

Is Coastal Tourism ready for the Next Generation?

A comparative study in the German and
Dutch Wadden region

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Abstract

In this study, a comparison will be made between the German and Dutch Wadden region, concerning sustainable tourism. The research has made a distinction between ecologic and socio-economic aspects and both perspectives will be examined in the Lauwersmeer region in the Netherlands and the Greetsiel region in Germany. The socio-economic perspective stresses the effect of tourism incomes on the local economy, with the Landal Greenpark Esonstad as case-study. This goal is reflected in the research question: “What is the effect of tourism incomes from Esonstad on the socio-economic development of the Lauwersmeer region?” Regional Development theory and Social Embeddedness theory are applied to examine the effects Esonstad has on the regional economy. Interviews with different stakeholders show that Esonstad has a positive impact on the development of the regional economy and the social networks within. Residents of the Lauwersmeer region emphasise the importance of the presence of the park and they don't see the park as competition but rather as a complement to their tourism industry, thus the park can contribute to regional economic development. This creates a paradox; investments are needed to attract more tourists throughout the season, but without more tourists investments are less profitable. Provided that there is a management of actors and entrepreneurs, exogenous investments like Esonstad could bridge this gap and provide incentives for more endogenous regional development.

Keywords: Sustainability, tourism, socio-economic development

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1.1 Introduction Trilateral bachelor project

In a new collaboration between three universities, Oldenburg, Bremen and Groningen, it is tried to cooperate on the theme of ‘sustainable tourism’. The goal is to make a comparative study on the subject of sustainable tourism in the Wadden Region. Sustainability implies ‘meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Brundtland Commission, 1987). The debate on sustainability is meaningful for the Wadden region and it is important to define the different perspectives on this debate. By making a comparative study between two comparable areas in the Netherlands and Germany, it is attempted to get an insight on the ecological and socio-economical perspectives. These perspectives are both equally important in dealing with the issue of sustainable tourism in the Wadden Region, or as Murphy (1985) states, to consider both ‘plants’ and ‘people’ when implementing the process of sustainable tourism development.

To make the comparative study the general theme of sustainable tourism is divided into two topics, one concerning ecological matters and the other socio-economic matters. Both examined in two different but similar regions on the mainland, one in the Netherlands and one in Germany. The socio-economical perspective focusses on the way local inhabitants and companies benefit from economic development through tourism. The tourism sector influences the income of a region and therefore the economic growth or decline. Economic growth is important, for it is an aspect of the process of economic development (Sen, 1983; Nissan, 2011). Nunkoo et al. (2013) argue; tourism is a ‘community industry’, because residents are directly influenced by economic change. If the local region benefits from the tourism incomes, sustainable economic consolidation can be supported. Economic consolidation matters, because it enables local residents or companies to invest in sustainable ways of working, residing and recreating, together with more sustainable, eco-friendly ways of tourism related activities.

1.1.2 Problem definition

Students from the three universities are cooperating to answer the general theme on sustainable tourism (figure 1). During an international workshop organised by the three universities, the following question will be answered.

“What do and how can economical, ecological and social aspects contribute to sustainable tourism in the Greetsiel and Lauwersmeer regions?”

To answer the question, the concept of 'sustainable tourism' has to be defined. The definition that will be used is that of the World Tourism Organisation;

“Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them” (World Tourism Organisation, 2005, p. 11).

1.2 Introduction paper

The tourism sector is one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) the sector will continue to grow, while contributing to approximately 10,6% of the world's GDP (WTTC, 2002). As one of the fastest growing industries, the sector places great pressure on biodiversity and local cultures. Much research has been done to assess tourism with a 'sustainable' regard to reduce the impact tourism has on its environment. In particular coastal tourism experiences great pressure from the growing tourism sector, for coastal environments have a limited surface, stretching along the edge of the sea. Coastal regions often have vulnerable ecosystems and specialized economies and impacts of tourism can be severe (Hall, 2001). In this paper, the effects of growing coastal tourism will be examined on the local economy in the Lauwersmeer region in the Netherlands.

1.2.1 Lauwersmeer – Socio-economic perspective

The socio-economic perspective focusses on the question whether income flows from tourism are beneficial for the local economy. According to the World Tourism Organisation (2002) there should be a management of all resources which conforms to economics, social and aesthetic needs of both residents and tourists. The Regional Development Theory stresses the importance of local actors and endogenous investments in shaping the economic development in a region (Ascani, 2012), though not only local actors are important in shaping the economy; also the social and cultural conditions where the region's economy is 'embedded' are relevant (Martin, 1996). In the Dutch Wadden area, tourism is a well-developed and competitive economic activity (Sijtsma et al., 2012), but this is mainly true for the islands. Compared to the islands, mainland tourism and leisure have less influence on economy (Waddenacademie, 2008). Moreover the mainland has a more diverse economy, based on tourism and leisure, but also agriculture and fishing industry (Waddenacademie, 2009).

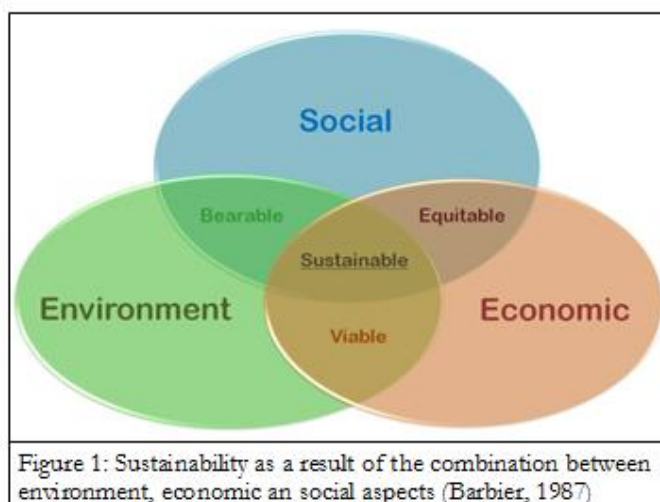
To examine whether the tourism sector is sustainable or not depends, among other things, on income flows earned from tourism. The aim of this research is to point out the effect of tourist incomes in the economy in the Lauwersmeer region and in particular tourism incomes from Esonstad. This aim is formulated in the following research question:

“What is the effect of tourism incomes from Esonstad on the socio-economic development of the Lauwersmeer region?”

To answer the main research question, several sub-questions will be answered. These sub-questions provide an overview of the tourism sector in the Lauwersmeer region and the role Esonstad plays in the sustainable regional economic development.

- What kind of tourists is visiting the Lauwersmeer region?
- What do the tourists consume? (activities, consuming local products, i.e.)
- To what extent is the development of the tourism sector a risk for the development of other economic sectors?
- Does Esonstad provide extra employment in the region?
- Has Esonstad a policy concerning the Lauwersmeer region?
- Does Esonstad contribute to a sustainable economic development?

This paper is structured as follows; in part 2 of the paper, tourism related theories will be discussed in the theoretical framework. In part 3 of the paper, the area of research is described. It will be made clear why the areas of Greetsiel and Lauwersmeer are chosen for the comparative study and Esonstad will be discussed. Part 4 will describe the methodology and the results of the data collection in the Lauwersmeer area, but also the data collected in the Greetsiel area will be discussed. The paper will end with conclusions about the main research question. Apart from the main research question that has the emphasis on Esonstad, it is tried to answer the common theme on the socio-economic topic; do incomes from tourism flow back to the local economy? And what does this imply for the Wadden region.



2.1 Theoretical Framework

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries and according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), it will continue to grow. Within the tourism sector, the ocean and coastal tourism is one of the fastest growing areas of contemporary tourism (Hall, 2001). The small territory, stretching alongside the coast, is being used for different purposes including agriculture, human settlement, fishing and tourism (Hall, 2001). This is also true for the Wadden region, which is a rural area with a highly specialised economy and which has to provide employment for its inhabitants (Sijtsma et al., 2012). Because the area is so rural, it is attractive for especially elderly tourists that seek quietness and calmness for their holiday. Tourism can be an effective source of employment and income to local communities, if tourists consume products and foods produced by local companies. This makes it important to examine which tourists come to the Lauwersmeer region and moreover, what they consume. Aside the earnings from consumption, a region can profit from tourism through tourist taxes. These tourist taxes are directly paid to the hosting municipality, in this case the municipality of Dongeradeel. The development of the tourism sector can have a great impact on the residents and their social relations, because it affects the development of other industries like agriculture, fishing and service industries. This emphasizes the risk tourism can pose to other activities. And according to Sharpley (2002) tourism can only be successful and sustainable as long as its social, environmental and economic benefits (figure 1) outweigh the costs of maintaining the hospitality industry (for example, costs like development of activities, the compensations of environmental aspects and investments in the sector).

The sustainable tourism debate can be linked back to the debate on sustainable development. It is assumed that sustainable development can occur as a result of economic benefits that diffuse from growth impulses (the tourism sector) or from growth poles (resorts like Esonstad). Therefore, the role of tourism in development can be justified for a basis of economic growth (Sharpley, 2000). To make tourism sustainable, different stakeholders are involved in the process; tourists, communities, companies and (local) government. Byrd (2007) applies the Stakeholder Theory within the sustainable tourism debate and he identifies four distinct groups; *the present visitor*, *the future visitor*, *the present host community* and *the future host community*. For this research, the present host community in the Lauwersmeer region is most interesting; what does the community earn from the present and future visitors in Esonstad and how does this affect the future community of the region. The park for example, is a supplier for jobs, but is it enough to increase the employment in the region and do the jobs go to local residents of the region? Besides the provision of jobs, it is presumed that the park also provides indirect employment through the entrepreneurship of local residents.

Following the aforementioned, another concept of sustainable development provides a framework for tourism-related entrepreneurship; it targets the effect that Esonstad has in the region. The focus of *social embeddedness* within the tourism sector lies with the way local entrepreneurs work in a system of social relations in a region (Prabawa, 2010). And as Granovetter (1985) discusses, the concept of embeddedness is relevant to the study of tourism for it is a contributor to sustainable development. If tourism incomes from Esonstad flow back to the local economy, then local entrepreneurs will receive the benefits and according to the Social Embeddedness Theory, this in turn is beneficial for the community and the social networks within. According to Martin (1996) the interest in network forms in economic geography reflects a more general concern to examine the ways in which economic activities of the park are "embedded" in, and made possible by, social and cultural conditions. The interaction and balance between society and community appear to be a key element in shaping the development potential of regions (Rodríguez-Pose and Storper, 2006). Considering embeddedness within a community, tourism can be seen as a 'community industry' (Nunkoo et al., 2013).

Rodríguez-Pose and Storper, (2006) argue about the importance of the development potential of regions. Tourism development in the Wadden Region therefore can be seen as a form of regional economic development, and as such being a source of employment and income to local communities. To contribute to economic development investments are required. The emphasis lies on economic development from within the region or as Romer (1994) argues; economic growth is an endogenous outcome of an economic system. The Regional Development Theory stresses *local* economic development, as economic development mostly occurs on the local and regional level. Emphasis lies on the regional processes and the role of local actors, like Esonstad, local entrepreneurs and residents, in shaping the economic development (Amin and Thrift, 1994; Ascani, 2012; Nissan, 2008). Like the Social Embeddedness Theory, the Regional Development Theory brings the relevance of contextual socio-economic and institutional characteristics at the core of economic growth and development. To create the appropriate environment for regional economic development, the existence of proper formal (societal) and informal (communitarian) institutions is necessary (Rodríguez-Pose and Storper, 2006). Or as Amin (1999) states; "intending to favor bottom-up, region specific, long-term and plural-actor based policy actions" on economic development. In the Wadden area, policy actions are largely regulated by strategic spatial planning (Nota Ruimte; Daams, 2013). Namely; by constructing infrastructure, the municipality of Dongeradeel tries to provide development of the economy. In this research emphasis lies on several stakeholders contributing to the development of the local economy and on the effects Esonstad has on its direct environment.

2.2 Conceptual model

The conceptual model (figure 2) is a simplified reflection of the income model in local tourism economies. The model assumes that tourists either come from the region or not, and either spend their money on local products or on products imported from outside the region, produced by national or international firms. When tourists buy non-regional products, national or international firms will benefit from the revenues. However, when tourists buy regional products or do activities organised by local organisations, the local entrepreneurs will benefit from the incomes from tourism. When local entrepreneurs receive higher incomes, the regional economy can grow and this is a part of economic development, which can be beneficial for the region (Sen, 1983; Nissan, 2008). Higher incomes can be an incentive for more endogenous investments in facilities or activities in the region. Local residents in their turn can profit from economic development, for a developed area can attract more businesses and facilities. But also tourists can profit from economic development, for a more developed region can attract more facilities. And more tourists will consume more (local) products and do more activities.

For the Lauwersmeer region this model is the starting point to examine what tourists in the Lauwersmeer region consume, in particular the tourists from Esonstad. For example; do tourists consume local products or products imported by Landal Greenparks and do tourists involve in local activities or do they stay at the park? The model will be examined through a qualitative study with different stakeholders, namely Esonstad, local entrepreneurs, a tourist office and a municipality. By conducting interviews, it is tried to get in insight in the way local entrepreneurs and Esonstad cooperate and if tourists indeed buy local products, so that the region benefits from tourism incomes.

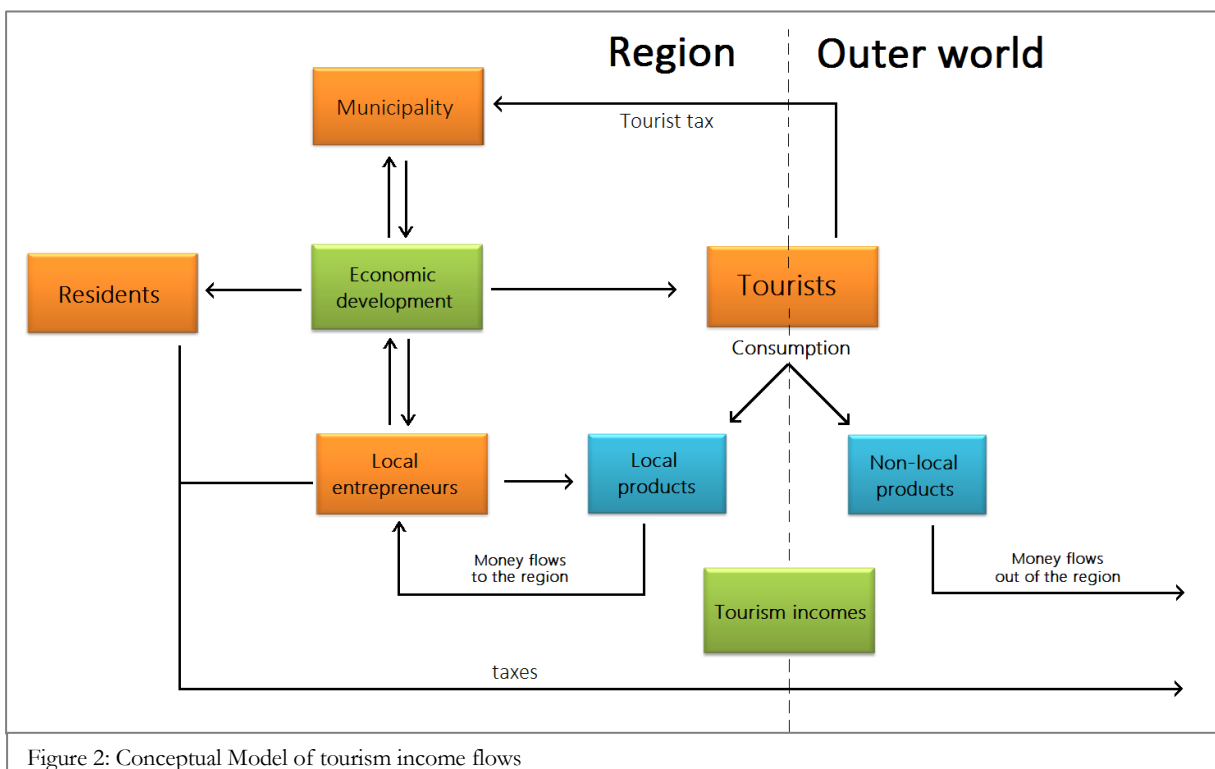


Figure 2: Conceptual Model of tourism income flows

3.1 Description of the research area

In this research the Wadden region is defined as all the municipalities adjacent to the Waddensea, in Germany and the Netherlands (see figure 3). In the Wadden region, two areas are chosen for the comparative study, namely the Greetsiel area and the Lauwersmeer area. These areas are chosen for their comparability. On the Dutch Wadden region, the Lauwersmeer area is defined as the municipalities adjacent to the Lauwersmeer, in this paper emphasis lies on the municipalities of Dongeradeel and De Marne (figure 4). The Greetsiel area in Germany is part of the municipality of Krummhörn. Both areas are situated on the mainland coast. Greetsiel has direct access to open sea, the Lauwersmeer has not, however it is possible to reach open sea through locks. The general perspective on the Wadden area is that of a rural area: “with one or more small or medium-sized cities surrounded by large areas of open space, with a regional economy comprising agricultural, industrial and service activities, and a relatively low population density” (Terluin, 2003, pp. 328-329). In these areas are Greetsiel and Dokkum the larger towns of both regions, surrounded by several smaller villages. Another important similarity, considering the ecological and socio-economic perspectives, is the presence of national parks, i.e. nature conservation areas. This is important for the Wadden region, for the tourism sector in the Wadden region is driven by the appreciation of immobile environmental capital (Sijtsma et al., 2012). For example, visitors of Esonstad use the qualities of the Lauwersmeer conservation area, as do tourists from other accommodations in both regions (Gemeente Dongeradeel, 2008).

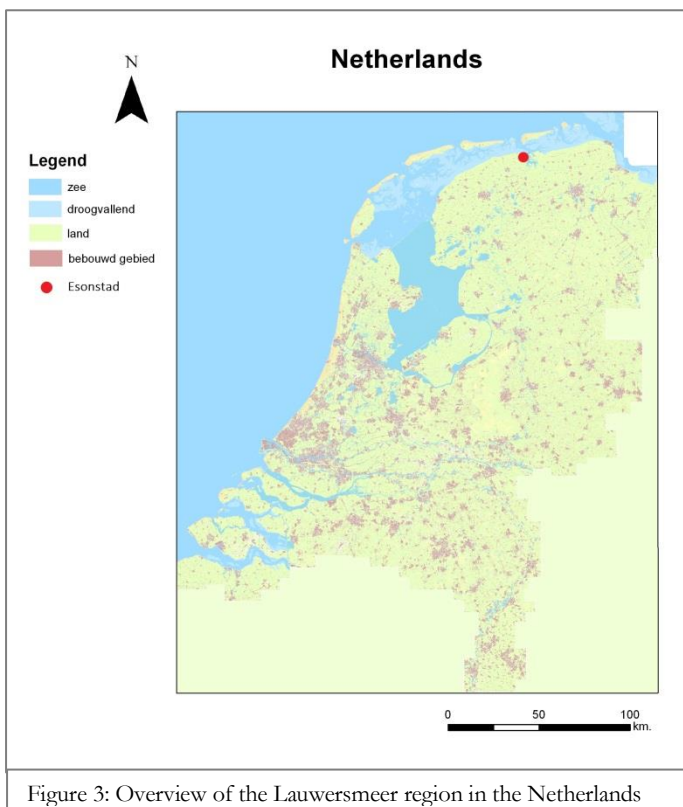


Figure 3: Overview of the Lauwersmeer region in the Netherlands

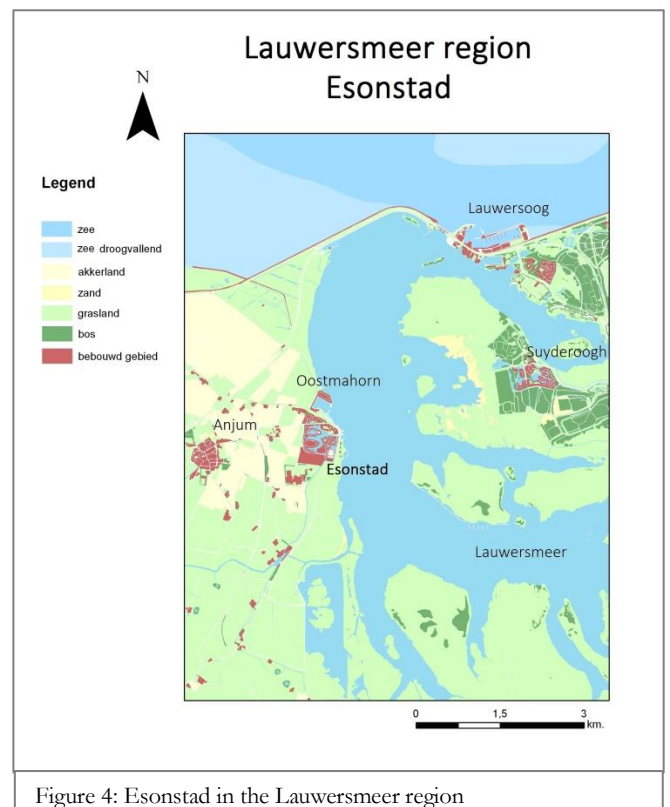


Figure 4: Esonstad in the Lauwersmeer region



3.2 Esonstad

The focus of the comparative study lies on sustainable tourism, both from an ecological and a socio-economic perspective. From the socio-economic perspective it is presumed that tourism can be sustainable if tourism incomes flow back the local economy. This is examined both in the Lauwersmeer area and Greetsiel area. In this research, emphasis lies on the Landal Greenpark Esonstad. It is examined whether Esonstad contributes to this kind of sustainability. The hypothesis is therefore; Esonstad can be sustainable if the incomes out of tourism flow back to the local economy of the Lauwersmeer area.

Esonstad is a large player in the Lauwersmeer region, a Landal Greenparks bungalowpark. The park has been built by external investors like Geveke Ontwikkeling and Landal Greenparks. The site nearby Oostmahorn was chosen by the municipality of Dongeradeel, who wanted to develop a park with holiday houses. Landal is a Dutch company, exploiting bungalow parks throughout Europe. Landal owns over 73 bungalow parks and with 51 parks in the Netherlands, Landal is the largest provider of this type of accommodation. The Landal Greenpark Esonstad has been completed in 2006, on request of the municipality of Dongeradeel, in a historical architectural way, with small 16th century type of houses (figure 5). Besides the recreational houses, the park offers a campsite with 129 pitches (Gemeente Dongeradeel, 2008). The park provides a ferry service to the island of Schiermonnikoog. Furthermore, the complex is home to a swimmingpool, playground, a Pitch and Putt course and hospitality services. To examine the economic effects that Esonstad has on the region, it is important to see if tourists from the park spend their money on local activities, foods and products; and whether employment in the region grows.

4.1 Methodology

To be able to make the comparative study between the two regions, similar methods have been used. For the socio-economic perspective interviews have been conducted. The choice for interviews comes from the social aspect; how are residents and entrepreneurs influenced by developments, like the construction of Esonstad, and how do they feel about it. The interviews were conducted with different stakeholders, to get results about tourism and the local economies, and with the possibility to exchange results. In appendix I the questions are listed which were asked in all the interviews in both regions. In this appendix there is a distinction between questions asked in both regions and questions specifically in the Lauwersmeer region. The questions asked in both regions had the object to reveal possible similarities or differences between the regions. In total, there are 5 common questions to be asked in both countries. In appendix II, the interview guide is listed. Besides the qualitative research method, quantitative secondary data about employment and overnight stays were examined. Also data about demographics have been examined because of the presumed influence economic development has on the demography and vice versa. This quantitative data is exchanged between the research parties in the Netherlands and Germany. The figures from the regions were compared, to find possible differences in the scale of the tourism and demographics.

4.1.2 Quality of the data

The interviews were conducted in the own language, that is to say that the interviews in the Lauwersmeer region were conducted in Dutch and the interviews in Greetsiel were conducted in German. The interviews might slightly differ between the different stakeholders, but the concept is the same for every interview. The challenge was to compare the results. The interviews were conducted in two different countries, with different cultural backgrounds and in different languages. Furthermore different stakeholders were asked for interviews. The interviews were exchanged in the language they were conducted, for translating the interviews to English could influence the results.

4.1.2 Ethical issues

Qualitative research in the form of interviewing can be a risk considering the fact that the actors have different backgrounds and therefore can give different answers (Valentine in Flowerdew and Martin, 2005, O'Leary, 2010). For example, the frontdesk manager of Esonstad was able to answer most of the questions, but she was not a manager like the owner of Hotel De Posthoorn was. This might result in different answers because there could be less knowledge about the company. Besides that, it is difficult to learn whether an interviewee holds back information, so by interviewing different stakeholders it was attempted to create the most objectively image of the region as possible (O'Leary, 2010). The thesis was sent to the interviewees, to give them the opportunity to comment on the results.

4.2 Results

4.2.1 Tourism development in the Lauwersmeer region

Development of the tourism sector – Tourism in the last couple of years has shown a small growth, with a slight increase in the number of beds offered by hotels, bed and breakfasts and small guesthouses (see table 2). This table however, does not show the increase in number of beds since the completion of Esonstad, because this park was delivered in 2006. Since 2007, the number of beds has increased with almost 100 in 2011. Table 1 shows that the number of overnight stays too has been steady over the last 3 years. With a slight increase in 2010, the number of overnight stays is steady with around 223.000 overnight stays per year. The higher number of overnight stays in 2010 might be explained by good weather conditions, for especially the number over overnight stays on camping sites is much higher than the year before and after. The average overnight stays in the hotels is shorter than on campsites or parks; for example, the average overnight stays in Hotel De Posthoorn is 1,7 overnight stays, whereas the average in Esonstad is 4 overnight stays, this is due to the fact that the hotel receives more weekend visitors and business travellers.

The increase in number of visitors that stay longer than one day has increased with the completion of Esonstad. Local entrepreneurs noticed a distinct increase in the number of tourists in the region. Or like Marije van der Wal from the Tourist Office Lauwerland points out:

“Ja op zich is het wel zo dat vanaf Esonstad, als je het daarover hebt, daardoor hebben we hier zoveel meer aantallen bezoekers. [...]Ik denk dat de lokale ondernemer er toch wel blij mee moet zijn, want het park brengt zoveel bezoekers meer in het gebied.”

Overnight stays	2009	2010	2011
Groupaccommodations	6.091	4.473	4.900
Bed en Breakfast	1.457	1.454	1.307
Campings	28.320	34.037	29.654
Hotels and Pensions	25.371	25.508	24.100
Recreational houses	162.750	163.472	163.477
	223.989	228.944	223.438

Table 1: Overnight stays in Dongeradeel (Municipality of Dongeradeel, 2013)

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of beds	948	965	987	988	1.051

Table 2: Number of beds in Northeast Friesland. (Toerdata Noord, 2011)

Demographic changes - The regional development in the Lauwersmeer region is heavily influenced by demographic and social changes. Especially the smaller towns in the municipality of Dongeradeel are declining, not only economically but also physically. The rural area has to deal with a declining population in the next 20 years (see figure 6). Young residents of the region are leaving for larger towns and cities to live and to be educated. The youngsters are leaving the villages, because these places are losing facilities such as supermarkets and schools. Schools are being merged into larger ones in larger towns like Anjum and Dokkum. As a result of these developments the populations of the smaller towns are ageing, but there are few facilities for elderly people (see figure 7).

The declining and ageing population have a negative influence on the facilities available in a city or town, when demand declines due to a declining population, facilities are not profitable anymore, so facilities disappear from the region and less facilities make more people leave the region. This process also has an influence on tourism, for tourists seek facilities and activities. When these are not available, they are less likely to visit the region.

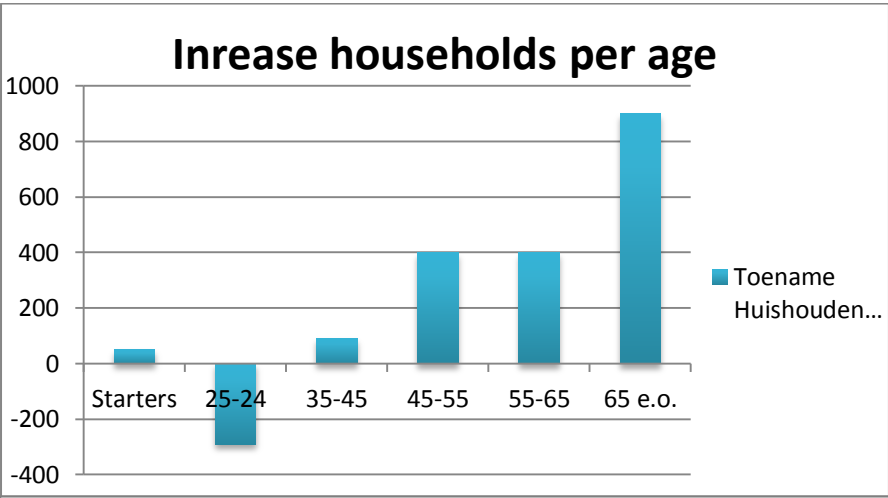


Figure 6: Increase households per age group, 2000-2015. (CBS, 2008)

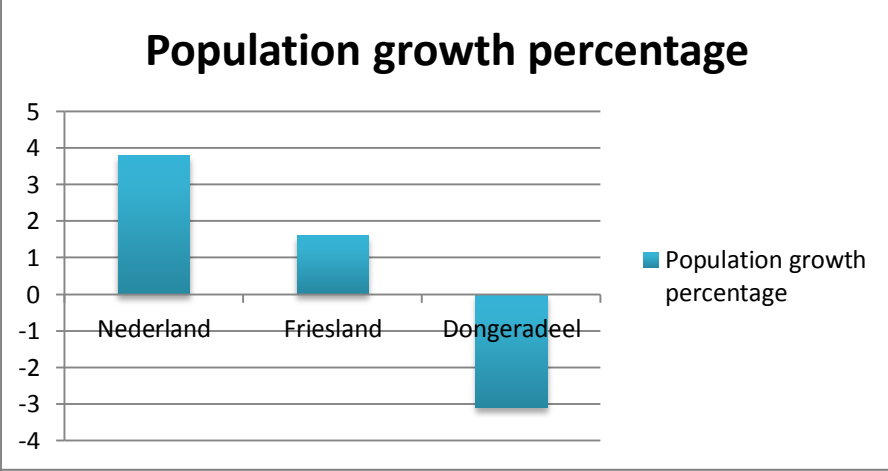


Figure 7: Population growth, 2006-2025. (CBS, 2006)

4.2.2 Results from research questions

- What kind of tourists come to the Lauwersmeer region?

Most of tourists come from the Randstad and Germany, in search of the quietness, peacefulness and nature conservation (Waddenacademie, 2008). The visitors in the region are mainly elderly people and younger families coming in the summer holidays or in the weekends in spring. The bed and breakfasts and hotels in the region are the main accommodation for elderly, while the younger families tend to go to campings and holiday parks like Esonstad. According to the municipality and the tourist information office, the target group in the region shifts from elderly people towards younger families because the region wants to lose her image of 'being boring and grey'. This might seem like a smart move, however, elderly people can provide for more income because they often have more to spend than younger families. This target group therefore should not be overseen when creating new activities in the region.

- What do the tourists consume? (activities, consuming local products, i.e.)

As aforementioned, the quietness and nature of the region are major attractions for visitors. These are considered the Unique Selling Points of the region. There is a relatively small range of activities tourists do, for the average number of overnight stays is relatively low with between 2 and 5 nights. All interviewed stakeholders mentioned the same kind of activities. According to them, tourists make daytrips to the islands of Schiermonnikoog and Ameland, and to the cities of Leeuwarden, Groningen and Dokkum close by. Besides these daytrips, visitors go to the Lauwersmeer for sailing, kitesurfing and windsurfing, or visitors go hiking and cycling through the region. A popular cycling event is the 'eleven-city' tour and this attracts a lot of cyclists to Dokkum. The entrepreneurs respond to these activities by cooperating with each other in projects like 'Dwaande'¹, this project connects local entrepreneurs and encourages them to learn from each other. This learning effect can trigger more endogenous investments of the entrepreneurs and thus development of the regional economy. This illustrates the 'community industry' of Nunkoo et al. (2013), where the residents of the region invest in development. This is part of the bottom-up approach and plural-actor based policy of regional economic development (Amin, 1999). Especially these projects contribute to the regional economy, for it are regional processes and local actors that shape the economic development and this in turn can contribute to sustainable growth (Amin and Thrift, 1994; Nissan, 2008). Thus, tourists are the trigger of these cooperation projects, because they are the ones consuming the products made by the local companies and entrepreneurs.

¹ www.dwaande.nl

Following the question of consumer behaviour, the question on future development has been asked; “what the region should do to develop the tourism?” The answers are all quite the same;

“Een attractiepark zou hard nodig zijn. Bij Lauwersoog zou echt meer gedaan moeten worden met watersport en kytesurfen enzo. En een leuk zand strand zou heel belangrijk zijn, want dat trekt mensen aan. Nu is er hier alleen maar slik. Er zou dus veel meer gedaan kunnen worden, maarja de gemeente heeft geen geld, dus dan gebeurd het ook niet.” – Sabine Reitsma

According to the interviewees, the municipality should invest in more leisure and indoor activities to ensure tourism throughout the year, for the region is considered as ‘boring’. Chances lie with activities for bad weather conditions and for the winter season. The development of such activities would be a contribution for a more sustainable tourism sector, to spread tourism over the year. Spreading the tourism throughout the year reduces high peaks in summer, because high peaks are vulnerable for economic and weather influences.

- To what extent is the development of the tourism sector a risk for the development of other economic sectors?

The demographic changes in the region have their effect on the employment in Dongeradeel. Larger and smaller companies leave the region and employment rate drops. It is mainly in the industrial and the agricultural sector where jobs are lost. The commercial services sector however, shows little growth. The municipality of Dongeradeel sees tourism as an employment substitute for other decreasing industries. Or as Bauke Dijkstra, policymaker of the Leisure and Tourism department of the municipality of Dongeradeel explains:

“Kijk, toerisme hebben we hoog in het vaandel staan, want het is een belangrijke speler op het gebied van werkgelegenheid. We moeten het niet van grootschalige industrie hebben en even kijken hoor... er gaat veel achteruit. [...] We zien toerisme wel als een vervangende werkgelegenheidspool... [...] Maar je ziet hier grotere ondernemers, die begonnen met 100 werknemers, later werden dat er eens 30 en die laatste 30 staan waarschijnlijk binnenkort ook op straat. Dus het wordt wel minder in deze regio...”

Dijkstra emphasises the importance of the tourism industry for the region. He explains the situation by illustrating his point with an example of a local firm that is declining and had to dismiss its employees. The municipality tries to develop the tourism sector as a substitute to other industries, but there is not enough money for direct investments in the tourism industry, therefore they take a facilitating role for the licensing local entrepreneurs. It is a risk however, to put too much value in the tourism sector alone, because this sector is vulnerable for external influences, like weather, social trends and economic development.

- Does Esonstad provide extra employment in the region?

Esonstad is responsible for a direct employment of over 100 jobs, which are mostly occupied by local residents of the region and the indirect employment the park creates is even bigger (Esonstad, 2013). Another way residents and entrepreneurs benefit from the park is by investing in houses at the park. Sabina Reitsma mentions the so-called ‘MKZ-huisjes’;

“Er zijn hier wel veel mensen die ook een huisje hebben in Esonstad. Weet je dat hier een paar jaar geleden de MKZ-crisis was? Nou, met de MKZ-crisis hebben boeren hier veel geld verloren. Omdat het vee moest worden geruimd enzo. Maar ze hebben veel geld ter compensatie gekregen en daarvan hebben de bewoners huisjes gekocht, want ze mochten het geld niet in het eigen bedrijf stoppen. De zogenaamde MKZ-huisjes. Dat was toen als investering.”

In 2001, the foot-and-mouth disease broke out in Europa and farmers in Dongeradeel have been affected by this. To compensate the losses the farmer suffered, the farmers were granted money which they were not allowed to invest in their own companies, so the farmers invested for their pensions in Esonstad by buying houses on the park. The local residents profit from the revenues gained by rental of the houses to tourists.

- Has Esonstad a policy concerning the Lauwersmeer region?

Since the completion of Landalpark Esonstad in 2006, the number of tourists has increased significantly. The park has been developed on request of the municipality of Dongeradeel, with several external investors like Geveke Ontwikkeling and Landal Greenparks. The plan was to build 250 recreational houses, of which 221 have been built so far (Esonstad, 2013). At first the local entrepreneurs were anxious what effects such a park would have, especially concerning increased competitions. However, this turned out not to be the case, even contrary from what the entrepreneurs had expected the park rather turned to be complementary to the existing accommodation supply. The target group of Esonstad is young families, whereas other accommodations mostly attract elderly visitors. Hotel proprietor Sabine Reitsma explains that she does not experience any competition from Esonstad, for Esonstad attracts a different target group than her hotel does;

“Nee helemaal niet. Wij hebben geen concurrentie met Esonstad. We hebben er wel wat aan door koffiedrinkers en eters voor ons restaurant, maar het is dus geen concurrent. We hebben gewoon een heel andere doelgroep, dus dat maakt niet uit.” – Sabine Reitsma



The park operates within guidelines of Landal Greenparks, but the park itself makes decisions about the development of the park. Esonstad offers only a few facilities like a swimmingpool, outdoors playground and a pitch and putt course, which are owned by Esonstad B.V. Therefore guests have to find their entertainment outside the park. Maaïke van der Molen, frontdesk manager, argues that the park works with a regional policy of embeddedness in the region, or “verankering in de regio”. To embed itself in the region, the park cooperates with local entrepreneurs, like the aforementioned ferry to Schiermonnikoog, several museums and local farmers. Entrepreneurs can promote their activities at the park and in return the park handles ticket sales, so visitors are encouraged to go outside the park. Other facilities, like a boat rental, snack bar, supermarket and a restaurant are owned by a local entrepreneur from the region. This is the way the activities of Esonstad are “embedded” in the local social and economic networks and this is beneficial for the regional economy (Martin, 1996; Prawaba, 2010; Granovetter, 1985). It is mostly this regional policy of the park, which makes that the park can contribute to the regional economic development (Amin and Thrift, 1994).

- Does Esonstad contribute to a sustainable economic development?

Besides catering facilities, also supermarkets, retailers and restaurants benefit from the presence of Esonstad, for example a local supermarket in Anjum, adjacent to Oostmahorn, has tripled its income after the completion of the park. Though, it are mostly the larger towns with enough facilities that benefit from the tourists from Esonstad, smaller villages do not often receive visitors. Notably, the interviewed entrepreneurs note that they do not experience any competition from the islands. “The target groups are different,” according to Marije van der Wal from the tourist information and Sabine Reitsma from hotel De Posthoorn in Dokkum. All the interviewees emphasise Dongeradeel is mostly a transit region for tourists going to the islands, but the visitors of the Lauwersmeer region choose for the mainland and the watersports of the Lauwersmeer. There is some competition with the accommodation on the other side of the Lauwersmeer in the municipality De Marne, but the tourists from these locations also visit the municipality of Dongeradeel, thus local entrepreneurs benefit from the visiting tourists.

Though it is mostly the cooperation with local entrepreneurs, which makes Esonstad a contributor to the local economic development. The park started as an exogenous investment, but it triggered more endogenous investment, which in turn is beneficial for regional economic development (Rodríguez-Pose and Storper, 2006; Romer, 1994). The “verankering in de regio”-policy (embeddedness in the region) helps Esonstad to keep in touch with the municipality of Dongeradeel and the companies in the region.

Besides economic impact, the park has a large influence on the social networks within the region. Primarily entrepreneurs are involved in the development of Esonstad, but also local residents have their feelings about the presence of the park. Most residents have mixed feelings about the park, they state “you either love it or you hate it”, but all interviewees stress the economic importance of the presence of the park in the region. They too profit from the presence of the park, in particular for leisure activities. Several interviewees went to the park for leisure activities, like drinking coffee and go ‘people watching’. Thus the social impact the park has is positive, especially in the first years after the completion. Nowadays the novelty is gone, but still residents come to the park for leisure time.

“Nou... Het park is eigenlijk best mooi. Ben je er geweest? Het heeft wel mooie architectuur en ik moet er toch vaak zijn als ik er weer flyers neer leg (voor de kaasboerderij), dan drinken we er een kopje koffie. Iedereen merkte wel dat het park veel bezoekers trok en dat is... ja dat is wel belangrijk voor de regio.” – Leen van Zelderen, cheesemaker.

“Ja goed... Dat is nu eenmaal zo. Ik weet nog wel dat in het begin... toen was dat park nog gewoon een uitstapje. Waar je dan heen ging mensen kijken enzo... terrasje pakken en allemaal van dat soort dingen. En dat zal ongetwijfeld nog zo zijn.” – Bauke Dijkstra, municipality of Dongeradeel.

4.2.3 Results from Greetsiel

Greetsiel is in many aspects comparable with the Lauwersmeer region. Both regions are considered rural areas with an economy based on agriculture, industry and service activities. Just as the Lauwersmeer region, the Greetsiel region has to deal with a declining and ageing population. As in Lauwersmeer, Greetsiel has to cope with youngsters leaving the region and elderly staying behind. (Young residents are leaving for larger cities in search of jobs and education.) The tourism sector is playing an increasing role in the region, but in contrast to the Lauwersmeer region the industry is already more developed and it has more large scale tourism. Greetsiel counts over 3600 beds, whereas the Lauwersmeer region has little over 1000 beds. This scale difference is reflected in the number of overnight stays. Table 3 shows that the number of overnight stays in Greetsiel is significantly higher than in the Lauwersmeer region, namely 537.783 nights in comparison to 223.438 in the Lauwersmeer region (table 1 and 3).

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Overnight stays	386.457	414.711	450.060	508.641	537.783

Table 3: Overnight stays in Greetsiel (Municipality of Kummhörn, 2013)

The research questions asked in the Lauwersmeer region have also been asked by the students in the Greetsiel region. First of all, the reasons why tourists come to the Greetsiel region are similar to the motives of tourists in the Lauwersmeer. Most tourists come for the nature, quietness and the coast. Visitors do activities like cycling, strolling and shopping in the town of Greetsiel, and also the islands of Borkum and Juist are visited during daytrips. The history and the culture of the region is a major attraction for visitors (Figure 8). Ulrich Soénius from the Industrie- und Handelskammer Emden explains that ‘Friesian freedom’ is what tourists are looking for:

“Die Krummhörn hat ja eben auch eine reiche Geschichte, wie andere Gemeinden in Ostfriesland auch. Das heißt einmal das ganze Thema friesische Freiheit [...] Also Kultur und was sich drumherum rankt und insofern glaube ich, dass man da noch mehr draus machen kann.” – Ulrich Soénius, IHK Emden.

Except the aforementioned similarities between the Greetsiel and Lauwersmeer regions, the largest differences are related to the scale of the tourism industry. Moreover, the types of accommodations differ; the most important accommodations in Greetsiel are hotels and holiday apartments, whereas camping’s and bed and breakfasts are most available in the Lauwersmeer region. In Greetsiel, the hotels and apartments are being exploited by local entrepreneurs and often the accommodations are family businesses. An illustrating case is the resistance of the local community against the development of Greetland, a holiday park like Esonstad. This holiday park Greetland would have been built in 2011 with exogenous investors, but after demonstrations and referendum by the local community², the municipality decided not to develop the park. Residents and local entrepreneurs resisted the development of Greetland, for they considered the park as a threat to their companies and activities. According to Ulrich Soénius from the IHK, this illustrates the discussion around tourism development. Soénius argues that the region needs “new tourism magnets” to secure the regional economy. The region is largely dependent on tourism incomes and investments are required if Greetsiel wants to be able to keep attracting tourists. Notably, like the entrepreneurs from the Lauwersmeer region vice versa, entrepreneurs from Greetsiel go to the Netherlands to learn more about each other’s best practices. This learning effect can have a positive influence on the tourism development.



Figure 8 (Phoenix-on-tour.de)

² www.stopp-greetland.de

4.3 Conclusions

Due to demographic and economic changes the tourism sector in the Lauwersmeer region is of increasing significance. The region is characterised by a declining and ageing population and employment rates are declining. Both Greetsiel and Lauwersmeer face these problems, but the place tourism takes in these areas slightly differs. Greetsiel has a more developed and larger scale tourism sector, whereas Lauwersmeer is still developing a small scale tourism sector. This is also the most distinct difference between both regions; the offer of accommodations differs from hotels and apartments in Greetsiel to smaller scale camping's and bed and breakfasts in the Lauwersmeer region. Visiting tourists come here for the peace and quietness of the region, preferring the small scale of the tourism sector. Activities consist of daytrips to the islands, to larger cities and local museums, but also water sports, cycling and strolling are most exercised activities. Local entrepreneurs respond to these activities by cooperating with each other in promoting the activities of one another. In projects like Dwaande, entrepreneurs try to learn from each other and this learning creates more effective businesses. Not only do entrepreneurs learn from each other, they also go to other places, like Greetsiel, to learn from other situations. Furthermore, this learning effect can have a positive influence on the tourism sector in the Lauwersmeer region, triggering more endogenous investments (Amin and Thrift, 1994; Romer, 1994).

In the Lauwersmeer region Esonstad plays an important role in the social networks, built from exogenous investments; the park gives local entrepreneurs the opportunity to invest in the park (Nunkoo et al. 2013). In the context of the Social Embeddedness Theory, the park cooperates with entrepreneurs, by promoting their activities and having little facilities at the park itself, thus the park tries to embed her activities in the regional economy (Prawaba, 2010; Granovetter, 1985). After the park was completed, it turned to be a complement to other offer of accommodation in the region, rather than competition for other smaller entrepreneurs. Most local residents see the importance of the park and they appreciate the presence for they know the park contributes to the regional economy. This is in contrast to Greetsiel, where the local community protested against Greetland, a holiday park like Esonstad. The local entrepreneurs feared the park would pose a threat to their business and therefore the municipality decided not to build the park. This idea of a threat might not be strange, for in the Lauwersmeer region it are mainly larger towns like Dokkum and Anjum that profit from the park, whilst the smaller villages without facilities have difficulties with attracting tourists. This is an item where future research can be done; to examine the social impact of tourism in a region with decline, and more specific declining villages. These villages are losing facilities and does this influence the number of visiting tourists and thus tourism incomes?

The municipality of Dongeradeel sees great importance in tourism as a substitute to other industries, but this might also pose a risk. Tourism is an industry heavily influenced by several external factors like economic developments, weather conditions and cultural trends; therefore the sector might not be a reliable source of employment. To develop the sector with a sustainable regard, the emphasis has to lie on spreading the touristic season over the year and avoid high peaks only in the summer season. For this development endogenous investments are necessary, but the local municipality hardly has money to invest. By endogenous investments of entrepreneurs, the tourism sector has the most chance of growing in a sustainable way (Rodríguez-Pose and Storper, 2006). This creates a paradox; investments will attract more tourists throughout the season, but without more tourists investments are less profitable. Provided that there is a management of actors and entrepreneurs, exogenous investments, like Esonstad, could bridge this gap and provide incentives for more sustainable endogenous regional development.

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Appendix I

Interview questions

Questions for both regions:

- What kind of tourists come to the region? (*e.g. age, reason, length of stay + season*)
- Which types of accommodations are in the region? (*e.g. how many?*)
- What do tourists consume? (*e.g. activities, retail trade, local products?*)
- To which extent do tourists use the supply of local transport systems (*e.g. rent bikes, bus, taxi, ferry*)
- Are there any changes in product prices during the last ten years?

Specific questions for the Lauwersmeer region:

- Does Esonstad provide extra employment in the region?
- Has Esonstad a policy concerning the Lauwersmeer region?
- What do local residents contribute to the tourism sector?
- What types of companies are in the region?

Appendix II

Interview guide in Dutch

Legenda:

- Vraag
 - Wat ik uit de vraag zou willen halen

Inleiding:

- Mezelf introduceren
- Uitleggen waar het onderzoek over gaat
- Vertrouwelijkheid en anonimiteit
- Toestemming vragen voor opnemen van het interview

Opening (begin van het interview):

- Kunt u me iets vertellen over het toerisme in het Lauwersmeergebied?
 - Aantallen toeristen, attracties.

Key questions:

Over de toeristen

- Wat voor soort toeristen komen naar het Lauwersmeer?
 - Leeftijd, reden, duur van het verblijf etc.
 - Gezinnen, ouderen of jongeren
- Wat consumeren de toeristen?
 - Welke activiteiten doen ze?
 - Kopen ze lokale producten of eten?
- In welke mate maken toeristen gebruik van lokale transportsystemen?
 - Fietsen huren
 - Bus, taxi of veerboot?

Over de regio

- Welke soorten accommodatie zijn er in de regio?
 - Esonstad, grote hotel- of appartementen ketens
 - Lokale B&B's, inwoners die hun huis verhuren
- Wat voor soort bedrijven zijn er in de regio?
 - Lokale producenten van gebruiksproducten
 - Visserij en landbouw
 - Grotere bedrijven van buiten de regio?
- Kunnen lokale ondernemers een bijdrage aan de toeristische sector leveren en zo ja, hoe?
 - Het hebben van een B&B
 - Produceren van producten of voedingsmiddelen voor toeristen
 - Het hebben van een winkel o.i.d.

Over Esonstad

- Wat vinden mensen van de aanwezigheid van Esonstad in de regio?
 - Gevoelens, leuk ja of nee? Waarom?
- Biedt Esonstad extra werkgelegenheid aan de regio?
 - Profiteren bewoners van dit bedrijf?
 - Komen de medewerkers van Esonstad uit de regio of juist van buiten de regio?
- Heeft Esonstad een beleid wat betreft bijdragen aan de regio?
 - Economie, milieu ed.
 - Weten bewoners of Esonstad zich met de regio bezig houdt?
 - Wat vinden bewoners hiervan?

Afsluiting (einde van het interview):

- Wat vindt u zelf van toerisme in het Lauwersmeer gebied?
- Heeft u nog vragen?
- Hartelijk dank voor uw tijd.

Lauwersmeer region Esonstad



Legend

-  zee
-  zee droogvallend
-  akkerland
-  zand
-  grasland
-  bos
-  bebouwd gebied



0 1,5 3 km.

Netherlands



Legend

-  zee
-  droogvallend
-  land
-  bebouwd gebied
-  Esonstad

