle and have polite conversations with other birthday-guests. But when you come to the birthday without knowing anyone you are very little talked to or the conversations are very mundane. In Nigeria, birthdays do not take place in a very formal, strict setting. There would be no problem moving your chair out of the ‘kring’ but here this would be rude...”*  
(Tanisha, 36, Nigeria)

It is difficult to determine whether the birthday that Tanisha attended is a representative example of a social gathering that international migrants in The Hague typically experience. Experiencing a social gathering is based on the background and culture of the international migrant. A German international for example may have not felt the same at this birthday at all, because social gatherings could be very similar in Germany. It can also have something to do with the language; people may be hesitant to speak English to a foreign birthday guest.

Another international migrant 42-year old Pamela, from the U.S. finds the Dutch very open and tolerant on the surface, but says it is difficult to really reach a deeper level of friendship and make social interactions mean more. Steve another U.S. international experiences this the same way.

*“When we just moved to the Netherlands 8 years ago we decided to move to Wassenaar because we heard it was a relatively higher class area. But it was very closed socially, it was difficult to gain access to the local social network and in fact because people in our area knew we were internationals they did not seem to want to invest time in befriending us. There were also many other internationals living in the area but because everyone only stays for a limited term the community is very transient.”*

It is interesting to note that some of these international migrants feel that due to the temporality of their stay it is difficult to enter local Dutch networks.

In Houston, the experience of culture is very different. Many participants described Houston as a very open and diverse city. Because there are so many people from many different backgrounds and because it is a large city most international professional migrants believe it offers endless opportunities. Although most international migrants recognize the mainstream American culture, but because there are so many people there is a large market for goods and services. “I had no difficulty finding Italian designer shops here”, says Maria (38, Italy). In addition, Houston has the largest variety of restaurants and leisure activities. “There is theatre, opera and nearly all cuisines are available in Houston”. It seems as though most international migrants do not experience the mainstream American culture as negative, but most add the huge variety of cultures that is available in Houston makes a large difference in their experience. “It is easier to feel at home when you are surrounded by so many different cultures and pretty much anything you want is available...” The great advantage for international in Houston is the abundance of housing, restaurants, free-time activities etc.

Negative experiences with regards to the culture in Houston seem to be quite regionally specific. Participants bring up gun laws, capital punishment and political preferences as local factors they do not align with. Many of those aspects are quite specific for Houston and the state of Texas and would not necessarily be encountered while on an assignment to another large American city such as San Francisco, Chicago or New York (InterNations, 2010). Other factors that negatively affect the stay of international professional migrants are segregation, criminality and the climate including extreme weather events. In addition a few professional migrants are troubled by the lack of any formal recycling program. Many of these factors are experienced by international professional migrants in comparison to their 'home-situation' that is these experiences are framed by how-it-can-also-be. Both positively and negatively international migrants unintentionally compare the situation so that for example when more crime is experienced than back home, it is a negative cultural experience in the host country.

Although culture is not necessarily determining in whether or not international professional migrants feel at home, it can be said that the further a culture is from one's native culture the more difficult social interaction and place attachment can be (Wang & Nayir, 2004). International professional migrants who live in a very international environment with frequent travel, or those who have been to other destinations on expatriate assignments previously are more likely to see the host countries cultures of Houston and The Hague culture as easy to adapt to, especially if previous assignments have been in Third World countries such as China or Nigeria.

#### *Time management on international assignments*

Time restraints can place a considerable burden on the social interaction of international professionals (Kraimer et al., 2009). Allocating time between professional life and home, the new country and the home country can be most challenging. Even more so if free time is limited; there is less time for social interactions outside of work to take place. Office hours and the typical workweek of an employee in Houston are averaging over 45 hours, leaving very little time for social encounters. In addition, frequent traveling puts a strain on the opportunities for maintaining newly established local friendships. Bhaskar, a 49-year-old international professional from India who was relocated from an assignment in Montreal to Houston feels that the hours put a big strain on him and his family too.

*"Houston is a work city however not a city to have fun. When I lived in Montreal I often didn't work more than 30 hours, but here, people don't come to have fun, they work long weeks over 50 sometimes 60 hours and vacation is not amply given, this leaves you with less time to spend with your family or to visit friends and relatives."*

In The Hague, the experience of many international professionals is very different. International professionals report they have ample of opportunity to visit other Dutch cities on the weekend, spend time with their children or visit cultural activities. *"Due to the international company culture and the frequent relocations, my company really advocates to balance your time between your professional and private life"*, says Steve a 54-year-old American professional in The Hague. He also states that his company has no problem giving him time off for his daughter's school performance for example.

Many international professionals in The Hague indicate also that there is an emphasis on balancing private and professional life. This emphasis seems less evident in Houston, and seems to correspond with the national work hours for both countries as given by OECD (2004). Even though many of the international professionals of this study are working for international corporations and organizations, it seems as though the company adapts company culture policies somewhat to the particular location, as is proven to be one of the most effective controls for expatriate retention (Harrison et al., 2004), so that it becomes easier for international professionals to adjust.

#### *New transportation and communication technologies*

Increases in more accessible transportation as a result of technological advance enable many international professional migrants to travel more easily. Especially international professional migrants in The Hague who were from other areas of Europe such as Great Britain or Poland reportedly traveled back to their home country quite often. Paul, a 44-year old professional from Great Britain who is working in the IT sector indicates that while he rents a place in The Netherlands, he owns a property in

England where his mother lives and visits her every five or six weeks. In Houston, professionals from other North American countries who believe they are used to frequent travel; also travel home frequently or attempt to combine a business trip with a personal visit. Jesse, the international professional from Canada says that his visits:

*"...Tend to be partially private and partially professional, I try to work when I go back because our project headquarters is in Calgary and I'm always able to accomplish something while I'm there".*

Due to the fact that some international professional migrants originate from the country where they were initially sent on an assignment from, many are able to combine family visits with business purposes. Kraim et al. (2009) state that this can be an effective method for expatriate retention. In addition, international professionals are able to maintain their ties with the home country and home office, which makes repatriation and career advancement after the assignment better possible (Kraim et al., 2009). Internet communication technologies allow international professional migrants to affordably call or chat with their family. Many of them utilize the newest technologies including instant- and text messaging, Skype (voice-over-IP program), and email. Due to the large geographic disparities, international professional migrants are pushed towards exploring and utilizing new communication technologies perhaps sooner than others. Almost all international professional migrants in this study, both in Houston and The Hague have indicated they use Skype or instant messenger to talk to their friends and family back home more than once a week. Results of Wellman et al. (2002) have shown that email contact is generally insensitive to distance but tends to increase for transoceanic relationships greater than 3000 miles apart.

But new communication technologies do not replace face-to-face communication. Jesse, who previously mentioned combining business and leisure on his visits home says:

*"I am not able to follow the details of my friends and families life progressions as closely as I was while I lived in the same city, and spoke more frequently with them. There is no replacement for physical interaction and missing out on that has no doubt had an effect on the flow of information."*

However, not only far-away ties can be intensified through new communication technologies (Sheller & Urry, 2006). For international migrants communities that are initiated online and facilitated offline with get-togethers can provide an easy access to such a network in a busy professional life. The Hague Online, InterNations, British Expats and Families in Global Transition (FIGT) are just a few examples of internationally oriented, social media networks that can facilitate off-line meetups besides online information (FIGT, 2010). Paul, 44-year-old British professional claims that it is vital to join clubs and expat groups. He has joined several groups and found it very useful in establishing a core group of local (international-) friends. The question as to how these new communication technologies affect the bonds international professional migrants have with their friends and family and newly made friends on the assignment location is becomes clear that most professionals find new technologies and the ease with which they travel complements their life. It does not however replace any personal contact, but does help in maintaining ties and relationships over longer distances. In addition, many find it easier to access other people in their local area virtually through forums and networks and eventually physically meet up if the occasion arises.

To conclude this section it can be observed that new communication technologies and transportation plays an important part in the lives of international professional migrants in Houston and The Hague. But in neither of the two research cities do international professional migrants replace their face-to-face contact completely with virtual communication. Sheller and Urry (2006) indicate that new technologies and increased mobility enhances the mobility of some people and the growth of information as a result of the new technologies is allowing for new forms of coordination of people, meetings and events to emerge (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Büscher, 2006; Jain, 2009). So far a few main features have been described: the experience and circumstances that the international professional migrants of this study encounter while in Houston or The Hague. This is necessary to frame the analysis of their social interactions and place attachment. The next section discusses the social interaction of participants of this study.



## 5.2 IDENTIFYING THE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONALS

In the previous chapters, the theory has indicated that in order to analyze the social interaction of international professional migrants it is necessary to look at background features. Chapter 3 has indicated that some of the most important features are family composition and life cycle stage. These personal characteristics may impact the surroundings of the international migrants. For example, professional migrants with children are thought to be more locally embedded, due to their connection to local institutions such as schools. In addition, professional migrants who take their spouse or significant other along may be affected by how their partner adapts to the new location or may have very different social encounters because of their spouse. Lastly, single professional migrants, traveling to a destination along will have less of a 'home base' from the get go- and may be very mobile. Unless they actively go out to establish a local network, it will be much more difficult to develop many friendships, but they are also more free to establish new social interactions on their own terms.

In order to analyze the social interactions of international migrants, it is important to distinguish between single professionals, professionals with partners and professionals with families. It is important to do so because apart from the local environment, life cycle and family composition may affect the social interaction and place attachment of international professional migrants (Wang & Nayir, 2006). Outcomes of this study indicate that there are variances present between these different categories of international professional migrants. Between these different categories of international professional migrants, the following social interaction characteristics may differ:

- The *medium* and kind of contacts: international, local, virtual
- The *location* of their social interaction: house, neighborhood, city
- The *nature* of their social interaction: personal, acquaintance, colleague, stranger
- How international professional migrants *experience*, value and utilize the social interactions in their environment

Each category of international professional migrants is therefore separately addressed in the following sections, due to the variances between these categories. In addition, international professional migrants in Houston are presented first, then professional migrants in The Hague are discussed and consecutively the two different locations are compared. Below, Table 5.2 displays the sample characteristics. Besides basic information, the international professional migrants were asked whether their current assignment aligned with their career plan, and how they had been prepared by their organization prior to their arrival. Previous assignments are also thought to be an important aspect of the background information of international professional migrants (Wang & Nayir, 2006), therefore 'previous experience' (yes or no) is mentioned as one of the sample characteristics in Table 5.2. In addition, interviewees were asked if their international assignment was part of their career plan. A career plan affects the purpose of stay and their investment in local social contacts of international professionals, and is also mentioned in Table 5.2 below.

Demographic Characteristics		Houston	The Hague
Gender	male	17	13
	female	6	12
Marriage	single/divorced	7	10
	partner	3	5
	married	13	10
Children	yes	8	10
	no	15	15
Tenure	length in city in years	4.7 yrs (sample average)	4.8 yrs (sample average)
Career plan	yes	15	14
	no	8	11
Preparation	yes	15	18
	no	8	7
Previous Exp	yes	14	17
	no	9	8
Nationality	European	15	13
	North American	3	5
	Other	5	7

### 5.3 SOCIAL INTERACTION IN HOUSTON

Many international professionals in Houston worked for large corporations and fourteen (14) of them had been on previous assignments to other locations. A lot of the international migrants had been extensively prepared or helped during the relocation by their company or organization. Some companies offered special (language) courses, other information packages and assigned personal assistance to help with finding schools and residential locations. Overall many of these international professionals found Houston a pleasant city to live in, many of the international migrants stating that the city has a lot to offer due to its size and cultural composition.

The average of the assignment for these international professional migrants is 4.7 years. However, this number is somewhat skewed as a result of a few participants who had decided to extend their stay. With most people staying under 5 years in Houston however, it can be said that many of these international migrants are affected by the temporality of their stay (Kraimer et al., 2009). All of the participants of this study lived in the western parts of Houston, (south-) west of downtown. The highest percentage of participants lived in the Memorial and Heights areas. Due to the large distances in Houston, a few of the professional migrants indicated that they commute large distances to their office every day. These professionals unanimously chose for those suburban residential locations as a result of their children and the presence of quality schools in the area. Others live closer to downtown and indicated their location choice was mainly for the amenities that are available around their community.

#### SINGLE PROFESSIONALS

For a few of the single international professionals it was their first assignment abroad. Most of the females of the Houston sample are part of this category. Although Harris et al. (2003) suggest that the traditional expatriate profile is changing and an increasing amount of female assignees are emerging, the sample in Houston included much more men than women. Many male participants had a spouse or partner accompanying them, but the main reason for the migration was due to the professional assignment of the male. Single professional migrants in Houston mainly saw the assignment abroad as an opportunity for their career and personal development and did not prefer the location of Houston necessarily. Morely & Heraty (2004) state that most international migrants have considerable expectations concerning the value of the assignment both as a personal and as a career development in addition to an increased level of education.

Establishing in Houston was not as straightforward as some had thought it would be due to the difficulties they experienced with establishing 'credit history' in the United States. Credit history refers to the financial history of an individual and is required in order to get loans, mortgages and credit cards (NASDAQ Glossary, 2010). One of the professional migrants stated that things such as mortgage loans, property tax payments, electricity distribution, and automobile insurance all required a significant learning curve before it was completely evident how they operated and what effect it had on her. For locally employed personnel for example at banks or insurance companies it is often very complex to understand the challenging situation and background of an international professional migrant. David, a 47-year-old Canadian professional says:

*"For me the most difficult part was not being treated equally by the financial institutions. Without pure capital it is discouraging trying to navigate your way into good credit standing or into a loan."*

Many larger corporations thoroughly assist their employees in their (financial-) establishment. In addition, due to the large variety of neighbourhoods and housing types it is challenging to find a good location for a residence. Most single professionals choose an accessible location in order to have many amenities close to their residence. An example is Rebecca, a 28-year old professional from Mexico temporarily residing in Houston, she says:

*"I decided to move into an area where there are a lot of facilities close, shopping market, clubs and restaurants. I travel a lot for work so when I am in Houston I want to be able to meet"*



*people easily. I live in a large apartment building, where I am renting a unit. I do know some of my neighbours but they are not really my friends."*

Most single professionals choose to rent a residence and some even live in company-facilitated residences. Kraimer et al. (2009) suggest that expatriate retention, completion of the assigned term of the expatriate assignment, remains a challenging factor in these assignments. Because many international migrants are temporarily in a location adaptation can be a challenge. Renting a property rather than owning increases the transient nature of their current location (Kraimer et al., 2009). This makes place attachment difficult as well.

#### *Medium*

Single international professional migrants use various different mediums for social interaction. This group of international professional migrants is the most mobile and flexible in their social interactions. Many of them do not interact particularly often through Skype, phone or email with their family and friends back home. The professionals with families tend to talk more often to their home front than single professionals. Single professional migrants in Houston have the advantage of choosing to be relatively grounded locally due to their social interactions with local friends and acquaintances. They can also be relatively footloose because they don't have anyone or any specific network to keep their contacts local. Kevin, a 28-year-old professional from Australia, who has been in Houston for 3 years, says that the fact that he came to Houston alone enables him to easily make contact with new people:

*"I think I also get invited sooner to people's homes to celebrate holidays than a person with a family does. I really feel part of my group of friends here. I have got a few mates through work and through them I have met many other people, who I now consider friends too."*

This group of professional migrants tends to meet people while they go out to bars and clubs or when they join professional associations or associations for international professionals. The life cycle stage or age of single professional migrants may also impact the social contacts they have. Oscar, a 42-year-old British professional for example, finds there are many people his age who have a partner and children. He is therefore more likely to go out with younger people from his office. The club he joined for playing golf in Houston allows him to play with other men from his own age. Most single international professional migrants indicate they have more American friends in Houston than friends from other nationalities. Their local network is indeed mostly local, although many participants proclaim that their social life is often interrupted by constant travel and uncertain work hours, with little or no organizational support. This confirms the findings of Morley & Heraty (2009).

As a result of the travel many single professionals establish an international network of acquaintances mostly through work. Although they do often stay in touch only over email, as soon as they are bound to travel they get in touch with people from this network to reconnect. This network of transnational networking includes exchanging knowledge with other international locations that the home and host countries (Faist, 2008). Virtual instant messaging or voice-over-IP communication is essentially only used for friends and family. Most single professionals indicate that they are in touch with their relatives once per week on average.

#### *Location and nature*

The *location* of the social interaction of single international professional migrants in Houston is largely determined by the kind of social interaction and by the nature of the social interaction. As for the *nature* of the social interaction: most of the local friends and acquaintances (many of which met through work) are met in person in a public space. Appointments are usually set up through a phone call, an email or a text message. These public spaces for international professional migrants tend to be restaurants and golf courses mainly. Although golf in North America is not an elitist sport; accessible and popular (USGA, 2010), some golf courses may only be accessed once one is a member of a club or an invitee of a member. Segregation becomes observable here, because the height of membership fees often determine for whom a particular club is accessible (Putnam, 2000).

Friends and family in the home country are often called from the house or in a hotel room when single professional migrants are traveling. Many however report to not speak with their family often when they are away on business trips. The rushed schedule and time difference were given as reasons for this. Single professionals prefer to call their family and close in weekends or evenings from home. Friends often receive emails and less phone calls; family-members typically receive more phone calls than friends. Carrasco et al (2008) have also confirmed however that personal social networks can display some idiosyncratic characteristics; it is therefore difficult to determine whether the kind of social interaction one participant has with his family or close friends is similar to the social interaction that another participant with his family and friends. Furthermore, from a transport viewpoint, “the dependency of the spatial distribution of personal networks on aspects such as income and life cycle point to the relevance of studying the spatial distribution of individual’s social activities” (Carrasco et al., 2008).

Social interaction with strangers in Houston is for single professional migrants mostly in places to go out (i.e. clubs and bars) or in shopping locations (i.e. supermarket, shopping mall). Single professionals tend to adapt quite easily to the locational interactions. Many report it is easy to talk to clerks, and the customer service and friendliness of people in Houston’s shops is admirable. Omiros, a 31-year-old Greek professional finds that even though social interaction in his home country is very different from Houston, the international culture in his company enabled him to get used to American social interaction. Company culture may be very determining for adaptation to local social interaction (Kraimer et al., 2009).

#### *Experience*

As idiosyncratic as the personal networks of these professional migrants may be, so may their experiences be. Overall single professional migrants tend to be generally positive about their experience in Houston. Some are able to compare this location with their previous destinations. They tend to emphasize the amount of opportunities and choices available for almost anything as a major advantage. Others, on their first assignment largely compare the situation in Houston with their home country, where they see advantages and disadvantages.

Most single professional migrants see their assignment as another stepping-stone in their career. Emerging themselves with another culture, meeting new people, speaking English more fluently and more often, and learning from individuals with a very different background are important experiences that single professional migrants have mentioned. Most single professionals feel that acceptance in a society is the best way to increase local social interaction and ultimately become more attached to a location. All single professionals participating in this study feel accepted in Houston, and believe they are part of the city. Larry, a 53-year-old Irish professional portrays his feelings like this:

*“The American society is made up of so many different people that of course I feel accepted. I have a good life here. Houston is a work city however not a city to have fun. As long as you are willing to work hard, you can make a lot happen and you are accepted into this society quite easily.”*

#### PROFESSIONALS WITH PARTNER

Morley and Heraty (2004) suggest that the number of dual career couples has increased significantly over the last decades. This brings significant barriers and challenges with an assignment. In Houston six (6) of the participants who were on their assignment in Houston brought a partner (not married) or spouse (married) along with them. Although some of the partners were employed, many had participants stated that the relocation put a significant strain on the professional life of their partner. Other non-employed spouses spend time in Houston volunteering as social worker or guide, or study in Houston (PhD and MBA).

This category of international professional migrants tends to be less socially involved in clubs and groups and other organized activities than the other two categories. Perhaps this is due to the fact that there are not children to attain a certain amount of attachment to local institutions, but there is a

partner to spend time and socialize with and it is not as easy to be footloose from a residential location whilst living together with a partner.

Some of the professionals in this group are in a relatively early stage of their career and life cycle, others have children who are grown up and no longer 'attend' the assignments to foreign destinations. Patricia, a 45-year-old German international migrant arrived as a single professional migrant, but extended her assignment after meeting an American partner. Her status has changed since her arrival.

*"Due to the fact that I don't have children, I have always been free to go where I wanted. I went on several assignments, most of them in Europe; Switzerland, France, The Netherlands, before going to Houston. My situation has changed now, I have a partner and I dislike frequent traveling because we don't get to see each other much, and when we are both in Houston we like to spend time together instead of always socializing in a group or attending activities."*

A partner can affect the way professional migrants socialize: a partner can have a preference how and with who free time is spent. In addition, since it has been noted earlier that many professional migrants travel frequently, the time that both partners are in Houston is valuable and is more likely to be spent together instead of socializing with others. Many professional migrants with partner indicate that they prefer spending their free time with other couples. This permits both socializing with others as well as spending time with their own spouse or partner. In addition, corporate invitations for sporting events, games and other social and networking activities are vital in establishing meaningful social interaction. This provides the opportunity to bring a spouse along and extend the social network through work relations.

But a partner can also negatively impact the experience of a professional migrant. Partners who are coming along –also called *trailing spouses*- may have difficulties settling or finding meaningful employment. Especially when they had a successful career back home it may induce stress and negative experiences for both parties (Wang & Nayir, 2006). It can be particularly important for the spouses to establish meaningful interactions in order to take some of the stress on the principal professional migrant. The reason for the relocation was due to the latter's employment, so it better be good and worth it. "My husband has had a difficult time establishing himself" says 31-year-old Dutch professional migrant Ellen. In addition, she says:

*"Especially because he was a man traveling along with his wife for her job, was difficult for many people here in Houston to understand. There is a lot more traditional attitude towards these matters I find here. He has joined a few clubs before getting accepted into a PhD program at the University of Houston. Once he started his studies he developed his own network and contacts and it has been a lot better for both of us."*

Although Ellen's example may be not particularly common – a man trailing with his wife - this example shows that the local environment can play a key role in the acceptance process of a spouse. In addition to getting proper permits for a spouse finding a meaningful way of spending the time at a temporary location is very important for the international professional migrant. Many large corporations have recognized this need and extensive research has been done in this field (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Lepak & Snell, 1999; Suutari & Brewster, 2001, Mercer, 2009) and in the past few decades attempts have been made to also assist trailing spouses in the expatriate adjustment process.

In addition, organizations have been founded to increase the ability of spouses to get temporary work visas in host countries. Permits foundation for example attempts to promote changes for worldwide expatriate spouse employment (Permits Foundation, 2010). Large companies provide funding for this organization in order to petition and lobby for better circumstances for spouses of expatriates. The importance of the spousal situation cannot be underestimated when analyzing the social interactions of international professional migrants (Kraimer et al, 2009). When a spouse or partner increases their network, this also means a significant extension of the network of an international professional migrant. Given their frequent travel and long workdays the ability of the professional migrant to establish meaningful social interactions may be limited. Spouses can contribute to the local network and help maintaining the existing international ties (Morley & Heraty, 2004).

Similar to single professional migrants, professionals with partners interact in various different ways with friends, family and acquaintances. The added value of a partner on an assignment can be tremendous for some; while they do not have much time to invest in making new friendships and getting to know the neighbourhood, their partner or spouse may have that time. And if the partner is also employed, the experiences of both partners complement each other's, making the overall experience and the extension of their network much more valuable.

The social interaction with locals for professionals with partners really depends on to what extent they attempt to become part of local life. Those who purchased a house seemed to attempt to maintain more local contacts and neighbourhood friendships, stating that they speak with their neighbours at least once a week. Professionals with partners who are leasing or renting a residence are often less inclined to become close with their neighbours. Although some do attend a neighbour's party or barbeque none of the participants seemed really close with their neighbours. Most described their neighbours as acquaintances rather than friends. For this category of professionals with partners, joining clubs and groups is a very important mean to facilitate face-to-face social interaction. Some couples joined a running or tennis club together; others had mostly separate activities. This pattern tends to be an extension of how these couples lived in their previous or home country. If these professionals were unlikely to join a club in their home country, it is unlikely that they will do so here even though their local network of friends and family is considerably smaller. All interviewees stated that the array of opportunities is tremendous in Houston; it really depends on the time and travel frequency of professionals with partners how likely they are to join a club.

More than single professionals, professionals with partners are conscious of their travel schedule and frequency. They adjust their social interactions accordingly. The previously mentioned Dutch international migrant Ellen says she is more mindful of her travel patterns since the relocation to Houston, because she feels that spending quality time together as a couple is even more important in a foreign location. *"The busy schedule makes me want to invest my free-time in activities with my husband, rather than interacting with others. When I come home I am less likely to call local friends to meet up or chat."* The interaction medium is not differing so much from other categories of professionals as the location and nature of the interaction.

#### *Location and nature*

One of the differences between international professionals with partners and other categories of professionals was the *location* of their local social interactions. Many participants in this category indicated that time spent with local friends and acquaintances (including those from work), was in restaurants, bars and other semi-public spaces. The residential area thereby plays a relatively unimportant role for most. Yet, professionals with partners do think it is important to live in a good area, which is defined by some as 'clean, low crime rates, nice residences and nearby office and shops'. But social interactions often take place outside of the neighbourhood in which they live. Their radius of most frequent local social interaction is approximately 25 kilometers or a 20-minute drive.

The nature of the activity determines the kind social interaction professionals with partners have. As was noted in chapter 4, joining sports clubs or other arranged activities could lead to friendships and closer social interactions. Many professionals indicate that it remains difficult due to the temporality of their stay, to become very closely involved with other members or clubs and organizations.

*"I simply don't have the time to follow up on many of the new contacts I make, I am happy to be able to attend my weekly running-club as is. Even though I really enjoy spending time with some of those people, meetings usually don't go further than an annual barbeque at the end of the season",*

says Dutch professional Ellen, indicating that most of her acquaintances never become true friends mostly due to time restrictions, both due to frequent traveling as well as the temporal nature of the work assignment in Houston. Especially in comparison to the later discussed professionals with families, the location of the social interaction seems to have little to do with the residential

neighbourhood of professionals with partners. Most of their social interaction, apart from contact with the neighbours, takes place outside of the direct neighbourhood. This has obvious implications for local place attachment of professionals with partners as noted by Dahl & Sorenson (2009) and will be addressed in the next chapter.

#### *Experience*

The experience of professionals with partners in Houston can be analyzed as twofold: either an enriching experience or a challenge. Depending on the occupation of their partners and the experience of their partner, these professionals may like or dislike their assignment. If a partner has an occupation during the stay, whether it is employment or another activity, the network of the partner also extends. Both partners are extending their network and thus increasing their social interactions. In addition, it seems that in order to have a positive experience of local social interaction, professionals and their partners need to both have their own fulfillment locally. When both partners experience local fulfillment, the social interactions with the home country tend to decrease. This does not mean that all transnational communication and transnational activities diminish (Portes, 2002), but the decreasing social interaction can affect the transnationalization of professionals with partners (Faist, 2008).

Although their social interaction can be similar to single professionals in nature, location and medium, the fact that there is a significant other who can influence the type, location, nature and frequency of the social interaction of these professionals should not be underestimated (Morely & Heraty, 2004). It is important to consider the situation of the spouse or partner in the experience of professionals with partners, because even more so than professionals with families, these partners can determine the success or disappointment of an international assignment in Houston.

#### PROFESSIONALS WITH FAMILIES

Professionals with families in Houston tend to have a more established network than other categories of international professionals, as was suggested in the theoretical chapter. Institutions tend to be linked to children and through the children also linked to their parents (Stueve et al., 1975). Although the situation for international migrants and their families may have changed upon arrival in Houston, children tend to make it much easier to become acquainted to the neighbours. In addition, their children cause this category of international professionals to be more locally oriented and more focused on their neighbourhood. In comparison to other international professionals in Houston, those with families tend to spend more time in their residential area and have more frequent social interactions with their neighbours.

When asked about the differences in daily life with their children in Houston in comparison with their daily life in their home country the answers were diverse. For those from countries relatively close in culture with the United States, the reply tended to be that the difference was relatively small. Canadian professional David, who moved to Houston with his wife and two children says:

*"I find the culture very similar to Canada, we miss the language diversity that Toronto had for us. Our children are going to elementary school and junior high school here in Houston, but speak very little French anymore. In Canada we had them enrolled in a French immersion program, where half of their classes were taught in French. At their school here they don't learn Spanish, although it may be useful here."*

Here, besides the cultural similarities or differences, the physical (and built-) environment and the city structure begin to play an important role also. Whereas Canadian cities tend to be much closer in shape and urban form, to American cities such as Houston (Jacobs, 1961), European cities tend to have a different urban form and transportation network (Priemus, 2002). European internationals have a different experience with their children in Houston than Asian or North-American international professionals.

The 38-year-old British international professional Alan, who is living in Houston with his wife and three children finds that children have a lot less independence in North American cities. *"Back in England, my children could walk by themselves to a lot of places. Here, the children are dependent on my wife to*

*drive them and they get to school by a school bus.”* Many international professionals believe that Houston is not more or less safe than any other large city in the world. *“London has over double the population of Houston, if anything, the spread out nature of the suburbs in Houston creates a safe and green environment for my children”,* says Alan. Even though the low density of Houston as was described in Chapter 4, may result into transportation and distance difficulties it may also provide opportunities for a very friendly neighbourhood environment.

As previously mentioned, participants of this study confirmed that contacts with neighbors tend to be more frequent and social contacts in general tend to be more local as a result of coming on an assignment with a family. Bhaskar, a 49-year-old Indian international professional states that his wife is the main reason that he has established an extensive local network.

*“We are connected to over a hundred families from India here in Houston. Because we are part of this network here we have to often go to obligations such as graduations, birthdays and other social attendances... Almost every night of the week is filled up with obligations and our agenda is always filled... I complain to my wife about all the obligations we have, but if it wasn't for her I wouldn't have established much of a social life here.”*

In addition, through his daughter's school sports team, he got invited for a small book club with other parents. Although there are many social clubs in Houston for internationals and expats, Bhaskar says he does not feel the need to join them. The local focus of children can result in their parents to be more locally oriented too. International professionals with families are less often member of a social club for internationals, unless it is a professional network. This is perhaps due to the fact that through their local area and connections to institutions, international professionals with families tend to already meet many people and establish a local network. This relinquishes the necessity to join clubs and groups in order to establish a local social network.

When comparing the situation of British professional Alan with the Indian professional Bhaskar, it becomes evident that the home country and culture can be very determining in how they experience their life and social interactions in the new environment. The assignment abroad is always placed in a frame of reference for the particular professional that is build up of their personal background and their native culture as was suggested in the conceptual model in Chapter 3 of this study. This also has an effect on how their new local social capital comes into existence. Their social interactions and the extent of those social interactions are also determined by personal background, including family composition and life cycle stage. Bhaskar is a little over 10 years older than Alan, but due to his daughter also in a very different phase. Bhaskar's daughter is already 22 and studying medicine in Austin, so no longer part of their household or even in such close proximity that he is able to see her on a daily basis. Although some of his friends and acquaintances may have initially resulted from his daughter's connection to local institutions, his new and current social interactions are no longer a result of this.

Alan's situation is very different; his children are in elementary school. He takes his son to baseball practice twice a week and assists the coach during competitions. With a few of the other fathers from the baseball team he occasionally gets together for a drink. Once per year they go golfing together for a weekend. *“It's great that activities with my children have lead to meeting so many great people. I never would have thought that. Due to my busy job I lack time to really invest much in friendships, but with my son's baseball I can spend time with him and enjoy seeing the other adults”,* says Alan. Perhaps for international professionals with younger children the network of the partner is less important for their social interactions than the interactions that result from the children's activities and from places that are visited because of the children (i.e. parks or public swimming pools). This confirms that life-cycle stage and family composition are important factors for the local social interaction of international professional migrants in Houston as was asserted in the conceptual model in Chapter 3. In addition, younger children compel their parents to be more involved in the local network automatically.

*Medium*

As a result of the amount of time spend with their family and the assistance that children require in their daily lives, the primary medium for the social interactions of this group of international



professional migrants tends to be local. The local social interactions involve colleagues at work, friends and acquaintances often met through their professional network or through their children's network. When getting together with other families international professional migrants with families in Houston state that they are mostly invited over for dinner (i.e. barbecue or dinner at home) or to go on a trip. Clemont, a 43-year-old French international with two children says *"It seems to me like there are a lot of people in Houston who, or their friends and family, have a summer home somewhere else, which really you can use all through the year, because of the weather. Sometimes we get invited to join for a weekend with our children."*

International contact for international professionals with families tends to be mostly with their family back home (i.e. parents, grandparents and siblings). Some international professionals have traveled as children or grew up living in a few different countries. Some of them tend to stay in touch with their 'mobile' friends. Calling family and friends many families use telephone, some use Skype with a webcam. Professionals with families tend to travel back home less often than other groups of international professional migrants. In this study, most participants in Houston say that family more often pays them a visit when they are living abroad.

#### *Location and nature*

Most international professional migrants in Houston, including those with families tend to spend most of their time in the western parts of the city. As seen in chapter 4, these are typically the more affluent areas and this tends to correspond with the profile of many international professional migrants. One of these areas is the Galleria area, which many participants confirm they visit frequently (3 to 4 times a week, some even more often). One professional says *"Outside of my neighbourhood, I live in Bellaire, I mostly go to the Galleria area because of the shops and because my wife works there."* When his children need to be picked up or driven to practice, they often meet in the Galleria area so that one of the parents can take them. Unless children attend a private school, their parents are bound to send them to a school in the residential area. For each residential area there are designated schools within that district (Houston County Board of Education, 2010).

For visiting friends or new acquaintances this category tends to visit mostly suburban areas. Previously mentioned Indian professional Bhaskar says; *"My friends in Houston don't necessarily live in my residential neighbourhood. They live all over the place but mostly in suburban areas. We live in Windermere, but we have lots of friends in Clear Lake for example."* Clear Lake, mentioned in Chapter 4 with regards to its close proximity to the NASA Space Center, is one of the residential areas that gets frequently mentioned by participants of this study, besides the Bellaire, West-University and Uptown/Galleria area. *"I also frequently visit Clear Lake because we lived there for a while when we arrived here and we know many people there"* says 45-year-old British professional Becci. When asked what their favorite area in Houston is, many participants responded it was the area they lived or the Galleria/uptown area. Perhaps the familiarity with areas in a new urban environment results to a certain extend in appreciation. One of the participants stated that he *"used to drive 175 miles to Austin every other weekend for a Saturday lunch with an old colleague from back home."* This type of response is quite uncommon for this category because these people do tend to spend more time in town during the weekends, with their family and friends or at an occasional professional invitation to a sports game.

#### *Experience*

The experience of their social interaction is quite different for international professional with families than for the other categories of international professionals in Houston. Although this cannot be said about all international professionals with families, these international professionals tend to be much more locally embedded. They attend more local groups, are more involved in local community life, often have a partner who can help to establish a local network and lastly due to their children come into contact with other adults.

The experience varies quite a bit depending on whether the children attend an international school, or are enrolled in the local school system. Those who are enrolled in the local school system meet more locals through their children and tend to partake in more local festivities. International professionals

who send their children to international schools have a network consisting of much more other internationals. In addition, the tuition for the schools is often fairly steep (Houston County Board of Education, 2010), resulting in exclusion of certain groups in the education system. The children of these international professional migrants are much more likely to become friends with a German school friend than a Hispanic child. Their parents, as a result, tend to be more involved with others in the international circuit. This can be beneficial for the experience, because other internationals 'know what it's like' to be from somewhere else and experience what they are experiencing (Wang & Nayir, 2007).

To the question whether or not they had become part of the society and adapted to the culture or not, one of the international professionals states: *"Well we celebrate some of the holidays - does that count? Living in different countries previously, of course we have adapted to all of the local cultures at least a little bit."* A few of the participants of this study had lived in other places than their home country prior to coming to Houston. *"My favourite thing about Houston is the multiple festivals year round, you really get to experience a city that way. Our family tries to participate in those, for example at the dance festival every year in April. It makes us feel part of society here"* says another professional. Many internationals felt that while they stayed true to their cultural background, it was inevitable to take over some of the local culture in order to adapt. *"My family is the most important to me, we try to retain some of our practices from back home, but adjusting to the local culture is a necessity to feel at home"*. This of course has an impact on their personal background and cultural experience and as a result on their social interactions and they way these international professionals go about them.

#### *Professional social interaction in Houston*

An interesting aspect of international professional migrants is their experience with social interaction in the workplace. Much of this is determined by the company culture (Kraimer et al., 2009; Morely & Heraty, 2004) as became evident in Chapter 3 of this study. Given the amount of time international professionals in Houston spend in their professional environment (Schor, 1991), social interactions in the work place can be particular important to them in order to establish a new local network (Kraimer et al., 2009).

As for the workplace experience international professional migrants in Houston, many report a very different experience when compared to the professional environment in their country of origin. For example; when compared to many European countries, international professionals in Houston indicated that there seems to be less tolerance for misunderstanding or incompetence at work places in the US. One of the Canadian professionals migrants says:

*"Making the transition professionally was more of a cultural shift than I expected, and thus I was challenged immediately to adjust my expectations. Punctuality was more important, however dress code was less important."*

Again, it seems surprising how the professional differences are seemingly large even for Canadian professionals, whose professional culture is arguably the closest to the United States (Hiller, 2009). Other international professionals seem to agree when it comes to this professional difference. Many Europeans noted the informal way of going about professional relations. German professional migrant Jörg says that he believes the informal professional relations took some time for him to adjust to.

Another characteristic of Houston that arose when discussing the professional social interactions is the large car dependency. The new mobilities paradigm accounts to some extent for the changes in social interaction as a result of transportation technologies. Sheller and Urry (2004) have stated that: "auto mobility impacts not only local public spaces and opportunities for coming together, but also impacts the formation of gendered subjectivities, familial and *social networks*, spatially segregated urban neighbourhoods, national images and aspirations". The form that private as well as professional social interactions take as a result of this large car dependency, is somewhat altered by this reality also. Typically, the United States has very few carpoolers and the large distances result in much time being spent alone in the car; valuable time for the international professional migrant to invest in their new local network and social interactions.

International professionals in Houston claim that car dependency and the extended workweek cause them to spend more time with their colleagues in the car to a meeting or to go for lunch. *“It is much easier to discuss private matters with colleagues when you are driving in a car and the situation is relatively informal”* says British professional Becci, who claims to have met most of her private network through her professional environment initially. This seems to be very common for international professionals in Houston; many of them state that their network is largely made up of people who they have met through work. This reinforces the importance of the professional environment for successful expatriate assignments as Kraim et al. (2009) have emphasized.

Company culture can provide an environment that enables the international professionally to interact much more easily with other local colleagues and other professionals, when they have been prepared well. Significant adaptation problems are seen to make it difficult to operate effectively, especially in the early part of the assignment (Morley & Heraty, 2004). When international professionals have been informed and educated prior to their assignment about the cultural differences, many international professionals claim it helps them with their social interactions and ultimately their adjustment process. But despite the above concerns, some international professionals state that due to the international company culture their company has, the differences at work were relatively minor or non-existent.

#### 5.4 SOCIAL INTERACTION IN THE HAGUE

Now that the three different categories have been discussed for Houston; single professionals, professionals with partners (trailing spouses), and professionals with families, it is time to discuss the same categories for The Hague. Although there are some similarities in the social interaction of international professionals living in The Hague in comparison to Houston, it will become evident over the next few paragraphs that the differences in experience are quite large. The average stay of the international professionals in this study in The Hague was 4.8 years, slightly longer than the Houston sample. Although a few professionals stayed in The Hague much longer than initially planned, most professionals were in The Hague for approximately 3 years. The temporality of their stay is thought to affect these international migrants in their social interaction and place attachment (Kraimer et al., 2009). Many international professionals in The Hague note that most of their colleagues are international. If most colleagues have an international background, it may indicate that (international-) company culture may have a more profound impact on their experience of the social interactions because the difference between their professional social interactions and their private social interactions (after work) may be more significant than in Houston. In Houston, most international professionals indicated that their colleagues are mostly Americans. In their professional environment, international professionals in The Hague could thus have fewer opportunities for social interaction with Dutch natives.

The participants of this study lived quite spread throughout The Hague. Many single professional migrants and professionals with partners prefer a residential location in- or in close proximity to the city center of The Hague. International professionals with families tend to also live in the neighborhoods bordering the city center or the more suburban parts of The Hague and surrounding communities (such as Wassenaar). The location of the school of the children of these international professionals with families frequently impacted the choice for a residential location. The residential locations in this sample of The Hague are much more spread out over the city than Houston's sample. There are a few areas that these international professionals tend to avoid. Around the train station in The Hague, as seen in chapter 4, these areas have mostly been developed after the 1950s. In these areas there is a large percentage of non-western immigrants and the housing prices tend to be a lot lower (Priemus, 2002). Most of the international professionals of this study, are not concerned with housing prices given their education levels and salaries. This confirms with the findings of Morley and Heraty (2004), who have indicated that most international professional migrants receive substantial financial rewards for their assignment and the median income of an international professional is well above the country's median.

#### SINGLE PROFESSIONALS

Single international professional migrants in The Hague mostly live in central areas of town. Because they did not go on their assignment with a family, it is not important for them to be in close proximity

to schools or live in an area that is safe for children or that has playgrounds nearby. The central areas such as the city center area, Bezuidenhout, Zeeheldenkwartier, Regentessenkwartier and the Archipelbuurt, are areas that have been indicated in Chapter 4 to be popular areas for international professionals to reside. The central location and close proximity to work were given as principal reasons for choosing this area by this category of international professionals. Because there are no family members who joined these people on their assignment, they are in relative freedom to choose how to spend their free time while in The Hague. As a result, many of the participants of this study belonging to this category suggested that they take as much time as possible to explore the country. As a result free weekends are often spend traveling around, both nationally as well as in Europe. Financial means to accommodate this lifestyle are available to most of these international professionals and perhaps needless to indicate; international professionals from other countries of Europe – including Eastern Europe- do not indicate they travel as much as non-European international professionals in The Hague.

#### *Medium*

The medium and kinds of contacts (i.e. international, local, virtual) that single international professionals in The Hague are quite often exclusively with other internationals. There are various possible explanations for this. Firstly, single international professionals who do not speak Dutch can feel very isolated, and for people who share the language barrier it is easier to connect. In addition, other international professionals are in the same boat. Discussing the experience of the Dutch culture, the people and professional life with them is much easier than establishing those types of social interaction with locals. And thirdly, to repeat again that the temporality of their stay frequently makes it difficult to establish thorough local social interactions. It is much easier to do this with other internationals whose stay is also temporal and who are also looking to meet new contacts.

Although locals may be interested in meeting new people, the established network they have can make it difficult for international professionals to enter (Kraimer et al., 2009). The international assignment makes many international professionals very excited to meet other people. Social interactions with locals but especially also with other internationals can enrich their assignment experience (Wang & Nayir, 2008; Kraimer et al. 2009; Morley & Heraty, 2004). Inga, a 26-year-old professional from Estonia says:

*“I have also become a lot more open as a person. I found it really difficult when I just arrived, because it took time to find real ‘friends’ instead of just acquaintances and people from the office. My Dutch is decent by now, and have friends in different phases of their life and from various nationalities – I didn’t have that back home, where I was very much in a friendship comfort zone and didn’t really put myself out there to meet new people.”*

Not only locals in The Hague seem to be following the pattern of maintaining their established local network without too much time and space for newly acquired (international-) friends; Inga is stating that back home she was in the same situation. But by entering a new environment (physical and social) it becomes much more of a necessity for these international professional migrants to go out and establish a local network and new friendships (Portes, 2002). International professionals are virtually forced to engage in new social interaction and enter a local network in order to establish local social capital (Portes, 1996). And similar to the way new immigrants prefer to reside in an area where people with a comparable (cultural, ethnic) background tend to reside – a process called *chain migration* – do these international migrants tend to surround themselves either physically or socially with other international professional migrants.

Furthermore, many internationals in this study indicate that they believe that many locals are not keen on having many international professionals reside in their area. One of the international professionals, living in the Archipelbuurt says: *“My neighbor has openly said she does not like the fact that so many internationals live in her street, because of the temporal nature of their stay and because they frequently travel.”* In addition, he says that the neighborhood is sometimes nicknamed the ‘Shell-Archipel’ due to the large percentage of Shell employees residing in the area. The neighbor’s reaction

can be understood: frequent travels and temporal stays do not exactly contribute durably to the social capital of the neighborhood and to the place attachment of its residents (Dahl & Sorenson, 2008). The residential locations of the international professionals of this study will be further explored in the next chapter on place attachment.

#### *Location and nature*

None of the participants of this study (in The Hague or in Houston) responded to this question that their friend lives in the same geographical location. Even if an international professional has been on many assignments, he or she is still likely to answer their best friend lives in the home country. This could be due to the fact that these international professionals are only staying or have only been staying in The Hague for a short period of time. But for some of these international professionals, it could also have something to do with retaining part of their background by hanging onto memories and a certain degree of *nostalgia* when thinking about their home country (Portes, 2002). Single professional migrants in The Hague who participated in this study said to invest 4 hours per week on average to stay in touch with friends and family in their home country. But of course living in a location is not possible without local social interactions. As for the local social interactions, single international professional migrants who work in a Dutch professional environment rather than an international professional environment (company culture), are more likely to establish a larger local social network as a result of their professional and private social interactions.

Elena, a 31-year-old Russian international professional enjoys the social get-togethers of her Dutch friends. She has been in the Netherlands for almost 5 years and feels like she has established a sound local network. Her social interactions with Dutch locals were mostly established when she was in a relationship with a Dutch man. He would take her to parties of friends and family, which she experienced as: *“Gezellig – I don’t really know a literal translation for it, but it describes a general environment and situation of contentedness and coziness with friends or family.”* Despite the international air The Hague has, Elena really felt part of the local culture as a result of the social interaction with Dutch people. She estimates that about half of her local social network is Dutch and the other half is international, also as a result of her work for a large international organization.

Local social interaction with acquaintances and strangers is by many international professionals experienced as blunt in The Hague. Paul, the 44-year-old single professional from Britain says: *“The Dutch have no qualms telling it as it is.”* But even though many international professionals experience this as a shock upon arrival, most participants of this study express their appreciation for the Dutch directness of telling you as it is, as long as they have somewhat of a social affinity with the person such as a colleague or friend. Elena says: *“I really have no problem with people telling me what they have a problem with, this makes me able to be better professionally as well as in friendships. But strangers telling me how I should or should not do something is occasionally unacceptable for me here.”*

Elena also enjoys the contact with her neighbours a lot. *“When I leave my house to go to work I always run into my neighbour because he is walking his dog. We chat a little bit before I take off, I really enjoy that moment of my day, and it gives me a feeling of home.”* That feeling of home can create a sense of belonging that can be very important for an international professional to engage in further social interaction with locals. Always feeling like an outsider will not encourage newcomers to participate in local social activities and social interactions with people whom they are not very familiar with. Overall most international professionals experience The Hague’s local residents as friendly. *“Complete strangers acknowledge and greet each other in stores, elevators or doctors’ waiting rooms”,* says Tanisha, 36-years-old from Nigeria.

#### *Experience*

Most single international professionals of this study were raving about their assignment experience in The Hague, whether they had been previously assigned elsewhere or not. This may be due to a bias in the sample; perhaps only happy international professionals are willing to share their experiences for this study. But it may also be due to the social and physical environment surrounding them in The Hague. Single professionals were a lot more explicit about their experiences with the local environment in The Hague in comparison to Houston. Given the experiences that were collected in this sample, for

many international professionals of this study the latter seems to be the case. One of the international professional directly links their experience of the local environment with her social behavior, she says:

*"I love biking to the market on Saturday to get great fresh vegetables and fish and spot the best deals. In turn, I cook a wider range of meals than I have done in the past, but I also eat out a lot more in The Hague. It is much cheaper than back home and I am much more social here."*

But the participants of this study appreciate not only the physical environment but also the social environment: Holly, 24-year-old Australian communications professional states:

*"I really appreciate the fact that retailers in The Netherlands have the drive and confidence to open stores dedicated to specific items that you cannot imagine would be profitable enough to maintain them, such as teapots, beads or travel books. When people are passionate about something they can talk to you in a store with an enthusiasm that makes you forget about the time."*

Despite the fact that many professionals complain about the level of customer service in The Hague, the above example shows that some social interaction is seen as positive: as soon as the retailer or sales person invests enough time and effort in the social interaction it is out of the ordinary in The Hague. This is very different from the responses of interviewees in Houston. As previously mentioned, in Houston most international migrants were very pleased with local customer service and friendliness. Research has indicated that these expatriates in The Hague spend 400 million Euros per year in the local area; which would seem reason enough to be considerate and invest that time (Colebrander, Tienbee, 2008). Lastly Paul, IT professional from Great Britain says: *"the people and work life balance in The Hague is something that is to be admired by many nations"*. The experience of the social interaction of most single international professionals in The Hague seems generally very positive and diverse.

#### PROFESSIONALS WITH PARTNERS

Professionals with partners in The Hague in this study seemed to have fewer problems obtaining a work visa or permit for their (trailing) spouses than their counterparts in Houston. Despite the efforts made by organizations such as the previously mentioned Permits Foundation, there are still trailing spouses here too that are unable to work. This can put a strain on the expatriate assignment (Kraim et al., 2009). Professionals with partners are most spread over The Hague; their residential presence is hard to define. Some live in the city center close to all amenities, others live in suburban areas on the fringes of The Hague. The choice of residential location for this category depends on proximity to work and access to shops, services and leisure activities.

#### *Medium*

Professionals with partners use the same communication means as other international professionals. In most cases, professionals in this category and their partners seem to attempt to maintain a connection with their home country or country of origin. Depending on whether or not the trailing spouse is locally employed or not, the time that is invested in this may differ. Local connections tend to decrease the amount of global connections, although it has no effect on the phone calls and emails to close friends and family (Mok et al., 2005). Similar to Houston, Skype is a very popular and widely used method of communication for this category. Some professionals even use Skype to stay in touch with their local friends.

Professionals with partners are relatively quick (in comparison to other categories of international professionals in The Hague) in establishing a basic local network, many of them reported to have at least 5-10 friends within the first 4 months of their assignment. The advantage of being together on an assignment is that both partners can build their network. They also tend to have more time for family-external activities, because they do not have to take care of children (anymore). Local friends and acquaintances are more frequently found through work and through the extended network of local friends and colleagues. Older participants, without children or whose children are already independent



tend to join local (international-) book clubs and sport clubs alike. Many international professionals in The Hague indicate that joining a club can be vital in establishing a new local social network as a result of the social interactions at a club or event. Another frequently mentioned way to find meaningful social interactions is Dutch classes, where of course other internationals in a similar or comparable can be found.

As for social interaction with acquaintances and strangers, professionals with partners most often made the following type of comment about the service industry of The Hague:

*"...I noticed right away in my social interactions with local Dutch people is 'Dat kan niet' ('It's not possible') – a classic customer service strategy employed by many retailers in The Hague said in an uncaring, nonchalant way, really used to upset me when I just arrived here."*

Perhaps this perception of 'uncaring' and 'nonchalance' is the interpretation of the international professional migrant (Vossestein, 2004), but what stood out is that many international professionals who participated in this study made such a comment when discussing the social interactions with strangers and acquaintances in The Hague.

#### *Location and nature*

The private social interactions are frequently with friends and acquaintances in the local area. Although professionals with partners in The Hague tend to know people from many different residential areas (for example through work), they tend to be friends with or most closely acquainted to people who live in closer proximity to them. The fact that closer friends tend to live closer as well, in an urban area corresponds with the findings of Wellman et al. (1990).

*"The area of The Hague that we live in is simply lovely. We chose not to buy our home but rent it, as seems to be quite common here. Housing is rather expensive in this country since land and space are limited in the low lands. There are plenty of homes available, but you will pay a premium for the space, whether you are renting or buying."*

But she does not feel that renting their home has an impact on their social interaction with neighbors. On the contrary, Agnes believes that they have much more contact with their current neighbors than they did back home. But she thinks that it may depend on the area that you live in. *"Our neighborhood is outside the center and relatively small, so people easily get to know each other. I can see how it would be different for internationals living in the center of town"*, she says. Carrasco et al. (2008) state that personal networks of people are affected by both their surrounding area (i.e. neighbourhood) as well as their social activities and travel patterns. Agnes however, travels outside of The Hague for work to another area (Westland) and on her trip to work barely encounters anyone. Her social interactions are largely determined by her social activities because to, from and at work she does not feel like she has met a lot of new friends. Therefore the neighbourhood that Agnes and her husband live in however, contributes greatly to their social interaction experience in The Hague, because she does not meet as many people at work (Forrest, 1974). A neighbourhood can thus be quite important for the social interaction of an international professional migrant in The Hague.

#### *Experience*

Although it is difficult to determine to what extent the change in life style and experience of social interactions are caused by the change in environment of the international professional migrants of this study, it is important to point out that the physical environment does play an important role. One of the international professionals in The Hague for example says: *"My lifestyle has changed since living in The Hague. Back home, I used to drive to work for an hour, get home, make dinner, watch TV then go to bed and basically live for the weekend...here I cycle 10 minutes to get to work"*. Distances are smaller in The Hague, offices are often in closer proximity to residences and different transportation means used (bike instead of car or public transit instead of a car) to get to work all significantly alter the overall experience of living in The Hague as well as the social interactions. How much however these different transportation modes and small distances affect the social interactions of international professionals is difficult to quantify. Chris, a 58-year-old international diplomat from Great Britain says:

*"I still congratulate myself on not having to be in a car. I also socialize a lot in the early evening after work – a quick drink with some colleagues, a dinner with a friend or my wife, or a concert or late-night shopping on a Thursday. I feel like your life is a lot less prescribed here, that makes it easier to interact with others."*

Chris and his wife no longer have children at home to tend to. They are in a later life cycle-stage. This could make them attend different sorts of social activities. Chris indicates him and his wife enjoy going to see plays or classical concerts. Being a diplomat most of his life, their family got used to multiple assignments. His wife is teaching at international school and has recently applied to work at the International School of The Hague, visas and work permits have never been a problem since they mostly resided in other European Union countries. He says the living environment in The Hague (Chris and his wife live right in the center of town) has been their most pleasant international assignment so far. Before this assignment, he was sent abroad to Belgium, but the larger car dependency and distances made it difficult for them to connect with others and establish a social network. The international culture of The Hague, the many international professionals working in The Hague make it easier for him and his wife to connect here and establish a network in a relatively short time period. This being said, most of the local social network of Chris and his wife consists of other international professionals.

Another question the participants had to answer in during the interview was if they had any suggestions or tips to make it easier for new international professionals to establish themselves in The Hague. Two suggestions stood out the most, as many participants of this study gave these:

- ☑ *"Learn the language. You may never have a real need to speak Dutch, but the locals will be so impressed that you made the effort."* (Helen, 51, Finland)
- ☑ *"Travel! Even though The Netherlands is a small country there is so much to see and take in. Spend time seeing it all."* (Megan, 28, Canada)

From the most advises that the international professionals in The Hague gave it becomes evident that many try to make as much out of the opportunity to explore the people, the country and the continent. Of course, balancing the exploration and free time with professional objectives remains a challenge for international professionals as Kraimer et al. (2009) and Morley & Heraty (2004) have found. Another advice useful for establishing more local social interaction was to join clubs and social events in order to meet people. Depending on their need to meet more people and enlarge their network international professionals with partners join clubs and events. But similar to Houston, this category of international professionals is least bound by the (social) environment of the host city, because the two partners came on the assignment together. Depending partially on the occupation of the spouse this group tends to socialize with other internationals or with friends and acquaintances in the local neighborhood.

#### PROFESSIONALS WITH FAMILIES

Professionals with families in The Hague find themselves in a similar situation as international professionals in Houston: their children are an important link or connection to a local social network as a result of social interactions. Due to the smaller distances however, children (including those of international professionals) in countries with a dense urban pattern such as the Netherlands have a relatively high spatial independence and mobility (Fyhri & Hjorthol, 2009; Christensen & O'Brien, 2004; Alton et al., 2006). This does not mean however, that professionals with families are not involved in their children's lives at all. Depending on the age of the child, parents still need to accompany them to various locations. International schools in The Hague often have extracurricular activities organized outside and in close proximity to school (ISH, 2010).

*Medium*

Depending on their residential location, participants of this study with a family gave quite diverse responses as to how they are interacting with others, both global and local. Some participants

responded that, given the fact that they had been away from their home country for a long time, they did not keep very intimate contact with many friends and family back home. Some family members were called on average twice per month. Email contact tends to be a bit more frequent, but does not seem to replace telephone interactions; it is rather complementing existing interactions. This corresponds with the findings of Wellman et al. (1990). Families who had not quite been away for that long, or whose The Hague was first assignment of, tended to stay in touch a lot more with friends and family back home.

In addition, some of these participants attempt to stay in touch with professional acquaintances and colleagues during their assignment. Most global social interactions for this group take place through telephone and email. Almost all international professionals with families indicated that staying in touch with friends and family back home as well as staying in touch with their family is much easier as a result of the Internet and communication technologies. Sheller and Urry (2002) have recognized the complexity that comes with this, because it means balancing interactions on both short and long geographic distances.

Social interactions locally are often subjected to a cultural difference (Portes, 2002). Many international professionals of this study most easily establish new ties and relationships with other internationals. Given the temporality of their stay, some of these international professionals have difficulty establishing and maintaining friendships. 54-Year-old geophysicist Steve from the United States, who has a daughter and has divorced since his arrival to The Netherlands attributes this difficulty to that fact that he has always lived in different places. *"They call us TCK's, third culture kids",* he says: *"I never really feel like I am really at home in any country, but it makes me quick and eager to adapt to wherever I am, as long as it is with the people I care about."* Upon his divorce, Steve decided to remain in The Hague where his ex-wife and daughter live. He sees his daughter every other long weekend. *"My divorce has forced me to make a decision to stay in The Netherlands, but I enjoy living here and I think The Hague is a great city for a child to grow up."* The fact that children can foster greater neighborhood dependence also becomes clear from Steve's example because his neighbor was very pleased to see him move into the house with a family. Even though she was not very fond of many internationals living in her area due to the frequent traveling and short stays, she enjoyed the fact that her new neighbor had children. To her, as a local resident, children meant that her neighbors would be home more often, even though it did not make up for the limited term stays.

Daily social interactions with local residents can be challenging also. Megan, a 28-year old professional migrant who is working as a communications consultant in The Hague and moved to The Netherlands with her husband and newborn son says:

*"I think most newcomers working here, especially those with a North American background, will be initially taken aback by the "directness" of the Dutch. However I came to find it endearing once I realized it wasn't meant to be insulting."*

Along with Megan, many other international professionals with families commented on the directness in local social interactions. However, it seems as though those with families tend to look further than just the directness or bluntness and put it in a larger context. *"In Canada we tend to be so far in the other direction, it's refreshing to be able to speak one's mind without having to skirt anything for the sake of tact."* Perhaps this is due to the fact that some of these international professionals with families tend to have more local friends and ties and get to know the local social interactions in a different way than simply services and shop local social interactions.

#### *Location and nature*

Professionals with families seemed most compelled to frequent other areas due to their children. Not only do some of them have to visit a gym or book club outside of the neighborhood, they visit other areas for the school of their children, and neighborhoods where friends (of their children) reside. Since many international professionals let their children attend an international school in order to make the repatriation process or move to a different assignment much more smoothly, friends of the children were spread over various areas of the city. This mostly concerns the areas in the northern and western

part of The Hague, with as many as 28 percent citizens from other industrialized countries in the Willemspark en Benoordenhout areas of The Hague (City of The Hague, Statistics 2009).

With regards to local social interactions with acquaintances and strangers, most professionals in this category said that they shopped in their local area and were familiar with some of the shopkeepers. Other professionals in this category stated that their spouse or significant other mostly took care of the shopping. 51-year-old international professional Helen says: *“I use more services: laundry, tailor, etc. they’re cheaper than in Finland. I have a good relationship with many of the business owners and most Dutch are very friendly and helpful once you get to know them.”* The more frequent international professionals shopped or visited an area, the more it seems like they felt acquainted with the people and the area. This may lead to a better understanding of local social interactions, but requires plenty of time – time many international professionals do not always have.

#### *Experience*

Many similarities can be found between the experiences of international professionals with families and other categories of professional migrants in The Hague. These professionals tend to live in the same areas, though there are some slight differences (often professionals without children live closer to the city center relative to professionals with families) – the areas frequented for social interactions tend to be very similar. Depending on the residential environment, but also the (international-) culture of the company professionals with families can have different social interactions. In addition, their children provide a different setting and a different mean of social interaction. The close proximity of stores, offices and recreational facilities make it easy to get around and explore other areas of the city. Professionals with families do this, but the visits are generally restricted to the more wealthy areas of The Hague, a similar pattern can be observed in Houston.

The social interactions with locals often depend on how international professionals with families live and where their children go to school. The difference between an international school and a regular local school is tremendous: it facilitates a whole different social setting for the children as well as their parent. The educational setting can also be determining for the free time activities of the children and travel patterns of the parents as a result (Christensen & O’Brian, 2004; Fyhri & Hjorthol, 2009; Harrison et al., 2004). Because children also force parents to quickly adapt to the local social setting, this process occasionally facilitates the extent of the initial local social interactions and the swiftness of local place attachment for these professionals with families. The fact that The Netherlands is a suitable location for children to accompany the international professional on their assignment is recognized by almost all of the international professionals of this study with families.

*“The upsides are tremendous. That list includes the ease of travel, the cultural family focus, the relative safety (very little violent crime in the city) of the country, and the beautiful countryside.”*

But similar to any physical relocation, adjusting to The Hague takes time for all international professionals, regardless of their life-cycle stage or family composition. The larger the cultural differences are the longer it tends to take in order to adjust to local customs and feel at home (Portes, 2002). International professional Billy from Trinidad who has two teenage children says:

*“Like any new place, it’s important to give it some time to really feel settled. I would say it took us at least six months before we felt comfortable and at home, and I consider that to be pretty quick. It’s worth the wait because The Hague really is a great city when you get to know your way around.”*

Many of the international professionals with families appreciate their local neighborhood and especially contact with the neighbors. While some professionals in other categories often responded they did not have as much contact with their local neighbors, almost all professionals with families reported to speak to their neighbors at least once or twice per week. *“We truly enjoy our neighbors and our associates, we feel accepted and we are comfortable here”* says 28-year-old Megan. It was an exciting prospect for most of the international professional migrants of this study to learn about and participate in the local customs of The Hague before and upon arrival. *“Participation and social*

*interaction with locals add richness to the experience of living in a different country*", says Billy, who tries to balance his local friends with other internationals. Some of the local downsides that participants of this study mentioned are the winter weather and the lack of space, the latter being primarily a concern to most Anglo-Saxon participants.

#### PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL INTERACTION IN THE HAGUE

Most of the participants of this study worked for international organizations and international corporations. The Dutch working culture is thus difficult to determine for them as they mostly experience an international work environment dictated by people with a great variety of cultural backgrounds. The participants of this study who did work in a more 'Dutch' setting such as Paul (British, 44-years-old) and Agnes (Polish, 29-years-old) said they found the Dutch to be more private, and seemingly strictly in separating work and personal life. However, it needs to be said that it is difficult to draw any conclusions from this due to the fact that very few participants worked in a Dutch professional environment and even in the 'Dutch professional environment' the mentality and working culture may differ greatly between different organizations and corporations (Beaverstock, 1996). In addition, Paul, who works as an IT professional also states that he finds: *"The agenda-business frustrating – spontaneity doesn't seem to exist, things must be planned, plans cannot just change"*. But by adding these internationals to the 'local' mixture, it becomes more difficult to define what exactly is 'Dutch' or local and to what extent does the international professional change the professional setting and the communication. Beaverstock (1996) has indicated that the work culture of international professional migrants can also play a significant role in the setting for others.

For internationals on an assignment in an international professional environment it is important to note that they can also influence their professional setting and corporate culture. The global organizational culture that is embedded in complex networks and personal interactions can affect the social interactions (Beaverstock, 1996). This may impact the way these international professionals work and communicate upon repatriation. Organizational career support assesses employees' perceptions of how much the organization supported their career during the repatriation process (Kraimer et al, 2009). Research has suggested that a major concern for many expatriate employees is whether they will have a job back in the home country upon completion of the assignment (Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Kraimer et al., 2009). This concern may impact both the professional social interactions of these international professionals as well as the extent of their place attachment, as discussed in chapter 6. As the conceptual framework of chapter 3 indicates, corporate culture and security around the assignment (perhaps secondary arrangements such as job security upon repatriation) affect social interaction and place attachment of the international professional.

#### 5.5 SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

As previously mentioned, social capital refers to the "connections amongst individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Social capital is important because it smoothens relationships within a society; it allows for resolving of collective problems and widens an individual's awareness of others. The networks that make up an individual's social capital also serve as conduits for the flow of information that helps achieving goals (Infed, 2010). A connection to the community may be particularly important for those who are new in a society (Portes, 1998) such as international professional migrants. Social interactions facilitate the process of social capital forming (Portes, 2002). In chapter 3, the conceptual model shows a direct link between social interaction and social capital. This study argues that social interaction is vital for establishing local social capital in the host country.

As was explained in chapter 3 as well, Putnam (2000) has distinguished between *bonding*, *bridging* and *linking* social capital. An abundance of bonding social capital is lacking in the situation of international professionals on an expatriate assignment, because almost all family and close friends are living further away. Bridging social capital, which encompasses more distant ties such as loose friendships and colleagues can be particularly important for the international professionals in The Hague and Houston, because it forms the basis of their new network. As was concluded in the previous sections, international professionals often have most of their local bridging social capital from their professional environment or their residential community. But even though bridging social capital may seem the

most important, linking social capital is also important in the case of these international professional migrants as it connects them as relative 'outsiders' to the local community. Transfer of information and exchange of ideas can take place in the form of bridging capital. And although it is not the focus of this study, the family composition and life-cycle stage may very well affect where and how international professionals interact with others and this may indirectly affect the formation of their local social capital.

The bonding capital is likely to remain the same for those on a temporal assignment (many international professionals in this study indicate that they do not feel the relationship or bonds with their close family and friends has changed), some of the bridging capital in the home country is replaced by new bridging capital in the host country. It seems very important some bridging capital is established locally (Putnam, 2000) in order to increase the social interactions, create a small network of local reciprocity and trust and perhaps build some of the local bridging capital into bonding capital if great friendships come into existence. The same goes for linking social capital, which is partially replaced by new local linking social capital. The establishment of a small network seems crucial to the success of the international assignment, as Kraimer et al. (2009) have indicated, because it helps the international professional to establish themselves practically and feel welcome or at home in the host society, even during a temporary stay. Achievements and health are thought to increase significantly when local social capital is developed (Putnam, 2000). Interaction enables international professional migrants to build and establish their local network, knit a social fabric, and ultimately establish local social capital.

Another aspect of social capital in relation to social interaction, which is difficult to measure in a study of this scale, is the gender dimension of social capital. Women tend to establish their network very differently and through very different social interactions than men in order to engage and create local networks (Bookman, 2004). Perhaps it is even possible to say that women partially establish social capital that is different from some of the social capital that is established by men. This study shows that international professionals with partners or families have different types and locations of social interaction, or in some cases their significant other has much more time to be able to establish local social interactions, maintain connections with ties in the home country and thus partially determine the social capital of the relationship or family. It can be concluded that local social capital is key for involvement in local life and participation in social networks for international professional migrants in The Hague and Houston. Furthermore social capital has proven to be positively linked to achievements, promotion of health and that it reduces the chance of international migrants to return from their assignment early (Putnam, 2000; Portes, 1998; Kraimer et al., 2009), which makes local social interaction crucially important.

## **5.7 CONCLUSIONS ON SOCIAL INTERACTION OF INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONALS**

This chapter has explored the social interaction of international professional migrants in The Hague and Houston. The participants of the study were divided in groups based on their family composition – single, partner, family – in order to analyze the local social interaction these international professionals have, as well as the communication and means of communication with friends and family back home. Although international professionals in Houston and The Hague show many similarities with regards to their social interactions, the social and physical setting appears to make a difference in the types and locations of the social interactions. Similarities include the areas they are located in – mostly wealthier areas of both Houston and The Hague - the local social networks they establish through their professional environment and the impact the temporality of their stay has on the type and frequency of their social interaction.

With regards to the social interaction of the participants of this study, the cities have a few resemblances. In both cities, The Hague more than Houston, the majority of the sample tends to be geographically clustered in certain areas. Mostly west of the city center (and to some extent north of the city center as well), these international professional migrants tend to reside in areas with a higher average income and higher housing prices (The Hague statistics, 2010; City of Houston statistics, 2010). Perhaps there is a slight selection bias in place affecting the geographical distribution of the sample, but the figures of The Hague statistics (2010) definitely show a clustering in certain areas of the city of these high-skilled migrants from other western countries.



By residing in these particular areas, the chance of diversity in social interaction decreases. The stores that are located in those areas (apart from chains and supermarkets) tend to be catered towards its residents (Putnam, 2000). The neighbours and other residents of the area are likely to have similarities in their socio-economic status. This may make it easier for social interactions to take place, because it is easier to relate to others when they have a similar social background (Putnam, 2000) or are in the same life-cycle phase. In addition, children in particular may increase the local social interactions in the neighbourhood (or school) significantly, particularly in The Hague as appeared from the responses of the international professionals with families in this study.

With regards to new local friends and acquaintances most international professionals meet people at work or by joining clubs or sport teams. Particularly people who have been on multiple assignments seem to understand the importance of joining local initiatives for new local connections. But this group of international professionals is also the most footloose, when they have been on numerous assignments the 'need' to make many new local connections seems to be much smaller, this corresponds with the findings of Wellman et al. (1993). In this study, international professionals on their first international assignment seem to make more effort to become established locally and are keen to build a network of local connections. It has to be said though that for some international professionals making local friends remains very unimportant due to the temporality of their stay. Some responded to simply be there for their professional assignment and given the temporal nature were not inclined to invest very much time in local connections. Rather, they would attempt to stay in touch with their friends and family back home. Some of these international professionals with a relatively strong tie to their home country spend many hours talking and emailing their family and friends and went on more trips back to their home country.

International professionals with families were less inclined to maintain a very strong connection with their friends and family back home. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the children and the activities of the children in the new or host country demand significant amounts of time. And that time, on top of a busy professional life (especially in Houston) makes it very difficult to allocate a lot of time for social interaction with friends and family back home. Some international professionals ensured their children talked at least to the grandparents on a bi-weekly or weekly basis, but often the spouse was responsible for most of the 'staying in touch' rather than the principal migrant on the professional assignment. Many international professionals did not feel as though the lack of or decrease in communication has impacted their ties with friends and family back home. *"Overall, the ties I have with my family and friends will likely remain unaffected. Its effect on my life is that I have realized how important reaching out is now that I'm away, and I make more time and effort to reach out to my friends and family"*, says Jesse, one of the international professionals in Houston. It is more the extended network (i.e. acquaintances, people from clubs and sport teams in the home country, and colleagues back home) that suffers from the foreign assignment.

Differences in social interaction between Houston and The Hague are the way the local social interactions are experienced. In Houston, most international professionals were very positive about the friendly and service oriented nature of the Houstonians. In The Hague however, many international professionals complained about the difficulty to arrange bureaucratic formalities, the lack of helpfulness from many people in the city, and the absence of English information about many local activities such as public transit information and changes in the schedule or route. Houston does not have this problem, because the city's main language is English, very well spoken by all participants of this study.

Another disparity in the social interaction is the geographic space upon which they take place locally. This may seem obvious at first, because Houston has a much larger surface; the chance of international professionals to visit every area of the city is quite small. But what differs is the way international professionals experience other areas of the city (i.e. outside of their local neighbourhood). International professionals in The Hague never responded they did not visit any other areas of the city on purpose, for example because they did not feel safe. In Houston however, many international professionals in fact stated that there were certain areas in the city they would rather not visit. The scale of the city and the social make-up, but perhaps to a certain extent the arrangement of streets and

buildings, may have impacted this belief. In both cities however, this decreases the chance of local social interaction with people of a very different socio-economic status (Portes, 2002).

Even though international professionals in Houston and The Hague are in the same situation in many ways with regards to their social interaction, it is the local features (i.e. social composition, physical layout of the city, size of the city, language and culture) that determine to what extent the social interactions are different or take place in different locations. In addition, the background of the international professional (i.e. whether they have already been on an assignment, their socio-economic background, their home culture and language, their family composition and life-cycle status) that determines how and how much local social interaction takes place. Within the city too, international professionals mostly differ in their type and frequency of social interaction as a result of their personal background and perhaps most importantly their family composition and life cycle stage. The latter often determines their residential location, their allocation of free time and the connections they have besides their professional environment. Due to the working hours, international professionals in Houston seem to be a bit more dependent on their professional network for local friends and acquaintances, especially when they are single or travel frequently. In The Hague, more international professionals reported to work for very international companies, perhaps due to the many international organizations (such as the ICC) employing a diversity of nationalities. This made it difficult to analyze the impact of the working culture. Most international professionals in Houston indicated they mostly worked with local employees.

In both cities, international professionals regardless of their family composition or life cycle stage felt their ties and bonds with friends and family remained unaffected by the move, even if the social interactions with the home country were much less frequent than before. International assignments seem to almost require a certain attitude towards social interaction and establishing a local social network, a life style that particularly becomes evident from the participants of this study who had been on previous assignments. There seems to be a certain ambivalence in many international professionals and perhaps also in their new local environment; they are curious and do want to establish a network and meet new friends by increasing their local social interaction, but the temporality of the assignment seems to always overshadow the true investment they are willing to make. This is perhaps best illustrated with the following statement from an international professional in The Hague who says:

*“I think in general I just do more. One thing I've always loved about the expat lifestyle is that you tend to take advantage of things you may take for granted in your hometown. Stuff like summer festivals, sports, day trips, etc. And one of the best things about doing more is that you tend to meet new people, even if they are not friendships that last forever. This is something most of us don't do much in our home country.”*

Table 5.3 on the next page sums up the results for the social interaction of different categories of international professionals in Houston and The Hague.

Table 6.1 Places of Attachment for Houston and The Hague

Place of Attachment	Houston	The Hague
Home and Neighbourhood	International professionals felt <b>most attached to their home and neighbourhood</b> . Many internationals were located in suburban areas, where contact with neighbours was most frequent for those with children. The neighbourhood was the most familiar place and many internationals talked to their neighbour 2-3 times per week on average. They indicated that neighbours and their home were the reasons they were attached to places on this spatial scale.	International professionals also had a lot of activities and interactions outside the neighbourhood. Many felt attached to the neighbourhood mainly due to its aesthetics and architecture and the contact with their neighbours.
Public Spaces	Shopping malls such as the Galleria, other shopping areas such as Uptown, and parks such as Hermann Park and Memorial Park were public spaces internationals in Houston felt most attached to.	Parks (Zuiderpark) and public squares (Het Plein and Markt were mentioned most often) with terraces were places that professionals were most attached to.
City district and city	International professionals mostly 'operated' in the (south-)western part of Houston, more affluent areas. Therefore they did not report to feel as much attachment to the city as a whole. This can be the result of the large spatial scale of Houston.	International professionals felt <b>most attached to city</b> and district; they named architecture, monuments, trees as landmarks of their attachment.

## 6 Place Attachment

As soon as people move to a certain location, that location often acquires a special emotional significance (Ponzetti, 2004). Place attachment, as was stated in chapter 3, refers to the emotional connection that is formed by an individual to a physical location. This chapter inquires if and how international professional migrants in Houston and The Hague are affected by the concept of place attachment. Firstly, Section 6.1 provides a general overview of place attachment in this study. Secondly section 6.2 discusses place attachment of international professionals in Houston. In section 6.3, place attachment of international professionals in The Hague is discussed. Other factors that affect place attachment such as purpose of stay and company culture are discussed in section 6.4. Section 6.5 compares place attachment in Houston and The Hague in conclusion of this chapter.

### 6.1 PLACE ATTACHMENT IN THIS STUDY

Before going into place attachment in the research city, it is necessary to make a few general comments. Place is seen as a fundamental component of personal identity (Hernandez et al., 2007). Giuliani and Feldman (1993) recognized that there is a lack of clarity regarding relations between the different concepts relating to place attachment. Place identity and place attachment are often overlapping. This study emphasizes the relation that the international professional migrants in this study have with their new (and often temporary) local environment.

Literature on place attachment, as has been asserted in chapter 3, dates back to the 1960s. Place attachment research is remarkably interdisciplinary; anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, social psychologists, but also architecture and environmental scholars (Low and Altman 1992; Giuliani and Feldman 1993). But despite the numerous academic papers on place attachment systematic studies aimed at the identification of predictors or consequences of place attachment to residence locations are lacking (Lewicka, 2010). Of the existing studies, most are concerned with attachment to neighborhood, some with attachment to home and house, very few studies are concerning attachment to city (Lewicka, 2010). This chapter examines the place attachment of international professional migrants in Houston and The Hague primarily in the following categories of locations:

- Home and neighborhood
- Public spaces
- The city district and city

In addition, from the collection of research in this area (Ponzetti, 2004; Hernandez et al., 2007; Brown et al.; 2003, Trentelman, 2009; Lewicka, 2010) predictors of place attachment can be grouped in three categories: Socio-demographic predictors, social predictors and physical predictors. Place attachment is discussed in the next sections is discussed using these three categories. But first will be discussed if and how place attachment is present, and to what kinds of places international professionals are attached in the research city.

## 6.2 PLACE ATTACHMENT IN HOUSTON

The spread out geographic nature of Houston makes the experience for the various interviewees very different. Some lived relatively close to many neighbors in a building with condominiums, others lived in more spread out areas and further away from their neighbors. The experiences of green space and aesthetics were very different for people who lived in different areas of the city. These different experiences can impact place attachment of the individual and place attachment can reversely affect the way an international professional migrant experiences their environment. An interesting point is that almost all professionals were comparing their current city, Houston, to the city they were from originally or to other cities they had been living for assignments previously.

Low and Altman (1992) have stated that places of attachment vary widely in terms of size, scope, tangibility, and direct experience. In the city of Houston the great variety of places and activities as explored in chapter 4, suggest that the opportunities for place attachment are diverse and amply available. But because this study concerns a certain type of individuals, international professionals, with specific characteristics (such as a certain level of education and income, and a limited term-of stay), the opportunities for place attachment may be limited for them. Between the international professional migrants of this study there are also considerable differences such as personality, background, culture, age and family composition. Due to those characteristics some international professionals are more attached to their local environment and places in Houston than others.

Both adults and children form emotional bonds with various places (Low and Altman, 1992), such as *natural landscapes* (e.g Hermann Park, Memorial Park, Buffalo Bayou), local churches or other *sacred or historical sites*. In addition certain types of *architecture* for example museums, office buildings, and shopping malls can also induce feelings of place attachment. Of course individuals can also form emotional bonds with *living spaces* and *neighborhood spaces* such as the home, a local park, or bicycle trails. For international professionals in Houston the degree of place attachment to the city differed very much from person to person. Single professional Rebeca for example says she now feels part of the local community in Kirby, the area in Houston where she lives.

*“It took me a while to get used to this city, and there are still many places in the city I do not really know well or feel comfortable with. But my own neighborhood now feels like home, I know lots of neighbors, and I really enjoy the patios in the area; those are the best places to meet with friends here!”*

Rebeca is not necessarily attached to Houston as a city, but she has definitely emotional bonds with her local surroundings and neighborhood. She states that she feels comfortable, that she knows her neighbors and that she enjoys the local patios. The patios in Kirby are thus places that she is attached to, and her (social) surroundings contribute to her attachment to the area. But not all single professional migrants share Rebeca’s attachment to the city of Houston or their local residential area. For example, Joaquim, a 33-year-old Argentinean professional migrant states he does not feel any sort of attachment or appreciation for his local area at all. “I am just here to work”, he says, adding that he has no desire to develop local connections.

*“I am not planning on staying in Houston for a long time, I do not really care to meet my neighbors or become close with them. I enjoy going running in the parks here, so I guess you could say that those are places I enjoy going to while I am in Houston”.*

Joaquim is clearly not looking for many social contacts and local social interaction here, but he does remark his appreciation for some of the green spaces in Houston to spend some of his free time there.

Families also differ in their opinion on how attached they have become to the local area. Although children bound their parents a bit more to the local area, children (family composition) does not seem to be as determining for place attachment in Houston as they are for local social interaction. British international professional Daniel, who is 42 and works as an investment banker in Houston, moved to the city with his wife and 3 children. Daniel says:

*“We have lived in several other cities over the past few years; London, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur. Every place has some nice aspects like architecture or activities to do with the children, but I cannot say I feel particularly attached to a city or possess any special feelings for Houston. I have been in nicer cities, cleaner cities, and greener cities. I mean we enjoy it here, but I can’t think of anything that particularly attracts me here.”*

Even though Daniel has children, this does not necessarily make him feel more emotionally attached to his local area or to the city. But length of residence may play a role here. Because Daniel has lived in a few different cities for a limited time, it may be difficult for him to become really attached. For international professionals who move from one assignment to the next, becoming emotionally attached to a location makes it much harder to pick up at the end of the term and move to a new location once again. German professional Derek, who is 37 and moved to Houston with his family including two children, feels very different:

*“My wife and I love going to public places on the weekend with the children, we visit parks in our area such as Hermann Park and Discovery Green. There are always activities for the children. We enjoy the Galleria mall with the many stores, well my wife especially does. The buildings are all new and clean and the people are very friendly. Our neighborhood is quiet, but we like it because it is a safe place for the children and there are many other children.”*

Derek shows much more place attachment than Daniel. He mentions places he likes to go to with his family, public places with activities for the children. He also mentions his residential area to be safe, granting him a *sense of security*, indicated earlier as a predictor for place attachment at the beginning of this chapter. Even though Derek and his family have only been in Houston for 3 years, they already feel part of their local community. His professional assignment is supposed to last for six years; a considerable time for an international professional to become attached given the fact that the average assignment of expatriates is between 2 and 3 years (see chapter 5). Place attachment thus widely varies for international professionals in Houston, but people are both attached to areas in the city as well as their local social connections. As a result, three points can be concluded about place attachment of international professional migrants in Houston:

- International professional migrants can be emotionally attached to physical locations in Houston
- One of the most important predictors of place attachment for international professional migrants is *length of residence*
- Social contacts and local connections can play an important role in the sense of belonging (feeling ‘at home’) and sense of place in the city

#### SCALES OF PLACE ATTACHMENT

Within the City of Houston, there are many places that international professional migrants can be attached to or enjoy to spend time. These places vary from the home, neighborhood and public spaces to city districts and the city. This section explores to what places international professional migrants are mainly attached to in Houston.

##### *Home and neighborhood*

Most international professional migrants were very satisfied with their location of residence. Some had picked the location themselves for example because it was close to their office or to an international school for their children. Others had help from a relocation agency or assistant in order to help them with the choice of residential area. The types of homes that these international professionals were living in varied from individual detached houses to high rises and new condominiums. Some of these newer condominiums had guarding and monitoring. Other homes or condominiums had a locked driveway. Eighteen (18) of the international professional migrants in this study lived in residences with more than two bedrooms in Houston. The others lived in single bedroom apartments or studios. Size and location of the residence affects the way people feel emotionally attached to their dwelling



(Ponzetti, 2004). In a temporary situation such as an international assignment, it may be more important to feel good about your house. German professional Patricia for example says:

*“The minute I walked into the apartment that I am now leasing, I thought this is a place that I can feel at home. It is very bright and has great views of the park across and the rest of the city. I love sitting on the balcony at night and watching the sunset over the city. For me my house is definitely one of the best things about living in Houston”*

Patricia feels an attachment to her apartment, but never said anything about the neighborhood. As her residence is a condominium she says it is much more difficult to connect with neighbors “*you never really know who is leasing a place across from you, and it changes all the time*”. The emotional place attachment due to social connections in her building is virtually absent; place attachment to her residence is mostly due to the features of the apartment (view, brightness, balcony). Patricia also mentioned she makes use of the public facilities (semi-public) in her building such as the gym and the common area. This has also helped her to meet other residents in the building. The physical features of the building including the gym and common room have contributed to her enjoyment of the building she lives, Patricia says. Canadian professional Jesse says that in comparison to his house in Canada, he is now able to live in a much larger home with more luxurious features for not much more as he was paying in Canada. The comfort adds to the experience and Jesse also enjoys his home very much. To the question why he enjoys his current home so much he surprisingly described many locational features, and less details about the home itself and the interior.

*“My current home is in a very nice street, lined with trees. I am very close to a small park and close to major roads, so it does not take me long to get to work. I also enjoy the buildings in the area. Many of them have very unique architectural features and are very modern. I really enjoy living in this area and since it is still being redeveloped I also feel that it will be even better once the area developments are a bit further along.”*

Jesse is to some extent attached to his home and neighborhood environment: he enjoys it and mentions many aspects that are favorable for place attachment. But place attachment takes time; if he would stay for 10 years his enjoyment of the area would be likely to increase. But not everyone is as pleased with his or her residence and local area as Patricia and Jesse are. Someone who is not very content and attached to her current residence and residential environment is 36-year-old British professional Kerrie. Kerrie lives with her husband and one child in a detached single family home in Clear Lake. Kerrie works as a director of marketing, while her husband is involved in research at NASA. They chose their residential location based on her husband’s work.

*“I feel no attachment to my local area at all. It is very impersonal, all the streets are so similar, and it is easy to get lost. Although we know a few people who also live in our neighborhood, it does not make me feel like I ‘belong’ here at all. There are other areas, such as Uptown, that I do like visiting and that would be perhaps a nicer area to live in.”*

On a neighborhood level, people point at parks in their area and little shopping zones that they enjoy going to. One of the professionals is living close to Rice University even says he enjoys his local supermarket. On Saturday mornings he gets his weekly groceries and drinks a coffee in the coffee corner of the large supermarket.

*“The space that Houston has available is sometimes inconceivable. It has its disadvantages such that everything is further away, but it also makes the stores larger, the houses larger and I just feel that people are much more friendly as a result. I enjoy visiting the same places, because you start to recognize people and you know what to expect when you go there.”*

Familiarity seems to be important for international professional migrants. Because the new environment is new and foreign, it is a relief to visit areas or places where ‘*you know your way around*’, as one of the interviewees put it.

Even though many international professionals really enjoy their house or neighborhood, simply enjoying is not enough to become attached to a place. International professionals do not get very

attached to their home or neighborhood, primarily as a result of the limitation on their length of residence. This works two ways: Firstly, they do not tend to have as much of a 'chance' to become really attached to their home and neighborhood because of the limited time spent there (Brown, 2004), and secondly because they know in advance that it is only for a limited time, they may not 'invest' as much of their time and investment for emotional bonds to the local area. This does not mean that perhaps after the assignment many of them may look back at the experience with nostalgia, a feeling of place attachment, and a sense of belonging (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974).

#### *City district and city*

The scale of the city may make it much more difficult for newcomers to feel a sense of security with a limited social network. This is because social networks increase social capital and results in individual's feelings safer in their local environment. There are many different areas of the city, and these differ from one another in socio-economic, ethnic composition and spatial organization. Depending on where in the city and in what area the international professional migrant resides and works, some rarely ever visit areas outside of the 'comfort' zone. *"I tend to stick with the neighborhoods I know and the neighborhoods I know that are safe"*, says German professional Patricia. Perhaps the slight fear for other areas is justified, but it can also be evoked by the fact that other areas are not being visited and cognitive perception creates the fear (Portes, 2002) In any case, many international professionals prefer to stick with the areas that are close to their home or professional environment.

Whereas the neighborhood often gets credit because professionals have chosen the area (or relocation agents have assisted them in their decision), the city rarely gets the same credit. Many international professionals find the city 'not particularly attractive' but the great professional climate (i.e. professional opportunities available, large business network, relatively low unemployment rates for a large US city), makes it a great city to live and work in, according to several interviewees. Some international professionals feel attached to the location because 'it is a city with many opportunities' or because 'everything you are looking for can be found in this city'. The abundance of choice in almost every aspect of life makes it sometimes seem like residents of Houston are still living the American dream to the max. *"The oil is very cheap here, so getting a full tank of gas never costs me more than 30 dollars, in England I used to pay at least 50 pounds when the pound was still very high"*, says British professional Daniel. *"Many of the secondary aspects to the life in Houston make you love the city, but the city itself, the built environment? I mean I don't think I would be able to really say I enjoy the cityscape or anything"* says Dutch professional Ellen. But not all international professionals see it this way. Sanjay, a 29-year-old Indian professional and previously mentioned Argentinean Joaquim for example, both believe that Houston has great architecture that really gives it its own unique identity. *"And it is the identity with interesting architectural features in some office towers and Houston's skyline, that make me happy to be back in Houston every time I have been gone on a business trip"* Sanjay says.

Although the city as a whole or city districts do not play a particular important role in the place attachment of international professionals, it would be inadequate to assume that all of the international professionals of this study are not attached to Houston as a city but only to their home, street, neighborhood or public space. The total image that Houston has for many international professionals is what makes them rate their experience in the city as good or even excellent. Many interviewees were very positive about the city, and that affirmative perspective on the Houston must have an impact on their place attachment to it.

#### *Public spaces*

Public spaces are perhaps most important for the place attachment of international professionals in Houston. These are places that many of the internationals can identify with and do not require as much time to emotionally bond to as homes and neighborhoods. Perhaps it is easier to link cognitive associations to a specific place; a square, a mall or a park, rather than a larger area such as a neighborhood, city district or even the city as a whole. Most international professionals, such as British professional Alan, mainly become attached to places in Houston and recalled stories and specific anecdotes about places in the local area during the interviews. For example:

*“One of my daughters woke up one Saturday morning, after we had been there for about 5 months. In one of the first weeks we had visited the Houston zoo, where the children could pet goats and other little animals. That morning she came to our bedroom with a drawing of the zoo and told us this was the best thing we had done since we were in Houston. That day we spontaneously went to the zoo again and bought a Zoo membership”*

Alan says that the zoo has become one of the places in the city that his family has become most acquainted with since their arrival besides their local neighborhood. Because his children enjoy biking on the streets of his neighborhood he states that he goes on frequent walks through the area with the children on their bicycles to the local neighborhood park. These types of activities, frequent visits to an area or spending time outside of the home in a residential area contribute to creating an emotional bond with an area. This is partially due to the cognitive impact it has, memories impact place attachment (Low & Altman, 1992).

It has been concluded in chapter 4 that Houston also has a lot of shopping malls (Mieszkowski, Smith, 1991; Putnam, 1999). These shopping malls function as (semi-) public spaces, and places for people to meet or dine. Not only local residents spend time in the shopping malls. International professionals were hesitant to specifically state that would spend their free time in the shopping malls of Houston. Most international professionals indicated that they frequently visit areas such as the Galleria mall, and would include mentioning stores and restaurants that are attached or next to shopping malls. In addition, some stated their spouse really enjoys the shopping opportunities in Houston. For example, in answer to the question whether him and his family visit the shopping malls, 49-year-old German professional Jorgen says:

*“Oh yes, my wife does, she frequently meets up with some friends for lunch and a few hours of shopping in the Galleria mall. And when we have friends or family visiting us from Germany she takes them shopping in the Galleria because the ambiance is so nice, and she buys a new wardrobe for the whole family back home...”*

Perhaps due to the fact that some spouses do not or cannot work during their partner’s assignment in Houston, they spend more time in shopping malls or restaurants in areas with stores. Jorgen also states that his wife really enjoys the indoor shopping when the temperatures rise up to 38 Celsius in the summer. *“Our home has air-conditioning and so does our car, but you cannot stay in the house all day and wait until the summer is over. So it is great that the shopping malls have air-conditioning too, and with all the facilities from restaurants to shops, it is easy to spend an afternoon or a day there”*. Since Jorgen’s wife meets her friends at the shopping mall, it certainly also facilitates as a public space for her to meet up with friends or acquaintances. For her, the mall is a place to which she is attached: she enjoys spending time there, takes visitors there, meets up with friends, enjoys the ambiance and air-conditioning. Having less free time however, Jorgen says he prefers to go to Memorial park for a run before work at 6 a.m.

Besides many shopping malls, it was indicated in chapter 4 that Houston has an abundance of parks (such as Hermann Park and Memorial Park). The parks were a location frequently mentioned by almost all international professionals as locations they enjoyed, locations they visited, or locations they had other activities in (e.g. running club, tennis, golf). Therefore, parks are an important location for place attachment of international professional migrants in Houston. Jorgen says: *“When the air is still cool and there are not too many people up, I enjoy going for a run while my family is still asleep. The park is very green and still quiet in the morning and when I can home I can start my day. And when I come home at the end of the workday I have time to spend with my family”*. For Jorgen the park is a place that he is more attached to than the shopping mall. The time spent at a location can thus also be an indication for the level of place attachment to a location. Others spend their weekends in parks, visiting cultural festivals, gardens or to play tennis. British professional Alan for example, who stated that he visits the zoo, also said he enjoys going to the park with his family on the weekends. In addition, he plays tennis there on Saturday morning with a group of other internationals that he has met through a British internationals club.

*“Taking some time for myself here in Houston, besides work and my family, I enjoy playing tennis with a few friends that I have met here... The fact that they are also here on a*

*temporary assignment and from England is great, because we can really relate to each other. We play tennis on a great court, and the environment is very green and beautiful. Honestly, I couldn't wish for a much better place to play!"*

Other sports activities important for spending free time are Houston's golf courses. Houston has approximately 145 golf courses in Houston's greater area (City of Houston, Parks and Recreation, 2010). Golf has also an important networking function for senior business leaders in the United States (Quinn, 1993). "In some industries, such as financial services and commercial real estate, golf is a must for anyone who wants to stay competitive" (Burden, 1996, p. 58). Some interviewees agree: *"Playing golf seems to be a lot more important here, than it is in Europe, for conducting business and establishing a network"*. Many of the golf courses in Houston offer spectacular greenery and views, so they are a very popular location for spending free time (City of Houston, 2010). Larry, a 53-year-old Irish international professional said during his interview: *"I really enjoy playing golf with other lads on my weekends. Golfing relaxes me and brings me to nice locations, especially when you get invited to private courses, the places are really unique"*. Because interviewees of this study are in Houston on a temporary basis, experiences such as Larry's golf invitations can contribute a great deal to the emotional bond these professionals have with Houston. Such positive experiences of the environment and specific places lead to a greater sense of place attachment (Trentelman, 2008).

Lastly, also important for place attachment of international professionals in Houston, are the coffeehouses and bookstores, as has been noted in chapter 4 (Mieszkowski, Smith, 1991). With their financial means or socio-economic background they may more often choose for a semi-public space such as a coffeehouse or a restaurant, where you pay for your drink or meal and have access to the location as a result. Bhaskar, for example, prefers to go to a little coffeehouse and bakery called 'The Ladybug' there are several locations of this coffeehouse in the city, but Bhaskar prefers to always go to the same. *"I enjoy the coffee, know the crew and meet up here with my friends or to just read a newspaper and get out of the house for a bit on the weekend"*. These places of regularity, where international professionals pay frequent visits to, may be locations that they become more attached to as well. Some prefer a coffeehouse, others a bookstore. There are very few public squares with outdoor-terraces such as is the case in The Hague. Perhaps this is partially due to the climate in Houston: *"The hot summers make it simply unbearable to sit outside"* says German professional Patricia. Some international professionals from European countries, where squares have traditionally taken an important role in social life (Davies, 1993), are impacted by this 'experience of social life' that mostly takes place indoors in malls, restaurants and homes, partly due to the hot climate for large parts of the year.

It is relatively unusual for international professionals in Houston to become very attached to their street or neighborhood (although some internationals do feel attached to their local area). It is the public places that are most significant for place attachment. Even their attachment to Houston, often displays itself through (semi-) public spaces. During an interview internationals would say: *"Yes I feel quite attached to Houston, I love going to the parks here, visiting the patios in my neighborhood to meet up with friends or colleagues or play golf at the golf course"*. This indicates that international professional migrants in Houston are more attached to certain places in the city rather than to the city itself. The scale of the city may have a definite impact on this, because it is simply impossible to really know and visit all areas of Houston and it takes even more to feel 'attached' to them. In addition, public places or other locations with which international professionals have a greater familiarity are being visited more frequently. And as a result, many international professionals stated that they 'operate' mostly in certain areas to go out for activities.

#### PREDICTORS OF PLACE ATTACHMENT

This section analyzes if some predictors of place attachment may be more important for the place attachment of international professionals in Houston than others. *Socio-demographic predictors* are most often reported as predictors of place attachment (Lewicka, 2010), one of them being *length of residence* in area. Other examples of socio-demographic factors, such as age, life-cycle stage and family composition and home-ownership, have been mentioned in the conceptual model. *Social predictors* of place attachment refer to the social ties and sense of security that lead to higher levels of place attachment. Social ties are realized in various ways and activities: number of friends and relatives in

the neighborhood, frequency and nature of neighborhood relations, proportion of different types of local contacts and the extensiveness of social networks (Lewicka, 2010; Brown et al. 2004; Ringel & Finkelstein, 1991). Lastly, *environmental predictors* refer to the local features that can ‘facilitate or hinder’ (Lewicka, 2010) place attachment. This category concerns the experience of the physical location, presence of public spaces, green areas, aesthetically pleasing buildings (Brown et al., 2004; Lewicka, 2010), more general urban layout (Kim & Kaplan, 2004), and weather and climate circumstances. Predictors of place attachment can play an important role in analyzing why international professionals in Houston are more attached to (public) places rather than their neighborhood or the city as an entity.

#### *Socio-demographic predictors*

Socio-demographic predictors such as age, life-cycle stage and family composition, home-ownership and length of residence do not affect the place attachment of all international professionals in the same way. Socio-demographic factors such as *length of residence* in an area can be important. The international professional migrant, who is on a limited term work assignment such as Argentinean Joaquim (in Houston for 2 years), has limited time to have an opportunity for place attachment similarly to a limited ability to have much social interaction locally. In addition, the short assignments (terms of 3 years on average for the interviewees of this study) make it very difficult to determine how much length of residence impacts place attachment. Some interviewees have been in Houston for quite some time and are not very attached at all, while others have only been in Houston for a short time but feel very connected and attached to their local area. Bhaskar is another good example of a ‘non-attached’ professional migrant. The 49-year-old Indian professional migrant for example, has been here for almost 10 years. It is almost no longer possible to call his assignment a limited term, because his company (a financial consulting firm) has determined that he can stay with their US office for the term he desires, yet he states that he “*could leave Houston any day and would not miss much about the environment other than the neighbours*”.

The last example perhaps shows that home ownership and length of residence do matter with regards to local place attachment, but some of the interviewees who rent apartments in the Kirby area for a term of only 2 years, also stated that they feel very much at home. “*The area I live in certainly contributes to my perception and experience of Houston. I picked this area for its close proximity to the stores and to exciting places to go out. My apartment is new and clean and my view on the beautiful streetscape is excellent,*” says 28- year old Mexican professional Rebeca. “*Kirby is not a cheap place to live and very central. Many of the apartment buildings are adult-only, so children are not very common in this area*”. Perhaps due to Rebeca’s life-cycle stage, but her relatively short length of residence – 2.5 years - is not the most important predictor of her place attachment. The esthetics of the environment and local social connections (to go out with) are more important for her.

#### *Social predictors*

When looking at the social predictors of place attachment, one of the first that comes to mind are the local social connections and local social ties of the international professional migrant. As seen in chapter 5, international professional migrants are often constantly balancing between their lives and obligations in the home country as well as the development of their new local social network in the temporary host society. The social ties however can make a profound difference on the experience (Kraimer et al., 2009) and the place attachment (Lewicka, 2010) of the international professional migrant. Home-ownership may make some international professionals much more conscious of their local area. They may be more careful in their location choice, but they also may be more enthusiastic to become attached. Homeowners often make their decision to buy a home also on a more permanent basis (Kraimer et al, 2009).

Bhaskar and his wife are homeowners. They purchased their house – a 5-bedroom single family home in a suburban area in the northwest of Houston. His wife is an investment analyst who works for a real estate brokerage firm so she has her own activities and networked on top of their shared connections. They have lived there now for quite some time, and are very close with their neighbors. Bhaskar states: “*One of our neighbor families is from Lebanon. Because of them my wife got into Lebanese cooking and often makes them meals and has them over for dinner, we love sitting on our patio and just talk all*



*night*". Even though clearly Bhaskar enjoys his home and his local company, it is difficult to determine how much home ownership has an effect on place attachment. Even by looking at other interviewees who purchased their home in Houston, it is difficult to conclude that they actually invest more time in their neighbors than renters; some do, others do not. The fact that Bhaskar has 'very nice neighbors' does affect his perception of the local area, and this can contribute to his place attachment because of the emotional bonds he has with other individuals locally and the 'Lebanese dinner-evening' memories that are tied to the home.

Previously mentioned British professional, Alan, who is 38-years-old and has young children (all three are still attending elementary school), says that him and his wife are very involved in their local neighborhood. They have many local connections and even a few new friends in their residential area, with whom they frequently meet. Alan says:

*"We often try to arrange for our girls to play with neighborhood kids, sometimes we stay at home and take care of other children. Occasionally, we go out for dinner with friends while my daughters stay at our neighbors for the night. It is great to have such nice people close to us who we trust, makes you feel like home you know..."*

This type of reciprocity tends to reflect more social ties and a greater place attachment to the local area (Brown et al., 2004). Emotional development linked to an area can affect the experiences international professional migrants have while they are on assignment, their social interaction as well as in turn their place attachment. And the more social connections an international professional has in a certain area, the greater the emotional attachment to the location will be (Hernandez et al., 2007). That social connections are important for the emotional attachment is confirmed with Patricia's statement, a 45-year-old German professional, who is HR manager for a large energy company.

*"When I just moved to Houston, all I knew were a few colleagues from my office. We would go out together for drinks occasionally after work, but often I would find myself alone at night and on the weekends. Through my art class I met a few great women, who I have become close friends with. And now that I lived in my house for a while I know most people in my street, and it really makes me feel like I belong here and I would miss not being here! I am planning on staying for a while."*

Patricia's statement clearly reflects her emotional attachment to the local area due to the emotional bonds and connections she has with people in her local area; friends from her art class and neighbors. That emotional attachment gives her a sense of belonging – an attachment to the local area – and makes her even want to stay in Houston for longer. This shows that place attachment can effectively impact the repatriation of international professional migrants; if they are satisfied with their current local situation, it may encourage them to stay longer. That social connections are important for place attachment is evident (Lewicka, 2010), but to whom these international professional migrants are typically tied varies amongst them. For some interviewees it is mainly colleagues, but for others also neighbors, acquaintances and other international migrants.

Similarly to their social interaction, the local social network and ties of most interviewees was a combination of all three. For the interviewees in Houston it was difficult to see a pattern based on life cycle stage or family composition as to whether younger families had more neighbor connections than individuals or older professional migrants. Typically, the more an international professional responded to the questions in a very positive way about their local environment, the more local social connections they had. But the obvious analysis for this may be that these people are more positive about their local area because they have the local social connections. Even though they spend a lot of time with people from Gurajat, the area where they are originally from in India, international professional Bhaskar says:

*"To us it really doesn't matter where people are from, we enjoy hanging out with Hindu's, Muslims, Jews and white Americans, it really doesn't matter what a person's background is as long as they have a nice personality"*

Even though most interviewees responded that they are open to meeting new people and that they have no issues or qualifications for their friends and acquaintances, unconsciously they still may prefer



people with a similar background or similar ideas. The previous predictor of place attachment: socio-demographic similarities may provoke the 'feeling at home' feeling much more easily. Social connections, knowing people in the local area and feeling socially similar or close to them can lead to a sense of security, another predictor of place attachment.

Bhaskar says that he is meeting up with friends or acquaintances from the local neighborhood for dinner or a drink approximately 3 times per week. He also gets invited frequently to local birthday parties or for drinks. *"The houses in this area are all so beautiful, much nicer and spacious than in Montreal where we were living before. And because we are both from India, we do not take the space for granted haha..."* he says. Although Bhaskar says it is mainly the social aspect of the neighborhood that makes him feel attached, the above answer also shows a physical attachment to the location; as shown through the appreciation for the spacious and beautiful houses in their area. Like many international professionals in Houston, Bhaskar feels an attachment with his local residential area mainly. The place attachment to public spaces will be discussed in subsequent sections.

#### *Environmental predictors*

The meaning that cities or places within cities can hold for those who reside in these spaces are important for understanding the choices and decisions people make while living there (Ponzetti, 2004) such as where to shop or spend their free time. Environmental predictors can determine whether people feel a sense of place, as described in the theoretical chapter, 3. Environmental predictors for place attachment vary greatly in their contribution to a professional migrant's emotional bonds with a local area, especially given their limited length of residence. This section describes some of the environmental predictors that can impact place attachment.

Fenneleau (2004) has shown that a high *topological identity* (the attachment to the city) is related to a more lenient perception of urban incivilities and upkeep. Hiroshi, a 42-year-old Japanese professional, stated that he is used to even cleaner streetscapes than there are in his neighbourhood in Houston. So perhaps due to the fact that his new city of residence does not resemble this, it may be expected that Hiroshi does not feel 'at home' as much in Houston. This may make his place attachment to his local area relatively low. But the opportunities that Houston offers him (Hiroshi mentioned the diversity of restaurants, different housing types available and the many green spaces) make up for the lack of cleanliness that he experienced. The difference in cleanliness of his home and host country city does not impact Hiroshi's place attachment. But Lewicka states that in a *"reversed causal relationship between place attachment and physical evaluations of the physical environment, a positive evaluation may be a consequence and not an antecedent of attachment"* (Lewicka, 2010, p.38). Thus, it may be the case that because Hiroshi enjoys his stay in Houston and likes the area he resides in, he may evaluate his local environment more positively because he is more attached to it.

Another aspect that may make it difficult to make assumptions about the place attachment of international professionals in Houston, is that place attachment is affected by subjectivity. Cultural perspectives and previous experiences affect the experience of an international professional migrant and their place attachment (Ponzetti, 2004). For example, a European international may have very different perceptions of cleanliness and a different definition of green spaces, than an Asian professional. For Canadians, the situation in Houston when compared to Canada may be quite similar given the similarities in city layout between the United States and many parts of Canada (Jacobs, 1985).

Ellen, 31-year-old married Dutch professional says her and her spouse have gotten used to going to certain locations. *"We now know exactly where we want to go for a jog, for our groceries, to go out, and we even have a favorite restaurant in town that has a patio decorated with lights and has live music every night."* In her answer to the question why she chose for the specific locations she had in mind for all of these activities she stated that they 'looked nice, had a nice atmosphere and good quality food, or were safe places to go'. *"There are many places here I love going to much more than back home. Perhaps living in a different environment in a different culture makes places you recognize and enjoy locally much more important"*. Ellen mentions the atmosphere of her favorite restaurant, but she also clearly expresses the *need for places to be attached to*, much more in a foreign environment than back home. Perhaps this is to partially make up for the lack of, or smaller size of the local social network. Whereas in the home country the social contacts make up more of the 'environment' of the

international professional and lead to place attachment, in a foreign environment *places* and *familiar locations* such as homes, offices, streets, malls parks, squares and other public spaces, suddenly gain more importance in order to become attached to the local area.

From the interviews with international professional migrants in Houston, it can be concluded that many of them are mostly attached to places rather than areas. Parks, including golf courses, are most frequently a location to which international professionals become attached. In addition, outside of the private realm, social gatherings mainly take place in coffeehouses and malls. Relatively few international professionals mentioned terraces as places they had become attached to, although some reported to frequently visit patios and restaurants with terraces to catch up with friends and colleagues. The fact that international professionals are mainly attached to public places and not areas is largely the result of the temporality of their stay. But it can also be due to the type of public spaces that are present in the city. By offering great parks and organized activities in the parks, the City of Houston ensures that people are attracted to go there when they have free time. The climate affects the patio-culture although some air-conditioned terraces can be found in the city. Architecturally not very many international professionals mentioned specific buildings (other than the shopping mall Galleria) that they were particularly impressed with. Some professionals mentioned they enjoyed the museums in the museum district and the theater downtown, but none of these interviewees' responses were so significant that it is possible to speak of place attachment. In addition, many interviewees found the city unorganized and arbitrary; such impressions impact the place attachment of international professionals to Houston negatively. In addition, the limited local social networks of some interviewees or the extent of the local ties differed greatly among interviewees. The larger the local social network of the international professional in the neighborhood or city-wide, the greater the chance that they feel attached to it. Lastly, Houston has a great diversity in communities, so the nature of a particular community can also impact the extent to which international professionals feel attached to their neighborhood or district in the city.

In the next section, the place attachment of international professional migrants in The Hague will be discussed and analyzed according to the same scale of places and predictors of place attachment.

The spatial scale of the second research city, The Hague, is much smaller than Houston. Interviewees generally really appreciated the city with a worldly nature, yet small in size. *"It's the best of both worlds really"*, says Australian professional Clive, adding that *"nearly everything you want is available in this city, all kinds of different organizations and agencies, but it has the atmosphere of a town"*. As concluded in the previous chapter most international professionals of this study lived in north and west of the city center. Although some lived in apartments, most lived in detached or undetached single family homes. Apart from the complaint that many services and public transit provisions are in Dutch only, almost all interviewees, really enjoyed living in The Hague. Interestingly, in comparison to interviewees in Houston, these international professionals showed much more passion for their local environment and their situation while living in The Hague, even if it was negative aspects of the city or the life in The Netherlands.

### 6.3 PLACE ATTACHMENT IN THE HAGUE

Although it is known that place attachment varies widely among international professionals (Low & Altman, 1992), most interviewees were very positive about their experiences in The Hague. Interviewees were enthusiastic about many facilities that The Hague offered and that were also indicated in chapter 4 such as great parks, proximity to the beach, history and architecture, international atmosphere, terraces and squares. The physical aspects of the city create an environment that most international professionals appreciate and cherish. For example Helen, a 51-year-old Finnish international migrant says:

*"Yes, I feel very attached to The Hague! It is a great city with such beautiful architecture, museums, and government buildings. On the weekends I often go to the beach for a coffee, I love these routines I have got going here. I feel at home here."*

Helen's perspective on her life in The Hague is definitely very positive. She went through a divorce since arriving in The Hague 5 years ago. She is planning to stay for at least another three years until her

daughter is finished high school. *“I’d even consider staying here I believe, but partially it depends on what my children are doing. I like living in The Hague a lot better than in Finland, but being close to family is important too.”* Helen is so positive about her life in The Hague, that she is considering staying there. Considering to prolong your foreign assignment, or to even stay in the host country for indefinite indicates great place attachment (Dahl & Sorenson, 2008). Another international professional who has been mentioned earlier, Paul, from England says:

*“Yes I feel attached to The Hague. I know my way around, understand the language, can read the signs, and love the café culture. All I need to do is convince everyone to drive on the correct side of the road...”*

Even though Paul is mostly spending his free time in The Hague with other internationals such as his best friend who is a Canadian programmer, he still feels attached to the local environment. *“I don’t believe that the background of my friends makes a difference for me, I don’t feel less accustomed to the Dutch life and to specific places in The Hague, such as ‘Plein’ square, with international friends as I would with Dutch friends”*. Place attachment in The Hague is not necessarily linked to the local culture, because despite the fact that some international professionals find the culture quite different from their home country, interviewees say they feel at home and are attached to certain places such as their neighborhood or a park. German professional Annette says:

*“Dutch culture is said to be close to German culture, but there are many differences that you notice when you have lived in another country for years. Holland is quite different from Germany. Different is not necessarily better or worse.”*

Without relating a judgment to her findings, Annette notices small differences in how Dutch deal with each other professionally for example. But not only social differences can be noticed: physical spaces are different too, as well as the way Dutch people use the space. *“In The Hague, I find that squares are utilized much more and have a much more social function. Every square always has terraces or benches”* says Annette. Another international professional’s statement is in agreement with Annette’s: *“The urban form of The Hague embraces the social places in the city, so it is easy to become attached to areas or locations here...”* says 49-year-old Billy from Trinidad, who grew up in England. Billy has been in The Hague for almost 12 years, but never planned to initially stay this long there. *“Right now, I cannot imagine having to leave The Hague with my family, we all really enjoy living here and each of us has his or her own way to move around in the city – both socially and physically”*, he says.

But there seems to be a difference in place attachment between Europeans from other nations in Europe who are temporarily residing in The Hague and international professionals from other continents such as North America. International professional Pam from the United States for example, says she can never get fully used to the life in The Netherlands. *“You know, I am really accustomed to the life here, there are aspects that I enjoy. The architecture is beautiful; it is great to be near buildings that have so much history all the time.”* Pam appreciates the environment but it is hard to find indications that suggest place attachment in her response. However Pam also states: *“I find especially the social dealings such as customer service and the difficulty to truly become someone’s ‘friend’ here have an impact on how attached I feel to The Hague”*. The latest statement shows that a great level of place attachment is partially lacking due to the limited social connections and the communication customs in The Netherlands. This interviewee’s response indicates that social aspects of the experience of an international professional migrant in a host-city can affect the extent of an individual’s place attachment, as Kraimer et al. (2009) have concluded.

But a difference in cultural background does not stop all non-European international professionals from becoming attached to places in The Hague and to the city. The 28-year-old Canadian professional Megan experiences this very differently. Even though she notes the differences between her home country and the culture and customs in The Hague, it does not stop her from feeling attached to The Hague. She speaks fluently Dutch and often gets comments or questions about her background:

*“But I don’t see that as a negative aspect: my background is that I am from Canada, but now we are here and I enjoy the different aspects that Dutch life brings us. I love biking to a park*

*with my son or eating dinner with our neighbors in their backyard. I definitely feel attached to the place I have in The Hague, I feel like we belong here for the time being”*

The temporality of her stay does not deter Megan from becoming attached to The Hague and to places in The Hague. Her response also reflects a social aspect; time with her son or with her neighbors. Many international professionals in The Hague mention specific buildings or squares or streets that they enjoy very much, with unique architectural features such as ‘Het Binnenhof’ and Kurhaus (see Chapter 4) but also Zuiderpark and the dunes. It is easier to form emotional bonds with homes and local the neighborhood environment when there are more unique features to it (Orum& Neal, 2010). The Hague with its rich cultural history and architecture has a comparative advantage for ‘place identity’ over Houston. The place identity is also determined partially by the scale of the city (Trentelman, 2008), and even though Houston has a diversity of landscape (the beaches are in relative proximity to Houston as well), the scale of the city determines the experience of international professionals and makes Houston ‘occasionally a bit impersonal’ as one of the interviewees in Houston carefully put it. Back to The Hague, the distinctive features of the city such as architectural landmarks, squares, fountains, trees give areas in the city, streets and neighborhoods their own unique identity. The distinctive features make it easier to become attached to a place, because international professionals know *what* they are becoming attached to (i.e. the fountain on the square next to their house, a bench in Zuiderpark where they watch their children play, the market on the square on Saturdays where they get their fresh produce). It is possible to feel a sentiment with the places because they relate to an action, even if it is just ‘biking by’ or seeing it out of the window of the office.

As a result, three points can be concluded about place attachment of international professional migrants in The Hague:

- ☑ Most international professional migrants are emotionally attached to places in The Hague
- ☑ Environmental predictors and the physical environment play an important role in place attachment to The Hague
- ☑ The background of international professionals can impact the extent to which they become attached to places in The Hague

#### SCALE OF PLACES

Even though the scale of The Hague is much smaller, for these international professionals there is still a difference in attachment to a home or neighborhood, a public space and the city of The Hague. More than in Houston, people are attached to the local area (around their residential community) but also to the city. The previous section as suggested why it is possible for international professionals to be more attached to places in The Hague and to The Hague itself in comparison to Houston. This section will discuss what places in particular international professionals in The Hague are attached to.

#### *Home and neighborhood*

Many international professionals in The Hague rave about the way the city is build, the aesthetics of some of the older areas where many of them reside. *“It is simply unbelievable how old some of the buildings are in this town, even though much of it was destructed during the Second World War”,* says Pam.

*“We live in a home from the 1920s that does not look like anything from the 1920s I have ever seen in North America! Our house has character, but is modern in design... at least I do not have to shower while I am sitting in a bath!”*

Pam and her family live in the Archipelbuurt, and are renting a house that is owned by a Dutch family who is currently away on an assignment elsewhere. She says the great thing about the area is that it is friendly and safe for children, it looks nice and it gives you a true feeling that *“you actually are living in The Netherlands”*. The feeling of distinctiveness really contributes to the place attachment of Pam and her family, even though she may feel that her local social ties are lacking.

International professional Holly from Australia says that she had to get used to the size of the homes. *“Our house is so small, yet feels so much like home. I have never felt more ‘at home’ in a house and I think it is partially because of the space. This house is so small that you literally have to live in every corner of your house to be able to live!”* Holly’s enthusiasm for her house has contributed to her becoming attached to both the home as well as the neighborhood.

*“We live right in the center of Delft, and are surrounded by little homes like ours. You live so close to your neighbors and all the amenities nearby, that you become familiar with your surroundings relatively quickly”.*

Holly and her boyfriend live in Delft, located in close proximity to The Hague. She works in The Hague and commutes there by bus, in the summer by bike. *“I love biking through the fields to The Hague, really at those moments I enjoy living here a lot and I would for sure miss it when I would be back in Australia”.* The size of Delft however may impact her place attachment differently than the place attachment of international professionals in The Hague. Delft is much more intimate in size and scale and living in the center, she is really close to everything and surrounded by old architecture, historical landmarks and small canals. Despite the fact that she has only been here for two years, Holly’s place attachment is greater than the place attachment of other interviewees. This may be partially due to the size of her residential environment.

Lastly, a previously mentioned example: in the previous chapter on social interaction it was briefly mentioned that a lot of Shell employees live in the Archipelbuurt in The Hague, also nicknamed the “Shell archipel” (archipelago). One of the professionals also living in this area is American geophysicist Steve. Steve has described his neighborhood contact with colleagues and other neighbors as a very great attribute to his perception of the neighborhood.

*“It is a very clean and organized neighborhood with nice people. I enjoy the architecture of the area because it is very distinctive. The home I live in is situated on the two upper levels of a house, like you see often in this neighborhood. This neighborhood offers so many features that I like, that after being there for almost eight years now, I feel really attached and at home to my house.”*

Again, cleanliness and aesthetics can impact the impression of the street or neighborhood and affect the place attachment of international professionals. Their local environment (e.g. home, street, neighborhood) is really important for their impression of the city and their place attachment to The Hague. Most of the interviewees of this study said to be attached to their house; only 5 out of 25 responded that they did not feel any attachment to their house or residential environment in The Hague.

#### *Public spaces*

The public spaces of The Hague were explored in chapter 4 and it was indicated that there are many squares, parks and streets that are accessible public spaces. It was also concluded that public spaces plays a key role for public social life in The Netherlands. Low and Altman (1992) have indicated that for the emotional bonds that people form with different types of places and landscapes, the physical form of the spaces and locations are very important. For international professional migrants the foreign environment in their host country may be very appealing. *“I really find the way The Hague looks an additional benefit on top my professional and social environment here”* says 39-year-old American professional Pete.

Pete and his wife have one daughter and on weekends in the summer they like to go to the beach. *“We enjoy sitting on a terrace while my daughter is playing in the sand right in front of us”* he says. In addition, *“We sometimes look at each other and say how did we end up in a situation where our home is so close to both the beach and a historic city center – we live exactly in between- and how did we get so lucky?”* Pete and his wife clearly enjoy their stay in The Hague and appreciate their environment. They consider themselves fortunate to have this physical surrounding indicating place attachment to The Hague for Pete. Parks are also very popular with international professionals of this study, One interviewee, Andras from Hungary states:

*“For me, summer evenings are the best, with a group of international friends we do evening picnics twice a month in de Haagse Bos during the summer. The Hague really has a unique environment and there are so many places where you can meet up with friends or colleagues”*

The moderate climate in the Netherlands allows for more activities to take place outside. Many international professionals in this study indicated that they tried to do a lot of activities outside from meeting up with friends to biking to the beach. The ‘outdoor’ life is really seen by many internationals as an important aspect of their social life. International professional Tanisha says: *“I enjoy the terraces in The Hague very much. They are usually located on beautiful squares with nice architecture, statues that teach me something about the history of Holland. My favourite terrace is on ‘Het Plein’ in The Hague.”* The more time is spent outside, the greater the chances that people become attached to their environment. Many international professionals said they appreciated the environment more when they walked or biked through their area. Australian Clive bikes to work every day and says that that has contributed to his place attachment:

*“The biking culture in The Hague has really made me appreciate the environment more. It has a relaxing aspect, biking to work is very different than driving. No paying for parking, no traffic jams and less time commuting. I really think it contributes to the quality of life in this city. Seeing familiar places every day makes me attached to the city.”*

Clive believes that his attention to details of the city is really a result of his biking trips. For many international professionals the alternative transportation methods such as tram and bike to get to work, offers a new way to explore the city. Commuting to work on bike or with public transit was very uncommon for most interviewees before moving to The Hague. The built environment and offered services (bike paths, bike friendly roads, public transit) have resulted in a change of certain life patterns. The change in life patterns may alter their way of perceiving the city, because biking makes it better possible to see certain features of the city for example buildings and infrastructure.

*“Well The Hague has many architectural features that I enjoy, specifically the combination between old and new building styles. They have many new and modern buildings, but in the city center you mainly find traditional architecture”*

Says Megan, who walks through her neighborhood a lot with her son. She visits different public spaces in the city such as squares while she is shopping or the boat-terraces on the Zuid Singelsegracht. *“The Hague has all these neat places to go to. The boat terraces for example, I think it is great how Dutch people try to be creative with the water and the water”* The appreciation for the environment as was evident in the responses of many interviewees, indicates a definite extent of place attachment to The Hague. Because The Hague has so many different physical features and public spaces with unique features, most interviewees were able to mention many areas, places or buildings that they felt a special significance for or that they enjoyed to have in their environment.

#### *City district and city*

Similar to Houston, place attachment to city districts and city was less obvious than the attachment to places in the city for international professionals. But whereas international professionals in Houston often indicated they did not have a specific feeling or sense of place attachment for the city, almost all international professionals in The Hague said they felt attached to the city. Interestingly enough, even the people who had only been in The Hague briefly (i.e. six months or less) or who did not necessarily like their residential environment still indicated that they felt attached to the city and carried a sentiment of fondness for The Hague. The attachment to The Hague is based on an appreciation of international professionals of many aspects of the city such as the architecture, the public transit provisions, the social environment, the geographic location and physical aspects as parks and beaches. International professional Billy says:

*“I find The Hague an extremely pleasant city to live in. The city offers so many options from nice squares to cultural activities: from the jazz fest to a festival for internationals in The*



*Hague. There is something for everyone here. Apart from the lacking service mentality of people in The Hague, I find that most citizens of The Hague always see options and opportunities so doing business here is great – it is like one great adventure to live here!”*

Billy briefly hints at the events that are organized in The Hague. The fact that there are so many different activities and festivals in The Hague provides entertainment for everyone. The events organized in the city may contribute to an international professional's place attachment too, not only as an opportunity to meet new social connections but also to create a sense of belonging that leads to an emotional bond with the local area (Low & Altman, 1992).

#### PREDICTORS OF PLACE ATTACHMENT

Now that it has been concluded that international professionals in The Hague are more attached to the city, it is important to understand what predictors are important for the place attachment to the city as an entity but also to neighborhoods or public spaces in The Hague. This section analyzes how and what predictors of place attachment are relevant for The Hague.

##### *Socio-economic predictors*

Although international professional migrants in The Hague come from a variety of backgrounds, with different nationalities and different life-cycle stages, they have some socio-economic predictors in common. One example of socio-economic predictors that many of these international professional migrants have in common is level of education. Another one is income. This study did not involve a direct comparison of the incomes of the interviewees, but what can be said is that due to the fact they have a similar income they may have many of the same activities (i.e. shop in similar stores or dine in similar restaurants), and as concluded in chapter 5, often live in the same area. The fact that these international migrants are 'mobile' in certain areas of the city (i.e. certain stores, certain restaurants, certain parks and terraces) may impact the *locations* to which they become attached. In addition, frequently these international professionals join clubs where they often meet peers in the same situation. With a language barrier in place in the Netherlands, it is often very nice to meet people who are in a similar situation and converse effortlessly in English. This may lead to less place attachment, because many other internationals are also relatively 'footloose' and foreign in The Hague's society.

More international professionals recognize the language 'problem' as a prominent feature in their stay: *"The language was quite a big deal to me, I felt very uncomfortable in the beginning that I was living in their country, but I was not able to speak the language at all"* says another Canadian professional Philip, who came to The Hague for a chemical engineering job, but ended switching jobs to a consulting position. *"But as soon as I tried to speak Dutch and people would hear because of my accent that I was not Dutch, they would start speaking to me in English. It was very frustrating"*. This problem is recognized by many interviewees, as well as in the literature (Vossestein, 2004): Dutch locals seem to be want to polite or show off their English skills to internationals. This makes developing local language skills difficult at times, even though language can significantly contribute to place attachment and 'feeling at home' in a society.

*"I lived in Toronto for six years and grew up in its suburbs so it will always be home and I miss obvious things: family, friends and the culture"*, says professional Megan. Perhaps this is the longest Megan has lived in a city or community for, because she was always moving around as a child. This may make it much more difficult to become attached to a place (Trentelman, 2008). For someone who is considerably older than Megan, six years may not be that much in his or her *length of residence* experience, but for Megan it is. This shows that length of residence is also relative to an individual's age and life cycle stage (which is in the conceptual framework referred to as 'background')

Similar to the situation in Houston, children in a family of international migrants can really alter the choices that are made with regards to the temporary migration. The choice of residence may be determined based upon the location of the schools. In The Hague however, there are quite a few options available with regards to international schools given the spatial scale of the city (Pollock et al., 2001; Zein The Hague; 2010). The location of the school had an effect on the location of residence chosen, but was not as determining as many interviewees in Houston stated it to be. This again is

perhaps due to the smaller spatial scale and relative proximity of all city areas in The Hague, especially for North-American international professionals, who are relating the distances to their own spatial scale. “I was used to driving for over an hour to get to the other side of the city”, says 42-year-old international professional Pam, who is a communications advisor for a non-profit organization. “Right now, when I have to drop my son off at soccer, it’s a breeze! Only a 10-minute drive, or occasionally he goes on his bicycle if weather permits it”. But it is not mainly the choice of residential location in which children can impact place attachment of international professionals. Many international professionals state that because of their children they were compelled to explore The Hague more than perhaps they would have done if they had come on the assignment alone. Discovering of the city can lead to a greater attachment to place as a result of the experiences and visual recognition of areas.

#### *Social predictors*

In the previous sector it was indicated that *language* is a very important socio-economic predictor: people who speak the local language are more likely to become attached to the location. But language can also act as an important link for *social ties* within a society (Portes, 2002). Interviewees who have stated that they were able to speak Dutch capably tended to have much more local friends and local embeddedness. That local embeddedness can create more emotional bonds with an area and lead to place attachment of international professionals. Other interviewees were very happy about the opportunity to meet other internationals. These international professionals were not really interested in or looking for local contacts and connections. To them, being connected to other people who live in the same location are close enough for local social ties. Perhaps interacting with other internationals is much easier because of the shared experience of alienation and a shared sentiment of being in an unfamiliar environment. This indicates that ‘local’ Dutch friends do not necessarily imply that professionals are more attached to The Hague in comparison to internationals that have more international friends locally. When individuals surround themselves with others who are very similar or at least similar in situation, it creates a certain place attachment too. Interestingly enough, despite what was mentioned in the previous section; that international professional migrants often interact and spend time with other international professionals in The Hague (much more so than in Houston), there are some international professionals who attempt to focus on local contacts rather than other internationals. This category of international professionals joins local swimming clubs, book clubs or simply tries to connect more with neighbors.

An example of the first category, which focuses on mainly establishing international friends, is Paul. As previously mentioned, Paul is a 44-year-old IT professional from Britain. His favorite location to spend his free time is at the local Bagels & Beans coffeehouse in the center of The Hague, a place that he says he feels very attached to within the city of The Hague. Every Saturday morning he goes to the café, starts his day with a coffee and waits for other internationals to show up. He has a small group of 5 or 6 people who will also come to the café on Saturdays, but sometimes one or two are traveling. The size of the group however ensures that there is always someone available for ‘social chatter’ as he calls it. In addition, Paul is member of two social clubs for expats. He attends dinners, drinks and other social activities with this group and has established a firm base of international friendships while he has been in The Hague. He does not really spend much time with Dutch locals at all. Paul owns a home in England, while he rents an apartment in The Hague. Paul openly says that he is trying to keep a base in both countries. That double base can decrease the place attachment to The Hague, because he is always trying to maintain links, connections and ultimately attachment to two locations. This does not mean Paul cannot be attached at all to The Hague, but such international professionals always may keep a temporal nature in establishing their social connections (Wang & Nayir, 2006) in The Hague.

Another example is American geophysicist Steve, also mentioned in the previous chapter for being divorced and sharing parental rights with his ex-wife. Therefore he stays in The Hague. He has joined the local swimming club and is very involved in the organization of swimming competitions for the Masters category. He also has purchased his home and - as far as homeownership matters - is very close with his neighbors and other people in the neighborhood, some who work for the same company. His positive attitude and his descriptions of his neighbors indicate a great degree of place attachment. Steve has been in The Netherlands for quite a while and purchased his home, so again those predictors may also have an impact on strengthening his place attachment. Steve has international friends too,

through his 11-year-old daughter who attends the British School in The Hague; he has become friends with some of the other parents, most of them internationals also. But he remarks that many international friends 'leave' after a while because they go back home or they proceed to another international assignment.

*"Every time someone leaves it is like you lose a little bit of the location here, especially if they have become close friends, so I try to focus my time a little bit on Dutch people too. I have a Dutch girlfriend right now, that helps!"*

Although some international professionals did not allow all their free time to be spent on their Dutch social life. But for many international professionals their daily local social interaction and their local home is the current place they want to be and where they feel at home. And unlike Houston the *sense of security* does not come as much as a result of local social ties as it does from the fact that The Hague is relatively small, most internationals live in safe areas where they feel that they are part of the neighborhood. This really seems to be a much more unique feeling that international professionals in The Hague have with regards to place attachment, despite the language barrier. Perhaps it is the scale of the city, the layout or the bike-friendly roads, which makes it seem like a small town occasionally.

Another large difference with Houston is the social role that the professional environment plays for the international professional migrant. Colleagues make up an important part of the international migrants social life, for international professional migrants in The Hague this seems to be much less so. Attended clubs or social activities seem to 'bring' more friends and new links in the local social network of the international professional in The Hague, than their work environment. One of the interviewees who seemed very adamant about her relationship with her colleagues and seeing them outside of the office was Polish 29-year-old professional Agnes. While her husband made many new friends in his IT job, her job in supply chain of a company that is based out of Westland has not provided her with any friends:

*"My colleagues are helpful and friendly, but the atmosphere in the office is not such that I would like to invite any of them for dinner really. I am strictly in my office to work and after work I meet people in other ways, my salsa class and the social group that Matt and I belong to and that we occasionally go out for dinner with"*

Agnes is attached to her home and to the location she takes her salsa classes, but not to her office environment. Other professionals seem to have very different experiences in The Hague. Australian professional Holly says: *"My colleagues have become true good friends, they are such a comfort to talk to when I miss my family and fun to go out with on the weekends. One of the girls in my office and I really get along well, we often go out for dinner together, see a movie or join the yoga on the beach sessions. They have really showed me around in the city!"* Perhaps the closeness to colleagues also depends on similarities in background, office composition (many internationals such as in Holly's case, or simply one or two internationals such as in Agnes case) are very determining in the extent to which the professional environment plays a role in local social connections and ties and ultimately the place attachment of an individual. And those local connections such as Holly's can contribute to getting to know the area and becoming emotionally attached to locations in the city. The chances that Agnes will become as attached to The Hague as Holly is to her city, are very slim. Social connections can really provide many ways to become attached to a place or location.

#### *Environmental predictors*

The effect of city's layout on sense of security in the last section is connected to the next topic, environmental predictors. Most international professionals said that even though the area in and around The Hague is very urbanized, the green spaces such as parks and trees on squares as well as the easy getaway that the beach provides ensure that the city is perceived as very green and aesthetically pleasing. The fact that they enjoy those characteristics of the cities makes many of them more attached to their current location. Another major difference with Houston is the architecture. Architectural features of the city that can be recognized, such as a skyline or buildings that form a landmark can really contribute to the feeling of appreciation and sense of belonging that creates affection for a place.

But in The Hague, international professionals do not only have this attachment with the area they live in. It is often seen that persons who have lived in a place feel greater attachment to it (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981). But another aspect of place attachment is; the ties that are established within the surrounding area. An increase in familiarity with other areas for example due to the fact interviewees had acquaintances or friends living there, or because they would go shop in that area or to the gym can lead to appreciation and ultimately to some extent also to place attachment. The 24-year-old and youngest international professional Holly who works as a communications consultant says:

*“The opportunity to go to local parks and to the beach is really outstanding here in The Hague. The city provides a great combination of green spaces, nice squares with ‘terrasjes’ and great housing facilities. The only thing is that the houses are quite small and expensive, right now my boyfriend and I live in a studio that is 35 square meters, quite small for the two of us!”*

When interviewees were asked to what extent the physical environment impacts their experience of the city, their perceptions tend to be diverse. Some spoke of the green spaces and parks, others about the social life and squares. Others saw their environment mostly as their neighborhood, the social setting with new friends and acquaintances. Another obvious distance with Houston is that interviewees in The Hague were much less likely (only one or two of the international professionals did) to mention their office as part of their environment or local setting. Most international professionals were satisfied with the way their office building looked and was designed. *“The Netherlands offers many great locations for offices where other companies are close by or where you can just go to the park to eat your lunch while you’re at work”*, says Russian HR professional Elena.

One of the largest environmental features mentioned by many international professionals are the outdoor terraces and patios in The Hague in the summer. After work many of them (especially single professionals and professionals with spouse or partners only) go for a drink at a terrace downtown, occasionally with colleagues. *“Everything is so close by our house”* says Chris, the British diplomat.

*“We are really satisfied with the neighborhood we chose, it is clean and quiet, yet very close to all amenities and some of the best terraces in The Hague. Summers are absolutely marvelous here, and it rains much less than in England it seems!”*

Chris’s statement clearly shows that him and his wife feel content and attached to their current location. They enjoy the aesthetical appearance of the city, the environmental factors such as the weather. In addition, Chris says: *“The Hague has such an interesting gathering of people from all over the world, yet it feels like somehow all these people feel like they belong here and they are part of the life in The Netherlands, even if most of their friends are internationals”*. Elena also confirmed this in her statement:

*“It does not matter whether your friends are Dutch or other internationals, it is about the place you create together. My friends and I are having a great time in The Hague. I think you’re in charge and responsible for making it a successful experience. I find the circumstances so much better for me than they would have been in Russia, that I try to make the best of everything I do here and I thoroughly enjoy it.”*

Elena’s response is a combination of social and physical aspects that lead to place attachment. Although her statement is not as strongly referring to how attached she is to the city of The Hague and her local environment in The Hague. But nevertheless it becomes clear from her statement that she feels at home and likes living there. In the chapter on social interaction Elena was also quoted about her social interaction with neighbors because she said she greets her neighbor every day while he is walking his dog, while she is leaving for work. They have a little chat. Small social interactions as takes place in her morning can contribute significantly to her sense of place attachment.

Brown et al. (2004) and Lewicka (2010) point out that when individuals want to point out positive features of their environment to emphasize their place attachment to an area, it is not hard to ‘find’ positive features to mention at all. This is how people frequently become attached to a place: they *want* to be attached to it. In addition, the environmental features are experienced differently depending on an individual’s background. If for example, Chris had lived in Arizona all his life and was

not used to rain at all, he may have perceived the weather in the Netherlands as very different (and perhaps more negatively) than he does now. But the impact of physical features of the local environment on place attachment should not be underestimated. Canadian professional Philip for example, experiences the summers in The Netherlands quite differently:

*“I really miss the summers that are generally always hot and sunny throughout July and August. There's hardly a day when you can't sit on a patio in shorts. Here it's a bit more infrequent. Also, our family has a beautiful cottage on a lake North of the city. I really miss spending weekends there.”*

But it is important to not that the perception of the experience and place attachment of international professionals therefore remains highly subjective to interpretation.

#### 6.4 OTHER FACTORS THAT CAN AFFECT PLACE ATTACHMENT

There are also other factors that may affect place attachment of international professionals in their host environment or city. This section discusses a few other factors that affect the place attachment of some of the interviewees of this study.

##### *Purpose of stay*

One of the predictors that has received most attention in research is *length of residence* (Hernandez et al., 2007). In the previous sections length of residence has been dealt with extensively also. *Purpose of stay* however can also play an important role on the place attachment. Depending on the reasons upon which the decision was based to initiate the expatriate assignment, international professionals can feel very differently about their adjustment process to the local environment and culture. Single professionals for example, may simply go to Houston or The Hague to work for a few years and have little interest in meeting a lot of new people while they are there and establishing a broad network. International professional Paul in The Hague for example, does have interest in meeting others but prefers to focus on other internationals.

*“I try to spend most of my time with other international professionals, who are in a similar situation. I enjoy meeting people from all over the world and expat groups really give me that opportunity. I don't have as much interest in establishing a broad social network in The Hague with many Dutch people.”*

Obviously, the desire to establish social ties is also largely dependent on the length of the assignment (and thus length of residence). But for professionals with families it may be much harder to see their assignment and professional choices that impact their private life and the lives of their families separately from their social network and local ties. For example, 44-year old French professional Jérémie says:

*“The hardest part about the assignment is that we came here for my job. My wife had to quit her job and has had difficulty obtaining a work visa. She is an HR specialist and so far my company has done very little to help us out with a work visa for her. This decision to go to Houston does not only impact my life but also hers, and because she cannot work it puts a strain on the assignment and it is difficult for us to become very attached to the city”*

A family's wellbeing can impact the success and duration of the expatriate assignment significantly as was concluded by Kraimer et al. (2009). But in this case it also puts a strain on the place attachment of Jérémie and his wife because it is unknown if they will stay and whether or not his wife will eventually be able to work. Morely and Heraty (2004) have identified the key causes of failure of expatriate assignments: First is the inability of international professional's spouse to adjust to a different physical or cultural environment, second is the inability of the international professional's ability to adapt in a different physical or cultural environment and third are other family-related problems. The fact that the three main causes of expatriate retention failure are a result of personal circumstances indicates that it is important that corporations and organizations realize the importance of well being of an international professional's family (Kraimer et al., 2009). Morely and Heraty (2004) have indicated that

in recent years, large international corporations and organizations have increasingly paid attention to the situation of spouses and other family members joining the international professional on their assignment. But simply paying attention is not enough; if the international professional's family is unhappy with the circumstances, the chances for place attachment are virtually non-existent for the international professional on the assignment.

Professionals who intend to stay longer or prolong their assignment may feel much more need to work on establishing a local network. For instance, Elena in The Hague says: *"I have no immediate plans to return to Russia, if I stay here until next year I can obtain the right to stay here permanently. The professional situation here is so much better for me than it would be in Russia, that it is necessary to establish a local network here if I intend to stay longer."*

Some international professionals stated that the largest driver behind their decision to go abroad was based on a change of scene, new career developments and meeting new people. *"For me this move was strategically very important for my career. Regardless of whether I intend to stay in Houston or not after this assignment, this role has provided me with a lot of opportunity for the future"* says British professional Becci in Houston. Becci says she sees a potential for staying much longer in Houston, this must indicate that she enjoys living there at least to some extent and could indicate that she has a certain level of place attachment that may influence her decision to repatriate or not (Kraimer et al, 2009). While some internationals are very open to establishing a new social life and to building a local network in the host country, others remain uninterested mainly due to the temporality of their stay. For the former, the place attachment to the host country at the end of their assignment is likely to be much larger than for people who are not interested in their social circumstances on their assignment.

This leads to believe that social factors and social connections remain largely responsible for initiating a certain degree of place attachment. Perhaps more than the physical environment initially does. But the longer international professionals stay, the more they start to appreciate their environment and become attached to places in the city and the city itself. The Hague just offers more physically distinct opportunities and places to become attached to, because they make The Hague unique. Houston has much more features that can be found in other large American cities and does not necessarily demonstrate uniqueness. More recently, apart from the already present parks, Houston has been developing certain areas and public spaces such as Discovery Green and Houston Pavilions (see chapter 4). These places may create more opportunities for place attachment in the future. It can be concluded that depending on the purpose of stay, place attachment can thus be affected negatively or positively as a result of the international professional's circumstances.

#### *Company culture*

Briefly discussed in the section on professional social interaction in the previous chapter, the company culture can also be a main driver for local place attachment (Kraimer et al., 2009). In companies where the company culture is strong and employees also feel personally close to their colleagues, the chance of successful expatriate retention is much larger. As a result chances of the international professional feeling 'at home' in the city increase also. Place attachment is thus partially a result of the professional environment of an international professional migrant.

*"The conditions upon which I was relocated to Houston were excellent. I received relocation compensations, a salary increase and relocation assistance. But I was not really prepared for the different professional situation. The culture in our office is much different than our head office, where I used to work. People are a lot more personal with each other and call each other by first name. Back home I was not used to this, and I still find it difficult to find the current situation 'normal', perhaps never..."*

Many international professionals in Houston said their financial compensation was significant. But in The Hague many international professionals emphasized the social assistance they had received was significant. Yet, both can make a considerable contribution to the place attachment of international professionals (Morely & Heraty, 2004). Some companies organize local agents that assist in setting up bank accounts, cell phones, school enrollments and gym memberships. When the professionals were asked whether that had made a difference on their place attachment, a professional in The Hague



responded: *“Well it certainly makes you feel at home, when you don’t have to search for everything in the first few weeks.”* But in the long run it really depends on the international professional and their family to establish social support for each other or through a local network. 28-year-old Milena from Bulgaria, who is in The Hague for European Union projects says: *“Your organization can help you settle and that is really helpful but making the best of your new situation is really up to you, they will not be able to do that for you.”* Milena believes that new friends and local contacts can really help to feel more at home, wherever the location is and regardless of whether or not you like the city or country that you are temporarily residing in.

Lastly, if the corporate culture is relatively similar in both countries, which is can be the case for multinationals and larger international organizations (Kraimer et al., 2009), it is easier for international professional migrants to identify with the corporate culture because they recognize it and are familiar with the practices.

*“Well I spent two thirds of my working life in Holland by now so it is getting difficult to compare. But I would say most of the company culture is the same, perhaps the dress code a bit more formal. Socially, I don’t believe I can really tell... oh yeah the Dutch debate and negotiate more about everything, that can be tiring sometimes...”* (British professional Paul, The Hague)

Differences or similarities in corporate culture can also affect place attachment of temporary international professionals in the office; if he or she is content with her work situation, and feels good about the professional environment it is more likely that other environmental predictors of place attachment will also be positively linked to place attachment (Dahl & Sorenson, 2008).

#### *Governmental policies*

Not much evidence or research exist to what extent different political or religious opinions affect the place attachment of international professionals (Lewicka, 2010). But large political differences in comparison to their home country, can affect the way international professionals feel attached to their host city because they can or cannot identify themselves with the policies. This can work two ways: people who agree with their political system and decisions that are made on a policy level in their own country, may not exactly be able to identify themselves with the politics of the host country. The opposite can also be the case however, where disagreement with an individual’s home country political course, can result into the host country’s political system to be more easily accepted.

Incidentally, one of the international professional migrants in The Hague is an American from the other research city Houston: international professional Pam. She and her family have been in The Netherlands for 2,5 years. *“In Houston, I really grew up with a very Republican orientation. My parents were always against socialists and the Democratic Party. We have gun laws in Texas and I identify myself with the values that accompany this.”* Pam says she has a very difficult time understanding the open and social structure of the Dutch system. She has been raised with hard work paying off considerably, and thinks to motivate people you have to reward them if they work, not if they are unemployed. Other Dutch values and laws on for example gay rights and euthanasia, she can understand and believes The Netherlands is very progressive in a good way. But from Europeans in Houston, similar sounds can be heard the opposite direction. Many residents of countries in the EU with relatively liberal regulations have difficulties accepting some of the political orientations of Houston’s politics and those of the state of Texas, as mentioned in chapter 4. *“The idea that I am temporarily residing in a state where capital punishment is still a practice, sometimes bothers me”.*

### **6.5 CONCLUSION: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON AND THE HAGUE IN PLACE ATTACHMENT**

Place attachment can involve an elaborate interplay of emotion, cognition and behavior in reference to place. Hernandez et al. (2007) and Hay (1998) have concluded that place attachment arises, among other variables, from mobility, length of residence, shared meanings and social belonging. In this chapter it has been concluded that the place attachment of international professional migrants who temporarily reside in The Hague seems greater than the place attachment of international professional migrants in Houston on certain spatial scales such city level. In Houston, place attachment seems to be

greater to a neighborhood area. This is largely due to the distinct features of the built environment, and the presence of public spaces where people can spend time and become attached to.

One of the ongoing debates in the place attachment literature is the question whether the social aspects of place should be emphasized more than the physical, since social meanings and interaction are what make it 'place' rather than 'space' (Low & Altman, 1992; Trentelman, 2008). Many scholars (Beckly, 2003; Stedman, 2002) have been concerned that the physical aspects of place do not receive enough focus in comparison to the social aspects of place. Others (Freudenburg et al, 1995, Greider & Garkovich, 1994) argue that physical matters less because our understanding of it is all socially constructed anyway (Stedman, 2002). This study attempts to combine the physical aspects of space with the social aspects of place by analyzing place attachment of international professionals with regards to their attachment to physical spaces, as well as social contacts and how those social contacts impact the places they visit and become attached to.

*Time* is a key element for place attachment in both cities. It takes time to become attached to a location. This is time that international professionals often do not have, either because they are working a lot, traveling frequently or due to the temporality of their stay. Especially in Houston, time puts a constraint on the chances to become attached to the location, because the temporary stay of an international migrant, filled with professional duties, does not allow for much time with local experiences of the surroundings. Another important aspect for place attachment is the physical surroundings that an international professional encounters during their temporary stay. The results of the interviews also indicate that public spaces and the built environment matter a great deal for place attachment of international professionals. The impression that international professionals get is largely based on aesthetics, activities and social contacts that they have in the vicinity.

The *purpose of stay* can also play a key role in the place attachment of international professionals. Many international professionals in this study in The Hague indicated that an important aspect of the relocation was to experience the life and environment there. In Houston, international professionals explained in their interviews that their relocation was primarily for career purposes and had little to do with the environment they relocated to. And although company culture can contribute to local place attachment it does not seem to be a determining factor in either place. Children are also less important to place attachment than they are for social interaction, although through children many local social interactions can be established that can affect the places that are being visited and as a result the place attachment of the international professional migrant.

Favorite locations in the city that many international professionals become attached to in the cities were different for both cities. In Houston it was mainly the parks such as Memorial Park, Hermann Park or Buffalo Bayou. Other public spaces that were important for local place attachment of international professionals in Houston were shopping areas such as Galleria Mall. In The Hague, parks were also popular (such as Zuiderpark and Haagse Bos) but the beach and dunes were also often mentioned as places that international professionals had become attached to or frequently visited. Social and public places that internationals in The Hague enjoyed, often visited and become attached to are squares with terraces and outdoor markets. Squares and other open public spaces have been traditionally important for the social life of Europeans (Davies, 1993), but are thus also important for the place attachment of temporary residents such as international professional migrants in The Hague.

If international professionals have more local contacts, it is suggested that they 'use' the public spaces and areas that lend themselves greatly as becoming attached to. These social contacts are not necessarily 'local' contacts but can also be other internationals. In Houston however, international professionals are more likely to have a lot of friends and acquaintances that are local. Interviewees in The Hague more often have local social networks that include more internationals than locals. Language may be one of the explanations for this. In Houston, language is not as much of a constraint for local social contacts and resulting place attachment, because English is the native language and all international professionals of this study speak English.

Lastly, attachment to the home and neighborhood often differed from attachment to the city as an entity. In The Hague more international professionals indicated that they were attached to the city. In Houston, most international professionals in the study felt they were mostly attached to their local

area, their street or neighborhood. For both locations, the choice of residence is very important for the place attachment of international professionals. The location where they choose to live may impact who they interact with and what locations they visit frequently. Since the built environment differs significantly between the two research cities it can be said that place attachment is quite heavily influenced by the structure of the urban environment. In addition, the more traditional features and smaller scale of The Hague make it a city that is easier to become attached to than Houston. International professionals feel like they ‘know’ the city sooner and feel at home more easily, this facilitates the process of becoming attached to a place. Table 6.1 summarizes some of the most important outcomes for place attachment.

Place of Attachment	Houston	The Hague
Home and Neighbourhood	International professionals felt <b>most attached to their home and neighbourhood</b> . Many internationals were located in suburban areas, where contact with neighbours was most frequent for those with children. The neighbourhood was the most familiar place and many internationals talked to their neighbour 2-3 times per week on average. They indicated that neighbours and their home were the reasons they were attached to places on this spatial scale.	International professionals also had a lot of activities and interactions outside the neighbourhood. Many felt attached to the neighbourhood mainly due to its aesthetics and architecture and the contact with their neighbours.
Public Spaces	Shopping malls such as the Galleria, other shopping areas such as Uptown, and parks such as Hermann Park and Memorial Park were public spaces internationals in Houston felt most attached to.	Parks (Zuiderpark) and public squares (Het Plein and Markt were mentioned most often) with terraces were places that professionals were most attached to.
City district and city	International professionals mostly ‘operated’ in the (south-)western part of Houston, more affluent areas. Therefore they did not report to feel as much attachment to the city as a whole. This can be the result of the large spatial scale of Houston.	International professionals felt <b>most attached to city</b> and district; they named architecture, monuments, trees as landmarks of their attachment.

## 7 Conclusion

Key to this thesis was exploring the relationship between the experiences of international professional migrants and their local social interaction and place attachment. The main idea behind this study is that both the background of an international professional migrant as well as their local environment affect the potential for social interaction and place attachment. Many local social connections and distinct features of the built environment are thought to positively impact local social interaction. Furthermore, through social interaction it becomes possible to form emotional bonds with the local environment. Chances are that social interaction and place attachment interchangeably affect each other, whereby an international professional who has many local social interactions is more likely to experience a sense of place attachment. In another way, international professionals who feel attached locally to their street, neighborhood, city or a public place, are more likely to establish local social interaction. But this interplay of social interaction and place attachment is affected by internal and external factors such as an individual's background and social characteristics, the purpose and length of the stay and the structure of the built environment. The main question of this study was:

To what extent does the degree of social interaction and place attachment to the host country differ for international professional migrants in the American city of Houston (USA), and a European city, The Hague (The Netherlands)?

Houston and The Hague were chosen as research locations of this study. These two very contrasting research cities were chosen in order to gain a greater understanding of the different background characteristics and environmental aspects that are most important for social interaction and place attachment. Because the environmental characteristics of these two cities are so fundamentally different it is thought to make it easier to identify key aspects that can influence social interaction and place attachment. The empirical data in this study was obtained through 48 qualitative interviews with international professionals on a temporary assignment in Houston or The Hague. All additional information was obtained from organizations that were involved in the relocation of professionals to these two cities as well as statistics, local websites, policy documents and theoretical literature.

This concluding chapter is not meant to provide a summary of the most important empirical results. These results can be found in the concluding sections of chapter 5 and chapter 6, sections 5.5 and 6.5. This concluding chapter is meant to highlight the relation between the theoretical part of this study and the empirical results. In section 7.2, the links between literature and results will be demonstrated by using the central themes of this study. In section 7.3 the answers to research questions and conclusions of this study will be discussed. Lastly, several limitations of the research will be provided in section 7.4, as well as recommendations for further research.

### 7.1 COMBINING THEORY AND EMPIRICAL DATA

At the beginning of this study it was stated that it is possible to see the mobility of high-skilled professionals as a vehicle for the development of human capital, necessary for constructing a progressive global economy (Faist, 2000). And although the primary focus in the field of international

migration has always been on the causes of international migration (Massey, 1998), this study has focused on the impact of international migration, also known as 'impact-based' migration research (Dahl & Sorenson, 2007). As a result of their relocation the social interaction – the dynamic and changing sequence of social actions between individuals or groups – their social capital changes functionally and geographically. Several key themes have been identified to be important for *social interaction* and *place attachment* in this study. The most important themes will be discussed below. These important themes are: the value of networks, intensity and nature of social interaction, background of the professional migrant, the effect of new technologies, the impact of the local environment and places of attachment.

### **> Value of networks**

The assertion that networks have value has really been confirmed as a result of the social interaction of international professionals in this study. Those with more extensive local social interaction more often reported to be more attached to their city or neighborhood. Social interaction enables people to establish *social capital*. Even though many of the effects of social capital are positive, there are also negative effects such as social exclusion and dividing communities instead of uniting them. International migrants can feel that sense of social exclusion, where they do not feel accepted as part of a society. In this study, the interviewees in The Hague more often felt a sense of exclusion than the interviewees in Houston. It is thought that this can be primarily contributed to the difference in *language* and the language proficiency of international professionals, as well as the primary language of the host country. International professionals tend to engage in high levels of social interaction. The intensity and frequency of their social interaction depends on their local network. International professionals with families tend to have most local social interaction, especially in their neighborhood. Networks do not only foster aspects of social capital, they also cause international professional migrants to have more chances for interaction with others in their extended network. This creates a snowball effect for meeting more local contacts because these international professionals are more frequently invited to social events and gatherings.

International professional migrants can often be in a situation where they have both local and global social capital. *Time restrictions* and demanding professional schedules can make it difficult for international professionals to invest time in their social interactions. But another complicating factor is that international professionals on an expatriate assignment have to divide their free time between local social interactions and maintaining ties with their home country. The constant interplay of global and local social interaction demands significant time investment. For many international professionals it is really difficult to find a balance between investing time in new local social contacts, while remaining in touch with friends and family in their home country. However, literature (Wellman, 1996) suggests that non-local ties do not imply disappearance of the need for local social interaction. In both research cities international professionals used modern communication methods such as voice-over-IP (VoIP) and instant messaging. Empirical evidence in this study has indeed shown that modern communication methods contribute to the social interaction of international professionals in the maintenance of both global and local interactions. The total time and frequency of social interaction with the home country is for international professionals in both countries once every two weeks on average for phone calls and VoIP, but often on a daily basis for emails and instant messaging.

### **> Intensity and nature of local social interaction**

The classifications of social interaction that were presented in chapter 3 focus on the frequency and nature of the social interaction which individuals may have. These classifications provide a guide to the intensity of the social interaction. By looking at how often and how long individuals interact with others such as colleagues, neighbors, friends and family on a weekly basis, it is possible to identify what categories of professional migrants have more local social interaction than others. Most international professional migrants interacted once or twice per week with friends and family back home. Locally, the social interaction tended to be more frequent for professionals with families. As literature has suggested (Holstrom, 1998; Dahl & Sorenson, 2008), children can significantly impact the intensity and nature of local social interactions of their parents, which can lead to greater place attachment. It is thought that the institutional ties to local government and organizations are the primary reason for this. Empirical evidence in Chapter 6 has shown that in both research locations international

professionals with families feel that their children have contributed to their local place attachment.

In addition, one of the classifications mentioned in the theoretical chapter of this study (Davies, 1993) described the nature and type of relationships: the type of acquaintance, what kinds of contact and with what frequency does interaction take place, and how involved are individuals locally in their community. International professionals in Houston were more involved in their community, especially if they had purchased their home. *Home ownership* (for international professionals often equivalent to *length of stay*) did thus invoke an increased sense of commitment to the local community, as the research discussed in chapter 3 has suggested. From the experiences of the international professionals in chapter 5 and 6 it seems that the increased sense of commitment to the local community is mainly a result of length of stay rather than home ownership.

Length of residence (for international professionals also length of stay) contributes thus significantly to the intensity and nature of local social interaction. The longer an international professional migrant has been staying in the research city the more likely he or she is to have established significant social ties and social interactions in the local area. Furthermore, some research has suggested that the longer an international professional migrant has resided in an area, the more frequent they interact with neighbors and local friends. For international professionals in Houston this seems to be the case, the longer they have been living in the city the more frequent their local social interactions are. In The Hague however, international professionals tend to establish more local social interactions with other international professionals who are on temporary assignments as well. This implies that these professionals will also depart again with time, so the frequency of the social interaction of international professionals in The Hague does not really increase with an increasing length of residence.

#### > Background of the professional migrant

It is thought that the more obvious the contrast is between the social setting in the host country in comparison to the home country, the more obvious it may seem to what extent individuals are impacted by their local social interaction. *Language* is one of the most apparent features of cultural differences. In the previous paragraph it was mentioned that international professionals in The Hague tend to establish more local social interactions with other internationals. This may partially be due to the fact that the native language in The Hague is Dutch, which most of the international professionals on a temporary assignment do not speak, or have not mastered enough to entertain a conversation with friends. Therefore, international professionals in The Hague may be more encouraged to establish social interactions with other international professionals. In Houston, where English is the primary language, most international professionals mainly establish local social interactions with locals. Of course, depending on their association with a club (e.g. expat club, British internationals club etc.) they may also interact with other international professionals. Most international professionals in both research cities have an incredible command of English. Due to the fact that English is the official language spoken in most offices of interviewees of this study, the contrast between the social setting in the host country and the country of origin may be more apparent in The Hague in comparison to Houston.

Since many international professionals *travel* frequently, this may impede opportunities for establishing meaningful social interaction. Many international professionals are compelled to travel frequently for business purposes and as a result spend much of their time away from the host-city, leaving less time to become attached. But frequent traveling may also provide opportunity to remain connected to home country ties. Even though literature has suggested that this does not imply a loss or decrease of neighborhood ties (Wellman, 1979), it may impact the amount of time that an international professional can invest in new local social connections. Especially single international professionals in Houston tend to travel frequently, due to larger distances in the United States. In The Hague, although some international professionals reported to travel frequently made a lot of day trips that were less strenuous on local social interaction with new connections. The geographic scale of the two research cities makes an important dissimilarity of the spatial mobility of international professionals. In Houston, interviewees with a European background reported to use their car much more than they were accustomed to in their home country. Many believed this was primarily caused by the spatial scope of the city and country (as was expected based on the analysis of the research cities in chapter 4), but also somewhat by the behavior of local friends and acquaintances. It is



interesting to note that many international professionals felt that their (social) environment is made up of “*places created together*”, as one of the interviewees put it. This means that the social interaction and place attachment of international professionals is a complex interplay between the receiving society and the professional migrant, rather than a simple relation.

Plenty of research was available on the effect of *children* on social interaction (Portes, 1996; Holstrom, 1998; Putnam, 1999). Children are thought to affect the location of social interaction, but this study has proved that children can also impact the *frequency* of the social interaction and *type of contacts* with whom international professionals interact. Children can also play an important role in determining the diversity of *locations* where their parents may engage in social interaction. From educational institutions to sports fields and in the supermarket, international professionals in this study frequently indicated that their children were the reason they were visiting locations and a recurrent cause for them to meet local contacts

The effect of *children* on place attachment was much greater than anticipated. The research discussed in Chapter 3 (Portes, 1996; Putnam, 1999; Davies, 1993; Holstrom, 1998) suggested that children primarily have an effect on place attachment. This is mainly due to the institutional ties (i.e. formal organizations of government and public services such as schools) the connections to they have and the connections that are established through activities with or for their children. In The Hague, interviewees who sent their children to the British School indicated that they have formed a tight knitted network with other international professionals whose children are attending the same school. Activities outside of school as well as privately organized meetings occur as a result of their children’s enrollment at the school. Not only are those individuals in a comparable situation, they often tend to be in the same life-cycle stage.

*Life-cycle stage* is another background characteristic has a significant influence on the social interaction of international professionals. The life-cycle stage (i.e. the phase of life that an individual is in such as adolescent, midlife or elderly) affects the objectives international professionals have for their assignment, whether or not they have a partner and/or children, their free time activities and how focused they are on establishing a local network. For professionals with families, younger children may require more involvement and time, while single professionals may be interested in meeting very different social contacts than professionals with partners. Life-cycle stage is thus very important in how time is allocated and how much time there is for local interaction and community involvement in order to become attached to the city. When interviewees had been on multiple international assignments they tended to be much more footloose. Many of them felt less ‘need’ to establish many new local connections. In this case international professionals are also much less likely to engage actively in many social interactions. Single professionals established most of their local social interaction through the neighborhood community and their colleagues at work. Professionals with a partner in both Houston and The Hague were very affected by the occupation of their spouse. Professionals with a spouse who found a meaningful occupation or employment were more positive about their social interaction and local social network, which is partially established by their partner.

#### **> Effect of new technologies**

*New technologies* have facilitated spatial mobility over greater distances. As a result, the social networks of individuals have increased in geographic scale significantly. Social interaction takes place on the local community level as well as in virtual networks facilitated by new computer technologies. International professionals are leaders in speedily embedding new technologies into their lives. Interviewees of this study used modern communication technologies such as VOIP and instant messaging to stay in touch with friends and family in their home country. In addition, many of them also use new technologies in their daily lives in the host country to stay in touch with new local friends and colleagues. New communication technologies enable the maintenance of transnational ties regardless of the length of residence in another area. Typically these new communication technologies do not take away from traditional social interaction.

New technologies facilitate the transnational ties of reciprocity, exchange and solidarity as mentioned in chapter 3. International professionals promote the global flows and networks of activity and interaction within the realm of transnationalism and transnational social interaction. International

professionals facilitate the flow of knowledge, products or other types of exchanges between the home and the host country. Interviewees of this study often send goods to friends and family in their home country. In addition, the obtained information and local experiences are communicated to individuals in the home country too. In addition, an international professional brings a wealth of knowledge and experiences to the host country. As one of the main reasons for their expatriate assignment many interviewees reported to possess skills and experience that were necessary for the organization that arranged their international assignment.

But for interviewees of this study new technologies also provided opportunities to meet other professionals or learn more about their host country and city from other international professionals. In The Hague, online communities provide information with regards to practical matters and events in the area. In addition, some communities organize physical meetings where international professionals can extend their local network with other internationals. These local connections stimulate the frequency of their local social interactions but also create a sense of belonging for some international professional. In many cases a sense of belonging creates a greater place attachment to the local area. *Social connections* can contribute to the attachment to physical locations such as a street, neighborhood or city. International professionals frequently use new technologies such as Internet to gain familiarity with their new urban environment through maps and websites with information about local activities.

### > Impact of the local environment

Just as new technologies can significantly influence the place attachment of international professionals, so can the local environment. The *built environments* as well as the *physical environment* both play an important role in the perception that international professionals have about the city. In addition, international professional migrants are affected by the presence of social interaction in their environment through the concept of embeddedness of behavior. The local surroundings including the built environment and other individuals are thought to affect and influence the social interaction of an individual. The most important social influences for place attachment to a local setting for international professionals are thought to be friends, colleagues and other potential interactive agents that are part of the local environment. The most important physical influences for place attachment are public spaces, unique architectural features, parks and outstanding landmarks that international professionals are familiar with in their area. Seeing those physical features and the memories that certain places carry for an individual can create an emotional bond or attachment with a place, an area or a city.

The built environment also determines how individuals are able to move through space and through the urban area. Their path from residence to the office for example is created by the physical layout of the city and the route they choose to go provides its own unique experience. Landmarks and unique features of the city determine to what extent international professionals become attached to a place. The more unique and distinct features a city has, the greater the chances are that an international professional will become attached to certain places during a temporary stay. In addition, the behavior and attitudes of international professionals become gradually formed by dominant social influences.

Many interviewees in The Hague for example reported to bike to work, something that most internationals did not do before arriving to the city. The established built environment, combined with social practices (in this case using a bicycle) can create new behavior that has an impact on the place attachment of the international professional. On their temporary stay international professionals may thus acquire some of the norms, values and tastes of their local environment. In the case of Houston the car dependency is one of such acquired norms. Deconcentration in land use is thought to be mainly due to several structural economic changes including the increase in car ownership over the past five decades. In such regions urban functions have decentralized from the core area across urban space, and many have relocated to suburban nodes of development or *edge cities*. The highly suburbanized urban environment of Houston invokes different mobility patterns and a higher car usage for many international professionals in comparison to their home country.

Length of residence also impacts the place attachment of international professional migrants with regards to their physical environment. The longer an international professional resides in an area, the more likely it is for place attachment to be greater too. More opportunities for 'getting to know' an

area as well as a longer time frame to become familiarized with the environment, leads to a greater emotional bond with a place or an area. Furthermore, the physical climate also plays a role that should not be underestimated. A climate with extreme temperatures may limit the opportunities to explore the local environment and meet other individuals in (semi-) public spaces. And although warm and sunny weather can encourage outdoor activities, extreme heat can refrain people from going outside. In Houston, international professionals repeatedly mentioned that because of the summer heat they tried to be outside as little as possible. In The Hague, the summers are for most international professionals the best time for social interaction, because they meet friends and colleagues out on terraces of squares in the city.

### > Places of attachment

But not only the local environment affects to what places international professionals become attached to. The specific places can have attributes or features that may make it more likely for international professionals to become attached to. Attachment to place can be an attachment to a home, a street, a neighborhood, a square or to the city. Research in the area of place attachment is mostly associated with neighborhood-level place attachment. Yet, most international professionals in this study were not very attached to their neighborhood. In addition, most studies on attachment to place have viewed places as social environments only. There are very few references available to the physical dimension of place as a definition and also few regarding its analysis. This study has indicated that there are different levels of attachment amongst international professionals. The degree of place attachment varies with the age, gender, and family-composition of an international professional. Especially family-composition seems to be an important factor for attachment. International professionals with children tend to have more local ties in their neighborhood and tend to spend more time in their local area too. This gives both social and physical causes to a greater place attachment in comparison to their single counterparts or professionals with spouses.

In addition, the results of this study indicate that social attachment is greater than physical attachment. This may be one of the reasons why international professionals in The Hague are more attached to their city and spaces in the city in comparison to international professionals in Houston. The time in The Hague spent in public places and the places that international professionals tend to become most attached to, often serve a social purpose: meeting up with friends or colleagues. Therefore, many professionals in The Hague associate public spaces in the city with social gatherings they have had or they have seen. More specific, the interviewees in The Hague tend to be most attached to their street and public spaces in their area of the city, while in Houston shopping does not really happen on the street but rather in malls. This makes it more difficult to become attached to streets and outdoor public spaces, because less time is spent there. International professionals in The Hague also enjoy the proximity of parks, dunes and beaches, although no specific areas were given.

In Houston, international professionals answered in their interviews to be most attached to public parks and shopping areas such as the Galleria shopping mall, where the social function of the area (shopping) combined with the physical appearance can be a reason for attachment. Lastly, international professionals answered they felt attached to the city of The Hague, although they often associated certain areas or buildings in the city as their reason of physical attachment. In Houston however, the majority of the international professionals said they were attached to their local community or area but not necessarily to the city. It is thought that the amount of time spent outdoors, taking up the built environment is one of the reasons that international professionals in Houston are less attached to the city. Another reason could be the fact that there are less public spaces to spend free time, and less city-specific architecture and landmarks that appeal to international professionals in order to become attached.

## 7.2 CONCLUSIONS ON THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After identifying major themes of this study, this section provides answers to the research questions. Before answering the main research question, first the sub-questions are addressed.

*1. What developments can be observed in the global migration of high-skilled human capital, and what significance do these developments have for the international professionals at the research locations?*

The current economic recession - since 2008 until the present - has resulted in many of the international corporations to decrease the number of expatriate assignments globally. Many international professionals' assignments have been shortened or directly ended. This may cause major disruptions in the social interactions of these international professionals. Although some interviewees have reported to be familiar with the effects that the economic situation has on some expatriates, none of them responded to have been affected by it. Perhaps this is due to the type of industries that the interviewees of this study work in.

*2. How does social interaction for international professional migrants in Houston compare to the social interaction of their counterparts in The Hague and what can this be attributed to?*

North American city Houston provides a very suburban setting with many parks but very few outdoor public spaces such as squares. The spread out nature of the city provides opportunities and challenges for social interaction. The vast spaces with parks and large shopping areas provide opportunities to meet up with acquaintances or engage in organized activities such as a running club. These activities foster more social interactions. But the warm temperature, the lack of spaces such as public squares limits the opportunities to engage in spontaneous social interaction and meeting new people. For international professionals in Houston their workplace and professional relations play an important role in their local social interactions. This is partially due to the time they spend in their office and due to network activities that take place outside of work hours. Children also play a very important role in the social interactions of international professionals in Houston. Their links to local institutions and activities require the parents to invest a significant amount of time in their local social interaction, whereas single professionals for example are much more footloose and are able to travel on weekends and limit their local social interaction. Single professionals and professionals with spouses tend to have less social interaction in their local neighbourhood and more citywide than professionals with families.

In the research city in Europe, The Hague, children also play an important role in the social interaction. Children can determine the extent of the neighborhood interactions also in The Hague. Professionals with families in The Hague tend to have a lot of citywide social interaction as a result of their children, for example because they are attending an international school. The Hague's spatial scale is much smaller, including the green spaces, but there are many public spaces such as squares for suitable social gatherings and social interaction. The size of the urban environment in The Hague allows for more frequent social interaction with other international professionals in other areas of the city, although most of them tend to be clustered north and west of the center of The Hague. For both cities it can be concluded that the longer an international professional has been residing in the research city, the more social interactions they tend to have. International professionals in The Hague frequently join local (international) clubs to meet other individuals; as a result many of their social connections live all over the city. Another big difference between the social interactions of professionals in The Hague in comparison to those in Houston is that they more frequently have other international friends, while in Houston international professionals tend to have mostly local (American) friends. Language could be one of the factors that play a key role in this difference.

Social interaction varies particularly between different categories of international professionals within each city. Professionals with families are more likely to establish a larger local social network and interact less with their friends and family back home because of the ongoing local activities of family and children. International professionals in Houston tend to have more social interaction in the neighborhood and as a result of their professional environment than international professionals in The Hague. The extent and frequency of social interactions for international professionals can be mainly contributed to the length of residence, family composition and the built environment.

*3. How does social interaction of international professional migrants affect their place attachment and vice versa?*

The relationship between social interaction and place attachment is complex and diverse. It is a complex interplay of concepts that mutually affect and reinforce each other. More social interaction can lead to greater place attachment, but greater place attachment is in return more likely to result in more social interaction. In a positive scenario this means that international professionals establish many local social interactions and become attached to the social and physical space in the city as a

result. In a negative scenario, it can mean that international professionals feel excluded, do not establish much of a local network and as a result do not come to like the place nor become attached. But empirical evidence in Chapter 6 has suggested that the situation is often a bit more intricate, because international professionals tend to feel 'lonely' or 'left out' occasionally but also do not have zero social connections and interaction either. The sense of loneliness is also part of moving and establishing in a new area, although geographic location or culture can make this feeling more obvious.

The negative and positive relationships between the two concepts with regards to international professionals are often difficult to assess. For example in The Hague, more local social interaction tends to foster a greater place attachment to the city, while in Houston increasing social interactions most often led to a greater attachment to the neighborhood but much less to attachment to the city. But it is not simply a result of social interaction; other factors such as the physical environment also contribute to the attachment.

*4. To what extent does the degree of place attachment to the host city and neighborhood differ between Houston and The Hague and how can this be explained?*

It can be concluded that the place attachment of international professional migrants who temporarily reside in The Hague is greater than the place attachment of international professional migrants in Houston. Empirical evidence mainly suggests that this difference is created by the built environment and physical spaces in the city. The Hague has a more unique appearance and smaller streets. Houses are often built closer to one another than in Houston, resulting in more interaction with other residents of the area. The physical space results into behavior (e.g. biking, contact with neighbors, visiting other areas) that can increase or decrease the opportunities to become attached to a city. In comparison to Houston, The Hague tends to have more favorable aspects in the physical space, including many squares, to facilitate this.

Furthermore, attachment to place develops to different degrees within different spatial ranges and dimensions. Attachment to the *home and neighborhood* often differs from attachment to the *city* as an entity. In The Hague, more international professionals indicated that they were attached to the city. This was more difficult for international professionals in Houston, partially due to the lack of outdoor public spaces with landmarks and city-unique architectural features. Because it seems that the more time spent outside in the new city, the greater the chance for international professionals to become attached to their environment. In Houston, most international professionals in the study felt they were mostly attached to their local area, such as their street or neighbourhood. In Houston attachment to the neighborhood was most difficult for professionals without families. In The Hague, attachment to the neighborhood was difficult because most international professionals had a greater spatial mobility than the neighborhood-level and had more attachment to areas and places that were not necessarily located in the local neighborhood. Places of attachment in the city for international professionals in Houston were mainly parks and shopping malls. In The Hague, parks were also popular as well as dunes, beaches and squares with terraces. For both cities, the built environment plays an important role in the perceptions of international professionals of places to become attached to.

Social attachment tends to be greater than physical attachment for both cities. If international professionals knew more friends and acquaintances in their area, they often responded to be more attached to their local area also. Length of residence has a considerable impact on place attachment and is particularly important for the international professionals in Houston, because more time is required to become attached to distinct landmarks and features of the city. In addition, the degree of attachment varies with age, family composition, gender, purpose and length of stay. But interestingly enough, these predictors of place attachment tend to be fairly similar impact on international professionals in both cities.

Lastly, the main question of this study: *To what extent does the degree of social interaction and place attachment to the host country differ for international professional migrants in the American city of Houston (USA), and a European city, The Hague (The Netherlands)?*

By contrasting the experiences of international professionals it is possible to identify what aspects have an impact on their social interaction and place attachment. For both cities the family composition (i.e.

single, with partner, with family) of international professionals proved to be particularly important for the local social interaction. Table 7.1 summarizes previous conclusions in order to answer the main question of this study. This table is a mere indication for determinants of social interaction and place attachment. Table 7.1 shows how diverse and complex these determinants are for international professionals. Local features (i.e. social composition, physical layout of the city, size of the city, language and culture) that determine to what extent the social interactions are different or take place at different locations in the city. These locations of social interaction also affect the locations to which these international professionals become attached in their neighborhood or city. Public spaces and other city characteristics simply provide an indication of the chances for social contacts and opportunities for social interaction in the research cities.

It can be concluded that attachment to the city is greater in The Hague, while attachment to a local neighborhood tends to be greater in Houston, mainly as a result of the spatial scale of the city. In addition, in Houston international professionals tend to have more social interaction with professional connections and other families with children. In The Hague the location of the social interaction is a lot more spread throughout the city as a result of the smaller spatial scale, the locations of free time activities and families with children who live in other areas of the city. Determining factors for social interaction are background of the international professional, language, the built environment, and length of residence. For place attachment the most important factors are spatial scale of the city, availability of public places, length of residence and purpose of stay.

Table 7.1 Differences in social interaction and place attachment for Houston and The Hague

Indications	Social interaction	Place attachment
<b>Internal factors professional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Life cycle stage</b> and family composition are most important</li> <li>- <b>Language</b> was also an important factor for the type of interaction in The Hague</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Cultural background</b> determines ease of attachment in host city</li> <li>- <b>Language</b> and communication can increase social attachment to the host city</li> </ul>
<b>Social capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Children</b> play an important role in the formation of social interaction and social capital</li> <li>- <b>Clubs and organizations</b> form an important source of local interaction</li> <li>- <b>Interactions</b> in The Hague primarily with <b>other internationals</b>, more so than in Houston</li> <li>- <b>Professional environment</b> can be an important source of interaction for international professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More interactions and a larger <b>local social network</b> is likely to increase the physical attachment to the city</li> <li>- Exchange of ideas and <b>suggestions for places</b> to visit are suggested by social networks of the professional</li> </ul>
<b>Role of physical space</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Setting</b> and structure of neighborhoods and other physical spaces can determine frequency of interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Distinct <b>physical features</b> can increase local attachment</li> <li>- Presence of <b>public spaces</b> can facilitate attachment, but does not guarantee it</li> </ul>
<b>New technologies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>New communication technologies</b> can make it easier to communicate with local and global connections</li> <li>- <b>Frequent traveling</b> can affect interactions positively (more contact with home) or negatively (not enough to interact with connections in new environment)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New technologies allow for <b>virtually exploring a new city</b> or looking at reviews of places in the city as suggestions to visit</li> <li>- New technologies help to <b>reinforce ties</b> with home country, place attachment to home country can as a result continue</li> </ul>
<b>Other factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Length of residence</b></li> <li>- <b>Purpose of stay</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Length of residence</b></li> <li>- <b>Purpose of stay</b></li> </ul>



Continuation...Table 7.1

<b>Similarities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Ties and bonds</b> with connections back home remain unaffected</li> <li>- <b>Social segregation</b> in neighborhoods can affect the type of social interaction of professionals in the cities may have</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Both research cities have professionals who <b>feel at home</b> and some who do not</li> <li>- International professionals in both cities use new technologies to help them establish in the new town, while staying connected with friends and family back home resulting in a '<b>dual-attachment</b>'</li> </ul>
<b>Differences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interactions more geographically spread <b>throughout the city</b> in The Hague</li> <li>- Interactions more <b>clustered</b> in the west of the city in Houston</li> <li>- Locations for <b>free time</b> activity important for interactions in both cities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attachment to the <b>city</b> greater in The Hague</li> <li>- Attachment to a local <b>neighborhood</b> greater in Houston</li> <li>- <b>Spatial scale</b> impacts attachment</li> </ul>

### 7.3 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The 48 qualitative interviews in Houston and The Hague provide an indication for the social interaction and place attachment of these professional migrants. Social interaction and place attachment are matters that all interviewees felt pertained to them. This is because the interplay of these two concepts can be fundamentally important for the experience and success of all international professional migrants on assignment. The findings of this study indicate that it is essential for international professionals to relocate to an environment where there are plenty of opportunities for social interaction. Important aspects for social interaction and place attachment were identified in both research cities. Even if they do not utilize the opportunity to meet new social connections, these environments usually provide a setting where place attachment is better possible also. This can be due to the fact that areas that encourage social interaction such as public squares often also have unique features and landmarks that facilitate place attachment for temporary residents of a city or neighborhood.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Several similar features that facilitate local social interaction and place attachment have been analyzed under different environmental circumstances in two very different cities. Several features are location specific, while other features are applicable to both urban environments. However, some limitations should be taken into account when considering the conclusions of this study:

- ☑ This study had a limited sample size; the data analysis is not large enough to make conclusions representative for all international professionals in the research cities and for international professionals in other cities and countries.
- ☑ The qualitative nature of this study makes the interviews and analysis subjective to interpretation. Using the same interview template for all interviewees reduced the risk for inconsistencies.
- ☑ There was no distinction made between occupations or professional fields of the international professionals in this study.

Even though there may be limitations to this study, various future research opportunities exist. Over the past decades a lot of research interest has gone into studying social interaction in a transnational perspective. And even though place attachment research has its foundations in the 1960s, there is little standardization available for researching place attachment. The challenges for clarity and consistency in the use of place attachment are almost inevitable because the concept is so diverse and inclusive. Diversity is a significant contributor to the appearance of confusion in place attachment, but also provides plenty of opportunities for future research in this increasingly popular research field. A few suggestions for further research:

- ☑ Another suggestion for future research would be to look at how international professionals impact and transform their local environment during their temporary stay. This study showed that in The Hague some international professionals encountered neighbors who did not enjoy living next to expats that traveled frequently. But international professionals can also provide positive experiences for local residents.
- ☑ It would be interesting to analyze a case study where comparisons across industry could be made. Perhaps individuals in different professions have different interaction types and frequencies. People who need networking skills in their profession may have different interactions than someone with a very technical profession for example.
- ☑ A local impact study in an area such as the *Archipelbuurt* in The Hague would add value to research in this area. Furthermore, instead of high-skilled western professionals, further studies could also analyze the social interaction and place attachment of high-skilled non-western international professionals.
- ☑ Particularly with regards to the social interaction of professional migrants, future research could further explore the impact of new technologies their social interaction. It would be interesting for example to look at how recent development with Smartphones and PDAs for example affect international professionals social interaction or how they become attached sooner as a result of location based services that are now offered on the devices.

Several findings can be derived from this study that may have a broader application than the study itself. For example, this research offers explanations on why some international professionals have more social interaction in their temporary environment than others. It also provides a better understanding of the daily lives of international professionals on an expatriate assignment and issues they may encounter. It analyzes whether these issues have the ability to contribute to place attachment. This information may help HR professionals at international organizations assist professionals in their relocation to understand better what aspects may result in a successful assignment. For international professionals this study may help to identify what aspects are essential for a positive experience during an international assignment.

For international professionals this study may help to identify what aspects are key for a positive experience of their international assignment. It is clear that studying the impact of the migration of international professionals is a very interesting and diverse subject of research. Because impacts of migration offer view on a diverse spectrum of concept ranging from modern communication technologies to more 'classic' concepts such as the effect of social capital, there are endless opportunities for further exploration. International migration is never a simple relation between the host environment and the migrant but a complex interplay. The continuous transnational activities of international professionals provide an interesting perspective on the lives in both countries and result in an occurrence of intermingling cultures and interactions. The places that international professional migrants experience are a result of interactions with locals, the support of friends and family back home and the setting in which these interactions take place. Future research should not only concern the experience of professional migrants, but the *places that are created together* as a result of it.

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# Appendix A

International professional migrant interviewees per research city

## The Hague

The Hague Interviewees									
	Name	Nationality	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Children	Location	Length of Stay	Occupation
1	Elena	Russian	female	31	not married	0	Scheveningen	5 years	Compensation Analyst
2	Paul	British	male	44	not married	0	The Hague	10 years	IT/ Automation
3	Matt	Polish	male	29	married	0	The Hague	1 year	IT/ Programming
4	Agnes	Polish	female	29	married	0	The Hague	1.5 years	Distribution manager
5	Billy	Trinidad	male	49	divorced	2	The Hague	unknown (12 y)	Chemicals/ Publishing
6	Holly	SouthAfrican/Australian	female	24	not married	0	Delft	unknown (2 y)	Communications
7	Milena	Bulgarian	female	28	not married	0	The Hague	3 years	PR/Events
8	Chris	British	male	58	married	3	The Hague	2 years	Diplomat
9	Steve	American	male	54	divorced	1	The Hague	11 years	Exploration Geophysicist
10	Francois	French	male	27	not married	0	The Hague	2 years	IT/ Programming
11	Jan	Polish	male	32	not married	0	Scheveningen	2 years	Procurement Specialist
12	Geraldine	British	female	46	married	2	The Hague	5 years	Graphic Designer
13	Pam	American	female	42	married	3	The Hague	3 years	HR Manager
14	Megan	Canadian	female	28	married	1	Voorburg	unknown	Consulting
15	Jean	French	male	36	not married	0	The Hague	2 years	Journalist
16	Helen	Finnish	female	51	divorced	3	The Hague	8 years	Teacher Int School
17	Annette	German	female	48	married	2	The Hague	11 years	Consulting
18	Daniel	Israeli	male	42	not married	0	The Hague	unknown	Investment banking
19	Clive	Australian	male	42	married	3	Wassenaar	6 years	Lawyer
20	Pete	American	male	39	married	1	The Hague	3 years	Engineer
21	Andras	Hungarian	male	38	married	2	The Hague	3 years	Lawyer
22	Inga	Estonia	female	26	not married	0	Rijswijk	2 years +	Landscape Architect
23	Tanisha	Nigeria	female	36	not married	0	The Hague	5 years	Legal counselor
24	Asako	Japan	female	33	not married	0	The Hague	unknown	Business Analyst
25	Philip	Canadian	male	42	not married	0	The Hague	8 years	Consulting
	<b>Average Age</b>			<b>38.16</b>					
	Men			13					
	Women			12					

## Houston

Houston Interviewees									
	Name	Nationality	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Children	Location	Length of Stay	Occupation
1	Omiros	Greek	male	34	not married	0	Houston	3 years	Geophysicist
2	Daniel	British	male	42	married	3	Houston	5 years	IT Consultant
3	Arnout	Dutch	male	51	married	2	Houston	3 years	Director Supply Chain
4	Jesse	Canadian	male	27	not married	0	Houston	3 years	Engineer
5	Bhaskar	Indian/Canadian	male	49	married	1	Houston	10 years	Marketeer
6	Becci	British	female	48	married	2	Houston	8 years	Marketing manager
7	Patricia	German	female	45	not married	0	Houston	6 years	Sales specialist
8	Maria	Italian	female	38	not married	0	Houston	2 years	Language instructor
9	Jeremie	French	male	44	married	2	Houston	3 years	Engineer
10	Clemont	French	male	43	married	2	Houston	3 years	Managing director
11	Jorg	German	male	49	married	3	Houston	5 years	Geologist
12	Oscar	British	male	42	not married	1	Houston	11 years	Engineer
13	Larry	Irish	male	53	not married	0	Houston	6 years	Corporate Lawyer
14	Kerrie	British	female	36	married	1	Houston	3 years	Marketing Director
15	Joaquim	Argentinean	male	33	not married	0	Houston	2 years	Construction manager
16	Ellen	Dutch	female	31	married	0	Houston	2 years	Exploration Geophysicist
17	Kevin	Australian	male	28	not married	1	Houston	3 years	Engineer
18	Sanjay	Indian	male	29	not married	0	Houston	2 years	Geotechnical Specialist
19	Alan	English	male	38	married	3	Houston	5 years	HR Director
20	Derek	German	male	37	married	2	Houston	6 years	Senior Executive
21	Hiroshi	Japanese	male	42	married	1	Houston	9 years	Trade specialist
22	Rebeca	Mexican	female	28	not married	0	Houston	3 years +	Manager communications
23	David	Canadian	male	47	married	2	Houston	5 years	Lawyer
	<b>Average Age</b>			<b>39.7</b>					
	Men			17					
	Women			6					

# Appendix B

Interview questions international professional migrants  
Ruby van den Hoff, Utrecht University, September 2009 – February 2010

## **Name of Interviewee**

Company  
Job title/Profession  
Age  
Gender  
Education  
Income  
Nationality  
Marital status: married/ not married/ living together  
Children  
Length of Assignment  
Length of Assignment to date  
Date of Interview

## **Background**

1. Where are you from originally, where are you now and what brought you here?
2. Has your position or job description changed upon relocation?
3. What were your main motivations for relocating?
4. Were you in any way assisted in any way, by a company or organization to facilitate your moving process? If so, how?

## **Upon Relocating**

6. Upon arrival what kind of support or help did you receive with settling?
7. How does the relocation contribute to your development professionally?
8. What difficulties or challenges have you experienced professionally?
9. Do you work with many international colleagues or are your colleagues mostly locals?
10. Is the interaction with colleagues very different from the situation in your home country? (e.g. more formal)
11. What do you particularly like about working in this country?
12. How has the relocation contributed to your personal life?
13. What challenges or difficulties have you experienced upon settling immediately?
14. What challenges or difficulties have you experienced in the months following your arrival?
15. Have you taken your family along, and how has the relocation affected your family? Are they currently employed? Have your children or spouse contributed to meeting new contacts?
16. How have you attempted to become part of the local society?
17. Do you speak the language? How have you learnt it (non-native only)?
18. How does language affect the way you are able to communicate with others?
19. What parts of the local culture are similar to yours? Did you expect this?
20. What cultural differences are the largest? Did you expect this?
21. Do you feel at home in this country? Why or why not?

## **Local Adjustment**

22. How did you choose a community or a location for your residence? What factors affected this choice? What were the alternatives and why have you chosen for this location/residence?
23. Have you established contact with your neighbors? How did this go? How often do you currently interact with your neighbors?
24. Where do you go grocery shopping? Why do you prefer that location?
25. Within the city, what other areas do you frequently visit and why? For what activities?
26. Do your local friends live mostly in the same areas? Or do they tend to reside in different areas?
27. How do you try to engage in local cultural activities in Houston/ The Neth? What activities and why



do you choose for those activities? Was it successful?

28. Have you joined any local clubs or organizations? Did you consider other clubs that you have not enrolled in?

29. What has been your favorite local event or activity so far?

30. Do you feel like you have been accepted as part of society, why or why not?

### **Transnational**

31. How often do you visit your country of origin?

32. Are these trips mostly work related or personal?

33. To what extent do you maintain ties with your home country? Why?

34. How and how often do you communicate with friends and family in your home country?

35. Where does your best friend(s) live? How often do you speak with each other?

36. How do you feel your relocation has impacted your ties with friends and family? How does it affect your daily life?

37. To what extent has living in a different country changed your life? Are your daily routines very different from your routines back home?

### **General/Conclusion**

38. Do you have any advice for people who want to get a job or visa in a foreign country? What was your experience with getting a visa/job? Was it difficult? How has the local political culture impacted your attachment?

39. Do you feel the recent economic recession has impacted your assignment?

39. Do you want to move back to where you originally came from? If not: what is it about your life and location that makes you want to stay?

40. Any practical tips for the new internationals moving to Houston/ The Netherlands?

# Appendix C

## Urban aspects and their potential effect on social interaction

Urban Aspect	Potential effect on social interaction
City structure	City structure can impact the daily life of individuals in the city. The lay out of the roads, streets and neighborhoods can determine the usage of the spaces and the chances for social interaction.
Residential	The neighborhood setting and housing can determine whether or not it is easy to encounter other neighbors to interact with. Density, architecture and streetscape can be aspects that may or may not encourage social interaction.
Children	Children can form important links to institutions and social gatherings that facilitate social interaction. For international professionals their children may be one of the first means for establishing a new network of local contacts in their new environment.
Economy	The economic situation of an area determines who and where most individuals are employed. Specific sectors may have a certain type of people working in them. A stable economy can create a balance in the labor market and create a more relaxed professional atmosphere for interactions. A diverse economy enables international professionals to encounter many different people to interact with.
Public spaces	The more public spaces there are in a city, the more opportunities there are for international professionals to interact with others locally.
Cultural life	Organized events, museums and other cultural outings can contribute to social interaction. A culture that is very different from an international professional's home culture may make interaction more difficult.
Climate	The local weather and climate of a city or area can determine how much of public life happens outside of the homes, offices and malls. Climate can facilitate outdoor activities or impede social interaction outside in extreme weather.

(Information in table based on Stueve et al., 1975; Goheen, 1998, Putnam, 1999, Portes 1996, Faist, 2000)