

TILBURG IN *SMERIS*: LOCAL AUDIENCES ENGAGING WITH (FAMILIAR) LOCATIONS ON NATIONAL TELEVISION

SANDRA WAGEMAKERS

Name Sandra Wagemakers

Academic centre Tilburg University (Tilburg, The Netherlands)

E-mail address s.wagemakers@tilburguniversity.edu

KEYWORDS

Local colour; audiences; location; place; television.

ABSTRACT

When a city that is rarely featured on television is used in a television series, local audiences get enthusiastic. Locations featured on screen have particular cultural values to those living close to these television locations. This article expands on local audiences' experiences by using a case study of the Dutch television series *Smeris*. Besides analysing the series and metadata, audience research,

including Tweets and interviews, was conducted. While the first season of *Smeris* is set in Tilburg, the second season is mainly filmed in the capital Amsterdam. The normality of viewing Amsterdam on the screen is contrasted against the novel and special, yet familiar, experience of seeing Tilburg. Precisely because Tilburg is rarely featured on television, local audiences play with this physical place in relation to the place as featured on television. Local audiences may display their pride in this repositioning of Tilburg as a central figure. Locals may engage with the (mistakes within the used) mediated familiar locations. Moreover, residents may mix elements of reality (e.g. news articles) with events from the series. Thus, locals engage with this television series in for them new ways through mixing the places with their imagination.

Television producers seem to prefer filming in one centre rather than in many different places. This may partly be attributed to cost-efficiency, convenience, and the cooperation of municipalities. However, sometimes series are situated in less central places. After the remake of *Doctor Who* (2005-) and *Torchwood* (2006–2011) the media landscape of the BBC seemed to change slightly in favour of Wales (Blandford and Lacey 2011). Local audiences thought that these series (*Torchwood* and *Doctor Who*) put their town of Cardiff on the map globally (Blandford and Lacey 2011) and allowed them “to play with the big boys of London” (Mills 2008: 391). However, being produced in Wales does not necessarily mean it is produced by people from Wales’s creative industries, nor that it truly represents Wales to local audiences (McElroy and Noonan 2016). In the Netherlands, several series set in the periphery (albeit some still in an urban setting) have gained national success, such as the crime series *Flikken Maastricht* (2007-), *Hollands Hoop* (2014-), and *Smeris* (2014-).

While many Dutch television series take place in or around Amsterdam, the crime drama series *Smeris* placed the town of Tilburg on the centre stage in its first season. Local audiences celebrated the use of Tilburg. Disappointment was high, however, when the second season moved to Amsterdam, the most common setting for Dutch television series.¹ The second season, nevertheless, continued to refer to Tilburg and contrasted this ‘peripheral’ region against the ‘centre’, exemplified by Amsterdam. This dichotomy is presented not only as a physical move from the south of the Netherlands to the centre, but as a cultural difference as well. This move to Amsterdam makes this series particularly interesting as it contrasts two cities within one television series.

Expanding on existing research, this article will elaborate on the ways in which audiences experience these locations within a television series. Local audiences familiar with the settings in a program may engage with it differently than people who are unfamiliar with the locations on screen. This seems particularly the case for locations where filming rarely takes places. Because their typically marginal position has been reversed, local audiences have an unprecedented insider’s perspective. Locals may engage with the imagined place of the fictional series as they integrate the series into social discourse. Even if such engagements are only temporary, they are still worthwhile to explore.

1 The crew argued in the media that the storyline caused the move to Amsterdam. Yet many people thought practical and economic reasons played a role because most of the crew and cast lives in or around Amsterdam. These arguments are supported by the fact that the third season takes place in Tilburg but is largely filmed in Hilversum.

Through analysing the series *Smeris* and examining audience responses through Tweets, interviews, and audience ratings, this article aims to understand how audiences interpret a national series that takes place regionally. This article examines how the city and region are given shape on television, but more specifically how people interpret these places in various ways, interweaving aspects of real-life with their imagination. However, before going into those aspects, *Smeris* will be introduced.

1. THE CASE OF *SMERIS* AND TILBURG

Smeris is a Dutch television series from public broadcaster BNN² and produced by Pupkin. So far, the series has aired three seasons, in spring 2014 and 2015, and the beginning of 2017.³ The series revolves around two police officers, Theo Kamp and Willem Niessen, who initially play the typical good cop/bad cop routine. They get involved in the cannabis drugs scene in the first season, which eventually leads to a criminal network involved in hard drugs, trafficking in women, and prostitution in the second season. The humorous dialogue between the two characters sets it apart and is an important component of this crime drama series.

As common in the crime series genre, *Smeris* actively incorporates its location. Places or regions may have their distinctive atmosphere as the Nordic noir genre illustrates. Television crime drama’s incorporation of place may let people engage with the specificity of their location while setting the scene and “offering a kind of photographic mood board for the series overall” (McElroy 2017: 14). The distinctiveness of its locations may even contribute to the success of a series, not only among local audiences but also people elsewhere (Turnbull 2015). The first season of *Smeris* actively engages with the city of Tilburg and its surroundings while the second season largely takes place in Amsterdam. The third season moves partly back to Tilburg, but this time the police station is in Hilversum.⁴ The series is set within Tilburg, but seems to reflect the broader region of Brabant simultaneously. Tilburg is not a tourist destination and the city is often denigrated by both inhabitants and outsiders.

2 BNN is a public broadcaster which targets its programs mainly at adolescents and young adults

3 While providing an interesting addition to the dynamics of place and representation, the third season is not considered here as it was not aired yet when this research was conducted.

4 Hilversum is the city where most national radio and television broadcasting agencies are hosted.

Through several complementary methods, I set out to get a grasp of the local significance of this television series. My research consists of a combination of analysing the series and audience research. I conducted interviews with people who watched *Smeris* partly or completely. To gather respondents I posted a message in a Facebook group for *Smeris* background actors and sent letters to people whose houses were used. In total, I conducted nine interviews with twelve people (in three cases two people were present). The interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour and forty-five minutes. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 67. Five of them were women and seven men. Seven of them live in Tilburg, three in the immediate surroundings of Tilburg, and two in another city in Brabant.

Furthermore, I collected all tweets containing the word 'Smeris' from 12 March 2014 till 24 August 2016 using TAGS (v5.1 and v6.0) (Hawksey 2013). I used Twitter messages to grasp people's immediate responses and to analyse how people make sense of this television series on a public media site (see Harrington et al. 2013). On Twitter, the crime series *Tatort* mainly generated a debate about the content of the episodes: "Users typically discuss the story, cast, and production value of the current episode" (Buschow et al. 2014: 144). This indicated that Twitter might be a good place to capture immediate responses to events happening in the episodes. Therefore, I was particularly interested in the period *Smeris* aired on television for the first time from March–May 2014 (Season 1) and March–June 2015 (Season 2). In total, I collected 38,568 tweets of which 15,587 started with 'RT' and hence are retweets. The tweets included both the use of #smeris and using 'Smeris' within a tweet. Most tweets relate to the television series, but in some occasions the word 'Smeris' is used to refer to cops in general. I analysed these tweets qualitatively by reading all the original tweets (not the retweets) and marked tweets that related to place in a broad sense.

Moreover, I requested the audience ratings for each *Smeris* episode from the television audience measurement service *Stichting KijkOnderzoek*, both for the Netherlands in total and for Brabant, the region in which Tilburg is located. Now that we have an idea of the series and the methods I have used, we can go on to discuss the local colour of the series.

2. LOCAL COLOUR

Series incorporating local colour do more than feature that locality. Being set in a specific place (a setting) differs from merely incorporating that place within the series:

Local colour in a film or television drama series includes elements of representing place [...], language [...], cultural practices with a cultural proximity [...], social discourses and the "spill-over" of narrative meaning into the real world. (Eichner and Waade 2015: 4)

Television series may incorporate the place where they are located in implicit and explicit ways. A series may appeal to its audiences for its cultural specificity and its engagement with a locality (Turnbull 2015). A nation or region can use cultural symbols and representations to depict that place. Language is a powerful means that binds different people together, but also other aspects can serve as symbols for this imagined community. Television series build from and on "pre-existing discursive repertoires and patterns" (Dhoest 2007: 62). To make this idea of an incorporated banal nationalism more concrete, I elaborate on four main elements that Castelló (2009) specifies as aspects of nation building within television fiction. While he speaks about (stateless) nations, these four aspects also reflect how a region can be incorporated in a series.

First, territorial representations may transmit an idea of the nation. Even when 'imagined villages' are used, they often reflect a national impression, in that the scenery looks familiar and the architecture matches that which is associated with the nation. Second, language use is an important way to build a nation as language and dialect are important aspects of national and regional identities. Audiences recognize soaps as 'Scottish' or 'Catalan' mainly because of the language and accents (Castelló et al. 2009: 481). Third, cultural representations can be used in fiction to emphasize the nation. Such elements may include history, traditions, festivities, cuisine, etc. Sometimes stereotypical elements of a nation are used, particularly in stateless nations such as Flanders, Catalonia, and Wales. While viewers happily accepted series as Catalan or Scottish, "they engaged with them as sites of discursive struggle over the definition of reality" (Castelló et al. 2009: 481). The featured representations relied heavily on stereotypes and did not reflect audiences' everyday experiences. Cultural representations encompass more than stereotypes, but also include the local style and banal elements referencing the nation. Dhoest (2007) shows that the (sub)nation is reproduced through everyday common elements in Flemish fiction. Because viewers recognize the situations and locations the characters are in, not even thinking about it as specifically Flemish, they are recognized as part of an ordinary

and normal everyday life: “As elsewhere, the settings signal taste, wealth and class, but always within the ‘local’ style” (Dhoest 2007: 69). Fourth, social discourses of a society may be used within fiction. For instance, fiction may deal with issues that are relevant to the nation (e.g. economic crisis) and reflect the ideological frame of that society (e.g. tolerance) (Castelló 2009).

The use of these four elements within a fictional television series is telling as to how a place is represented. The extent to which these elements are used with regards to a locality, and precisely how they are employed, reflects the local colour. Using one of these features alone does not necessarily mean that local colour is represented. A program may be set within a locality, and reflect this location, but might not necessarily engage with the specificities of the place. This means that even when iconic buildings are used, it does not necessarily result in a “deeper sense of place or contribute significantly to the narrative” (Murphy 2014: 39). *Smeris*, however, uses all of these elements to represent and visualize Tilburg and the Netherlands. In what follows, I will illustrate how *Smeris* has incorporated the four elements of nation-building discussed by Castelló (2009). In particular, I will incorporate and reflect on audience responses to these depictions of Tilburg and Amsterdam.

2.1 Territory: Visualizing Tilburg and Amsterdam

In the series, Tilburg is both visually and verbally emphasized as the setting. In contrast to some other regionally located series, only a few locations in the first season of

Smeris are outside of Tilburg, most of which are close by and therefore justified in terms of the story. The opening sequence of the first episodes sets the tone by showing various images of Tilburg alongside the actors. Many people comment on the beauty of this. At several moments in the first couple of episodes, criminals talk over the phone while we are shown time-lapse imagery of Tilburg at night (Figure 1). The length of these shots, and the fact that the voices of the criminals are offscreen, puts more emphasis on the scenery, inviting the viewer to gaze at Tilburg. As one interview commented:

Sven: What I think is beautiful from Season 1, is that you hear phone conversations with the criminals. You don’t really know who is talking to whom, but you’re only supposed to know later on in the series, and then during those phone conversations they do a time-lapse of Tilburg by night. I think that is really cool.

(Interview with an extra from *Smeris*, living in Tilburg, June 2016)

Like Cardiff in *Torchwood*, such images present Tilburg as a generic modern city, but, simultaneously, specifically local aspects index it as Tilburg: “There is a pleasure in seeing a familiar place rendered, spectacularly, in an unfamiliar way” (Lacey 2013: 142). However, while viewers may enjoy such images of Tilburg, the city’s depiction also contrasts with people’s common assumptions, and so can produce a sense of irony. Instead of a small place, Tilburg is presented as a modern big city:

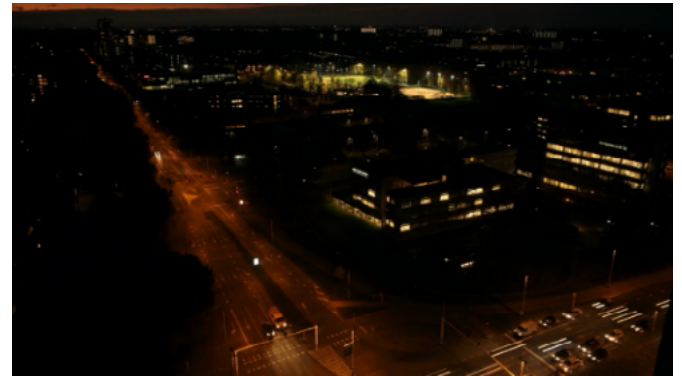
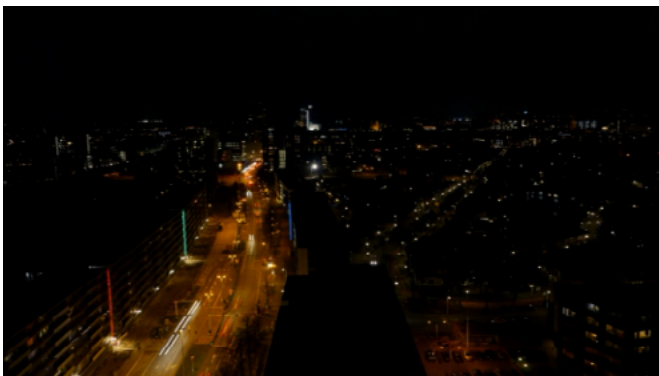


FIGURE 1. STILLS FROM THE TIME-LAPSE FOOTAGE OF TILBURG BY NIGHT (LEFT: *SMERIS* 1.02, PUPKIN; RIGHT: *SMERIS* 1.03, PUPKIN).



FIGURE 2. THEO DRIVES FROM TILBURG TO AMSTERDAM FOR THE FIRST TIME (*SMERIS*, 2.01, PUPKIN).

I am really rolling off the couch laughing, the Hart van Brabantlaan [a street in Tilburg] as so-called 'skyline' #Smeris (Twitter, March 2014)

#smeris Tilburg top city! Now we are talking! (Twitter, 24 May 2014)

In the second season, time-lapse footage of Amsterdam is used, although the presence of Amsterdam seems less prominent and intentional. The images are shown more briefly and are more familiar because of Amsterdam is so frequently depicted on television and film in the Netherlands.

In *Smeris*, Tilburg does not simply provide an anonymised setting or backdrop for the drama. In Season one, the series instead emphasises that its story takes place in the actual city of Tilburg. Tilburg is frequently referenced, and audiences noticed such remarks, such as in response to a scene in episode nine of season two, when a stumbling Sam comes home upon returning from Tilburg, where she has been drinking with Theo. "It looks like you had a lot of fun," says Esther. "Tilburg, top city!" Sam replies (2.09). A user on Twitter echoed the endorsement:

Viewers not only actively engage with locations, but – as this comment on Twitter illustrates – also engage with direct, spoken references to Tilburg. Local people appreciate that Tilburg is featured and talked about on national television.

In the second season, the first episode still largely takes place in Tilburg, but towards the end of the episode, Theo gets in a car to drive to Amsterdam. Around thirty seconds are spent visualizing this transition: the highway, the signs passing by, and Theo in a car moving to Amsterdam (see Figure 2). This highlights the journey the characters and the series make. The car journey thereby relates to the narrative of leaving Tilburg behind. Except for the scene following this one with another character, the next (brief) return to Tilburg is in the fourth episode.

On several more occasions, the characters move from Tilburg to Amsterdam,⁵ or vice versa, or make other cross country journeys. In *Smeris*, these journeys are visualized by fast-forward images of the highway. These images invoke a sense of familiarity, as they present the very same highways that Dutch people routinely use. The blue signs and matrix signal indicators register the place as the Netherlands. While in the first season, Theo and Willem were frequently seen in a car, they often remained within the realms of Tilburg and its surroundings. Here, the featured car journeys hinge segments together and illustrate the travel from one place to another. Simultaneously they are narrative segments whereby the conversations within the car characterize the emerging bond between the two police officers (see Bignell 2017). In the second season, the characters move much farther. The bridge and tunnel in television series *Bron/Broen* (Danish/Swedish), *The Bridge* (American) and *The Tunnel* (British/French) function as a metaphor for collaboration – building bridges – while conveying a sense of distance between the two respective countries and cultures (Agger 2016, García Avis 2015). In a similar way, the move by car from Amsterdam to Tilburg shows its distance and closeness at the same time. As the shots are sped up, the characters quickly move from one place to another. However, the need to move also highlights the distance they travel.

2.2 Language: Talking Tilburgian and other languages

The series is called *Smeris*, a Dutch variant for the term ‘cops’. This is a little ironic, as the Tilburgian criminals in season one of *Smeris* use the term ‘*wouten*’ to refer to the police, while the Belgian criminals in *Smeris* use the word ‘*flikken*’. It is only in season two, in Amsterdam, when someone uses the term ‘*smeris*’ for the first time. These three different words (*smeris*, *wout*, *flik*) index three different linguistic or geographical areas. In Tilburg, and several other regions, people often use the term *wouten* to refer to the police. Hence, some tweeters wondered why the series was not called *wouten* as that would have better reflected the local colour.

Most of the language used in *Smeris* is standard Dutch, and some characters in the first season have a soft *g*, a feature or pronunciation that is a characteristic in the south of the Netherlands. Some Brabantish words such as ‘*houdoe*’ (‘bye’)

and ‘*ons Gaby*’ (‘our’ Gaby) are used by several characters. This type of language use is easily understood by the wider Dutch audience, but still indexes Brabant. While the main supporting characters do not speak Tilburgian, some of the guest roles use a distinctive Tilburg accent. Some television viewers appreciate the use of Brabantish language, though other viewers also judged some attempts to speak Brabantish as sounding ‘fake’ and missed the typical Tilburgian dialect. The use of Tilburgian, or the use of an accent from this region, made the series more authentic to some:

#Smeris takes place in Tilburg and I actually hear soft gs. This is in contrast to other series that are set ‘regionally’.
(Twitter, March 2014)

Additionally, some English is incorporated, particularly by certain criminals. Both the use of Tilburgian and some inserted English phrases are considered ordinary in the first season as the lack of subtitles emphasizes. The subtitled use of English and German, mainly in the second season, highlights the international scope of the story. Belgian criminals also play an important role, particularly in the second season. Besides the occasional subtitled French when talking to each other, the Flemish criminals’ Belgian Standard Dutch is subtitled. When Flemish characters speak to Dutch characters, the Belgian Dutch of the criminals is subtitled but the Netherlandic Dutch of the other character is not.⁶ Flemish programmes in the Netherlands and fiction from the Netherlands in Belgium often have subtitles. People have mixed feelings about the inclusion of such subtitles and this is also reflected in responses to *Smeris*:

Anyone who doesn’t understand it without subtitles? Annoying! #smeris
(Twitter, April 2015)

While these subtitles are included for comprehension, it also distances the Flemish people from the Dutch. While (most of) the audience understands the Flemish characters, the inclusion of subtitles suggests otherwise. In contrast, Brabantish characters are not subtitled. Thus, the subtitles create a subtle sense of similarity for the Brabantish with other Dutch people, while the Flemish are represented as culturally more distinct.

5 The distance from Amsterdam to Tilburg is around 110 km and while this may be considered relatively small, within the Netherlands this distance of one and a half hour is not considered short.

6 The subtitling practices are somewhat different on the DVD from the episodes as featured on television.

2.3 Cultural proximity

Culturally, Brabant and Tilburg are emphasized through (stereotypical) Brabantish jokes or use of Brabantish elements. For instance, the sausage roll, a type of food acknowledged as Brabantish cultural heritage, is incorporated multiple times. Moreover, songs by local artists, possibly with a clear reference to Brabant, are used in pub settings. For instance, the tune *Brabantse Nachten zijn Lang* (Brabantish Nights are Long) is played in a bar. Some ironic responses on Twitter criticized the production for going overboard with Brabantish references. For others, however, such references went unnoticed or were appreciated:

OMG! Brabantish nights are long... #smeris @[name] ;) they constantly play this in all the pubs here ... #brabantishnights #smeris (Twitter, March 2014)

In this way, *Smeris* incorporates popular culture in order to situate it within the local context. The producers really seemed to want to engage with Tilburg as a locality beyond merely using it as the backdrop of the series. In the second season, such references to Tilburg and Brabant remain. The centre, Amsterdam, is culturally opposed against the 'provincial' city of Tilburg. In season two, we see that one of the Amsterdam police officers often degrades Willem's character for being provincial:

Arthur: A drugged girl in the back of a van might be trafficking in women in Brabant, but here we just call it Wednesday afternoon. (*Smeris*, Season 2, Episode 3)

Moreover, the characters in the series regularly joke about Brabant and Tilburg as opposed to Amsterdam. Looking more at the subtle, banal elements of everyday life within *Smeris*, we can observe the national discourse (e.g. number plates, road signs, police officers). Simultaneously, the buses and trams reflect the local sphere, as transportation companies in the Netherlands are also region-specific. Such subtle elements indicate and register the places as familiar from one's everyday life.

2.4 Social discourse

The last of the four elements of nation building – social discourse – is also incorporated within *Smeris*. The series engages with contemporary issues, also serving its public service. The first season revolves around drugs, specifically cannabis

– Tilburg is reputed to have a substantive cannabis scene (e.g. Haenen 2014). Regardless of the accuracy of this claim, it has been argued that this aspect of Tilburg's reputation contributed to the selection of the city as a location for *Smeris* (Willems 2014). Interview respondents often emphasized the relevance of drugs as a social issue when asked about the role of Tilburg in the series:

Suzanne: It is of course a city where many dealers, where uh... yeah, they often find ecstasy labs, so yeah, it is not strange that they do it here. (Interview with extra from *Smeris*, living in Tilburg, July 2016)

The specific locations strengthen this link to social discourse. One respondent told me that one of the locations used in the series had actually been a grow house, and in another case, people had grown cannabis in one of the streets that features in the series.

In the second season, the crime scene is extended beyond soft drugs to hard drugs and trafficking in women. This arguably reflects social discourse around the capital of the Netherlands, because prostitution is an issue often associated with Amsterdam.

Smeris actively engages with Tilburg by incorporating these four elements of nation building or local colour: territory, language, cultural proximity and social discourse. The combination of these elements in the creation of a regional identity, as we will see, is what attracts viewers to the series, as it enables and activates knowledge, participation and community in the audience. In the following discussion, I elaborate more on audiences' interpretations of Tilburg in terms of the city's visualisation in *Smeris*.

3. LOCAL REASONS TO WATCH

Audiences may watch programmes for reasons related to the locality. For instance, Griffiths (2009) reports that among local viewers of *The Edge of Love* (2008), the inclusion of the town and local people was one of the main reasons to watch the movie. And while most local viewers were generally positive about the movie, some inhabitants of the featured town thought not enough locals featured in the final product. The production had involved the active participation of many locals and a disruption of their everyday life, but not all local elements made it to the final cut. Consequently, some local

residents were dissatisfied when they realized that many local roles were cut out (Griffiths 2009).

Tilburgians reported that the fact that the series was set in their home town was (one of) the reasons to start viewing *Smeris*. Some residents reported that they stopped viewing *Smeris* when the series moved its location to Amsterdam. One respondent formulated this quite boldly:

Sofie: but yeah you miss the part of Brabant and then it becomes an ordinary series like Baantjer and Van Speijk and so on. I think that's too bad and then, and then I think I've seen that [kind of series] so many times, that I don't think it's uh... worth watching anymore. That sounds stupid, but yeah I follow a lot of crime series and then at some point the newness, the specialness, is lost when you move [the location of the series] to Amsterdam. (Interview with extra from *Smeris*, living in Tilburg, June 2016)

Sofie also mentions that many of her friends living close to, or in, Tilburg stopped watching *Smeris* once it moved to Amsterdam. She, herself, did not watch it anymore because Tilburg was no longer featured in the series, and because of that, the series' distinctiveness was lost. The data on audience measurement I received from Stichting KijkOnderzoek (2015), visualized in Figure 3, support the argument that less people from Brabant viewed *Smeris*'s second season. At the beginning of the first season, *Smeris* was watched by a disproportionate share of Brabanders, more than would be expected given their numbers among the general population. While this

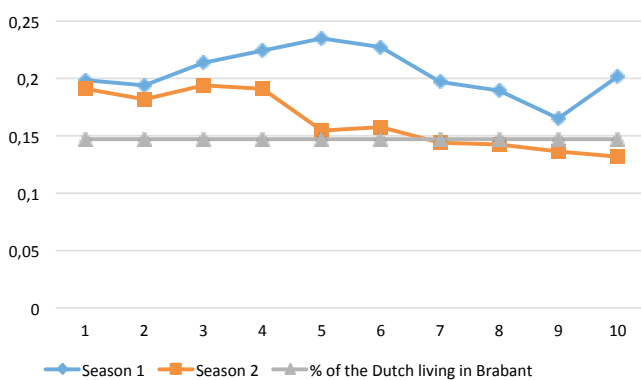


FIGURE 3. PERCENTAGE OF VIEWERS FROM BRABANT PER EPISODE (DATA FROM STICHTING KIJKONDERZOEK 2015).

audience group diminished towards the end of the season, Brabantish viewers returned for the beginning of the second season. From the fifth episode in the second season onwards, neither more nor less Brabantish people were watching *Smeris* than expected based on the percentage of Brabanders in the Dutch population. From this data, it becomes evident that the number of people from Brabant who watch *Smeris* is related to whether or not the series features Tilburg.

4. LOCATION SPOTTING

The data discussed above indicates that local viewers may watch a series because it takes place in their city. Related to this is the way that many local viewers – not only fans or people who strongly identify with Tilburg – may look to recognise the drama's locations while watching *Smeris*. Some viewers watch an episode multiple times because, paying more attention to the locations, they had not sufficiently followed the story on their first viewing, or because they would like to explore the locations further:

Maria: So I am pretty glad that my daughter taped it, because you're not really watching the story consciously, but only watch the locations and whether you can recognize them. (Interview with couple whose house is used in *Smeris*, September 2016)

Audiences enjoy seeing familiar places on the screen and are actively involved in spotting locations. Blandford et al. (2010) report that around 60% of their respondents indicated that spotting recognizable locations added to the enjoyment of *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*. Audiences may spot two different types of locations. First, typical recognisable landmarks are spotted (e.g. the London Eye in London, the bridges over the Rhine in Cologne, Westpoint in Tilburg). Second, local audiences may search for places to which they connect personally (e.g. 'their' street, the park in which they always sit) (Bollhöfer 2007).

Looking for locations continues after watching the episodes. Many respondents discussed *Smeris* with others, and in particular the locations that were used in the series. People have sometimes gone to great lengths in trying to find some locations, sometimes even without success. By speaking about the location they recognise, residents may display their own Tilburgianness. This is even stronger when locals recognise (continuity) mistakes.

Whereas media tourists may search for inconsistencies between the actual location and its depiction onscreen (see Reijnders 2011), locals may spot these discrepancies while watching. While some dislike this inaccuracy, others take pleasure in it. For them, it adds to the enjoyment of the show:

I am very curious about where the Smeris actors will get out of the teleportation machine this time! #smeris #nederland3 [the television channel on which it is aired] #tilburg
(Twitter, March 2014)

The teleportation machine refers to the ability of characters to, for instance, be inside a building in one place in Tilburg, but when leaving this place exit onto a different street in another part of Tilburg. Another participant enjoyed recognizing that the characters, shown to be on a particular street from one camera angle were shown to be on a different street when the image cut to a new camera viewpoint. The knowledge of these continuity 'faults' provides certain viewers with a privileged position of 'being in the know'. Beeton observes a "dissonance" that can be experienced by tourists who visit filming locations, but such an experience can be obtained by local inhabitants as well:

For some, the dissonance between reality and fiction may detract from the viewing experience, but for many it appears that having knowledge of the process imbues that person with some cultural cachet. Through knowing the inconsistencies between reality and fiction, the person becomes an "insider" to certain knowledge that was, in the past, the reserve of those in the industry. (2005: 235)

Thus, regional viewers enjoy *Smeris* because it incorporates a familiar setting that is not usually featured on Dutch television. Moreover, the setting retains its essential character throughout the series. Especially the extras and home-owners I interviewed had gained knowledge about how a series is produced, and thus could claim Beeton's 'cultural cachet'. Also, those who were not involved in the series' production still had an insider's perspective that viewers unfamiliar with Tilburg do not possess.

On Twitter, it was more common to find 'location spotting' in messages that were written in response to episodes set in Tilburg or other out of the ordinary places. Nevertheless, some Twitter users did proclaim their recognition of locations in Amsterdam-set episodes. However, the relative scarcity of such messages suggests that even if people in Amsterdam recognize locations, they hardly talk about it on Twitter. In fact, some tweeters who recognize Amsterdam locations

live outside of the city. Moreover, such messages are not inflected with pride to the same extent as those from Tilburg. People in Amsterdam are more used to seeing their city on the screen, and so the specialness of recognizing one's own locality onscreen is not publicly celebrated.

5. *SMERIS* LOCATIONS AND THEIR MEANING

By being featured in a series, places can gain additional meaning (Bollhöfer 2007). In the case of media tourism, people explore places they know largely or only through the depiction of those places in the media. Residents of those places, however, may find them imbued with new meaning after seeing them depicted in a television series. People may remember the scenes of a series or movie when they are at the actual sites (Blandford and Lacey 2011, Blandford et al. 2010). Mills (2008) speaks of additional place making as the locations gain, next to the existing meaning they already hold for the residents, new meaning due to the representation on screen. Locals may need to fit the meanings of the fictional screen locations with their existing ideas about the places. Tilburg locals on Twitter also commented on their encounters with locations used in the series:

Special place for a meeting: the 'police station' #smeris #tilburg – unfortunately without officers! [Includes a picture from inside of the building used as police station in *Smeris*]
(Twitter, May 2014)

In his examination of media tourism, Reijnders (2011: 105-6) indicates two main forms to make a piece of imagination that is essentially immaterial (e.g. a story) tangible. The first mode is a rational mode in which media tourists are trying to compare reality with how they imagined the place from a movie or series. People use an emic differentiation of imagination and reality to categorize their experiences (Reijnders 2011). This corresponds with the earlier discussion on spotting locations and inaccuracies within television series. This comparison of Tilburg on screen with the physical Tilburg helps to disentangle each from the other. The Tilburg on the screen is separated from and compared with the physical place.

A second mode is an emotional-intuitive mode in which people search for bodily proximity. They want to be part of their imaginative world, and thereby experience these places themselves (Reijnders 2011). For instance, in the tweet below, the per-

son is not trying to compare the media representations with reality, but rather she enjoys the correspondence between the two:

TOO funny to see the lights of #Westpoint #Tilburg from my bedroom while simultaneously being the scenery on TV in #smeris
(Twitter, April 2014)

Residents not only spot locations they know, but they relate these featured locations to their own experiences.

Haha and that that woman then says: 'The neighbourhood is going down' about the street where I have already lived for 13 years. #smeris
(Twitter, March 2014)

The above tweet illustrates how a fictional situation on television may be integrated with the viewer's own life, while continuing to maintain a distinction between fiction and reality. The tweeter laughs about how her neighbourhood is considered 'bad' in the fictional series. Had it been non-fiction, she might not have laughed because it would have reflected her actual street. The same person writes another tweet a couple of minutes later, in which she continues to comment on the character Loes who lives on that street:

It all worked out for Loes, we as neighbours got her through this all, shhh. #smeris
(Twitter, March 2014)

Regardless of whether (in the series) neighbours actually helped Loes handle the bad situations, it is interesting how this viewer integrated her media consumption with her own frame of reference. People pretend, for a moment, they are part of the series, despite being perfectly aware of the distinction between fiction and reality.

Fans often engage with television characters online, for instance by making fan Twitter accounts for the characters. With *Smeris*, such fans (ironically) integrate real news with the fiction of *Smeris*. For instance, some respond to posts about news concerning drugs in Tilburg with #smeris, playing with television meeting reality:

Theo Kamp and Willem Niessen intercept another big drug shipment in Tilburg <http://t.co/LB5mFoylA9> [link to news article] #Smeris
(Twitter, June 2014)

This mixing of screen and street perfectly reflects the "spill-over of narrative meaning into the real world" that is also a component of local colour (Eichner and Waade 2015: 4). *Smeris* integrates Tilburg's 'problems' into the drama and subsequently the series' fiction is incorporated back into the real-world social problems. Relating actual news events to the fiction series *Smeris* doesn't appear to happen as frequently in Amsterdam. While this may be due to the different social discourse addressed in Amsterdam (prostitution, hard drugs), it could also be because Tilburg is rarely featured on TV. People connect real-life scenarios to those happening within fictional television series due to the novelty of seeing Tilburg on screen. Since a place that is usually in the shadow now becomes the centre of attention, people (fans or people from Tilburg) are speaking about it. In contrast, because of the abundant depictions of Amsterdam, such references are more frequent, routine, and less interesting.

While, on the one hand, local audiences seem to be more aware of the differences between screen and reality, they also feel a greater need to integrate the two because of their familiarity with the locations. People start to imagine they are in the series, as they know the surroundings, or, vice versa, start to imagine the fictional characters acting in their everyday surroundings. Precisely because Tilburg is not a place they know mostly from television (as Amsterdam may be to many Tilburgers), but because of their intense familiarity with the physical place, the integration of the two becomes more interesting. Nevertheless, such symbolic layers should not be exaggerated. While for fans, visiting a media location might be special and may involve some enactment of the series, after seeing such places on a more regular basis, these locations become normal again, especially for ordinary viewers.

This marks a point of difference from the account given by Mills (2008), who has reflected academically on his own relation to *Torchwood* in which his house was also featured in a passing shot. However, he no longer lives in this house, nor even in the town where *Torchwood* is filmed. I would say that for Mills, *Torchwood* became a sort of souvenir for this place, a means of revisiting it without actually going there. The inability to see the house everyday makes its depiction on television even more special, as it provides a point of access to one's memories of the place. It may be similar to how watching a tourist destination on television after one's visit might revive memories of one's trip. Inhabitants who still live in these places encounter these locations more frequently. While in the beginning, Tilburg locals may think about *Smeris* in relation to locations around the town, this quickly wears

off as they continue encountering these places in real life, but the episodes of *Smeris* are no longer broadcast on television. The additional meaning attributed to the locations is only temporary, and may only be evoked again in specific contexts.

6. NO LONGER 'OURS'

Finally, the idea that the periphery becomes the centre is also one of ownership. Not only are local viewers watching the series differently, some claim it as theirs. In a similar vein, people from Wales may take ownership over *Torchwood*:

Identifying places as familiar becomes a way of taking ownership of the programme, of staking a claim to be at the centre of things for once, reversing the position of marginality that normally pertains for small nations invisible amongst larger ones. (Blandford and Lacey 2011: 7)

When the periphery becomes the centre, a re-positioning of Tilburg occurs, even if this is only temporary. Some respondents spoke of 'we' and 'us' being featured in the series. Not only are 'we' featured, but 'we' also produce the series. Respondents take some ownership of programme, simply because it is within their proximate surroundings:

Sofie: The series was really Brabantish. I hope really that it will return to uh.. Tilburg, or at least somewhere in Brabant. So that we Brabanders can also show that we can make a series.

Sandra: Even though the producers remained the same.

Sofie: I mean more that we can represent Brabant, that's more how I mean it.

(Interview with extra from *Smeris*, living in Tilburg, June 2016)

This ownership is particularly evident when *Smeris* moved from Tilburg to Amsterdam in the second season. People particularly dismissed the (boring) standard choice of Amsterdam, rather than another atypical city. Some locals feel that because it is set in Tilburg and uses local features, *Smeris* is a series about themselves.

Both the setting and local colour provide handles for identification. Literature on domestic adaptations of productions suggest that series are often modified to fit with

localized customs and ideas, thereby creating cultural proximity (Beeden and De Bruin 2010). Such adaptations may facilitate recognition, identification and credibility among viewers through, among other things, the use of banal elements (Adriaens and Biltereyst 2012). Straubhaar (1991) argues that audiences have a craving for cultural proximity, for media products from their own (local) culture. Such cultural proximity does not necessarily have to relate to the locality, as people may share cultural and moral values from other parts of the world (Castelló 2010). The responses to *Smeris* suggest that in the case of a Dutch series, which uses the four elements of nation building (Castelló 2009), this recognition and identification is strong among local viewers. Series may resonate among local audiences for a recognition that is hardly found elsewhere in popular culture. This is not to say that other television series do not involve any familiarity, as national discourse is still recognizable and viewers may be involved, and identify, with the series in different ways, such as by relating to the stories personally. This change of scenery nevertheless gives some locals an appreciation of the local colour that goes beyond merely recognizing the locations:

Sven: I think recognition, maybe very stupid, but just the accent is understandable but might need to be subtitled for some people.

(Interview with extra from *Smeris*, living in Tilburg, June 2016)

This quote illustrates that respondents enjoy this recognition, and the familiarity of the language, that is part of the local colour of *Smeris*. Sven notes how he enjoys the recognition and familiarity of watching *Smeris*. Moreover, he emphasizes the fact that the language he is (more) familiar with is now on television. While for those living in other places in the Netherlands, the language might need to be subtitled, the language spoken in *Smeris* is understandable and familiar to *him*.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have explored people's responses to *Smeris* and its local colour by examining the episodes in combination with interviews and Twitter analysis. In its first season, this Dutch television series put the atypical city of Tilburg at the centre of attention. The series visualizes Tilburg, incorporates regional accents, jokes, and cultural references, and integrates the social problems of the city in the series. The

news reporter in *Smeris* states about a crime scene: “It really is an American big situation, here in trusted familiar Tilburg” (1.06). This sentence summarizes how Tilburg is represented within this television series: while the visualization of Tilburg, particularly the time-lapses, imply Tilburg’s spectacular (American) scope, the playfulness of a familiar Tilburg is created through the recognizable locations and the extensive use of jokes, both about Brabant and about other subjects. Tilburg in *Smeris* is thus presented as both grand and gritty, cosy and fun.

Locals express their pride at Tilburg being featured in *Smeris*. Some local audiences may spot locations, and may even enjoy seeing the familiar on television, without feeling proud. Not all respondents feel equally strongly about Tilburg being featured. Some argue it is merely fun to see Tilburg on screen, but no more than that. However, a number of Tilburgers, integrated their daily lives with the series, identified and personalized locations, even going so far as to blur the lines between fact and fiction in order to consolidate these connections and meanings. This is also illustrated by the intense disappointment when the series moved away from Tilburg to Amsterdam in the second season. Locals appreciate the use of Tilburg because, for once, ‘they’ also are featured on the national screen. This is strengthened by the fact that Tilburg is not only featured as an anonymized backdrop, but through the handling of local colour it is constantly emphasized that *Smeris* in fact takes place in Tilburg. Locals spot locations and discuss this. For once, they are insiders in a television series because they know the ins and outs of the city, and can spot inconsistencies in the series’ depiction of the city’s locations. While some locals simply watch and enjoy Tilburg on screen, others display their Tilburg pride through this behind-the-scenes knowledge of faults and inconsistencies, and thereby display their own Tilburgianness as ‘their’ city finally features in a nation-wide broadcast.

The pride of seeing ‘your own’ place on television may also be expressed by relating the series to actual incidents. People start integrating *Smeris* in the social discourse, mixing the series’ events with those from the news. People take the ‘screen’ to their ‘neighbourhood’ as they appropriate the places visualized onscreen to their own situations. In the case of *Smeris*, Tilburg is not simply featured on television as it actually is in the real world, but in a way that allows Tilburg locals to engage with their city as an imagined place. Precisely because Tilburg is not a place local audiences mostly know from television, but rather as a result of their intense familiarity with the physical place, the integration of the physical

place and the one featured on television becomes appealing. Moreover, the fact that Tilburg is not often featured, and this is an activity one is normally not able to participate in, makes this combination of reality and fiction more appealing.

Engagement with *Smeris* on screen and in locals’ everyday lives is about involving themselves with their environment in a new way: through fiction. Just as fans may immerse themselves in the media they adore (e.g. media tourism, fan fiction), people who are (strongly) attached to Tilburg may more eagerly engage with integrations of reality and fiction. If neither the place, nor the series means anything to someone, he or she may not be tempted to engage with the series in a more intense way. Thus, locals integrate elements of fiction and reality; through searching for and engaging with the locations used in the television series and through engaging the issues of *Smeris* in social discourse. Locals have new opportunities to engage with a television series because they know the places on the screen. Nonetheless, this engagement should not be exaggerated as this may be only temporary. While additional layers of meaning may be added to locations, this quickly submerges again as people continue to live in this physical Tilburg, part of their everyday life.

REFERENCES

- Adriaens, Fien and Daniel Biltereyst (2012). ‘Glocalized Telenovelas and National Identities: A “Textual Cum Production” Analysis of the “Telenovelle” *Sara*, the Flemish Adaptation of *Yo soy Betty, la Fea*.’ *Television & New Media* 13(6): 551-67. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1527476411427926>.
- Agger, Gunhild (2016). “Nordic Noir – Location, Identity and Emotion.” In *Emotions in Contemporary TV Series*, edited by Alberto N. García, 134-52. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Beeden, Alexandra and de Bruin, Joost (2010). “The Office: Articulations of National Identity in Television Format Adaptation.” *Television & New Media* 11(1): 3-19. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1527476409338197>.
- Beeton, Sue (2005). *Film-induced Tourism*. Clevedon: Channel View Publications.
- Bignell, Jonathan (2017). “Cars, Places and Spaces in British Police Drama.” In *Contemporary British Television Crime Drama: Cops on the Box*, edited by Ruth McElroy, 123-36. London, Routledge.
- Blandford, Steve and Lacey, Stephen (2011). “Screening Wales: Portrayal, Representation and Identity: A Case Study.”

- Critical Studies in Television* 6(2): 1-12. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/CST.6.2.3>.
- Blandford, Steve, Lacey, Stephen, McElroy, Ruth and Williams, Rebecca (2010) "Screening the Nation: Landmark Television in Wales". Report for BBC Audience Council Wales. <http://culture.research.glam.ac.uk/documents/download/13/> (last accessed 05-07-17).
- Bollhöfer, Björn (2007). "'Screenscapes': Placing TV series in their contexts of production, meaning and consumption." *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 98(2): 165-75. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2007.00389.x>.
- Buschow, Christopher, Schneider, Beate and Simon Ueberheide (2014). "Tweeting television: Exploring communication activities on Twitter while watching TV." *Communications* 39(2): 129-49. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/commun-2014-0009>.
- Castelló, Enric (2009). "The Nation as a Political Stage: A Theoretical Approach to Television Fiction and National Identities." *International Communication Gazette* 71(4): 303-20. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1748048509102183>.
- Castelló, Enric (2010). "Dramatizing proximity: Cultural and social discourses in soap operas from production to reception." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 13(2): 207-23. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367549409352274>.
- Castelló, Enric, Nichola Dobson and Hugh O'Donnell (2009). "Telling it like it is? Social and Linguistic Realism in Scottish and Catalan Soaps." *Media, Culture & Society* 31(3): 467-84. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0163443709102718>.
- Dhoest, Alexander (2007). "The National Everyday in Contemporary European Television Fiction: the Flemish Case." *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies* 2(2): 60-76. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/CST.2.2.7>.
- Eichner, Susanne and Anne Marit Waade (2015). "Local Colour in German and Danish Television Drama: *Tatort* and *Bron/Broen*." *Global Media Journal. German edition*. 5(1): 1-20.
- García Avis, Isadora (2015). "Adapting Landscape and Place in Transcultural Remakes: The Case of *Bron/Broen*, *The Bridge* and *The Tunnel*." *SERIES – International Journal of TV Serial Narratives* 1(2): 127-38. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6092/issn.2421-454X/5898>.
- Griffiths, Merris (2009). "Small Town on the Big Screen: The Edge of Love and the Local Experience." *Participations* 6(2): 403-430.
- Haenen, Marcel (2014) "Tilburg Wietstad." *NRC Handelsblad*. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2014/01/25/tilburg-wietstad-1338670-a625678> (last accessed 15-07-16).
- Harrington, Stephen, Tim Highfield and Axel Bruns (2013). "More than a Backchannel: Twitter and Television." *Participations* 10(1): 405-9.
- Hawksey, Martin (2013). *Twitter Archiving Google Spreadsheet (TAGS)*. <https://tags.hawksey.info/get-tags/> (last accessed 05-07-17).
- Kuijpers, Pieter (2014). *Tilburg Wietstad?*. Tilburg: Night University. (1-10-14).
- Lacey, Stephen (2013). "'When you see Cardiff on Film, it looks like LA' (John Barrowman): Space, Genre and Realism in *Torchwood*." In *Torchwood Declassified: Investigating Mainstream Cult Television*, edited by Rebecca Williams, 137-53. London: I.B. Tauris.
- McElroy, Ruth (2017). "Introduction." In *Contemporary British Television Crime Drama: Cops on the Box*, edited by Ruth McElroy, 1-24. London, Routledge.
- McElroy, Ruth and Caitriona Noonan (2016). "Television Drama Production in Small Nations: Mobilities in an Changing Ecology." *Journal of Popular Television* 4(1): 109-27. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jptv.4.1.109_1.
- Mills, Brett (2008). "My house was on *Torchwood*! Media, Place and Identity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 11(4): 379-99. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367877908096002>.
- Murphy, J. J. (2014). "Where are you from? Place as a form of scripting in independent cinema." *Journal of Screenwriting* 5(1): 27-45. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/josc.5.1.27_1.
- Reijnders, Stijn (2011). *Places of the imagination: media, tourism, culture*. Farnham, England: Ashgate.
- Stichting KijkOnderzoek (2015). *KijkTotaal Smeris*. Amsterdam: Stichting KijkOnderzoek.
- Straubhaar, Joseph D. (1991). "Beyond media imperialism: Assymetrical interdependence and cultural proximity." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8(1): 39-59. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15295039109366779>.
- Turnbull, Sue (2015). "Trafficking in TV crime: remaking Broadchurch." *Continuum* 29(5): 706-17. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2015.1068731>.
- Willems, Niek (2014). "Tilburg op je beeldscherm." *Quats* (9): 9-12. Tilburg: Bureau Zuid.

TV Series and Films Cited

- Doctor Who* (2005 -)
Smeris (2014 -)
Torchwood (2006-2011)
The Edge of Love (2008)

