

# 'Van Lauwerszee tot Dollard Tou'

*A study into the effects of a new cycle route on the Wadden coastal area of Groningen*



## **Bachelor Thesis**

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*Image front page: De Wadloper. Westernieland. Source: Author (2019)*

## Abstract

In 2016, the new cycle route 'Kiek over Diek' was opened. This 90-kilometre route connects Lauwersoog and Nieuwe Statenzijl and situated on top of, at the seaside and inland of the main dyke. Opening up the area by this new cycle route should increase the public support for preservation, restoration and development of the nature and landscape values. By increasing the tourist experience and providing information about nature and culture, the route should help to increase the brand awareness of the Groningen Wadden coastal area. Besides, the project should contribute to the generation of new initiatives, such as local products, accommodation and cultural events. The project Kiek over Diek should lead to more visitors to the area, stimulating economic development. This could strengthen the liveability in the region, counteracting the consequences of *krimp* the region is facing. The total costs of the route were calculated at around five million euros. This thesis will help to get a deeper insight into the effects of the new cycle route in the Wadden coastal area, and the following research question will be answered:

*"To what extent did the 'Kiek over Diek' cycle route contribute to the development of the Wadden coastal area of Groningen?"*

With six interviews, an attempt has been made to answer this question. The interviews were conducted at local entrepreneurs in the tourism sector, at Het Groninger Landschap and the Project team Kiek over Diek.

The interviews showed that there has been an increase in tourism in the region over the past few years. However, it remains difficult to determine the exact contribution of the route to this development. An improvement could be made in the signposting of the route. In addition, improvements can be made in sharing information on the route to the touristic sector. It appears to be difficult to find a balance in information-sharing. The interviews did show that tourists are often positively surprised about the Groningen landscape. Although the route is greatly appreciated by tourists, it is difficult to measure whether brand awareness has increased because of Kiek over Diek.. The last aim of the project Kiek over Diek was the generation of new initiatives. Many respondents indicated that the route fits in an already existing trend of the emergence of new initiatives in the region.

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

### 1.1 Background

At cultural festival OVER de VLOED in 2016, the new cycle route ‘Kiek over Diek’ was opened (Waddenacademie, 2016). The 90-kilometre route connects Lauwersoog and Nieuwe Statenzijl. The route is situated on top, at the seaside and inland of the main dyke. In figure 1 below, the route is shown. The route crosses the four municipalities of de Marne, Eemsmond, Delfzijl and Oldambt. At 11 points the route is connected to the hinterlands. At these so-called TTPs (Tourist Transfer Points), the route connects to existing cycle routes and at these points is the possibility to switch to another mode of transfer: walking or taking the car (Van den Brink, 2010).

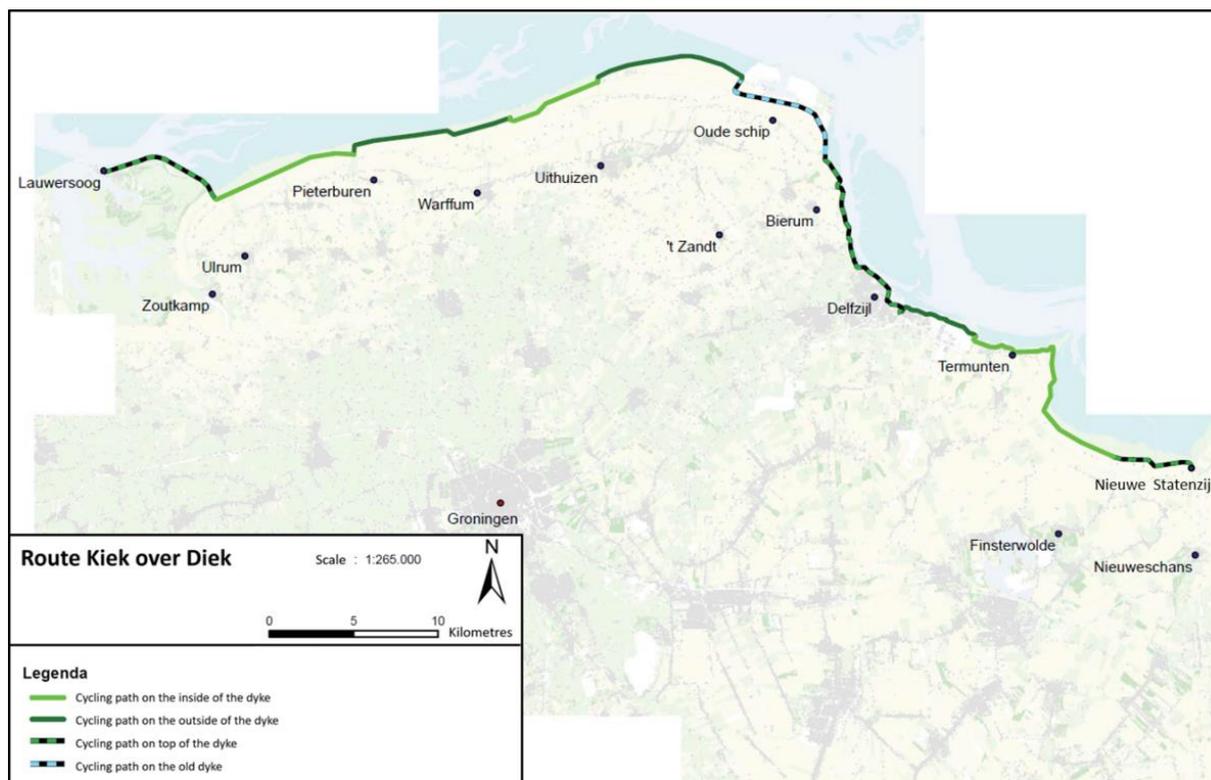


Figure 1: Kiek over Diek Route. Source: Landschapsbeheer Groningen (2013).

The main goal of the project Kiek over Diek was to open up the special, but hardly disclosed, nature and landscape richness of the Wadden Sea coast of Groningen (Van den Brink, 2010).

The Wadden Sea is the largest unbroken system of intertidal sand and mud flats in the world, with natural processes undisturbed throughout most of the area (UNESCO World Heritage centre, 2019). The area is rich in species specially adapted to the demanding environmental conditions and is considered as one of the most important areas for migratory birds in the world (ibid.). Since 2009, the Wadden Sea is listed by UNESCO as World Heritage (ibid.).

Opening up of the Groningen part by this new cycle route would ensure that more people feel involved in the landscape values and it would strengthen the existing ties of people with the area (Van den Brink, 2010). This increases the public support for preservation, restoration and development of the nature and landscape values (ibid.). This support is important because the Wadden Sea as World Heritage must be preserved for the benefit of present and future generations (Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, 2019).

By providing information about nature and culture, the route helps to increase the brand awareness of the Groningen Wadden coastal area (Van den Brink, 2010). Along the route, Kiek over Diek has several hot spots along the route, where information is available.

At last, the project should contribute to the generation of new initiatives, such as local products, accommodation and cultural events (Van den Brink, 2010). The mainland coast of the Wadden Sea is mostly peripheral rural area (Sijtsma et al., 2012). While the Wadden islands have a complete specialised local economy in tourism, tourism at the mainland is far less developed; the share of tourism in the economy of the mainland coast is below Dutch national average (ibid.). The project Kiek over Diek should lead to more visitors in the area and support economic development. This could strengthen the liveability in the region, and it could counteract the consequences of population decline the region is dealing with (Van den Brink, 2010).

All four municipalities involved have been designated by the government as a *krimpgebied* (Rijksoverheid, 2018). A *krimpgebied* is an area which has to deal with population decline (Rijksoverheid, 2018). Reasons for *krimp* may include that fewer children are born and/or people move to larger cities (Rijksoverheid, 2013). In this case, there are four neighbouring municipalities dealing with *krimp*, therefore there can be spoken of a *krimpregio*: several neighbouring municipalities have a substantially and structurally decline in terms of population and number of household (Cörvers, 2014). The projection of the population growth is shown in Figure 2. The consequences of *krimp* on a municipality may include the withdrawal of facilities, such as schools, healthcare, sports facilities and shops, and a decline in prices for real estate. (Rijksoverheid, 2013).

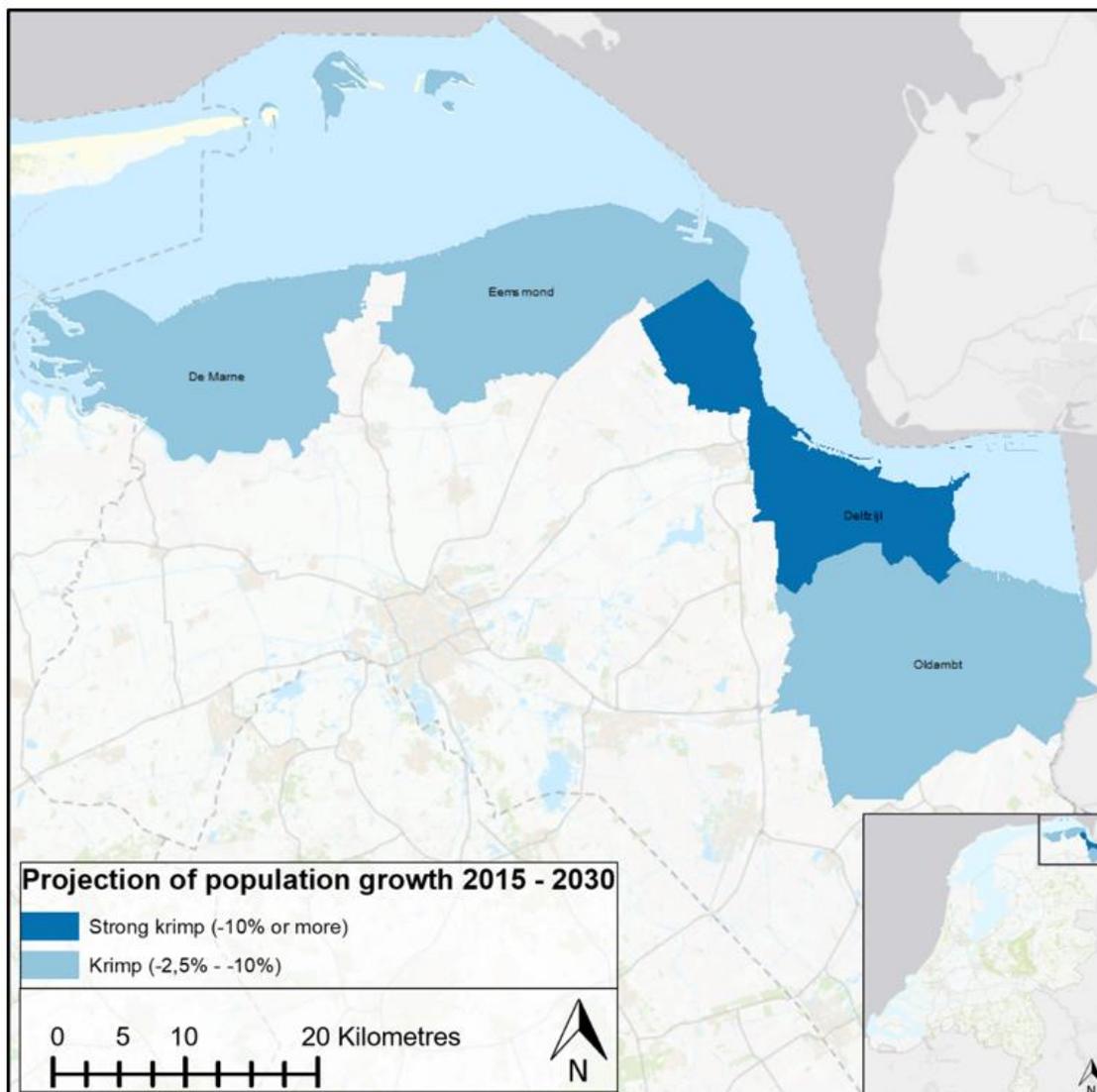


Figure 2: Projection of population growth 2015-2030 in the four municipalities of De Marne, Eemsmond, Delfzijl and Oldambt. Source: Author (2019)

Despite the *krimp*, tourism in the province of Groningen is growing. In table 1, the amount of guest and amount of overnight stays for the whole province of Groningen is shown. The table shows an increase in both the total guest and overnight stays.

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Total guests</b>	600	550	569	653	667	661	8550
<b>Total overnight stays</b>	1489	1324	1321	728	1454	1506	1826

Table 1: Total guest and total overnight stays in the Province of Groningen. Source data: CBS (2019)

Next to the increase in total guests and overnight stays, there is another increase in the tourism sector. Table 2 shows the number of jobs and establishments in the tourism- and recreation sector on a municipal level. The total growth can be attributed to the growth in De Marne and Oldambt.

Municipality		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
De Marne	<i>Jobs total</i>	3760	3650	3650	3730	3990
	<i>Establishments total</i>	1010	1010	980	990	1020
Delfzijl	<i>Jobs total</i>	12080	11770	11820	11670	11700
	<i>Establishments total</i>	1600	1580	1600	1540	1570
Eemshmond	<i>Jobs total</i>	5380	5470	5310	5280	5340
	<i>Establishments total</i>	1250	1270	1260	1240	1260
Oldambt	<i>Jobs total</i>	15330	15050	14560	14840	15040
	<i>Establishments total</i>	2770	2730	2660	2750	2880
<b>Total</b>	<b><i>Jobs total</i></b>	<b>36550</b>	<b>35940</b>	<b>35340</b>	<b>35520</b>	<b>36070</b>
	<b><i>Establishments total</i></b>	<b>6630</b>	<b>6590</b>	<b>6500</b>	<b>6520</b>	<b>6730</b>

Table 2: Number of jobs and touristic establishments in the tourism and recreation sector per municipality. Source data: LISA (2019)

Table 1 and 2 raise the question to what extent the route Kiek over Diek has played a role in this increase.

## 1.2 Research question

The total costs of the route were calculated at around five million euros, financed by the province of Groningen, the Waddenfonds and the municipalities (Van den Brink, 2010). Therefore, it is important to get an indication whether these investments have yielded any positive effects and if these ambitious goals as described earlier are being achieved.

This research will help to get a deeper insight into what the new cycle route has actually brought the region. In this research the following question will be answered:

*To what extent did the 'Kiek over Diek' cycle route contribute to the development of the Wadden coastal area of Groningen?*

In order to answer the research question, the following sub-questions will be examined:

- *How much is the Kiek over Diek route being used?*
- *To what extent did Kiek over Diek contribute to the brand awareness of the Wadden coastal area?*
- *To what extent has Kiek over Diek been an incentive for activities that strengthen liveability in the region?*

### **1.3 Structure**

This thesis is structured as follows: In chapter two the theoretical background will be discussed. In this chapter, the most relevant theories on the subject will be reviewed and the conceptual model which is used in this research is being discussed. In chapter three the methodology will be explained. The chosen method of data collection and data collection is justified and the ethical consideration are being discussed. Chapter four discusses the results of the research. Chapter five, the conclusion, highlights the results in and gives recommendation for further research.

## Chapter 2 – Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Tourism and bicycle tourism

Tourism can be defined as the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment, for less than a year, for any purposes (business, leisure or other) (UNWTO, 2013). According to Lamont (2009) there are four parameters that can be added to the definition of tourism to get to the definition of bicycle tourism: the nature of the cycling activity is non-competitive (1), cycling should be the main purpose of the trip (2), participation in cycling occurs only in an active context (3) and bicycle tourism is a form of recreation or leisure (4).

### 2.2 Tourist experience and brand awareness of an area

One of the aims of the route was to increase the tourist experience. Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003) define tourist experience as an interaction between tourists and destinations. McNamara & Prideaux (2011) state that, besides how visitors understand a site, the experience also includes what visitors learn from it and how they interact with it. The experience begins before the arrival at a destination and ends with recollections of the experience and plans for future visits (Da Costa Mendes et al., 2010).

The tourist experience of 'nature' is mediated through a variety of discursive texts and images (McNamara & Prideaux, 2011). The result of this is that the tourism industry has partly control over the form of the visitor experience (ibid.). This emphasises the importance of information facilities. A study of Taylor & Cheverst (2012) has shown that using (interactive) displays creates awareness, preserves local history and disseminates information of local interest amongst visitors.

Out of experience, satisfaction may arise. Tourism satisfaction is understood as a state of mind that is the result of the judgments and emotions developed during the tourist experience (Bigné et al., 2005). Tourist satisfaction is important for a destination to be regarded as successful because it influences the choice of destination, the consumption of products and services, and the decision to return (Da Costa Mendes et al, 2010). Besides, satisfied tourists tend to communicate their positive experience to others (ibid.). This means that satisfied tourists could contribute to the increasing brand awareness of an area. Brand awareness relates to the strength of brand presence in the consumer's mind (Veríssimo et al., 2017). Brand awareness is important because it impacts consumer decision-making: consumers generally use brand awareness as a decision heuristic (Gouveia et al., 2013).

Increasing the brand awareness of the Wadden coastal area was also one of the aims of Kiek over Diek. Therefore, it is important to know how to increase the tourist experience for bicycle tourists to increase the brand awareness of the area.

The attractiveness of a cycle route depends on several features such as service facilities, a historical village or a scenic landscape to be enjoyed along the way (Černá et al., 2014). Ritchie (1998) gives more detailed requirements: there should be a range of accommodation types, bike hire/repair shops along the route, adequate and reliable information and education. Besides, it is necessary to create a safe, convenient and attractive cycle route that caters for both long and short distance cycling (Deeniham & Caulfield 2015). Investments in infrastructure should increase the percentage of bicycle tourists that are satisfied with cycling (ibid.).

### 2.3 Tourism, liveability and the local economy

As stated before, the route should counteract the consequences of shrinkage, but how can tourism, in general, give a positive impulse to a region?

Timothy (2014) states that tourism is often seen as an economic panacea for regions and most places in the world have a desire to utilise it as a development tool. Besides, all forms of heritage can be seen as a resource for tourism and have potential socio-economic implications for destination communities (Scheyvens, 2002). The Wadden coastal area of Groningen borders the World Heritage of the Wadden Sea. Therefore, this region can be seen as a resource for tourism.

There are several economic effects to be expected from tourism, such as the increase in employment opportunities, economic diversity and the increasing or stabilising in the supply of restaurants and shops (Andereck et al., 2005).

In a study to tourism in Dutch *krimpregio's* Remijn (2015) states that tourism has several effects on the liveability of a region. Liveability in a Dutch context can be seen as the extent to which the environment meets the requirements and wishes that are set by people (Leidelmeijer, K & Van Kamp, I., 2004). The liveability consists of five dimensions: physical environment, housing, population, security and facilities (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2018).

The effects of tourism on liveability include the economic impulse, new infrastructure, an increase in the maintenance costs, an increase in pride amongst inhabitants, an increase in the recreational offer (products and services) and an improved place image of a region. A place image is the sum of beliefs, ideals and impressions people have towards a certain place (Haider et al, 1994). Improving the place image creates more visitors and can ensure the retention of residents or possibly attract new residents, which increases the support for new facilities (Remijn, 2015). Another effect of tourism on liveability can be that, because of the increased outcome out of tourism, the budgets for public facilities are being increased (ibid.).

That especially bicycle tourism can have economic benefits for a region is shown in a study to bicycle tourism in Ireland. In order to increase the tourism numbers visiting the country, investments in the infrastructure have been made. Which has also been the case in the Kiek over Diek project. In this study, it is found that 76% of the daily spend of a user of a certain cycle-route was spent in local businesses such as pubs, restaurants and accommodation (Deeniham & Caulfield, 2015).

The reason for investing in cycling infrastructure to increase the number of tourists is because of the fact that investing in the development of cycling infrastructure requires to spend limited amounts of resources, but allows for noticeable returns (Černá et al., 2014). Providing bike trails that connect touristic spots is a cheap way of increasing the appeal and promoting the development of a region (ibid.). The investments in infrastructure should increase the satisfaction of bicycle tourists and therefore the numbers visiting the route will grow, which should lead to higher expenditure (Deeniham & Caulfield, 2015).

### 2.4 Conceptual model

Below, figure 3 shows the conceptual model that will be used in this research. The criteria for a successful cycle-route are given in the literature. When using these criteria, the opening of the new cycle-route can have two effects. At first, it can increase the tourist experience and eventually the brand awareness of an area. Secondly, the new cycle route will increase the number of tourists and with that the tourist expenditure in the area. This will lead to an increase in liveability and will counteract the consequences of *krimp*.

In this research, this conceptual model will be applied on the Kiek over Diek route. It will be reviewed to what extent the Kiek over Diek route has actually increased the brand awareness, has counteracted the consequences of *krimp* and has strengthened the liveability in the region.

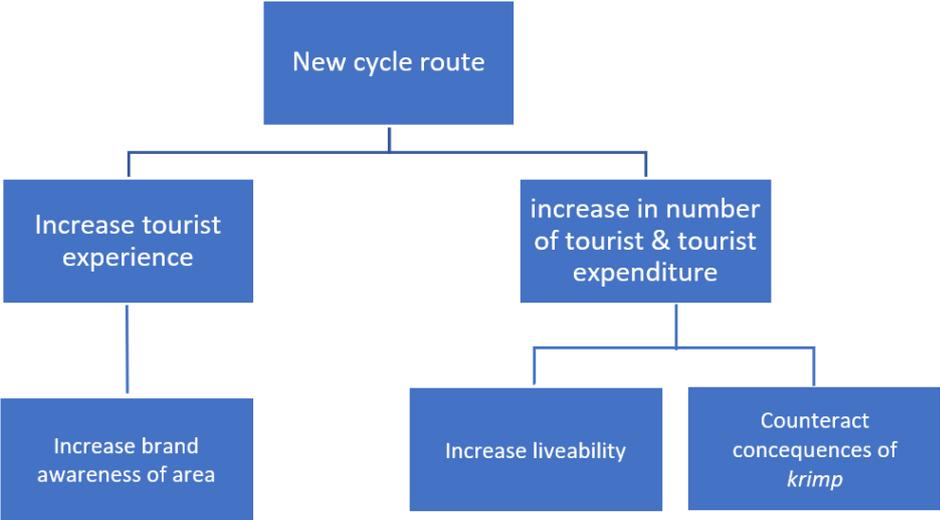


Figure 3: Conceptual model. Source: Author (2019)

## Chapter 3 – Methodology

### 3.1 Method

In order to answer the research question, the methodology of interviews is used in this research. Instead of questionnaires, interviews are chosen because in an interview a more complete view of the area before and after the route can be conducted. This is necessary because then the two situations can be compared and the effects the route may have had, can become clear.

In order to answer the secondary questions, six semi-structured interviews are conducted. Semi-structured interviews have some degree of predetermined order but still, ensures flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant (Clifford et al., 2010).

### 3.2 Data collection

The interviews will be taken from people with a different relationship to the route.

First, to represent the tourism sector, four interviews have been conducted from local entrepreneurs in the vicinity of the Kiek over Diek route. The local businesses include restaurants/cafes and overnight facilities such as hiker's cabins, campings and bed & breakfasts. The vicinity of the route means that the facilities are not in a greater absolute distance than 5 kilometres from the route. All these facilities existed before the route was opened, therefore they can provide information about the possible differences between the past and current situation.

Second, Het Groninger Landschap participated in this research. Het Groninger Landschap is an organisation that is committed to protecting nature, landscape and cultural heritage in the province of Groningen and increasing social support for it (Het Groninger Landschap, 2019). This organisation could help to determine whether the route Kiek over Diek has contributed to increased brand awareness of the Wadden coastal area. Het Groninger Landschap also owns four hiker's cabins along the route, therefore they could also provide insight into the touristic perspective of this research.

Last, a team member of the project team of Kiek over Diek has been interviewed. The project team is involved in the implementation of the Kiek over Diek project.

All stakeholders were contacted by e-mail and telephone to inquire if they were willing to participate in the research. Nearly all contacted stakeholders were willing to contribute and share their views. The interview guides used for the interviews are included in appendices 1 to 3. Three different interview guides are used, one for the local entrepreneurs, one for Het Groninger Landschap and one for the project team member Kiek over Diek.

In table 3 below, all the respondents and their occupation are shown. This table can be a useful guide when reading the results.

<b>Respondent nr.</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Distance to the route</b>
1	Camping and bed & breakfast	5 km
2	Camping and vacation homes	1 km
3	Het Groninger Landschap	-
4	Bed & breakfast	2 km
5	Café and manager of hiker's cabins	<1 km
6	Member Project team Kiek over Diek	-

Table 3: Respondents. Source: Author (2019)

### 3.3 Data analysis

After conducting the interviews, all interviews are transcribed. Afterwards, the interviews are coded and analysed using the program Atlas.ti. The code tree used for coding the interviews can be found in Appendix 4. The transcriptions of the interviews are included in Appendix 7 to 12.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

The participation in the interviews was voluntary and was based on informed consent. Before the interviews took place, all the participants all received an information sheet with information about the research and with their participant rights. This sheet was discussed before the interviews and it was asked whether the respondents had any questions. The information sheet is included in Appendix 5. Besides, all participants signed an agreement to participate, this agreement is included in Appendix 6. For privacy considerations, the names of the respondents are not used in this research.

## Chapter 4 – Results

### 4.1 Usage of the route

As stated in table 1 in the introduction, tourism in the whole province of Groningen is growing. In the interviews is asked whether the entrepreneurs noticed the same increase over the years. All the respondents recognises an increase in the number of tourists. The respondents also agree on the reason for this:

“People go on holiday more often, just for a weekend away or a few days. That was much less in the past. And I think that Groningen, over the last 25 years, gained more and more reputation.” – *Respondent 2*

"I notice that more and more people choose to stay in the Netherlands. For environmental reasons, for safety reasons. [...] And there is also a very large group that discovers that the province of Groningen is so wonderfully quiet and that it is not full here. [...] There is growth, you notice that people go more often on vacation, on shorter vacations. Then they stay close to home.” – *Respondent 1*

However, the number of tourists is growing, all the participants shared the view that Groningen wouldn't become a region of mass tourism.

“We will never become a region of mass tourism, but perhaps we should not want that either. Because then you lose other guests.” – *Respondent 1*

“We don't have to become like Giethoorn. I really like that you can still experience that peace here.” – *Respondent 2*

That Groningen would become a region of mass tourism, was also never the aim of the Kiek over Diek route:

“We said beforehand that it would not be that suddenly hordes of people go to just cycling that route. And the fact that you make that cycle path suitable, or make that connection suitable for cycling, does not necessarily mean that more people will actually start cycling. Anyway, it will be that it does increase a bit” – *Respondent 6*

The respondents do have the idea that the route Kiek over Diek is used by bicycle tourists. However, no clear evidence for this statement can be tabled.

“Yes, that's just based on observations that we see ourselves: when we are along the coast, you see how many cyclists pass by. But I dare not make any statements as to whether this is because of the new cycle route, [...] whether it has increased as a result or has remained the same. I don't think it has diminished. But I don't dare say whether it really had an attractive effect” – *Respondent 3*

To get clarity about this, it should be recorded how often the route is really being used. However, this is not the case. The team member of the project team explains why this didn't happen so far.

“That would, of course, be the best, but for a project like this, it is pretty complicated. And that takes a lot of time and energy if you would like to do that.” – *Respondent 6*

In order to get a deeper insight into whether the increase in tourists can be related to the route, in the interviews the question 'do tourists come especially for this route?' is brought up. The respondents disagree as to whether the route was a reason for tourists to come to the region. Some respondents indicate that tourists are not always aware of the existence of the route.

"We have not had anyone who has cycled that route and therefore wants to be in such a hiker's cabin. No. We have had people who think: How nice, here are hiker's cabins, we want to spend a night there. But they don't come for that cycle route. Neither do the campers, they just look where they can stand for free and then come here. [...] No, nobody actually knows that route, or too little." – *Respondent 5*

On the other hand, some tourists have been informed on the route. However, when the tourists asked for more information, such as flyers or a map, the local entrepreneurs were not able to provide it to them.

"There were people and they had seen that and they reserved a room with me and they wanted to cycle that route. Well, that was really missing, that it wasn't there. [...] I did get people in the reception: "The Kiek over Diek route, do you have a map?" – *Respondent 1*

The respondents agreed that a flyer or map is not the only thing missing. Also the signposting of the route is lacking.

"Such a cycle path behind the dyke is really an advantage, but you must know that you can go there, that you can go over it. [...] Nobody knows how to find the way to the dyke. You always have to tell them." – *Respondent 2*

In some cases, this can even lead to minor issues.

"Because it is not indicated, people sometimes go on paths that are not really intended. Or that they come in front of a closed gate and then lift their bikes over it or whatever. Not all farmers appreciate that." – *Respondent 2*

Some respondents themselves indicate points for improvement to increase the acquaintance of the route.

"I think a brochure at the tourist offices, where you can clearly see where you can cycle outside and where you can cycle inside the dykes. [...] Or a sign with 'cycling outside the dykes' and 'cycling inside the dykes' where you have to change." – *Respondent 2*

"Make sure it is on a good map somewhere." – *Respondent 1*

"People still want something tangible, want to take something with them [...] and not have to search all the time on the mobile or on the internet." – *Respondent 5*

One respondent suggested the idea that Kiek over Diek should be connected to the LF10-route. This long distance route runs along the Wadden coast of Friesland and Groningen and is part of the North Sea Cycle Route (Landelijk Fietsplatform, 2019). This North Sea Cycle route runs through Germany, Denmark, Norway and Sweden (ibid.). Connecting Kiek over Diek to the LF10-route could lead to more bicycle tourists on the Kiek over Diek route.

## 4.2 Tourist experience and brand awareness

In the interviews, the respondents have been asked about the tourist experience. In general, the tourists seem to appreciate the landscape of Groningen due to the wide views.

“In their opinion, the Groningen Landscape is fantastic. [...] You have a wide view, I think they really appreciate that – *Respondent 5*

When it comes to the tourist experience of Kiek over Diek, it appears that the opportunity for tourists to cycle on the outside of and on top of the dyke is appreciated by the tourists.

“What is greatly appreciated is that you can also cycle on top of the dyke on certain sections. [...] That was what people missed. I notice from my guests that they really appreciate that.” – *Respondent 1*

One of the reasons why Kiek over Diek is a success is that Kiek over Diek could be seen as a way to further connect the Wadden Sea with the mainland of Groningen.

“That dyke was always a kind of border, a kind of wall, that was difficult to cross. [...] People always want to go to the other side of the dyke, walk or cycle there and do things. So, I think it's a very good initiative. [...] You indeed make it more accessible, which also makes it more visible.” – *Respondent 2*

“If you wanted to go from Groningen to the Wadden Sea, you hit that dyke. And there are gates everywhere and signs with "forbidden access" everywhere. [...] We actually said that we should try to change that image.” – *Respondent 6*

In order to increase the tourist experience, information about the area is provided along the route. However, some respondents indicate that they thought the information provided was not enough, or tourists are not paying attention to it.

“Here is a sign with some information. But you do not often see people really watching, they just pass by.” – *Respondent 5*

In this situation, it appears to be difficult to determine whether the information provided is enough.

“Information is given along the route. [...] Of course, I am certain that it can be improved even more extensively. Only the question, how? You also don't want a sign paradise along the coast. [...] I would not like to motivate putting more signs along the coast. I would do that as low-profile as possible.” – *Respondent 3*

“That is a bit of the question, it is also the art of when is it enough, and when is it too much? Does it have to be in the physical sense, or digital?” – *Respondent 6*

To provide information about the area in a different way than with information panels, so-called *social sofas* (Figure 4) have been placed in ten villages adjacent to the dyke. Because of the chosen locations, it is expected that more attention will be paid to the information and the story being told.

“That arose because we thought how can you, in a fun way, tell those stories from the past, from the Wadden Sea and those villages, how can we bring that back? Those sofas are made in the village itself, with the people. And then they have mosaiced those sofas and a story has been added. [...] Together with the village, we have made a choice for those locations in those

ten villages. So, if it all goes well, these are places that will benefit the people in the village. That is another way to tell those stories of that area to the tourists too.” – *Respondent 6*



Figure 4: The creation of the social sofas – Social sofa in Spijk – Social sofa in Oldambt – Social sofa in Nieuw Beerta. Source: Respondent 6 (n.d.); Peeters & Raaijmakers (n.d.)

Despite the information panels and social sofas, it is doubtful whether this increased tourist experience of Kiek over Diek has contributed to the brand awareness of the Wadden coastal area. The respondents did not have a clear answer to this.

“Difficult to measure, I would not know. [...] I think nobody could answer that. Undoubtedly, people, users, who are known, would think "ah beautiful here". Or maybe it is disappointing. I don't know.” – *Respondent 3*

However, overall Kiek over Diek can be seen as a contributor to make the area more attractive.

“I think that if you know it is possible, it will make the area more attractive.” – *Respondent 2*

### 4.3 Tourism and the local economy

As stated before, one of the aims of the route is that Kiek over Diek should function as an incentive in generating new tourism products and events. Table 2 in the introduction shows that the tourism sector is growing. In the interview is asked whether this increase in jobs and branches could be devoted to the route.

Respondents generally have the impression that the route has not been the main reason for this increase. The route shouldn't be seen as something that stands on its own. Rather, the route should be seen as part of a larger development to make the region more attractive and liveable.

“It is, of course, a total picture. That route alone cannot give a boost to tourism as a whole. But it is something that broadens the range. Making it more fun.” – *Respondent 1*

“No, I don’t think so. [...] It can be an impetus for several initiatives. But then much more needs to happen.” – *Respondent 2*

Respondents subscribe the premise that a cycle route, in general, could contribute to generating new local initiatives. At the same time, a difference of opinion is noted on who carries the responsibility for this. On the one hand, some respondents feel that the initiators of the route are responsible for this. Other state that that when the route is completed, the task of the project team is done and there are many opportunities for the local entrepreneurs.

“Where do you get those initiatives from? Those initiatives are probably already there. But how do you connect that to each other? And who takes the lead in this?” – *Respondent 3*

“The next step is now: how do you translate all that physical that there is, into a number of very nice arrangements, or routes. [...] And to a large extent that will also be the role of the entrepreneurs themselves” – *Respondent 6*

Kiek over Diek is not the only new initiative in the past years. Rather, the project fits in within an already existing trend in which more and more new initiatives are being developed.

“I think it has also increased in recent years. Also, with the initiatives that have been there. [...] I think there have also been entrepreneurs in recent years who have started more activities, [...] because there is more tourism.” – *Respondent 4*

“There has certainly been much more to offer in the last 15 years. Many small businesses emerged, so there is more to do in the area.” – *Respondent 2*

However, there are also initiatives generated thanks to the route. The teahouse in Westpolder (Figure 5) is an example of this. Het Groninger Landschap is involved in this project to make a teahouse and information point on top of the dyke.

“Such a tea house, that could very well meet the need as a starting point. Because you can just have a drink there, just go to the toilet, those are the basic necessities for people.” – *Respondent 3*



Figure 5: The teahouse, on top of a shed owned by the water board Noorderzijlvest. Source: NRJ Architectuur (2013)

Nevertheless, the plans of the teahouse are not satisfactory for everyone.

“That is all still under development, but there has also been a lot of contradiction. People who did not think it fits in the world heritage, too high, too iconic, et cetera.” – *Respondent 3*

“You can see how sensitive and how difficult that is. Because why isn't that teahouse built yet? That has to do with all kinds of objections from local residents, who have something like "it's good with your quality of life and your tourism, but we don't want those people at all". It is quiet and quiet here and it should stay that way.” – *Respondent 6*

Even though the generation of new initiatives can be difficult, the route can help increase the use of existing facilities.

“And certainly, in places like Noordpolderzijl, that people don't just go there for a day trip, but they can now also spend the night there if they want to. That means they will probably go and eat there, in the neighbourhood. And so, it will gradually develop a bit, that was the idea. And yes, what we sometimes hear from entrepreneurs is that things are getting busier” – *Respondent 6*

## Chapter 5 – Conclusions

### 5.1 Conclusions

In this research question *‘To what extent did the ‘Kiek over Diek’ cycle route contribute to the development of the Wadden coastal area of Groningen?’* is investigated. This is done by a literature study and six interviews.

First, the usage of the route has been investigated. This was necessary because, in order to get an idea of how the route may have helped to develop the Wadden coastal area of Groningen, there is the need to know if and how much the route is being used at all. The literature study gave some factors for increasing the attractiveness of a cycle-route to increase the bicycle tourism experience. These factors include service facilities along the route, a scenic landscape to be enjoyed along the way and a safe path. In Kiek over Diek, these requirements are implemented. Along the route facilities such as camper spots and hiker’s cabins are created. Investments in the infrastructure and attractiveness of the route should increase the satisfaction of bicycle tourists and therefore the number of visitors would grow.

The interviews showed that there was indeed an increase in tourism in the region. The respondents didn’t feel that the route was the main reason for this increase. According to the respondents, the signposting of the route could be improved and clear information about the route must be distributed in order to increase the number of visitors of the route. Another idea was to connect Kiek over Diek to the North Sea Cycle route.

In order to increase the tourist experience and brand awareness of the Groningen Wadden coast, information about nature and local culture is provided. Information facilities can influence the tourist experience. The respondents indicated that the provided information wasn’t satisfactory. On the other hand, the respondents from Het Groninger Landschap and the Project team Kiek over Diek emphasised how many information panels there are already there. It appears to be difficult to find a balance in providing enough information. That is why new ways of telling stories have been sought, such as social sofas.

Overall, it appears to be doubtful whether this increased tourist experience of Kiek over Diek has contributed to the brand awareness of the Wadden coastal area. The interviews showed that it is greatly appreciated that people are now able to cycle on top and at the seaside of the dykes.

Kiek over Diek can be seen as an incentive to make the area more accessible and with that, as a contributor to increase the brand awareness of the area.

The last aim of the project Kiek over Diek is the generation of new initiatives, such as local products, accommodation and cultural events. In this case, too, it proved difficult to demonstrate the specific consequences that could be attributed to the route. Many respondents indicated that the route fits in an already existing trend in the region. A trend in which, over the past years, many new initiatives emerged. The interviews also showed that, in some cases, it could be difficult to start new initiatives, such as the teahouse. While, according to the literature, such facilities along the route are necessary for the attractiveness of the route, it appears that not everyone sees the need for it. On the other hand, the social sofas in the villages proved that, in collaboration with the people, many things are possible.

### 5.2 Discussion & recommendations

It is, in general, difficult to evaluate the effects of the cycle route because there has not been a baseline measurement. In this research, an attempt was made to gain insight into the situation of the Wadden coastal area before and after the implementation of the Kiek over Diek route. This insight has been obtained by conducting interviews with local entrepreneurs that were already operating in the area before the route was opened.

In this study, one important group is not included, that group is the bicycle tourist. The reason why the tourists are excluded from this research is that it was difficult to find cyclists that were cycling on the route or had cycled the route in the time period the research had to be done. This period was

outside the cycling season. In order to get a full picture of the contribution of the Kiek over Diek cycle route in the development of the Wadden coastal area, the tourist should also be interviewed. A recommendation for further research would, therefore, be that the opinion of the tourist should be included as well. It could also be interesting to do quantitative research among the tourists to get a deeper insight into how many people are actually using the route.

Another recommendation would be to do more research on how the route can be better known to visitors, to increase the number and the experience of bicycle tourists, and how to improve the signposting of the route, without making it a so-called *sign paradise* along the route. In order to increase the awareness of tourists in the Wadden coastal area of Groningen, more research can be done on how tourist can make more use of the information panels.

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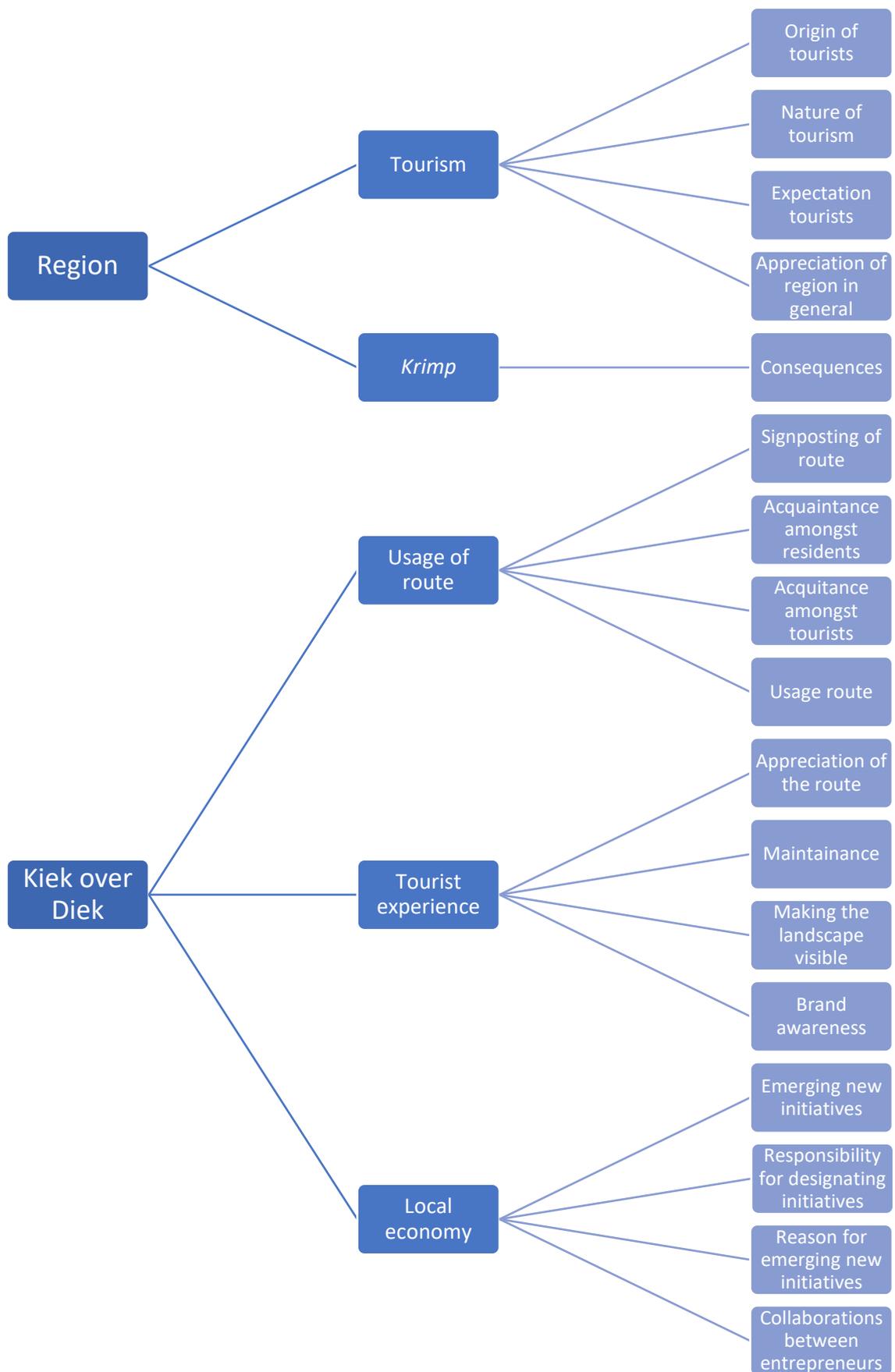
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## Appendix 4: Code Tree



## Appendix 5: Information sheet respondents

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### **Informatieblad**

*Onderzoek naar de fietsroute Kiek over Diek*

Hartelijk dank dat u de tijd heeft genomen om te overwegen mee te doen aan mijn onderzoeksproject.

In dit onderzoek wordt onderzocht in hoeverre het doel van de route is gehaald. Volgens het projectvoorstel zou de route het bijzondere landschap van de Groningse waddenkust zichtbaar maken. Dit zou er onder andere voor zorgen dat meer mensen zich betrokken voelen bij het Waddenlandschap. Ook zou het draagvlak voor behoud, herstel en ontwikkeling van het landschap vergroot worden en zou het waddenkustgebied meer naamsbekendheid krijgen. Daarnaast zou het een impuls kunnen zijn voor activiteiten die de leefbaarheid in de regio versterken en de gevolgen van krimp tegengaan. Dit onderzoek ik in een groter kader van hoe je door middel van (fiets)toerisme een soort bewustwording van een gebied kan creëren en hoe een (krimp)regio kan profiteren van toerisme.

Vertrouwelijkheid en deelnemersrechten:

- Het interview wordt opgenomen en tijdens het interview zullen notities worden gemaakt
- U heeft het recht om de audiorecorder uit te laten zetten bij bepaalde vragen. Daarnaast heeft u het recht het interview te eindigen op elk moment
- U heeft de mogelijkheid een kopie van het interview te ontvangen en u heeft de mogelijkheid hier correcties in aan te brengen of materiaal te verwijderen
- De informatie die u verstrekt, wordt vertrouwelijk bewaard
- De informatie die u verstrekt zal mij helpen bij mijn scriptie, de informatie kan ook gebruikt worden in presentaties door mij gegeven.
- Alleen indien u toestemming hebt gegeven om persoonlijke namen of andere informatie die dient om u als informant te identificeren, zal dit worden gebruikt in het onderzoek.
- U heeft het recht om u terug te trekken uit het onderzoek tot drie weken na het interview
- U heeft het recht om vragen te stellen over het onderzoek tijdens het interview

Nogmaals bedankt voor uw tijd heeft. Mocht u nog vragen hebben, kunt u altijd contact met mij opnemen. U kunt, indien gewenst, ook contact opnemen met mijn supervisor door middel van onderstaande contactgegevens.

Met vriendelijke groeten,

Contactgegevens onderzoeker :	Contactgegevens begeleider
Romee Uijterlinde Email: <a href="mailto:L.R.Uijterlinde@student.rug.nl">L.R.Uijterlinde@student.rug.nl</a> Telefoon: 0620099437	Bernadette Boumans Email: <a href="mailto:b.m.boumans@rug.nl">b.m.boumans@rug.nl</a>

## Appendix 6: Agreement to participate

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### Agreement to participate

In het onderzoek naar de fietsroute Kiek over Diek

*Het doel van dit onderzoek is om te onderzoeken in hoeverre de fietsroute Kiek over Diek heeft bijgedragen aan het vergroten van het draagvlak voor behoud, herstel en ontwikkeling van het landschap én in hoeverre de route een impuls is geweest voor activiteiten die de leefbaarheid in de regio versterken om de gevolgen van krimp tegen te gaan*

- Ik heb het informatieblad van dit onderzoeksproject gelezen en ik begrijp dit.
- Ik heb de gelegenheid gehad om vragen te stellen over dit onderzoek. Ik ben tevreden met de antwoorden die ik heb gekregen
- Ik begrijp dat de deelname aan dit onderzoek vrijwillig is, dat ik het recht heb om me terug te trekken uit dit onderzoek binnen drie weken na het interview en ik begrijp dat ik mag weigeren om persoonlijke vragen te beantwoorden
- Ik begrijp dat mijn deelname aan dit onderzoek vertrouwelijk is. Zonder mijn toestemming zal er geen enkel materiaal dat mij zou kunnen identificeren, gebruikt worden in het onderzoek
- Ik begrijp dat alle informatie die ik verstrek, vertrouwelijk zal worden bewaard.

Omcirkel JA of NEE in de volgende stellingen:

Ik stem ermee in dat dit interview wordt opgenomen JA / NEE

Ik wens anoniem te blijven voor dit onderzoek JA / NEE

**Indien JA**

Mijn voornaam kan voor dit onderzoek worden gebruikt JA / NEE

**OF**

Een pseudoniem van mijn eigen keuze kan worden gebruikt JA / NEE

**“Ik ga akkoord om deel te nemen aan dit interview en heb een kopie van dit toestemmingsformulier en informatieblad van het onderzoeksproject.”**

Handtekening deelnemer: \_\_\_\_\_ Datum: \_\_\_\_\_

**“Ik ga akkoord met de voorwaarden uiteengezet in het informatieblad en ik zorg ervoor dat er geen schade wordt toegebracht aan een deelnemer tijdens dit onderzoek.”**

Handtekening onderzoeker: \_\_\_\_\_ Datum: \_\_\_\_\_

Vul de volgende informatie in indien u een kopie van het interview wilt ontvangen, zodat u de mogelijkheid heeft om correcties aan te brengen.

Email: