Hotel quality in the European Capital of Culture: Leeuwarden 2018

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This research looks into the experience as perceived in 2014 by hotel guests in 15 bigger Dutch cities. The hotel reviews of Leeuwarden (Capital of Culture 2018) are compared to those of hotels in the other cities to provide an initial benchmark of how Leeuwarden hotels are performing. Literature shows that guest reviews have a significant influence on hotel booking behaviour, which affects hotel revenues and cities' reputations. For this study, reviews were collected from 51 review sites and analysed for 15 of the bigger Dutch cities with 10 hotels or more. Results showed that Leeuwarden hotels generally perform in the middle category, only being in the top three where it concerns "service". A concern is raised about the only 53% of positive guest reviews overall that were generated on Leeuwarden hotels compared to the 57% Dutch average. A quite positive outcome relates to the fact that in all of the six specific categories within the hotel product offer, Leeuwarden performed higher than the Dutch average. This was next to Leeuwarden only the case for Rotterdam and The Hague. Recommendations include the suggestions to further investigate in detail how individual hotels perform, to stimulate Leeuwarden hotel guests to leave more positive guest reviews on review sites, and for authorities to engage in stimulating the knowledge and skills of local hotel operators in order to be best prepared for the Leeuwarden Cultural Capital 2018 event.

Keywords: guest reviews, hotel performance, European Capital of Culture, service quality

Introduction

This research is the first in a series that explores and details the hospitality service related quality of northern Dutch city Leeuwarden in the context of the upcoming European Capital of Culture 2018 event. On September 6, 2013 Leeuwarden won the Dutch bid for the European Capital of Culture 2018 (Dijkstra & Klarenbeek, 2013). Together with Valetta in Malta, Leeuwarden will hold the title for one year. The European Capitals of Culture initiative was designed to highlight the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe, celebrate the cultural features Europeans share, increase European citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area, and to foster the contribution of culture to the development of cities (European Commission, 2014). The European Commission, furthermore, suggests that the European Capital of Culture initiative is an excellent opportunity for regenerating cities, raising their international profile, enhancing the image of cities in the eyes of their own inhabitants, breathing new life into a city's culture, and boosting tourism (European Commission, 2014). Receiving an increased number of probably mostly international visitors in 2018 will provide extra revenues for hotels, but will also put Leeuwarden's hospitality and accommodation sector to the test. Leeuwarden's European Capital of Culture 2018 (LECC18) organisation has installed a Hospitality team that is responsible for all hospitality related tasks. An estimated four million visitors are expected to visit the city, generating an additional 13% overnight stays in the Leeuwarden vicinity (Stichting Kulturele Haadstêd 2018, 2013). Although the LECC18 organisation expects to create "overnight accommodation in unusual places" such as using empty offices throughout the City and making use of little-used buildings in the countryside such as farms and churches, the initial search by potential visitors will certainly be for the established hotels in Leeuwarden.

In the exploration of Leeuwarden's hospitality provision, hotel quality is reviewed in a comparative research project that was set up between Stenden Hotel Management School, the Academy of International Hospitality Research (AIHR) and its Advisory Board member, and the Marketing Manager at Revinate, Thomas Landen. For the purpose of benchmarking Leeuwarden hotels' overall perceived quality, this research looks at guest review scores from 51 review sites. We compared this data against those in the other cities in the Netherlands that are in the top 25 largest cities in the Netherlands and that have 10 hotels or more. Furthermore, an overview is presented that shows the guest reviews on some of the important categories within Leeuwarden hotels' provision compared to the hotels in other cities. The main questions addressed in this research are:

• What is the overall guest review score of Leeuwarden hotels compared to the other major Dutch cities with 10 hotels or more?
• How do Leeuwarden hotels' guest reviews in particular important categories compare to those of the other major Dutch cities?

This comparative research provides the Leeuwarden's European Capital of Culture 2018 organisation, Leeuwarden Municipality, the Province of Fryslan and the Leeuwarden hotel sector with a tangible indication of how the hotel sector compares to those of its main fellow Dutch cities. More

detailed follow-up research can be initiated to identify actions needed to improve Leeuwarden's hotel provision.

Literature review
European Capital of Culture
The Greek actress, singer and politician Melina Mercouri proposed the creation of a European Capital of Culture in 1983, and the European Union formally established the programme in 1985 with Athens as the first title-holder in 1985 (Ghincul, 2014). Other sources state that it was a joint initiative of Melina Mercouri together with Jack Lang that aimed to bring the people of Europe closer together by celebrating the key role played by cities in European culture (Marseille-Provence, 2013). This European Capital of Culture, according to one of its former organising committees, allows a unique encounter between local populations, artists, and visitors from all over the world and reflects the vibrant tradition of hospitality at the heart of regional culture. Experiences in previous European Capitals confirm the stimulating effect the event has for the city involved. An impact study on Istanbul ECC 2010 revealed that leading stakeholders in the business world said that the event created employment opportunities in sectors such as communication, operations, training and design (Ozan & Unver, 2012). Even more strongly in Liverpool ECC 2008 it was concluded that the festival year saw 9.7 million visitors to the city – an increase of 34% – and generated £753.8 million for the economy. Media coverage of Liverpool's cultural attractions doubled and for the first time in decades, positive stories outweighed negative ones focusing on social issues. The study found that 85% of Liverpool residents agreed it was a better place to live than before (Carter, 2010). One of the important elements in the bid plan for becoming European Capital of Culture is the organising city's ability to ensure that the tourist and visitor capacity of the city can cope with the targets set out in the plan. This covers hotel capacity, transport links, and soft skill areas such as visitor languages, quality of hospitality and welcome programmes (both in the public and private sectors) available in the city (European Commission ECOC, 2014). Hospitality is one of the factors besides culture and language that needs to be competitive before a successful bid of a city is awarded and part of the hospitality offer of a city is provided by its hotel sector.

Hotel guest reviews
Guest reviews are important for hotels because they influence the likely bookings and revenue generated by them. Today, a company's reputation can be ruined in a matter of minutes, as disgruntled customers or even competitors can broadcast damaging information instantaneously across the world via the internet and social media, often under the "guise of anonymity" (Dennis, 2013). Successful management of a company's online reputation has a significant relation to a company's business performance. In 2012, one of the companies specialised in tracing guest reviews providing hotels with infographics estimated that by 2013 there would be an average of 465 reviews per hotel while in 2008 there were only 88 (Breure, 2012). Furthermore, the following statistics were noted: 81% of hotel bookers find hotel reviews important, 46% post hotel reviews, and 49% would not book at a hotel without reviews. To illustrate the enormous real growth in the number of reviews per hotel and its importance, Revinate,

which specialises in collecting guest reviews, calculated that in 2014 the number of reviews per hotel in the Netherlands had grown to over 729 and 93% of travellers worldwide say online reviews have an impact on their booking decisions (Landen, 2015). Competitive pressure is higher than ever, knowing that, on average, travellers consider seven properties before making a booking. Hoteliers now also have realised too well how critical it is to optimise their online reputation; 98% of hoteliers say reviews are influential in generating bookings (Revinate, 2014). Improvements to a hotel's online reputation bring benefits. Revinate calculated that increasing a hotel's rating by 1 point (on a 5-point scale), allows the hotel to increase their daily rate by 11.2% without affecting the likelihood of decreasing the number of bookings. Similarly, Ye, Law, Gu, and Chen (2011) found that a 10% increase in overall review rating resulted in a boost of online bookings by more than 5%. It is apparent that a hotel's service quality has great influence on its online reputation, as service quality is one of the main drivers for guests to leave reviews according to Serra Cantallops and Salvi (2014). Other views on why guests produce reviews exist, however. According to Bronner and Hoog (2011), the most frequently mentioned motivation for leaving web-based comments was not so much the service quality itself but for 70% to help future guests to make proper decisions. Although Bronner and Hoog focused on periodic review writers for specific websites and not so much on booking engines, it is apparent that people write reviews for many reasons. Serra Cantallops and Salvi (2014) concluded that there is still no clear definition about what generates guest reviews, but it is certain that they are important for hotel business.

Research design

To answer the questions addressed in this research; what is the overall guest review score of Leeuwarden hotels compared to the other major Dutch cities with 10 hotels or more? and wow do Leeuwarden hotels' guest reviews in particular important categories compare to those of the other major Dutch cities? a comprehensive web search was performed using Revinate's guest feedback web crawling research system. As criteria for defining the search, the number of inhabitants to identify the major Dutch cities (including Leeuwarden) was taken and the number of hotels in these major cities as mentioned by TripAdvisor, taking Leeuwarden as the bottom-line. In terms of size, Leeuwarden was listed no. 25 in the Netherlands. We discarded cities that had a full tourism profile (Noordwijk and Valkenburg) which then put Leeuwarden with its number of 10 hotels around place no. 15. Therefore the decision was taken to look at the 15 Dutch cities having 10 or more hotels as mentioned by TripAdvisor. The cities that fitted the criteria are listed in Table 1 with their relative size within the Netherlands and the number of hotel properties.

There are more types of accommodation in the cities included in this research that are not strictly defined as hotels or not mentioned in TripAdvisor. Based on the reputation of TripAdvisor as a review site, being the second biggest in both the Netherlands and Europe, enough confidence was found with the choice. The most frequently used review sites in The Netherlands are: 1. Booking – 62%, 2. Tripadvisor – 12%, 3. Hotelspecials.nl – 6%, 4. Zoover – 4%, 5. Hotels.com – 4%, while in Europe the order is: 1. Booking – 62%,

2. Tripadvisor – 22%, 3. Hotels.com – 5%, 4. Expedia – 3%, 5. Holiday Check – 2% (Landen, 2015)(Landen, 2015). In The Netherlands in 2014 a total of 51 channels were identified where people visiting the hotels in the 15 selected cities in this research left their feedback and ratings for hotels. In Table 2 the review sites are listed.

Findings

The first set of findings related to the reviews and review scores of the Netherlands overall and in the 15 major cities as could

be found on the websites used for this research (Table 2) are shown in Table 3.

The guest review sample sizes for the cities in this research varied between 3 618 minimum (Dordrecht) and 249 001 maximum (Amsterdam). Without providing any measures of statistical significance for the samples used in this research, it would still be justifiable to conclude that because of the number of reviews per city a relatively robust review package was collected. When comparing the average review rating (ARR) between the cities, Leeuwarden came out at rank 6 (ARR: 4.04), a slightly higher average review rating than the Dutch

Table 1: Major cities (15) ≥ 10 Hotels

City/NL 2014	Inhabitants	Properties	City/NL 2014	Inhabitants	Properties
Netherlands	16 877 351	852	Nijmegen (10)	168 840	10
Amsterdam (1)	813 562	224	Haarlem (13)	155 758	11
Rotterdam (2)	619 879	41	Arnhem (15)	151 356	10
The Hague (3)	510 909	34	Zwolle (20)	123 507	10
Utrecht (4)	330 772	12	Maastricht (21)	121 906	17
Eindhoven (5)	221 402	17	Leiden (22)	121 249	11
Groningen (7)	197 823	13	Dordrecht (23)	118 782	10
Breda (9)	180 420	10	Leeuwarden (25)	108 249	10

Table 2: Review sites (51) accessed for guest reviews in this research

4TravelJapan	Google+ Local	Marriott Rewards	Travelocity
Ab-in-den-Urlaub	HolidayCheck	Marriott Verified Reviews	TripAdvisor
Agoda	HostelBookers	Orbitz	Trivago
AsiaRooms	Hostels.com	Priceline	Venere
Atrapalo	HostelWorld	PriceTravel	VirtualTourist
BestDay	Hotel.de	Qunar	Virtuoso
Booking.com	Hotels.com	Reviewz.eu	Weekendesk
Ctrip	Hotels.nl	Revinate Surveys	WestCord
Despegar	Hotelspecials.nl	Routard	Wotif
Dianping	HRS	Skoosh	Yahoo Travel
Expedia	IHG Guest Reviews	Starwood	Yelp
Facebook	LateRooms	TabletHotels	Zoover
Fodors	Mafengwo	Tophotels.ru	

Table 3: Reviews and review scores (cities ≥ Leeuwarden, ≥ 10 hotels)

City/NL 2014	Total reviews	Average review rating	Rank	Positive reviews %	Rank	Rev pace (rev/wk/prop)	Reviews per property
Netherlands	*621 169	4.00		57		14.0	729.1
Amsterdam	249 001	3.97	**11	57	7	21.3	1 112.0
Rotterdam	33 885	4.15	2	64	2	15.8	858.0
The Hague	26 039	4.08	4	59	3	14.6	765.9
Utrecht	10 743	3.95	**12	51	***13	17.2	895.3
Eindhoven	15 105	4.08	4	59	3	17.0	888.5
Groningen	10 402	3.89	**14	44	***15	15.3	800.0
Breda	4 677	3.87	**15	45	***14	9.0	467.7
Nijmegen	4 559	4.03	8	55	9	8.7	455.9
Haarlem	6 047	3.93	**13	52	***12	10.5	549.2
Arnhem	7 335	4.09	3	59	3	14.1	733.5
Zwolle	4 966	4.03	8	58	6	9.5	570.7
Maastricht	19 710	4.02	10	54	***10	21.8	1 159.4
Leiden	8 944	4.04	6	56	8	15.6	813.0
Dordrecht	3 618	4.18	1	67	1	6.9	361.8
Leeuwarden	5 116	4.04	6	53	***11	9.8	511.6

*More reviews were added up for the overall NL score than represented in the 15 cities displayed here. The total number of reviews used in this comparative research for the 15 cities is 410 147
**Cities with a lower average review rating that the overall NL score of 4.00
***Cities with a lower percentage of positive reviews than the overall NL percentage of 57%

overall ARR of 4.00. Amsterdam, Utrecht, Breda, Haarlem and, interestingly another city in the north of the Netherlands, Groningen, had ARR's lower than the Dutch average.

The percentage of positive review scores (PR) put Leeuwarden in the middle category at position 11/15 and 4% lower than the Dutch overall percentage of 57%. Amsterdam had a percentage of exactly the Dutch overall, while Dordrecht, Rotterdam, The Hague, Eindhoven, Nijmegen, Arnhem, Zwolle and Leiden had a higher percentage than the Dutch overall. Looking at this measuring of PR, the other northern city Groningen came out at the lowest PR of 44%.

Review pace per week per property and numbers of reviews per property showed that the intensity of reviewing is the highest in Maastricht, followed by Amsterdam, Utrecht, Eindhoven and Rotterdam. On the low end were Dordrecht, Nijmegen and Breda, while Leeuwarden was close to their numbers at an average of 9.8 reviews per property per week and on average 511.6 reviews per property.

Categories mentioned in Dutch hotel reviews
Table 4 lists the categories related to the more detailed aspects of the hotel offering. The number of times mentioned, and the percentages of positive, neutral and negative mentions express some guest review sentiment in terms of the importance hotel guests attach to the different categories.

Rooms, service, facilities, general staff, F&B, location and value were mentioned most in the hotels overall. General staff had a relatively high percentage of positive/neutral mentioning (95%), which seems to indicate that hotel guests are not that critical about the people taking care of them. This finding is somewhat reconfirmed by the percentage of positive/neutral mentioning on service (92%). Bathroom (26%), security (23%), manager intervening (22%), room service (22%), value (21%) and check in/out (20%) showed a relative high percentage of

negative mentioning. In these categories, one or more out of five customers wrote a negative review.

Review scores on main categories
Finally, a detailed breakdown was made on the review scores for a selection of the main categories within hotels in each city (see Tables 5 and 6). For the purpose of providing a relevant overview the choice was made to select five of the most mentioned eight categories: "location" (indicator important for getting an impression about the hotel in its city context), "rooms" (as the indicator of the physical core product of the hotel), "cleanliness" (as an indicator of hygiene, and potentially health related issues), "service" (indicator of hotel product delivery quality) and "value" (indicator of how guests perceived the overall offer in relation to the price they paid). There may be arbitrary choices incurred in using the categories as indicated, but we considered them to provide the most representative sample of the hotels' quality in the guests' perception.

The overall score on the chosen five categories in most cases was the same as for all the 23 categories listed in Table 3 (column 3) with only minor differences of 0.01 point. Exceptions were Groningen and Zwolle, which both had a 0.09 higher review score on the five categories than on the overall score on all the categories in Table 3. Dordrecht, Rotterdam and Zwolle had the highest overall scores, while Utrecht, Haarlem and Breda received the three lowest scores. Together with Groningen and Amsterdam, these cities were below the Dutch overall score. Leeuwarden's overall 4.03 review score was in the middle (8) and 0.03 above the Dutch overall average.

For "cleanliness", Dordrecht (4.41) and Zwolle (4.39) had observably higher scores than the other hotel cities, leaving Leeuwarden at the fourth position with 4.24. Another

Table 4. Categories mentioned in reviews (positive and negative)

	Topic category	Mentions	% Positive	% Neutral	% Negative
1.	Overall	1 103 505	62% (685 339)	25% (274 410)	13% (143 756)
2.	Rooms	324 765	55% (178 349)	27% (88 620)	18% (57 796)
3.	Service	311 089	74% (230 285)	18% (56 054)	8% (24 750)
4.	Facilities	234 263	60% (140 349)	29% (68 597)	11% (25 317)
5.	General Staff	201 563	84% (168 937)	11% (22 530)	5% (10 096)
6.	Food / Beverage	150 490	65% (97 790)	23% (34 118)	12% (18 582)
7.	Location	135 907	69% (94 251)	25% (34 592)	5% (7 064)
8.	Value	118 041	47% (56 027)	32% (37 285)	21% (24 729)
9.	Breakfast	72 869	62% (45 163)	24% (17 804)	14% (9 902)
10.	Cleanliness	54 159	68% (36 644)	17% (9 322)	15% (8 193)
11.	Bathroom	47 265	42% (19 771)	33% (15 362)	26% (12 132)
12.	Waitstaff	33 024	84% (27 750)	11% (3 699)	5% (1 575)
13.	Front Desk	31 290	64% (20 082)	22% (6 847)	14% (4 361)
14.	Checkin/out	10 685	45% (4 789)	36% (3 797)	20% (2 099)
15.	Restaurant	8 477	60% (5 055)	26% (2 199)	14% (1 223)
16.	Bar	6 236	63% (3 909)	25% (1 529)	13% (798)
17.	Housecleaning	6 173	53% (3 246)	30% (1 849)	17% (1 078)
18.	Bellstaff	3 788	70% (2 667)	21% (780)	9% (341)
19.	Security	3 183	32% (1 027)	44% (1 415)	23% (741)
20.	Manager	2 805	50% (1 404)	28% (783)	22% (618)
21.	Concierge	2 621	77% (2 021)	15% (405)	7% (195)
22.	Room Service	1 839	50% (915)	28% (521)	22% (403)
23.	Lobby	1 680	69% (1 158)	21% (347)	10% (175)
24.	Recreation Staff	65	62% (40)	23% (15)	15% (10)

important category to consider within the hotels offer was the guest reviews on "location". Leeuwarden was among the four most appreciated cities in terms of the hotels' locations, scoring 4.22, with only Rotterdam (4.32), The Hague (4.32) and Amsterdam (4.29) getting higher review scores. In contrast to the "overall" and "cleanliness" scores that ranked Dordrecht no. 1, the "location" guest review score put the Dordrecht hotels at the last position (3.80).

In the category "rooms", Haarlem (4.17), Zwolle (4.13) and Leiden (4.12) were most appreciated by guests. Groningen (3.68), Breda (3.77) and Utrecht (3.85) scored the lowest guest reviews in this category, while Leeuwarden was also on the lower end (3.96) but still on par with the Dutch average score on "rooms". In terms of "service", Zwolle (4.37), Dordrecht (4.30) and Leeuwarden (4.29) were the top 3 performers and Nijmegen (4.06), Breda (4.14) and Groningen (4.15) the three lowest. Finally, in terms of "value" guest reviews showed the highest hotel scores in Zwolle (4.20), Dordrecht (4.19) and Rotterdam (4.06) followed in position five by Leeuwarden

(4.03). Same as in the category "service", Nijmegen (3.87), Breda (3.86)) and Groningen (3.89) showed the lowest three guest reviews on "value".

Table 7 shows the categories per city in which hotels in a particular city received a lower guest review score than the Dutch overall average score in the particular category. Rotterdam, The Hague and Leeuwarden scored in each of the categories overall (for the six selected categories, "overall", "cleanliness", "location", "rooms", "service" and "value") higher than (or the same as) the Dutch overall score for the particular category. At the other end, Utrecht, Groningen and Breda scored lower guest reviews on all categories. Except for Maastricht , the cities that combined lower scores on service and value also underscored on the category "overall".

Conclusions

The questions addressed in this research are: what is the overall guest review score of Leeuwarden hotels compared to

Table 5: Review scores on main categories: overall, cleanliness and location

City/NL 2014	Overall	Rank	Cleanliness	Rank	Location	Rank	< NL
Netherlands	4.00		4.15		4.18		
Amsterdam	3.97	*12	4.22	8	4.29	3	1×
Rotterdam	4.14	2	4.24	4	4.32	1	0×
The Hague	4.08	5	4.23	6	4.32	1	0×
Utrecht	3.94	*13	4.09	*11	4.04	*11	3×
Eindhoven	4.08	5	4.14	*9	4.20	6	1×
Groningen	3.98	*11	3.95	*14	3.95	*13	3×
Breda	3.87	*15	3.96	*13	3.94	*14	3×
Nijmegen	4.03	8	3.82	*15	4.22	4	1×
Haarlem	3.93	*14	4.25	3	4.10	*8	2×
Arnhem	4.09	4	4.11	*10	4.19	7	1×
Zwolle	4.12	3	4.39	2	4.02	*12	1×
Maastricht	4.02	10	4.05	*12	4.07	*9	2×
Leiden	4.04	7	4.23	6	4.06	*10	1×
Dordrecht	4.18	1	4.41	1	3.80	*15	1×
Leeuwarden	4.03	8	4.24	4	4.22	4	0×

*Lower than the overall NL score

Table 6. Review scores on main categories: Rooms, Service and Value

City/NL 2014	Rooms	Rank	Service	Rank	Value	Rank	<NL
Netherlands	3.96		4.20		3.97		
Amsterdam	3.97	9	4.19	*7	3.92	*10	2×
Rotterdam	4.09	4	4.23	5	4.06	3	0×
The Hague	4.06	6	4.24	4	4.02	8	0×
Utrecht	3.85	*13	4.17	*11	3.89	*12	3×
Eindhoven	3.98	8	4.20	6	4.03	5	0×
Groningen	3.68	*15	4.15	*13	3.89	*13	3×
Breda	3.77	*14	4.14	*14	3.86	*14	3×
Nijmegen	3.99	7	4.06	*15	3.87	*15	2×
Haarlem	4.17	1	4.17	*11	4.03	5	1×
Arnhem	3.90	*12	4.19	*7	4.04	4	2×
Zwolle	4.13	2	4.37	1	4.20	1	0×
Maastricht	3.95	*11	4.19	*7	3.91	*11	3×
Leiden	4.12	3	4.19	*7	4.01	9	1×
Dordrecht	4.09	4	4.30	2	4.19	2	0×
Leeuwarden	3.96	10	4.29	3	4.03	5	0×

*Lower than the overall NL score

Table 7. Review scores on main categories

City/NL 2014	Categories scoring lower than Netherlands overall	Overall	Cleanliness	Location	Rooms	Service	Value
Rotterdam (2)	0×						
The Hague (3)	0×						
Leeuwarden (25)	0×						
Eindhoven (5)	1×		√				
Zwolle (20)	1×			√			
Dordrecht (23)	1×			√			
Leiden (22)	2×			√		√	
Amsterdam (1)	3×	√				√	√
Nijmegen (10)	3×	√				√	√
Maastricht (21)	5×		√	√	√	√	√
Utrecht (4)	6×	√	√	√	√	√	√
Groningen (7)	6×	√	√	√	√	√	√
Breda (9)	6×	√	√	√	√	√	√

the other major Dutch cities with 10 hotels or more? and how do Leeuwarden hotels' guest reviews in particular important categories compare to those of the other major Dutch cities? To answer these questions, guest reviews were collected from 51 websites where guests post their experiences and perceptions of the hotels they visited. The scores were taken at face value without using any statistical analysis other than calculating the mean scores. The scores were in a rather narrow band within a range of maximum 0.59 difference between the highest and lowest guest review, which is lower than 12%. Differences are relatively small but looking at the high numbers of reviews in the samples per city (between 3 618 and 249 001), it would be fair to draw some conclusions based on the findings in this research.

At rank 6, Leeuwarden seems not to be prominent in the overall hotel review score per city, but still with a 4.04 above the overall Dutch city average of 4.00. Having only 53% of positive guest reviews, however, Leeuwarden stays below the overall Dutch city outcome of 57% positive guest reviews. This outcome puts Leeuwarden at place 11 out of 15 and provides "food for thought", because it raises the question: "why do only slightly more than half of the hotel visitors leave a positive review?" Leeuwarden lags behind compared to another small city such as Dordrecht, which has 67% (two-thirds) positive reviews. Further research focusing more in-depth on the individual hotels in Leeuwarden would be needed to find out why there is this relatively low percentage of positive reviews. In terms of review pace (reviews per hotel per week) and the number of reviews per hotel, Leeuwarden was in the lower half of the 15 cities compared in this research. Drawing conclusions on why the review pace and number of reviews per hotel are low is difficult, although the results appear to be in line with those of the other smaller Dutch cities such as Dordrecht and Zwolle. It is not the full explanation because, contrastingly, other small cities such as Maastricht and Leiden show double or 150% of the review pace/number of reviews per hotel compared to Leeuwarden. Important for Leeuwarden hotels certainly is to increase positive guest reviews because, as mentioned in the literature review,   increasing a hotel's rating by 1 point (on a 5 point scale), allows the hotel to increase daily rate by 11.2% without affecting the likelihood of decreasing the number of bookings. Öğüt & Onur Tas (2012) also stress the importance of customer rating where they calculated that an increase in hotel

star rating does not increase hotel sales, whereas increases in customer review ratings do increase hotel sales.

The more detailed reviews per category show a more favourable picture of Leeuwarden hotels compared to those in the other hotel cities. Although still generally performing in the middle segment where it concerns guest reviews, it is interesting to observe that Leeuwarden together only with Rotterdam and The Hague in all of the categories "overall city score", "cleanliness", "location", "rooms", "service" and "value" has guest review scores above (or on) the Dutch overall score. This means that based on the outcome it would be justified to say that Leeuwarden, although not performing top three in any category except for "service", is one of the few cities not underperforming compared to the Dutch overall guest review scores. Furthermore, "cleanliness" and "location" are in the upper scoring guest review categories. The overall conclusion about Leeuwarden hotels, therefore, is that:
• they are above the Dutch average at both city level as well as on the six categories identified specifically in this research
• the number of positive reviews is on the low end and, slightly worryingly, just above half of the total reviews
• they are above Dutch average in all of the six identified categories and no.3 in service.

Recommendations for further research

Further research is needed in more detail to complement and further refine the findings of this exploratory research into the quality of Leeuwarden hotels, to identify where specific improvements can be realised. Also, research is needed on how Leeuwarden hotels can stimulate their guests to leave more positive reviews (and less negative) about their stay. For the hotel practice in Leeuwarden in the context of Cultural Capital 2018, it will be essential to provide a well-organised and effectively operated package of products and services that satisfy and preferably exceed the needs and expectations of international guests visiting the city. For the local and provincial authorities it will be important to offer dedicated resources such as training funds and knowledge for the Leeuwarden (Frisian) hotels in order to stimulate a positive guest experience. On this latter issue, cooperation

with the local institutions of vocational and higher education in hospitality and tourism can provide significant value.

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