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# **Food Tourism as a strategy for regional economic development**

A case study comparison of cheese producing regions

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# **1. Introduction**

The promise of food tourism is not too good to be true. Traditions, heritage, sustainability are key elements of manifold tourism strategies and at the same time food tourism helps the farmers, the agri-food producers, the little shop owners and the high-quality gastronomes in the region. Yet, food tourism can only be a development tool for a rural region if both sides are recognised: the touristic and the economic side. Thus, what food tourism can be and what food tourism is, are often two different things. This thesis will find out what food tourism is in two European regions that are famous for their cheese, but not before establishing what food tourism can be. A quick look into literature shows why food tourism is believed to have large potential for the economic development of rural regions:

*"Food experiences for tourism:*

- *can diversify rural economies with few development alternatives;*
- *are labour intensive and create jobs;*
- *contribute to regional attractiveness, thereby strengthening all aspects of the economy;*
- *sustain the local environment and cultural heritage;*
- *strengthen local identities and sense of community;*
- *can extend the tourist season;*
- *generally do not require major new investment;*
- *create backward linkages, stimulating agriculture and local food production, industry, and ancillary services thus reducing economic leakage"*  
*(Richards, 2012, p.23).*

But how exactly do these benefits develop? What are the levers that convert something that attracts tourists into a sustainable solution for the economies of rural regions? This thesis aims to find answers to these questions through multiple steps that are all subordinated to the overarching research question: *How can food tourism facilitate economic development in rural areas?*

Factors that are suggested to play a role by the given academic literature are tested on their application in two existing food tourism destination regions that are renowned for their cheese in the Netherlands and Austria. A common feature across the literature are institutions and regional organisations that aim to dissolve frictions for cooperation within a region. Therefore, this research is consciously conducted with a perspective on regional collaboration and the role that institutions play. It aims to achieve three goals in this regard:

1. to determine the expected dominant influence of institutions especially on how networks function and develop; this includes aspects like mobilising potential assets,

contributing to the formation of social capital and helping to build collective learning which can stimulate bottom-up initiative or innovation (Pike et al., 2017, p.207).

2. to carve out the easily influenceable aspects of context dependent factors in order to facilitate applicability of food tourism strategies in different regional settings;
3. to remain on a strategic level that allows policy advice for regional collaboration.

To understand the workings of regional collaboration in food tourism and its importance for regional economic development, we need to understand the phenomenon “food tourism” first, before we discuss the meaning and possibilities of regional economic development.

In order to do that, I will elaborate what food tourism is and what it comprises. I will then explain why food tourism is a relevant stream of tourism and an important part of touristic activity nowadays, before describing in which ways it can affect regional economies. In the next subchapter, I will explain how these impacts can be handled and managed through regional development plans and highlight the economically relevant levers that can therefore be strategically mobilised. Subsequently, I will derive my approach that will focus on the role institutions from the elaborated foundations of economic theory. Finally, I will outline the rest of my thesis and give an overview of my research endeavour.

## **1.1. Food tourism**

### **1.1.1. The trend and its importance for the tourism sector**

Food tourism is evidently more prevalent today than a few years ago and will probably continue to grow in popularity. Food tourism according to Hall & Mitchell (2001) comprises all “visitation[s] to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations” (p.308. cit. a. Rachão et al., 2017, p.35) that are conducted with the intention to taste and/or experience the food in its special local setting. This trend is rooted both in a greater interest in cultural tourism from a tourist demand side and aims of regional decision makers to make the region’s culture more accessible. Food is a straightforward tool to achieve this if farming and culinary traditions already – or rather still – exist in a region. Then, hopes “to maximize benefits to the local economy by providing locally produced foodstuffs for purchase and consumption by tourists” (Boyne et al., 2002, p 94) are based on the fact that food always plays a role during holiday stays in a foreign region. In fact, tourists spend up to 40 per cent of their holiday expenses on food and drink (ibid.). A survey by the OECD (2012) among 1,600 English residents, who travelled to sample regions in England, indicated that 6 per cent to 8 per cent chose their holiday destination based on the local food and drink. 30 per cent to 33 per cent considered food an important contributor to the enjoyment of their travels and were happy to purchase local food when the opportunity arose (Hall, 2012, p.53).

The attractiveness of trying local food of course depends on the culinary reputation of the region of destination, but one can draw general conclusions from the survey by the OECD. It is true

that a substantial share of tourists cannot be reached by food tourism (in this survey 28 per cent), and that the share of tourists travelling mainly for food is very small. But although not actively seeking local food out as a part of their travel plans, the vast majority of tourists were happy to try it when they came across it (ibid., p.52).

Plans to introduce or enforce food tourism must therefore not only seek for tourists who travel only or mainly for food, but also make an impression on tourists upon arrival. The fact that the mass of tourists is distributed over a huge range of commitment provides a wide scope of chances for businesses to develop a food tourism offer at any degree of commitment asked by the visitor. The lack of necessity to shape a whole holiday around food is perhaps also what distinguishes food tourism from gastronomy tourism, which may mainly attract an elitist niche crowd and is much more concentrated on the processing of food and less so on the ways of production and direct-purchase of locally produced food.

Jones & Jenkins (2002) find that food has “developed from being a basic necessity for tourist consumption to being regarded as an essential element of regional culture” (p.115). In truth, the role of food lies at both ends and everywhere between, depending on the individual tourist. Even with tourists who treat local food rather as a necessity on holiday, there is a chance that they may have already come across those food products even in supermarkets due to our globalised shopping possibilities (Hall & Mitchell, 2002a). Cheeses from multiple countries are available in almost any European supermarket. That has an effect on one’s food preferences and purchases and – in case one is convinced – on one’s travel preferences. The trend of curiosity for experiencing foreign food authentically goes hand in hand with a trend of curiosity for experiencing regional cultures authentically. The idea that certain foods are experienced best in specific places (Richards, 2012, p.37) is mirrored in the ranking of the culinary in third place among the most frequent travel motives, according to a survey by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2017, p.17). With the cultural motive in first and nature in second rank, the connection between food tourism and cultural tourism is confirmed by the UNWTO (2017).

Food tourism experiences “actively [involve] consumers in learning about the culture of the places they visit” (Richards, 2012, p.40). At the same time, they enable a spectrum of commitment from a simple tasting opportunity before buying a food speciality product to a co-creative interactive experience where “tourists can learn to cook, can learn about the ingredients used, the way in which they are grown and appreciate how culinary traditions have come into existence” (Richards, 2002, p.16f.).

Food tourism is per definition a “tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional or national cuisine, heritage and culture” (OCTA & Skift, 2015. cit. a. Rachão, 2019, p.35) and as such “[combines] elements of education, entertainment, aesthetics and escapism” (OECD, 2012, p.9).

### 1.1.2. Its potential for a rural economy

Food tourism integrates activities of local food producers and suppliers with activities of cultural and tourism entrepreneurs. In turn, this means that a successful food tourism strategy can increase the value of a range of activities within the local economy (OECD, 2012, p.9). The integrated and mixed economic nature of businesses that participate in food tourism make it hard to put it into numbers as restaurants, shops, farms, cheese production facilities, museums may attract more or less visitors and may want to engage in regional cooperation more or less strongly. Although hard to estimate, a broad base of participating stakeholders is, unequivocally, the key to a wide range of benefits – individually and collectively – which then “can contribute towards maintaining local economies, societies, cultures and environments” (Beer et al., 2002, p.207). Consequently, a broad collaboration of stakeholders and the way in which institutions can facilitate it lie at the centre of this research project.

Arguably, a dilemma can arise when the goal of maintaining the economic and cultural landscape is to be achieved through the act of adapting – here in the form of bringing new uses to the primary sector (UNWTO, 2012, p.10). Transforming traditional jobs or broadening their task spectrum is one of the key promises of food tourism. Because it is difficult in rural areas to create new jobs in emerging sectors, economic development may take the form of maintaining existing jobs through new additional tasks, like a touristic offering by an agricultural business.

Actively participating in food tourism requires engagement, willingness to cooperate and commitment to creative and innovative ideas to convince the tourist. If local products and services are recognised as special or authentic, a high margin of profit can be gained on the products in direct sale to the tourist as opposed to a highly competitive retail market that food producers otherwise face. Especially small agri-food producers are able to profit from having additional (channels of) revenue to sustain their jobs in rural areas. But it is important that additional revenue is reinvested in the region through “buy-local”-campaigns that reduce economic leakage out of the region and through recycling financial resources in the region (Hall & Mitchell, 2002a, p.83). The size of this promised multiplier effect in the local economy is then again dependent on the number of stakeholders actively engaged in the food tourism strategy (Rinaldi, 2017). The more food tourism stakeholders are involved, the higher the chances that the money spent by tourists circulates longer in the regional economy (Hall & Mitchell, 2002a). Therefore, a high number of stakeholders and interactions between them is instrumental for regional economic development.

## **1.2. Regional economic development**

Regional economic development is not simply a process of reorganising economic activities in an area, as long as the future structure of the economy is different. Especially in rural or lagging regions the term “economic development” is tied to an active push in a particular direction in

which the region is supposed to develop. Typically, or realistically, interventions do not aim to solve all existing issues that are causes for the lag or the structural disadvantages compared to other regions. Instead, the metaphor of a direction stands for a guided way for self-help. According to Richards (2012), "the purpose of local development is to build the capacity of a defined area to improve its economic future and the quality of life for inhabitants" (p.22). Instead of a passive understanding of how a region's economy changes over time, regional economic development is considered as something that can be influenced and should be influenced if structural issues exist. Such structural issues, that apply to rural areas, are often depopulation (leading to lack of skilled labour and lack of demand for a range of consumer goods reinforcing each other), robotisation (leading to changing working processes also in agriculture and food processing) and globalisation (leading to global competition also for agricultural products over their price). No regional development strategy would claim to solve these issues and set the goal of overcoming them. Instead, distinctive strategies or approaches like food tourism take the direction of giving new use to an agricultural sector that is subject to change. The exact alignment of that direction depends on the extent to which one wants to fight those issues and the extent to which one wants to learn to live with them. What becomes clear is that either way an adaption has to take place and that this adaption is an intervention in the existing ways of economic activities in the region.

This work does not aim to analyse to what extent the implementation of food tourism intends to fight or live with structural issues in rural economies nor reflect on the consequences of the named issues. The primary objective is to understand the capacity of the areas under review to improve their economic future created by food tourism and in what way and to which extent it is used. The relevant mechanisms in that respect lie in the relations of cooperation between businesses and other stakeholders. In many existing strategies that use food tourism for economic development, creating a food cluster was the targeted means to deliver synergistic relations – either through cooperation or competition.

*"Clustering can help overcome a scarcity of financial, organizational, human and other resources by enhancing mutual support among firms and service providers, stimulating local creativity, increasing the capacity for new product development and/or product specialization and diversification, and by increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of innovation processes through collaboration."* (Lee et al., 2016, p.75)

While the institutional dynamics of the cluster model or rather the neglect thereof have been scrutinised ever since Michael Porter published his first work (1990) about it, it remains valid that the relations between economic stakeholders in the region are the main drivers of positive effects for businesses in geographical proximity. Porter (1990) had originally outlined four determinants: "factor conditions", "demand conditions", "market structure", "related/supporting industries". Lee et al. (2016) added four facilitators to those, namely "environmentally friendly movement", "stakeholder collaboration", "leadership" and "communication and information flows". In their addition to and adaption of Porter's clustering model, Lee et al. (2016) thus set an emphasis on "the role of public and private sector

partnerships, and the need for strong leadership, including the role of local government as facilitator in encouraging stakeholder collaboration and communication" (p.76).

### **1.3. Institutions & qualitative approach**

While Lee et al. (2016) conduct an extensive mixed-methods single case study on all eight determinants and facilitators, I will conduct a qualitative analysis on three of their facilitators that qualify for qualitative interviews in two case studies: "stakeholder collaboration", "leadership" and "communication and information flows". The limitation is done due to the limits to this research project that allow only for a single-method approach. At the same time, however, there is still so much need to bring clarity into a research area that lies along the border of the academic disciplines of tourism and economic geography and where there has been a reluctance to engage in conducting and interpreting qualitative research (Pike et al., 2017, p.190).

Of course, the factor conditions, demand conditions, market structure and related/supporting industries will play a role in the question why food tourism in one area is organised differently than in the other. For regional development agencies or local policy-makers or other decision-makers it is probably not easy to influence them directly. Thus, influencing them indirectly via the mentioned facilitators is a much more likely approach. Ultimately, the aspects that can and need to be influenced directly by local decision-makers in order to subsequently shape the indirect determinants are:

- the extent to which collaboration between regional stakeholders takes place,
- the question of who takes leadership to facilitate that and
- the differences in platforms along which the communication among local stakeholders and between stakeholders and tourists take place.

My aim is to find out the differences in these three factors against the backdrop of different levels of touristic cultivation instead of a backdrop of different economic structures which would require a much more extensive research endeavour. This will limit the findings of my research but will allow activity-oriented policy-advice.

The goal of this paper is to assess factors that facilitate regional development when looking at two regions which are famous for producing the same sort of product (cheese), but differ in their touristic utilisation thereof. By keeping the context factor of the specific sort of product constant, I can firstly check if the potential of food tourism exists for cheese, too. Secondly, I can examine which institutional settings prove more instrumental for economic development.

#### **1.4. Structure of work**

This paper will proceed as follows. First, the theoretical framework will be delimited along the expectations regarding the actions and attitudes of food tourism stakeholders derived from the current literature. These expectations will be elaborated in order to argue for the relevance of my research questions, but also to establish the relevant elements that may contribute to a comprehensive food tourism strategy. Institutions play an indirect role in the research questions when they aim to positively influence the studied actions and attitudes of food tourism stakeholders, but also directly when their mode and range of operation is studied. Contextual factors, such as landscapes and travel distances, shall be studied to prevent mixing the effects of the actions of institutions with the effects of their physical environment. Next, I will describe technical details on the case studies. This includes a short description of the distinctive characteristics of cheese which make it a special, but representative food product for this type of research, a description of the two case study regions Noord-Holland and Bregenzerwald and the methodological foundation for the interview procedure. Following the methodological outline, the next chapter will cover the analysis of the content of the interviews, which present the findings to the theoretical expectations generated from the literature. Subsequently, the results of the interviews will be taken to a strategic level, where stakeholder collaboration, leadership and information and communication flows – the three mentioned facilitators of food tourism – in the two case study regions will be analysed in direct comparison. Lastly, the discussion chapter will provide recommendations for both policy-makers and the academic world.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

In this section, a theoretical framework is established that summarises the literature in six key aspects to this research. These sections cover different elements of food tourism that are relevant to a positive economic impact among stakeholders and lead up to research questions that are to be answered in the case study regions respectively. These six research questions shall narrow down the question under which conditions food tourism can lead to economic development. The first section, chapter 2.1., will deal with the goals and perceived benefits of food tourism stakeholders and go beyond the direct effect of more revenue for the individual business. In chapter 2.2., I will elaborate how an increase in cooperation of regional businesses in a broad sense and the shorting of supply chains in a narrow sense can be induced. Furthermore, this section shall determine how fit the literature assesses food markets and food trails to do so. Building upon these insights, economic necessity and social capital are discussed as potential factors to bottom-up engagement within an integrative food tourism platform in chapter 2.3.. In chapter 2.4., tasks that the literature expects regional organisations to take over in that regard will be elaborated along with the question whether a separate food tourism organisation is necessary for that sake. In chapter 2.5., expectations regarding the embeddedness of food tourism in the overall tourism offering of a region and the implications thereof are explained. Subsequently, chapter 2.6. will determine the potential role of geographical factors, such as physical distance and connectivity, for food tourism. Finally, chapter 2 will be concluded with a table that summarises the research questions, the expectations formulated by the literature regarding those questions and the relevant factors described throughout the subchapters. This table will later be used for determining relevant content following the collection of data.

### **2.1. Perceived benefits of food tourism stakeholders**

For the last 20 years, the benefits of food tourism to a regional economy have continuously been noted and theorised in academia. Doubtlessly, these benefits can only materialise if the stakeholders also grasp the opportunities that food tourism presents to them. There are of course different interests involved between food producers of different scales, restaurants, hotels and leisure activity providers. Some of those may also fear competition from an additional stream of tourism offering, but overall theory suggests that more tourist attractions lead to or at least enable more nights and more money spent per stay, ideally even distributed among a larger group of regional stakeholders. Dramatically put, "integrating food experiences into sustainable tourism development in rural and outlying areas may help ease poverty" (OECD, 2012, p.9).

Food producers who are not part of traditional tourist attractions have a chance to profit from food tourism as visitors “enjoying [their] products can create a market for those products elsewhere” (Hall & Mitchell, 2002b, p.198). Multiple reports of tourism’s role for developing food exports (OECD, 2012; Hall & Mitchell, 2002a) base their findings on the effectivity of shared branding of a regional food tourism network. Branding will not be explored in detail here, but it cannot be left unmentioned that visitors can act as ambassadors of a destination (UNWTO, 2017, p.12). This is underlined by the “ambiguity [...] [of] the concept of ‘local’ food because local may be understood both in terms of a bounded region in which products are produced and sold and/or in terms of ‘specialty’ foods that might be valuable for export to other countries” (Rinaldi, 2017, p.5). This is particularly true for a food product like cheese that is nowadays easy to transport in a safe way, but also comes in a shape and weight that allows purchases to take home. Consequently, when cheese is perceived as special from a particular region, a cheese purchase can both induce a visit to the region as well as be a result of a visit to the region. In a globalised world, where countless destinations are accessible, food products can “put places on a map” through their broad availability and visibility outside of their region of origin. At the same time, that broad availability allows for the chance of continued purchases from home following a trip to the region of origin.

An important condition for establishing or extending export market relations is a direct experience in situ which convinces the visitor of the quality of the product. As is often stressed in the literature, “allowing the consumer to experience where the produce is from and the people who grow or make it” (Hall & Mitchell, 2002b, p.201) can create a personal connection of the consumer to the product and the environment in which it is produced. This can be done through a farm or cellar door sale or through more interactive experiences. While creating place attachment may create sales in the future, the initial purchase at the farm or cellar door already increases the food producers’ sales following the visit of the tourist.

At the same time, the hospitality industry may look at higher guest numbers if regional food producers offer additional attractions like guided tours through production sites to tourists. Therefore, the interplay of agriculture and tourism can be exploited to reach higher revenue in both sectors. Synergies can develop through cooperation in the process of the production or the provision of a service. A simple example would be a restaurant or café that both displays the local products it uses and sells these products. The restaurant can show how the produce can be used as well as position itself through offering the best local produce. At the same time, the producer gets some additional income with a chance of continued sales due to their name being promoted through the restaurant or café.

Furthermore, “food, export and tourism [are] regarded as ideal partners for joint marketing activities because they target consumers with a high discretionary income” (Hall & Mitchell, 2002b, p.198) and promote the distinctiveness of the region based on one another. Exporters benefit from a developed image of the place of origin of the product, local food producers benefit from tourists who are already familiar with a kind of their product through the

exporters, and the tourist sector benefits from exporters putting the region on a map and food producers offering attractions to their visitors.

Synergies may not always be detected in the most visible way, such as selling under a distinct regional brand. They can develop through sharing marketing intelligence or other forms of knowledge and information flows (Lee et al., 2016, p.73). Furthermore, participating in food tourism may be a way to attract external resources, such as public funds and private investments, to improve efficiency and quality of the food product or the hospitality services (Hall & Mitchell, 2002a, p.84).

The simplest synergistic goal of participating in food tourism is perhaps improving or sustaining liveability of rural areas through employment benefits. Encouraging the production of specialised and typical regional food and its offering in the regional hospitality sector can not only improve the food's value for the region but ideally empower the local community to recognise and grasp the opportunities within the region (Corigliano, 2002, p.166). To aim at sustaining the respective rural community means sustaining potential clients, partners and staff.

For food tourism to be relevant for regional development, activities of regional stakeholders in the agricultural and hospitality sectors need to have some broader economic impact. This can be represented in an increase in revenue at first, but for the region to profit thereof collectively, successive actions like investments, collaborations or expansions including additional jobs are important. Theory lets one suggest that food tourism as a new addition to the traditional tourism offerings has the power to show this impact. However, it remains crucial that stakeholders take actions that pursue not only individual short-term goals but also collective middle- or long-term goals of the region as a whole. The first research question to be answered by this case study is therefore: *What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?*

## **2.2. How to shorten local food supply chains?**

For the region as a whole, it is beneficial if either an increase in revenue or synergistic cooperation – or ideally both – lead to those financial resources being reinvested locally. This need not be understood only as recycling large one-off investments, but also as reducing the “economic leakage” (Hall & Mitchell, 2002a, p.83). The mentioned distributional effect of including multiple regional businesses can most easily be pictured along the supply chain.

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, regional supply chains have been challenged with the establishment of an “agri-industrial paradigm [...], which is characterized by industrialization, globalization, the placelessness of the agri-food production chain, and the ‘standardization of food production and processing’” (Rinaldi, 2017, p.4). This paradigm of course did not develop by chance, but because it is reliable and sufficient for the everyday life of the mass of consumers. But consumer

behaviour on holiday may be different and present an opportunity to regionalise food supply chains again. On holiday, food generally receives more attention and time attributed to food and eating is spent more consciously. Moreover, the counterpart to the agri-industrial paradigm “focuses on food quality, shorter geographical distances between producers and consumers through localized/regionalized food networks, local biodiversity and sociocultural traditions as elements that ensure quality and increase consumers’ trust” (ibid.).

The intangible aspects of this “short supply chain”-paradigm show that distance – or in this case short distance – does not only comprise how far food travels physically, but it also includes cognitive and social relationships of understanding and interacting between the producer and their customer and/or consumers (ibid., p.6). In this paradigm, the relational distance is reduced and a network of cooperation is in place, that enables working together and learning from each other. The capacity of any food tourism platform to build or strengthen personal relationships within the region is expected to determine whether they are adequate to shorten supply chains to positively influence economic development in the region.

The relationships that Rinaldi (2017) mentions require an interest in the food and in the people dealing with food at one point of the supply chain or another. Although conceptually different, food trails and local markets theoretically both have the potential to create or intensify the interest in the particular food and the people dealing with it to an extent that encourages cooperation. The integrative function of tourism platforms ideally allows the creation of a new touristic product (i.e. attraction) that requires the cooperation of many stakeholders or is most effective if many stakeholders contribute to it.

A popular way to think local agglomerations of related stakeholders and of supply chains are clusters. A cluster has its theme, which can prevent issues with being holistic in appearance, and it also incorporates any innovative stakeholder that is committed to collaborating with other businesses in the cluster. The targeted effect by governments who try to create clusters is the upgrading of value chains through cooperation or competition (Pike et al., 2017, p.134), but as mentioned above, it remains to be answered how these effects can actually be initiated.

In the case of food tourism, it is not enough to improve the quality of the food product or of the processing. It is also important to consider how to make visible where the high quality of the food comes from, i.e., the supply chain. An example can be a participating restaurant that promotes the quality and typicality of their dishes, if it points out further possibilities of learning about where the food is produced or the typical recipes for that region or that food (Corigliano, 2002, p.178). Food tourism presents an opportunity to exploit the regionality of food supply chains through visitors interested in the specialty of local food. Reciprocal promotion of partner businesses as would happen in the ideal economic cluster can have advantages for the quality, quantity and distribution of touristic activity, especially among a large group of participants. In reality, however, the expectation is that there is a need for a platform or some form of institution to initiate or facilitate the ongoing process thereof.

### 2.2.1. Local food markets

Theoretically, a local market can also fulfil the functions of the restaurant in the previous example. It can be an authentic food experience, connecting food and place through offering to taste the produce, offering specialised knowledge about the region's special food produce and offering recommendations and information about the use of the food by the local community (Rinaldi, 2017, p.10). Furthermore, the fact that a local market is the point where farmers would traditionally sell their produce makes it possible to represent an authentic place to experience the local food culture. As far as economic development deals with "the sustainability of traditional farming, the landscape and farming communities" (ibid., p.6), local markets and the revenues which small producers generate through markets also contribute to that (Beer et al., 2002, p.214).

Moreover, local markets can be a central starting point to learn more about the food on request, especially when it comes to the initial steps in the supply chain, i.e., the food production process. Food markets enable a rather footloose first direct contact of tourists with the products from the region and are hence attractive for tourists who do not only travel specifically for food, but are interested when conquered on their travels (James & Halkier, 2016 & Hjalager, 2002). Producers can also promote "other methods of direct supply such as farm shops and box schemes" (Beer et al., 2002, p.214) at the local markets as Beer et al. (2002) observed in the USA. But markets could also serve as the place of contact for the restaurants in the region and, as a next step, perhaps even as their regular supply. This may enable a form of cooperation simply based on "exchanging information, e.g., by alerting restaurants to new suppliers, or inviting a producer who already sells at markets to add a new venue to their itinerary" (James & Halkier, 2016, p.37).

Returning to the agglomeration economies, the establishment of a market itself is based on the pooling of resources (Hall & Mitchell, 2002b, p.203), and its effect is that it makes local food "accessible for quality-oriented eateries" (James & Halkier, 2016, p.30), potentially "with demands for large quantities and regular deliveries" (ibid.). Furthermore, local markets can operate multiple functions and lead to many add-on services from which a whole region can benefit.

However, the development effect relies so heavily on these add-ons that it is questionable if the market can be identified as a sufficient single driver of economic development. Theory suggests that this can only be achieved by a network of multiple stakeholders which is unlikely to be formed only by a food market as a starting point. It is more realistic that a food market is one key element of a bigger platform or in fact a food trail (see [chapter 2.2.2](#)). In most cases, local food markets are rather an example of the "most simple resource mobilization" (Hjalager, 2002, p.32) than of the "creation and utilization of sophisticated knowledge and innovation capabilities" (ibid.).

The importance of the network-building-capabilities of food tourism attractions stems from the inclusiveness of smaller producers and businesses to sustain their jobs. The relevant

parameters in a simple or “indigenous” food tourism development are scale and visibility (Hjalager, 2002, p.23). This means that large producers will be able to attract more tourists for instance through better appearance to their stand on the market and their follow-up information and activities. Large markets or “mega food fairs mainly support the continued specialization in food production and globalization of the markets” (Hjalager, 2002, p.24f.). Furthermore, if large producers continue to grow, they have little incentive to cooperate with other businesses in the tourism sector, which “are almost always small or medium-sized businesses with limited resources, [...] [and as such are dependent on] access to knowledge, resources, markets, and innovation” (Quaranta et al., 2016, p.3). Synergistic relationships do not evolve at a juxtaposition of food production and consumption, but where creative processes lead to some form of interaction and eventually cooperation in a culinary cluster or similar networks (Lee et al., 2016, p.76). According to the academic world, “food tourism [ought to be] small-scale, supports agricultural diversification and may spread benefits throughout the area’s economic sector, increasing employment opportunities. It also fosters community participation, generates a multiplier effect in the local economy” (Rinaldi, 2017, p.10).

### 2.2.2. Food trails

Per definition, a food trail involves multiple different actors in the food and gastronomy sector and therefore makes it possible for the benefits of tourism revenue to spread across the region. If promoted cohesively, little effort is asked of the tourist to find and experience another food tourism attraction. Thus, it can be expected that the provision of a food trail platform leads to higher overall spending by the tourist on local food and other services offered in the region. Following a trail may per se be an experience that adds to the value as it enables discovering the region with some guidance and by such also incorporates the landscape dimension. But trails can also allow a combination of different kinds of tourist attractions, for example sites of historic interest. This serves tourists who want to learn about the region, but have other interests related to the culture of a region than food (UNWTO, 2012, p.7).

Within an alignment of similar stakeholders, heterogeneity can be a key strength or goal of a trail. This also follows Porter’s (1990) cluster theory that suggests that relatively low entry barriers spur the need of innovation in order to stand out. This can include product innovations, but also innovative inter-organisational forms of collaboration and partnering (Pike et al., 2017, p.135). The effect of competition on innovations within the agricultural and hospitality sectors is perhaps hard to determine. It is, however, likely that those stand out who cooperate with other regional businesses to create a new product or service. Hall & Mitchell (2002b) point out a reluctance of viticultural producers to work with the tourism industry out of a “general lack of experience and understanding [...] of tourism, and a subsequent lack of entrepreneurial skills and abilities with respect to marketing and product development” (p.200). In the case of a food trail, a stand-out agricultural business that does understand the benefits and requirements of offering a food touristic attraction is more visible not only to the tourists, but also to its regional

competitors. A food trail that organises joint destination marketing and has a central information point offers a level playing field for food producers to attract food tourists. At this point, those who offer the most interesting food tourism experiences are likely to have a competitive advantage. A trail can therefore also have the potential to overcome such a reluctance because it sheds light on the differences between the active business and the reluctant business. Furthermore, by making all producers and processors visible to the interested tourist, food trails manage to put local food on the map and strengthen the connection between the name of region and its food.

Moreover, a food trail can set certain standards to its participants regarding the quality of the food. "Pursuing quality objectives can change the division of labour among producers throughout the entire value chain. [...] New institutions in charge of tasks not previously defined in the production system will be established, mainly in the area of marketing, quality control and other business services." (Hjalager, 2002, p.25)

Food trails as well as local markets can encourage shortening local food supply chains, but theory suggests to expect a local market to lack integrative power among regional stakeholders and therefore too little distributional effects in terms of economic development. My second research question is therefore: *Are food trails and local markets both adequate food tourism measures to encourage shortening local food supply chains?*

### **2.3. Participation within an integrative food tourism platform**

The more integrative a food tourism platform operates, the higher are the possibilities for the relevant local businesses to work together. Furthermore, the network grows in opportunities for every new business joining. What remains unclear is: what are the driving and motivating forces for the first movers who reach out to connect their businesses with others? Subsequently, because this strategic care-taking unquestionably draws capacities and resources, another question is: what are the driving and motivating forces for those who engage in the shaping of the network? And essentially: who decides what are the goals and priorities, what is a fair way to achieve them? On the one hand, the literature expects that economic necessity forces small and less competitive businesses to be innovative and to modify their way of doing business to become more sustainable. On the other hand, trust and other forms of social capital are an established facilitator of network building and cooperation that help actors to share and discuss goals and potential means to become more competitive through cooperation.

### 2.3.1. Economic necessity

In a competitive market for agricultural products, it is necessary for small scale food producers to adjust some part of their business plan if they want to catch additional income streams. However, "the extent to which subsistence-type businesses can expand and prosper while maintaining quality standards" (James & Halkier, 2016, p.29) is very limited.

Exporting their product on a large scale may therefore not be possible, even if tourists visit their farm or production site and are so convinced by the product that they would choose to buy it from their home region. Despite trending farmer's box offerings, it can be more promising to invest in the continued process of bringing in new visitors to profit from one-time farm door sales or tours. In that regard, engaging in the development of a substantial and holistic food tourism network can be as important to small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs as the development of their own food tourism attraction.

Efforts to make notice of the food touristic attraction that the small enterprise offers may influence the overall food tourism platform. As mentioned above, food tourism platforms can have distributional effects spreading the mass of visitors over various regional businesses. Small, less competitive businesses would be more dependent on their share of food tourists and therefore be likely to influence the management of a food tourism platform. For businesses in the hospitality sector, motivating factors could be the simple need to attract more guests, but could also be about attracting the right group of guests that are interested in food specialties and are ready to pay a premium price.

### 2.3.2. Social capital

Any approach to engage in the offering or management of a food tourism platform – both in the agricultural and the hospitality sector – requires some form of social capital, especially when financial capital is low. Social capital can cover all sorts of personal relationships and be a valuable asset in form of trust or support. A single business alone will not be able to develop successful food tourism in a region but require collaboration or other forms of support by other regional stakeholders.

*"Trust and social capital are crucial to the processes of cooperation and networking that characterize integrated rural tourism, and also in the operation of clusters. They prove fundamental in influencing the willingness of firms to cooperate, create alliances, and actively work together to reach long term goals, valorizing collaboratively the available resources"* (Quaranta et al., 2016, p.3).

Rather than waiting for two businesses to overcome the barriers to innovation, academia advocates the creation of institutionalised networks in which trust and social capital can

gradually grow (ibid., p.2). With the success or persistence of the platform, a cumulative effect of trust can foster participation and involvement progressively (ibid., p.12).

“Institutional arrangements that encourage participation and shared decision making are critical in place-based development strategies [...] and in the formation and operation of ‘food clusters’ or places with a geographical concentration of inter-connected firms and service providers offering culinary and cultural products and programs” (Lee et al., 2016, p.73). An institutionalised or formalised structure of an organisation typically makes it easier to establish leadership. Effective leadership is necessary to facilitate communication and information flows in order to inspire them to participate, engage and cooperate, but requires good relations with multiple stakeholders within a food cluster or a food tourism platform (ibid.). Leadership can be claimed by government-run organisations or by regional “champions and individual innovators who have been able to generate local interest and involvement” (Hall & Mitchell, 2002b, p.201). Other authors, however, advocate a “neutral and super-partes” (Quaranta et al., 2016, p.12) leader that has “all relevant stakeholders [...] engaged through a participatory approach” (Rinaldi, 2017, p.19).

The literature lets one expect two streams of factors determining the engagement of members of the agricultural and hospitality sector in the definition and the management of food tourism product offerings. Firstly, businesses who realise the need to innovate but do not have the possibility to do so within their original scope of business may see a way out of their economic pressures in food tourism. Secondly, the personal relationships to other stakeholders in the region define whether they can count on their tolerance, support or cooperation within a platform that serves the whole region. Whether these two factors can be confirmed or whether other factors play more important roles in the active participation of food tourism stakeholders will be determined in the approach of my third research question: *Which factors can encourage regional actors of the agricultural and hospitality sectors to become involved in the definition and management of food tourism offerings?*

#### **2.4. Could the tourist office take over the tasks of a regional platform for food tourism?**

It would be possible to treat food tourism as just another set of attractions that can be handled by ordinary tourist information offices. After all, the vast majority of tourists do not actively travel for the local food but could show interest once it has come across (Hall, 2012, p.52). However, the supportive tasks are much more complicated, as they deal with businesses in several sectors (agriculture, retail and hospitality) and quality management is a large, but essential task for the “very select type of tourist with a high volume of expenditure on very high-quality products” (UNWTO, 2012, p.9).

Next to linear support from the advisory agency for the providers of food tourism attractions, “it is also important that a facilitating organization exist (sic!) to help promote partnerships and

collaborative initiatives and, eventually, to help market the place to outsiders" (Lee et al., 2016, p.86). The ultimate task for such an integrative platform is to create an environment where innovation processes can develop in order to increase the quality of the tourism offering and where tourism opportunities are effectively transformed into business activity (Rinaldi, 2017, p.13). Corresponding to the ideal image of a cluster, it facilitates the entry of high-productive stakeholders and "gives rise to high quality food products with attributes that reflect their place of origin" (Lee et al., 2016, p.75).

Furthermore, food tourism calls for active marketing to attract the niche crowd that is actively searching for high-quality products. This may include "develop[ing] local tourist products distinct from 'industrial' or conventional tourist products [and] valoris[ing] locally produced or locally managed products characterized by the local landscape, region and culture in order maximize benefits at local level" (Corigliano, 2002, p.175). Marketing may also require disciplinary regulations regarding the quality of the produce and the signage system (ibid., p.173). It is unlikely to imagine an ordinary tourist office to carry out the tasks of quality assessing certification boards<sup>1</sup>; these could, however, be outsourced to an agency that specialises on this on a higher scale (e.g. nationally).

These expectations may or may not be verified through the results to my fourth research question: *Is a regional agency/platform for food tourism additional to existing tourism administrations necessary?*

## **2.5. Complementarity of food tourism with other cultural and natural heritage attractions**

The cooperation of a regional food tourism agency with the tourist information office is essential to make the most out of the touristic and economic potential of food tourism activities. Food tourism is a form of cultural tourism where tourists come to learn about the tangible and intangible aspects of the culture of the places they visit (Richards, 2012, p.40). This implies that there are "new demands of the modern tourist, who is increasingly looking to experience not just the natural environment but also the cultural heritage and typical products of rural areas" (Quaranta et al., 2016, p.1).

Cultural tourists themselves, however, show different levels of interest in the food compared to the other sights of a region. This means that there are choices to be made on which activities or businesses to promote to whom (Corigliano, 2002, p.173ff.). From an economic development perspective, it is relevant how tourist bodies are able to "attract tourist flows to less visited

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<sup>1</sup> According to Hjalager (2002), these tasks ought to achieve "precise criteria, easy to follow for any food provider who wants to obtain or increase a rating[,] efficient control and advisory organizations, able to motivate and guide the food providers to take steps that improve quality[,] [...] marketing of the system to the tourists, using it to increase interest, create competitive advantages for accredited suppliers, and enhance value added among food producers throughout the value chain" (p.26).

regions, consequently generating spending in a way that is more equitable throughout the region" (UNWTO, 2017, p.12).

Tourism organisations are in a pivotal position as regards communicating, connecting and mediating between operators as well as between operators and guests. Their actions are vital for shaping and presenting an integrated overall food tourism product, for avoiding overcrowding problems at certain times of the year and for differentiating committed food tourists from mass tourists (Corigliano, 2002, p.179). Moreover, helping the high-quality demanding food tourist allocate to niche businesses is important for marketing efforts with the goal of associating the region's food with high-quality (Hall, 2012, p.56).

*"As noted by Du Rand and Heath ([2006.] p.209), 'the roots of food tourism lie in agriculture, culture and tourism' in that agriculture provides the product (food), culture offers the historical setting and authenticity, and tourism should provide infrastructure and services to combine all three components into a food tourism experience" (Rinaldi, 2017, p.9).*

Food tourism takes place in the embedded environment of the history of a region, its landscapes, the manual work of farmers and services to provide leisure and entertainment to the tourist. It would require the attention of agricultural institutions as well as of touristic institutions. I will answer if this is the case following my fifth research question: *How important is the complementarity of food tourism offers with "other visitor products such as cultural and natural heritage attractions" (Hall, 2012, p.50)? Are they competitors for public support?*

## **2.6. The role of peripherality and transportation infrastructure for establishing a food tourism product**

Next to good food and drink, landscapes are one of the most important factors that draw visitors to rural areas. Landscapes, "peace and quiet, lack of commercialization and the opportunity to relax" (Beer et al., 2002, p.219) have in common that they embody the opposite to a hectic urban everyday life. Moreover, "the trends seen in recent years towards a re-discovery of rural life and traditional local products and towards a re-localization of production, have predominately taken hold in urban centres" (Quaranta et al., 2016, p.12). Thus, rural regions often market themselves consciously in this way to attract urban visitors promising relaxation and sensorial enjoyment of local food specialties framed by the surrounding nature (James & Halkier, 2016, p.26).

Nevertheless, it remains doubtful if attracting urban guests works for any rural or peripheral region. It can be assumed that at first, increasing distance to urban centres has a positive effect for the purpose of escapism but decreases with the length of the journey. Also, "the remoteness of many rural businesses, including those working in tourism, creates a competitive disadvantage and a peripheralization of the local market compared to densely populated urban

areas where demand is concentrated” (Quaranta et al., 2016, p.12). If this leads to a lack of entrepreneurial and employment opportunities, out-migration to urban centres will be the consequence and will further reduce the opportunities in the region. Furthermore, agricultural businesses offering food tourism attractions are also dependent on the provision of key tourism infrastructure.

This means, the “friction of distance” (Capello, 2009. cit. a. Pike et al., 2017, p.32) creates costs in money and time both for tourists and regional stakeholders in order to enable their mobility (Pike et al., 2017, p.32). Regional development policies have traditionally focused on investments in infrastructure to provide connectivity for businesses and residents who would otherwise move out of the region (ibid., p.33). Thereby, it is important to follow a strategic alignment to build and strengthen existing networks between rural areas and their individually most important urban centres (Quaranta et al., 2016, p.13). In this sense, transportation infrastructure stands in direct relation to the kind of tourists a region can attract.

As there are food tourists with different degrees of interest or commitment to the local food, the role of landscapes and escapism as destination factor needs to be separated to understand the inclinations of food tourism. Furthermore, physical distance and the transportation infrastructure play a much more visible economic effect on the feasibility of food tourism and the range of potential food tourists a place can attract. I will establish those context factors in my case study regions following my sixth research question: *What role do landscapes, peripherality and transportation infrastructure play for establishing a food tourism product?*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Expectations from the literature</b>	<b>Factors relevant to the expectations</b>
<p><u>Overarching RQ</u> <i>How can food tourism facilitate economic development in rural areas?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Stakeholder collaboration</li> <li>– Leadership</li> <li>– Communication and information flows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Platforms &amp; networks               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Mobilising potential assets</li> <li>– Formation of social capital</li> <li>– Building collective learning</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>#1 <i>What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?</i></p>	<p>Businesses participate in food tourism offerings in order to directly increase their revenue or indirectly capitalise from synergistic cooperation with partner and supply businesses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foreign/export market for cheese</li> <li>• Marketing               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Creating an image of the region and its food</li> <li>– Transporting the image</li> <li>– Tourists on site as target group</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Sharing information/knowledge</li> <li>• Attract external resources (private &amp; public)</li> <li>• Improve and sustain liveability</li> </ul>

<p>#2</p> <p><i>Are food trails and local markets both adequate food tourism measures to encourage shortening local food supply chains?</i></p>	<p>A food trail is more likely to be the adequate food tourism measure to encourage shortening local food supply chains than a local market.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumer behaviour: more conscious, aware</li> <li>• Invest in the region</li> <li>• Personal relationships</li> <li>• Cooperation</li> <li>• Platforms build relations, integrative function</li> <li>• Upgrading value chains</li> <li>• Reciprocal promotion</li> </ul> <p><u>Markets</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tradition</li> <li>• Selling point for farmers/small producers</li> <li>• Less commitment by the tourist</li> <li>• Place of first contact/starting point <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Tourist to business</li> <li>– Business to business</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Scale and visibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Need for innovation and cooperation</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><u>Food Trail</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combination of activities</li> <li>• Need to stand out <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Need for innovation and cooperation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reluctance of agronomists to go into tourism</li> <li>• Light on the difference between active and reluctant businesses</li> <li>• Bottom-up initiative</li> </ul>
<p>#3</p> <p><i>Which factors can encourage regional actors of the agricultural and hospitality sectors to become involved in the definition and the management of food tourism product offerings?</i></p>	<p>A lack of competitiveness, especially among small businesses, presents an incentive to actively engage within an integrative food tourism platform, and trust and social capital are a facilitator for the projected acceptance or success of their initiatives within the platform.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First-movers: building of a network</li> <li>• Shapers: developing and operating the network</li> <li>• Deciders: influencing the goals and priorities Capacities and resources</li> </ul> <p><u>Economic Necessity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small scale: adjust/modify</li> <li>• Large scale: export</li> <li>• Visitors spending on site vs. Foreign consumer market</li> <li>• Dependency on new visitors</li> <li>• Need to influence platform</li> <li>• Attracting those who pay premium price</li> </ul>

		<p><u>Social capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barriers to innovation and cooperation</li> <li>• Institutionalised networks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Shared decision-making</li> <li>– Leadership</li> <li>– Communication and information flows</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Neutral &amp; super-partes vs. regional champion</li> </ul>
<p>#4</p> <p><i>Is a regional agency/platform for food tourism additional to existing tourism administrations necessary?</i></p>	<p>Irrespective of the limits to the capacities of tourist offices, a platform specialised for food tourism promises better outcomes because of more complex tasks to be covered for food.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple sectors: agriculture, retail and hospitality</li> <li>• Quality management</li> <li>• Supportive tasks/Advisory agency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Linear support to attraction provider</li> <li>– Promote partnerships, initiatives</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Place marketing to outsiders</li> <li>• Niche crowd (premium)</li> <li>• Connection/association of the place with the product</li> </ul>
<p>#5</p> <p><i>How important is the complementarity of food tourism offers with "other visitor products such as cultural and natural heritage attractions" (Hall, 2012, p.50)? Are they competitors for public support?</i></p>	<p>All tourism stakeholders realise that integrating various tourist attractions to a holistic tourism package is advised in rural areas. However, public institutions may have reservations to cooperation to protect their range of operation for which they receive funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural heritage</li> <li>• Joint touristic offering</li> <li>• Who is promoted/supported</li> <li>• Avoid overcrowding/less visited regions</li> <li>• Equity distributions</li> <li>• Embedded <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– History</li> <li>– Landscape</li> <li>– Farmer's work</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>#6</p> <p><i>What role do landscapes, peripherality and transportation infrastructure play for establishing a food tourism product?</i></p>	<p>Peripheral areas and their landscapes attract tourists seeking for an escapist holiday but create a hindrance due to the length of their journey. Transportation infrastructure is expected to play less of a role for tourists.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landscapes</li> <li>• Peace and quiet/lack of commercialisation</li> <li>• Urban (people's) trend <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Re-discover rural life</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Escapism: relaxing</li> <li>• Degree of concentration of demand and labour supply</li> <li>• Transport connection to urban centres</li> </ul>

Table 1: Overview of the factors relevant to the expectations by the literature by research question

### **3. Case Study & Methodology**

The above-described factors, that are expected to play a role in the effect of food tourism on economic development in a region, require a careful examination in current real-life practice of food-tourism. When examining food tourism, two aspects need to be followed in the process of the case selection to allow a comparative analysis. Firstly, two regions need to be chosen that are different, but not too different. A region with a tradition for a specific food product is for instance difficult to compare with a region with only recently discovered interest or capabilities for the production of a food product. A large distance between the two regions and the positioning on a different continent are also likely indicators for major differences in consumer behaviour and countries of origin of (potential) visitors of the region. However, if the circumstances are too similar, the added value of comparative work is probably too low compared to the additional effort. Secondly, the food product that the regions are famous for shall be as identical as possible because each type of food product has its own implication regarding the way it can be consumed, the transportability and the value or meaning attributed to it.

Therefore, this chapter will firstly elaborate why cheese was chosen as the single stand-out agri-food product in order to analyse food tourism. Then, the two case study regions will be introduced with respect to their extent and geographic location as well as their topographical and ecological environment and the historic development of dairy culture which is embedded therein. Each description of the regions will ultimately contain a brief overview of the food tourism attractions and the most famous food tourism actors in the respective region.

#### **3.1. Cheese**

Cheese as the dominant feature of food tourism in the case study regions was chosen for particular reasons. Cheese allows interest to be shown along the whole value chain, starting with the breeding of cattle (other forms of cheese play only a minor role in these areas), milking, processing, ripening up to the finished cheese product which is sold in shops or processed and served in gastronomy. This allows the development of multiple different touristic offers at multiple stages and linkages between different stakeholders as opposed to a food product that requires processing along with many other ingredients or has no intermediary steps between the harvest and the gastronomic processing like most vegetables for example. The fact that it does not demand much processing or a lot of other special ingredients leaves it as something appealing to more than just gourmets. In truth, this opens an enormous number of possibilities for tourism. Cheese as a part of everyday life represents local culture on a much broader and more perceptible basis. It is not only a very tangible and consumable example of a symbol for

the life lived by the people of the region, but it is also one that a large number of tourists can relate to out of frequent consumption of cheese at their home.

Perhaps because cheese does not always qualify for the more specific academic term of gastronomy tourism, cheese has not always received that amount of attention from the academic world. In part, that lies in the perception of local cheese to be a complementary product to the more important local wine specialty. Wine itself, however, has a lot of different implications regarding the way and time it is consumed, who it attracts and how well established the ties between agriculture and gastronomy already are. It is important to note that the cheese in the case study regions of this thesis are not complementary food specialities. Given that both regions do not have any significant wine production, the reputation for their cheese outshines all other food products from the respective regions.

The fact that the cheese-producers in these regions have no such natural partners in the agricultural sector make the development of networks of cooperation harder, but shows more clearly the issues and barriers that food tourism institutions may face in their attempt to integrate multiple businesses from different sectors.

### **3.2. The case study regions**

As mentioned above, the two chosen “cheese-regions” come with different institutional settings as they lie in different parts of Europe. Furthermore, they currently also have different levels of touristic cultivation of their cheese production. This applies to the level of promotion to tourists and the consciousness of touristic value of regional high-quality cheese. Ergo, between the regions lie differences in how prominently activities related to cheese are presented to tourists, also by whom activities are presented and simply how many of these activities there are. This is also a representation of the potential attributed by regional stakeholders to (their) cheese – both touristically as an attraction and economically as a chance for profitable tourist offers. Beside these attitudes, the role of formalised institutions and public organisations is still to be determined by this research.

Comparing two regions famous for the same food product in the centre of attention not only allows comparison, but adds value over a single case study. In a single case study, it is hard to separate the effects of interdependent factors from each other. In a comparative case study, the effect of the food product being cheese can be separated from the effect of landscapes or consumer behaviour, for instance, that are both interconnected with the prevalence of high-quality cheese in the region. Of course, the effects can be separated in a more precise and more representative manner, the bigger the sample size, but for reasons of feasibility, the number of the compared regions is two.

### 3.2.1. Noord-Holland

Noord-Holland is a province in the Northwest of the Netherlands that is surrounded by the North Sea, the Wadden Sea and the IJsselmeer and Markermeer. The influence of the overall wet environment, due to the proximity to the sea, has shaped the landscape and its cultivation from early ages. Land had to be reclaimed and drained and the resulting landscapes, which lie at a very low elevation, are known as polders (Britannica, 2021). Dairy farming was then established on these grounds for technical reasons because “[dairy] farming is more water-tolerant than crop cultures” (Koothafkan, 2010). The most famous polder in Noord-Holland is the UNESCO World Heritage listed Beemster Polder which was drained in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Britannica, 2021).

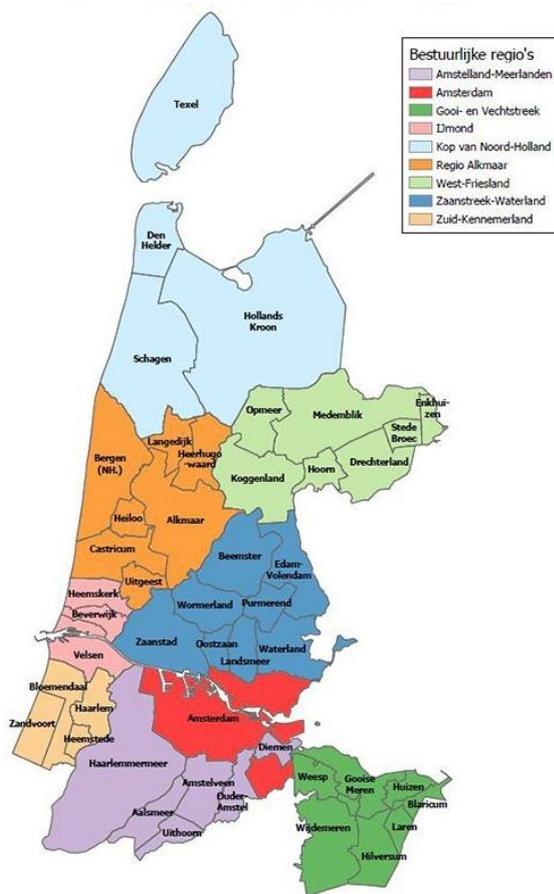


Figure 1: Regional structure used by the Province Noord-Holland  
Source: <https://www.noord-holland.nl>

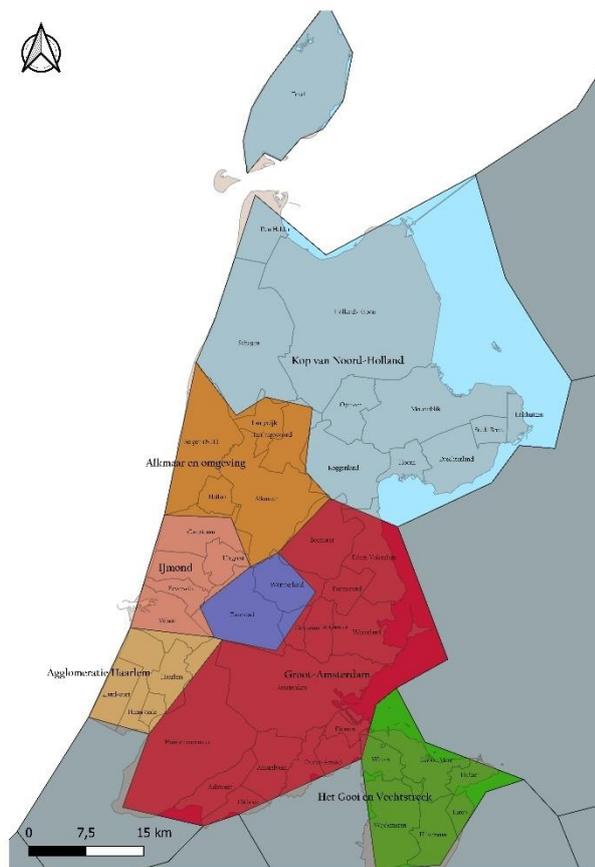


Figure 2: Regional structure in statistical regions

Dairy farming in Noord-Holland is mostly concentrated on the peninsula to the North of the North Sea Canal. This excludes the urban areas surrounding the national capital Amsterdam and the provincial capital Haarlem. Roughly in the centre of the peninsula lies Alkmaar, which is the second largest city of the area North of the North Sea Canal and also home to the oldest cheese market of the Netherlands. Famous historical cheese markets also take place in Hoorn,

the fourth largest city of the region and Edam, known for its particular smaller-shaped type of cheese.

The entity beyond the North Sea, however, remains hard to define because there is no intermediary regional level on which municipalities permanently cooperate or on which public institutions exist. For example, the municipalities Beemster, Purmerend, Oostzaan, Landsmeer and Waterland, which are agriculturally dominated, belong to the statistical region "Greater Amsterdam" ("Groot-Amsterdam", dark red in Figure 2), but according to Province to the region "Zaanstreek-Waterland" (blue in Figure 1). A contemporary name for that region comprised of those municipalities and rural areas of neighbouring municipalities is "Laag Holland" (Low Holland), which is also the name of a touristic destination marketing organisation in that region.

For the sake of this paper, it is easier to use the administrative regions proposed by the Province because food tourism is prone to take place in the three regions Alkmaar, Zaanstreek-Waterland and Westfriesland since that is where the famous cheese markets are located. Agriculture with cattle is of course prevalent in many more areas in the Netherlands, but these are the regions where food touristic visits to farms would take place, given that the cheese markets and the corresponding towns that are known for their cheese are the centres of attraction or an obvious starting point for food tourism.

Given the history of the cheese market in Alkmaar and the importance of the city as an economic centre of the region, food tourism is expected to be most developed starting from here, providing linkages to its surroundings, for example the Beemster. The cheese from the famous polder that is also marketed under the brand name *Beemster* is one of two cheeses that the re-enactment processions of the historical bargaining at the cheese market centuries ago takes place with (Beemster Cheese, 2021).

Beside the historical cheese markets, food tourism attractions in the regions Alkmaar, Zaanstreek-Waterland and Westfriesland currently include farm visits, guided tours, cheese making workshops and farm shops at smaller cheesemakers, both tradition-themed guided tours through historical cheese making facilities and a farm in a characteristic polder landscape next to a dike by *Henri Willig*, cheese- and local food-themed walking routes, cheese-themed boat tours and a cheese museum in Alkmaar. *CONO Kaasmakers* are furthermore planning on developing a "Beemster Experience" in their previous production facility that shall allow tourists insights in the whole production process of their *Beemster* cheese. Although the number of different attractions is substantial and the region therefore doubtlessly qualifies as a food-tourism destination, it must be said that each of these different attractions on average exist once or twice across the region and have to be searched for across a large number of websites.

### 3.2.2. Bregenzerwald

Bregenzerwald is a region within the Austrian Bundesland<sup>2</sup> Vorarlberg (see Figure 3: Bregenzerwald in ochre) that is situated in the very West of Austria bordering the South of Germany and the East of Switzerland. The name translates to Bregenz Forest which has to do with it being the first region North of the Alps that completely lies below the tree line. The region lies in an intermediary elevation zone bordering the high alpine zone in the South. It still appears rather mountainous and it is the mountains that form clear topographical boundaries to the region. Arguably, that is the reason why the region developed its own regional identity distinct from more and less mountainous regions in the Bundesland Vorarlberg. It is noteworthy that the city of Bregenz, which the region partly owes its name to, is the capital of its political district and the only city of the district. Bregenzerwald itself is comprised of 24 municipalities and can be described as a very rural area.



Figure 3: Regional structure in statistical regions used by the Bundesland Vorarlberg  
Source: Amt der Vorarlberger Landesregierung (2018)

Bregenzerwald would naturally be a fully forested region, and the use of the lands as pasture is the only ecological way to sustain the land as a cultural landscape that can be used by humans up to the highest elevations. In fact, a projected area of the region from a birds-view would account 565.1km<sup>2</sup>, but if the relief is taken into account, the total land area in Bregenzerwald sums up to 670.7km<sup>2</sup> (Amt der Vorarlberger Landesregierung, 2018). For comparison that is roughly two thirds of the land area of the three administrative regions Alkmaar, Westfriesland and Zaanstreek-Waterland (together 1,002.86km<sup>2</sup>), or slightly more than the regions Alkmaar and Zaanstreek-Waterland (together 667.68km<sup>2</sup>) (CBS, 2021).

The cultural landscape today is protected by the UNESCO World Heritage status of the way it is cultivated. The three-stage agriculture has the cattle follow the temperatures of the season, starting in the valley in winter, going to the “Vorsäß” - a place to graze on intermediary elevation – in spring, followed by summer months spent at high elevation on the mountains, before returning to the “Vorsäß” in autumn, and to the valley again in winter (KäseStraße Bregenzerwald, 2019a). That way, not only is the pasture land sustained, but also cheeses of slightly different taste are produced

<sup>2</sup> The “Bundesland” is the intermediary administrative level between the municipalities and the national government in Austria.

across the year. In the summer months, cheeses are even produced on the huts on the mountains. This of course is only possible on a rather low scale of production.

With no city of higher order in Bregenzerwald, the centre of food tourism in the region may be assumed at the cheese cellar which is open to all cheese producers to rent ripening spots for their cheeses. The cheese cellar is also the headquarters of the *KäseStraße Bregenzerwald* (*CheeseRoute Bregenzerwald*). The *CheeseRoute* is not like a tradition trail that can be followed by foot or bike, but a network that connects all cheese related stakeholders of the region. As there is only one higher-levelled road, roughly in North-South direction, one could argue that the alpine pastures, farmers, dairies, cheese makers, inns and other partners lie close to the one big route.

Food tourism attractions that can be found online are all listed by the *CheeseRoute* organisation, with the exception of organised culinary hiking tours that are also offered by the regional tourist board (Bregenzerwald Tourismus GmbH, 2021). The list includes farm visits with the possibility of feeding or milking animals, visitations of alpine dairies, hiking routes to alpine dairies, guided tours through cheese making facilities in the valley, cheese tastings, cheese making workshops and an alpine dairy museum. In Bregenzerwald, each of these attractions exists in multitude by many different dairies or farms (KäseStraße Bregenzerwald, 2019b).

### **3.3. Methodology**

#### **3.3.1. Goal of the analysis**

I aim to test the expectations raised from the literature regarding the engagement of multiple food tourism stakeholders and the linkages between them in semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviews of individuals are ideal to understand the context of actions from the personal perspective of representative actors. In case studies where interactions and interconnections of actors are tried to be understood, it is in fact a strength that the analysis of the researcher is based on the subjective perceptions because subjective perceptions are, in the end, what decides whether an action is taken and which action is appropriate. Deciding to become active in food tourism, to offer a guided tour, a farm shop or a food tasting are all examples of such an action that is ultimately, and perhaps mainly, determined by the perceptions of one's possibilities and the expected costs and benefits. Moreover, through assessing motivations and attitudes toward cheese in both regions, I aim to get a better view on the institutional settings and the room for manoeuvre for regional development initiated by food tourism.

### 3.3.2. Semi-structured interviews

A key goal of qualitative research is often to identify a structure or concept that acts as the basis of human action through personal expression (Helfferich, 2004, p.20). This is frequently named theory-building, which is misleading because, as in this case, a theoretical framework might already exist. What qualitative interviews can achieve is gaining an understanding of how pillars of that framework actually function inherently and how they interact in real life. Calling for stakeholder collaboration, leadership and communication and information flows are probably keywords that find an easy consensus for any regional development strategy. Instead, the goal of the interviews here is to understand what creates or what hinders these facilitators as Lee et al. (2016) call them. This will be done by gaining insights in the approaches of tourism and agri-food experts to food tourism in the case study regions. The experts may have different perspectives and assumptions about food tourism. However, those can be made clear through open questions before questions are narrowed down to the explicit pieces of interest according to the expectations from the literature. This way it is possible to determine what plays a role for the decisions that the experts take for their organisations as well as for the decisions that their members or affiliated stakeholders take for their businesses.

Furthermore, the course of the conversation is dependent on the congruency of the interviewee's perspectives and assumptions with the interviewer's (Bortz & Döring, 2016, p.365ff.). However, a semi-structured question scheme allows to react through both giving way to the direction set out by the interviewee as well as correcting the direction of the conversation through a different, perhaps more explicit question. The question scheme therefore outlines a frame for the conversation within which flexibility is mandated to allow for unexpected new insights as well.

#### 3.3.2.1. Expert-interviews

In expert-interviews, the interviewee is interesting due to their particular feature as an expert in a particular field and less so because of their characteristics as an individual person (Flick, 2011, p.214). This has certain implications that can deepen, but also limit the value of the information provided. A strength of the expert interview is that, as a representative of a group, the expert's statements have meaningfulness beyond themselves. The norms and values (or rules and assumptions) that shape the professional work of the expert are relevant not only for themselves but also for other stakeholders in the field of interest. Furthermore, the expert often also has the possibility to shape the conditions that other actors in the same field deal with (ibid.). Therefore, the practical knowledge about the rules, collective orientations and social structures that apply to decision-making processes and any actions relevant to the field are, in this case study, even more insightful than systemised fact-centred information that the expert possesses due to their position (Bogner et al., 2002. cit. a. Flick, 2011, p.215). The expert interview is also stated as a suitable method for a comparative perspective on the content and

variation of expert knowledge of representatives of different institutions in a field (Flick, 2011, p.217).

The most severe issue with expert-interviews is the dependence of the researcher on the understanding of the exact research matter by the potential interviewee or their institution. This applies to the phase of the interview request, when it is difficult for the researcher to identify the true expert on the matter within an institution from the outside and one is dependent on the requested institution to recognise the content and emphasis of the researcher's work. This also applies subsequently, when the interviewee is expected to transpose complex matters from the field of research that are new to their well-known working environment and vice versa, which can be a challenge. Overconcentrating on the expert's professional role can of course limit the range of potentially relevant information (ibid., p.215ff.).

To prevent the drawbacks and limit the damage to the information content in the case of an unfortunate course of an expert-interview, input from more open interview methods like the half-standardised interview is taken into account in the set-up of the interviews. Here, different types of questions - from open to explicit or confrontational - are prepared for each thematic section to allow for bigger flexibility depending on how congruent the assumptions of the interviewer and the interviewee are (ibid., p.203ff.).

### 3.3.2.2. Choice of interview partners

To test the implementation or the potential of food tourism as a tool for regional development, the experts interviewed are representatives of the institutional organisations dealing with affected sectors. Those organisations, of which I aimed to interview one representative per region, are

- the highest or central food tourism institution in the region,
- the regional tourist board,
- the regional development agency,
- public administration on regional or local level and
- a food or agriculture development agency.

This selection of interview partners was also approached from a perspective on the potential content that could be collected and from whom it could be collected. Interview partners ought to have some overlapping in their field of work to be able to combine the findings and gain a holistic understanding of food tourism. While this includes the possibility of reconfirming what others have said, it is also important to allow for contradicting statements. This means ensuring that the organisations are not too strongly affiliated with each other so that the researcher only gets one side of the story. Therefore, a detailed overview of what can be expected from whom in connection to which research question was elaborated. It can be found in [Table 3](#) in

Appendix A. Table 3 was later used to draw up the concrete questions for the semi-structured questions schemes targeted at specific research questions.

Before that, the institutions had to be searched for in both regions and were found rather easily in the region Bregenzerwald. That is because the central food tourism organisation in Bregenzerwald, the *CheeseRoute* organisation (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*), lists all its partners, among which are the regional tourist board (*Bregenzerwald Tourismus GmbH*), the regional development agency (*REGIOalplanungsgemeinschaft Bregenzerwald*), the regional administration of Vorarlberg (*Amt der Vorarlberger Landesregierung*) and the national agriculture development agency (*AgrarMarkt Austria*) (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*, 2019).

In the region Noord-Holland, identifying those stakeholders was not as easy. The Alkmaar cheese market is the highest or central food tourism attraction but is operated by *Alkmaar Marketing*, a destination management organisation (DMO) owned by the municipality Alkmaar. It is debateable if *Alkmaar Marketing* is to be recognised the highest or central food tourism institution but due to lack of alternatives, it was preliminarily assumed so. The regional tourist board used to be the *VVV Hart van Noord-Holland*, the regional branch of the *Vereeniging voor Vreemdelingenverkeer* (VVV) for the area North of the North Sea Canal. This organisation and its website, however, were recently reintegrated in the *Alkmaar Prachtstad* website, which is operated by *Alkmaar Marketing*. Additionally, there are several DMOs in Noord-Holland with partially overlapping regions they work in. Most notable is the *Holland Boven Amsterdam* platform that works in the region North of Amsterdam, i.e., the identical region, and also operates several local DMOs like *Visit Medemblik*, the *Westfriese Omringdijk* and *Ik hou van Hoorn*. Then, there is also the independent DMO *Marketing Zaanstreek* that operates in an overlapping area with the already mentioned DMO *Laag Holland*.

Furthermore, there is no regional development agency in Noord-Holland. In fact, Noord-Holland is the only Province in the Netherlands without a *Regionale Ontwikkelings Maatschappij* (ROM), which is planned to come to existence in 2021 as a consequence of the economic crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the ROM have taken over the role of administrators of "Corona Bridging Loans" (Noord-Holland, 2020). The Province of Noord-Holland, on the other hand, already became active in 2020 in three categories of regional development: food, biodiversity and recreation & tourism (Noord-Holland, 2021). Finally, there is no publicly organised national or provincial food or agriculture development agency that appears in any connection with cheese-related food tourism attractions or cheese-production. There are some organisations on a lower scale that try to take up some of those tasks and responsibilities. *Westfriese Tafel* (Westfrisian Dining Table) and *Smaakvol Noord-Holland* (Tasteful Noord-Holland) are examples of food-focused organisations. The *Bond van Boerderijzuivelbereiders* (Association of Farm Dairy Preparers) and *Water, Land en Dijken* (Water, Land and Dikes) are examples of agriculture-focused organisations. They of course have different priorities from gastronomes over retailers to cheese makers and farmers.

### 3.3.3. Restrictions and challenges along the way

After initially identifying the suspectedly relevant institutions in Noord-Holland, a fragmented picture of relevant food-tourism attractions presented online was recognised. As food tourism attractions were scarce and spread out all over the different websites of the named organisations in Noord-Holland, it was necessary to gather more information about both the organisation of food tourism attractions and their stakeholders. Many important stakeholders, however, refused to respond to inquiries, such as the municipalities of Edam and Alkmaar, the VVV tourist office in Edam, the DMOs *Ik hou van Hoorn* and *Holland Boven Amsterdam*, the regional gastronomy development organisations *Westfriese Tafel* and *Smaakvol Noord-Holland* and the agri-food sales organisation *Verkoopstalletjes.nl*.

More severe set-backs to this research were the neglects to information inquiries by the project team of the Province Noord-Holland working on the regional development visions regarding food and recreation & tourism, as well as the regional managers for Alkmaar, Westfriesland and Zaanstreek-Waterland that work for the Province Noord-Holland. The latter cases are problematic because a different staff member at the Province, who declined an interview invitation, referred to the responsibility of "the regions" in matters of tourism. On pursuit of food tourism strategies initiated by municipalities and DMOs, an interview invitation to *Alkmaar Marketing*, which is arguably the most important DMO regarding cheese-related food tourism, was also declined. This meant that the VVV tourist office in Alkmaar that operates on the square of the cheese market and cooperates with a supplier of the cheese market became the highest food tourism institution in my interview plan.

Many municipalities in vicinity of Alkmaar were well aware of the limited number of small-scaled offerings in their area and the respective DMO that is active there and referred to those. None of them seemed to be able or willing to set out an own tourism strategy related to cheese or to initiate a cooperation process between several municipalities like the staff member at the Province suggested.

Consequently, the approach had to be adapted and interview requests were sent out to the main participative companies at the historical cheese markets. At the Alkmaar cheese market, those are *CONO Kaasmakers*, a large cooperative which produces the *Beemster* cheese, and *Zijerveld*, which belongs to the *Campina Friesland* group. The Edam cheese market is also operated with cheese by *CONO Kaasmakers* but the weighing house in front of which the market takes place belongs to *Henri Willig*, who consequently also take their share of sales through visitors of the market. What makes *Henri Willig* particularly interesting is the fact that it is the company that has been operating tourist experiences based on cheese, for example at historical cheese farms, for the longest and primarily produces cheese for tourists that come to the Netherlands from abroad.

### 3.3.4. Data collection

In the light of the outlined complications, the interview plan had to be reorganised to the design of table 2:

<b>Type of organisation</b>	<b>Noord-Holland</b>	<b>Bregenzerwald</b>
Highest or central food tourism institution in the region	<i>VVV Alkmaar</i>	<i>KäseStraße Bregenzerwald</i> (also referred to as <i>CheeseRoute Bregenzerwald</i> )
Regional tourist board/DMO	<i>Laag Holland</i>	<i>Bregenzerwald Tourismus GmbH</i> (also referred to as <i>Tourismus Bregenzerwald</i> )
Regional development agency	n.a.	<i>REGIOalplanungsgemeinschaft Bregenzerwald</i> (also referred to as <i>Regio Bregenzerwald</i> )
Public administration on regional or local level	n.a.	— <sup>3</sup>
Food or agriculture development agency	<i>Water, Land en Dijken</i>	<i>Netzwerk Kulinarik</i> (part of <i>AgrarMarkt Austria</i> )
Prominent private food-tourism stakeholder	<i>CONO Kaasmakers</i>  <i>Henri Willig</i>	<i>Metzler Käse-Molke GmbH</i>

Table 2: Interview plan

Five semi-structured question schemes – one per type of organisation – were prepared to ensure both stakeholder-tailored questions as well as comparability in the analysis between the two regions. Thus, every semi-structured scheme will apply to both regions respectively. The five semi-structured interview outlines can be found in Appendix B. The names and positions of the specific interviewee from the individual organisations will not be mentioned as their personal identity plays a subordinate role, at most, to the knowledge and experience gained through their work for the organisation, which is what is interesting for this work.

The five interviews in Bregenzerwald were conducted in German, the native language of the interviewees. Translations of the interview schemes as well as transcript sections were

<sup>3</sup> Attempts for interview invitations in this region for this stakeholder group were not undertaken for two reasons. Firstly, comparability could not be achieved after the invitation decline in Noord-Holland. Secondly, the two regional development agencies in Bregenzerwald are owned by the municipalities of the region or act as an administrative bridgehead to the regional government (REGIOalplanungsgemeinschaft Bregenzerwald, 2021; Regionalentwicklung Vorarlberg, 2021). The range of potential information that could be given by the public administration is therefore congruent with the range of the regional development agencies. Of the two agencies, the latter, affiliated to the regional government was not chosen because it mostly deals with EU-LEADER projects, but none of which were relevant to this research.

conducted by the author himself. The five interviews in Noord-Holland were conducted in English, the presumed first foreign language of the interviewees. Given the fact that the interviewees work in an international and/or tourism context, the language barrier was expected to play a negligible role. All interviews were planned to last approximately 45 minutes and conducted between November 2020 and April 2021.<sup>4</sup> The interviews were fully transcribed in the original language. Sections of the German transcripts were translated once deemed relevant according to the process described in the following.

### 3.3.5. Data explication and content analysis

Scientific content analysis of qualitative interviews is based on two principles for interpretation: guidance by theory and by rules (Mayring, 2010, p.57). Theory guiding through the process of carefully phrasing research questions (see [chapter 2](#)) allows precise answers that enable comprehensibility with regard to the content. What could be relevant to the research question was therefore predefined in the theoretical framework. [Table 1](#) (see chapter 2) gives an overview of the expectations from the literature and the relevant factors to these theoretical expectations. Should the words listed in the third column of the table or broadly defined synonyms and examples thereof be mentioned in the transcripts of the interview, this text passage qualifies for the content analysis.

Subsequently, rules-guidance is needed for the proportion of information that does not fit exactly into the grid of elements deemed relevant according to Table 1 and furthermore for the proportion that goes beyond what theory would suggest. Following a set procedure to deal with this information, first and foremost ensures reliability in the form of reproducibility. Moreover, the procedure allows effective use-making of the gathered data. In this case, the procedure of choice is called explication. "The aim [of this method] is to gather additional material to the specific questionable text passages (terms, sentences, ...) in order to increase the understanding of what the text passage means, describes and explains" (ibid., p.65). The strength of this analysis method is the fact that it allows for assembling unexpected information. Therefore, it is the ideal complementary partner to the theory-based first step of the content analysis.

The name of the method already reveals the procedure in which text passages that require interpretation are made explicit with the help of additional material (ibid., p.85). Firstly, the narrow context will be admitted, which in this case is the interview transcript of the same interviewee. Secondly, broader context information will be consulted according to the content of the respective text passage, if necessary, in order to understand it and its importance for the answer of the respective research question. In a first step, the remaining interview transcripts will serve as broader context. In a second step, a closer look will be taken at the information that has been gathered during all inquiries for this research. Consequently, quotations of text

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<sup>4</sup> The long period of time was a result of interviewee declines and readaptations as described above.

passages from the transcripts can then not only be used to underline a statement, but to deliver the statement that gives an (unexpected) answer to the respective research question itself. Context information gathered – if needed over the whole research project – will then explain and underline this statement.

## **4. Findings on the research questions**

In this chapter, the six research questions outlined in [chapter 2](#) will be answered for each region. Following the methodological procedure described above, the analysis of the interview transcripts will be based on relevant answers from all interviews from one region to the respective research question. Consequently, also the build-up of the findings-subchapters will follow the line of the factors that were deemed relevant by the literature (summarised in [Table 1](#)). Moreover, the information provided in this chapter is derived directly from single interviews or from multiple interviews that reported on the same matter. Ultimately, each research question will be answered in a conclusion of theory-guided and unexpected findings. The reasons for presenting the findings on the research questions for both regions separately are twofold. Firstly, it improves the readability as the research questions logically build upon each other. Secondly, the research questions focus on the actions and attitudes of stakeholders which makes the lead-up to the answer too context-dependent to compare it directly. The direct comparison will be carried out on a strategic level in chapter 5.

### **4.1. Noord-Holland**

#### **4.1.1. What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?**

Naturally, the benefits to the regional economy striven for by food tourism stakeholders differ in the nature of their operation. A nominal food tourism attraction provider like *Henri Willig* bases their business and consequently their revenue almost entirely on tourists, while cost-benefit considerations are more complex for a large domestic cheese producer like *CONO Kaasmakers*. Lastly, it was shown in the interviews that the organisations and institutions sometimes struggle to bring the goals of their partners in line with their own goals.

Marketing activities and actions by the businesses and attraction providers to have marketing activities done for them are primarily taken for the benefit of oneself (*Laag Holland*). A lack of joint marketing of the region and its cheese which would have been suggested by the literature had to be noticed. This has to do with a significant fragmentation of the responsible organisations and the polarised size distribution of the relevant businesses. On the one hand, tourist information offices by *VVV* are not responsible for marketing the region and its attractions. The *VVV* in Alkmaar is therefore also not responsible for ensuring that attractions are made marketable. On the other hand, *VVV* tourist offices are responsible for financing their own operations. This way, large tourist operators with more resources available for the promotion of their activities are likely to be treated preferentially over small agri-food businesses or farmers. For large agri-food businesses who can afford to pay tourist organisations for their help, synergistic cooperation was recognised both for *CONO Kaasmakers* and *Henri Willig* in singular cases of collaborations with organisations. *CONO*

*Kaasmakers* as supplier of cheese at the cheese market in Alkmaar rents part of the VVV tourist information next to the square of the cheese market for a sort of shop in a shop construction. *Henri Willig* received artifacts and assistance by the town museum of Edam for the opening of their "Story of Edam Cheese" experience.

Smaller agri-food businesses and farmers interested in offering something of touristic value have to cooperate with the destination marketing organisations and agricultural or food organisations like *Water, Land en Dijken* to profit from marketing activities.

*"Farmers have their own company and they're not touristic-minded, or they're not entrepreneurial owners like in tourism, they have some tourism activities, really small, but they need to be helped to make it known that they offer. And that's why we thought we should make this map<sup>5</sup> because we are an organisation who is really locally focused and not commercially focused on big tourism and that"* (*Water, Land en Dijken*).

The DMO *Laag Holland* confirmed that many small businesses in the agri-food, gastronomy and hospitality sectors are open to projects that market the region for food tourists, but do not expect to contribute to those marketing activities. The most effective marketing for the region and its food is therefore done privately by larger businesses. This does not lead to a distributional effect of tourists among all the food tourism attraction providers, but to a concentration among the biggest with the most marketing know-how.

Food tourism attractions by the large providers target foreign tourists mainly. This confirms that the potential of stimulating foreign consumer markets through touristic attractions is recognised by private actors. It is clear that the domestically successful cheese producer *CONO Kaasmakers* aims to target consumers from their most important foreign markets Germany and Belgium with their recently developed tourism strategy. Interestingly though, the foreign market in the case of *Henri Willig* is not so much an export market, but rather a domestic foreigners' market.

Other goals of food tourism stakeholders, like attracting external resources, sharing information and knowledge or improving and sustaining liveability in rural areas, were most notably mentioned by the government-funded organisation *Water Land en Dijken*, whereas the DMO *Laag Holland* in general focuses on sharing information and knowledge, how and which businesses could be expanded or on adjusting their offering for tourists and benefitting from that.

Based on the literature, it was expected that businesses participate in food tourism offerings in order to directly increase their revenue or indirectly capitalise from synergistic cooperation with partner and supply businesses. In Noord-Holland, the large food tourism operators did recognise the possibility to capitalise on direct revenue flow through foreign tourists. Smaller operators often aim for local customers without the need of providing a touristic attraction

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<sup>5</sup> *Water, Land en Dijken* have produced a tourist map that lists local attractions together with small-scale agri-food businesses in order to highlight and better promote the latter.

themselves. No synergies were noticed in regard to marketing the region as a food tourism destination, of which smaller enterprises could benefit. Instead, only the large operators knew how to use cooperation with organisations and promote the region for their sake. As a result, the small size of businesses and the large fragmentation of organisations reduce the means or willingness to engage in synergistic cooperation. The interviewed organisations focus on sharing information and knowledge but not on engaging in projects themselves like a business partner. Thus, there was no aim for synergistic cooperation noticed.

#### 4.1.2. Are food trails and local markets both adequate food tourism measures to encourage shortening local food supply chains?

A food tourism measure or attraction can induce the shortening of food supply chains if visitors to the attraction together with locals create a big enough demand for high-quality local products elsewhere in the region. Given that the visitors are unfamiliar where to experience the high-quality products or in which ways it is possible to experience them, the central food tourism attraction – in this case the cheese market, be it in Alkmaar or Edam – must be able to channel demand by visitors with a preference for authentic local produce. The reality pictured from the interviews, however, looks like a clear separation of offerings for tourists and offerings for locals is prevalent.

*“On the cheese market [in Alkmaar], yes. There’s a lot of advertisement, lots of tours are of course advertised, because there that’s where all the tourists are. If you go to the more traditional cheese shop, where the Dutch people actually buy their daily cheese, there they are focused on selling cheese, not on tourists” (CONO Kaasmakers).*

In fact, the traditional cheese markets are rather to be considered a touristic event with opportunities of doing business on the side than a place for doing business with local food products and an openness to tourists on the side. The first and foremost implication thereof is that they are not a selling point for a large number of farmers and cheese producers to offer a wide range of cheeses. What follows is that no gastronomy business will be linked to the market as there is no platform where the best cheese producers compete for clients. What is more, the gastronomes are unable to refer to a handpicked specialty cheese from the market.

The tours that are advertised on the side of the cheese market in Alkmaar (CONO Kaasmakers) could be an activity that includes several smaller local businesses, which would accord to what the literature suggests. However, it is unclear if those tours include any cheese producers at all since there was no mention thereof by the VVV Alkmaar after a question about options to learn more about the cheese after the cheese market.

The cheese market as an attraction builds strongly on the traditions in the region so that even the persons selling the cheese for CONO Kaasmakers are dressed up in traditional clothing (VVV Alkmaar & CONO Kaasmakers). As such, it is traditional but not authentic. That may be enough to attract crowds of tourists, but not people interested in the culture of authentic high-

quality cheese production and consumption. The interviewee from the DMO *Laag Holland* stressed that local food as an attraction means two different things in the region: big tourist attractions like the cheese markets draw mainly foreign visitors, while making local food available and highlighting it can draw a lot of local people because they increasingly value produce from their own region highly.

The expected function of the market as a place of first contact and starting point cannot be confirmed or dismissed due to the uncertainty which other activities are offered next to the market. However, it has to be questioned, just as the expected factor of a low-effort-barrier to make contact in the context of a physically overcrowded setting.

The gained impression supports Hjalager's (2002) assessment that "mega food fairs mainly support the continued specialization in food production and globalization of the markets" (p.24f.). That, however, does not mean that cooperation does not take place. The large cheese producers organise close cooperation and operations along supply chains within their own business sphere. *CONO Kaasmakers*, for example, have started their own *Beemster* cheese café in the centre of Alkmaar to enable food tourists to do more, if they are interested in further experiencing the cheese. The interviewed organisations are also aware that there is a large number of initiatives and small-scaled organisations that work together with small gastronomy businesses, shops and farmers to make local produce available in the region and shorten the supply chains (*Laag Holland & Water, Land en Dijken*). Yet, these efforts are not always interconnected and made aware to everyone. Most importantly for this research question, they also have nothing to do with the traditional cheese markets.

Based on the literature, it was expected that a food trail is more likely to be the adequate food tourism measure to encourage shortening local food supply chains than a local market. In Noord-Holland, the traditional markets played no part in shortening supply chains or promoting regional cooperation in more broad terms. The cheese markets are dominated by three large cheese producing companies which sell cheese directly to tourists on site. But besides that, the cheese markets are not part of cheese supply chains themselves. They also do not encourage other stakeholders to shorten supply chains through buying directly from regional producers because cheese markets are not places where a large number of cheese producers or stakeholders can be seen – or want to be seen – in order to promote their product. On a broader scale, shortening supply chains through food tourism implies creating a large enough amount of demand in order to make regional cooperation and operating with regional suppliers profitable. In Noord-Holland, there is no entity except for the cheese producer *CONO Kaasmakers* that eyes on both tourists as well as locals as their target group. Consequently, there is also no organisation affiliated to the cheese market that aims to achieve short supply chains or promote that touristically.

#### 4.1.3. Which factors can encourage regional actors of the agricultural and hospitality sectors to become involved in the definition and the management of food tourism product offerings?

*"To get one block to say: 'Listen guys, we are one cheese sector, let's step out all together.' I know that some people, they have tried it in the past, but in the end, all the producers and all the traders they go and find their own niche. So, yeah. I'm not sure. I think the Dutch are also a bit stubborn, everybody likes to do his own thing, and he wants to do it in his own way and I think it's quite healthy actually" (CONO Kaasmakers).*

In Noord-Holland, there is no overarching organisation that subordinates stakeholders from agriculture, tourism, gastronomy and hospitality for food tourism. This means the question who influences the goals that food tourism shall follow has to be approached differently than in the case where a single platform (operator) exists. In the case of Noord-Holland, one has to look at the network of smaller organisations that work primarily with their own share of farmers, gastronomists and tourist attraction providers – all of which also on a smaller scale – but also with other organisations.

Large producers, on the other hand, have their own network in which they organise different stakeholders they need for their business operations. *Henri Willig* ensures that the farmers who provide them with milk also have *Henri Willig* cheese at the farmer's farm shop and are in constant exchange with their partner tour operators to ensure that their tourist experiences fit in as many bus tours as possible. *CONO Kaasmakers* has recently decided to engage in food tourism wherever it is directly possible to position their brand *Beemster* explicitly. They operate cheese shops in Amsterdam by themselves, are building their own *Beemster Experience*, rent a shop in a shop at the VVV office in Alkmaar and operate a *Beemster* cheese café in Alkmaar. According to the interview conducted, *CONO Kaasmakers* so far refrains from influencing the availability of their cheese at venues not branded by *Beemster*, like farm shops or restaurants. Interestingly, what has spurred their engagement in food tourism is the possibility to attract people who pay a premium price, which accords to the theoretical expectations:

*"Other cheese producers that actually make the small cheeses which aren't that good of a quality but very nice for gifting, [...] they get very, very good prices for this item. They ask 25-30 euros a kilo which is crazy for the product, but it's nicely packed, it's nicely presented, it's a beautiful gift, so people buy it" (CONO Kaasmakers).*

Within this noninstitutionalised network, there is no organisation that stands out as a leader or as centrepiece that is connected with more organisations than others. This has of course to do with the fact that many touristic and destination marketing organisations work on small regional scales, but there is also large fragmentation among the agricultural and food organisations – so large that in fact each contact person knew different agri-food organisations and had never come across the other organisations I confronted them with.

Looking at the two main expectations from the literature, “economic necessity” and “social capital”, it became clear that the former may be a factor in why smaller stakeholders start a food tourism offering, but not in the engagement within a larger regional network. The difference between large- and small-scale producers is too large, not only for the possibilities to attract people but also for the willingness to attract people. Fearing visitors coming in busloads at once, foreign tourists are not the target group of the small-scale food tourism stakeholders according to the interviewed organisations. Overavailability of tourists may also cause a lack of initiative to make their business interesting for tourists and to promote it with touristic organisations (*Laag Holland & Water, Land en Dijken*).

The theoretical expectation that cheese producers who are too small to compete on domestic or foreign consumer markets could be dependent on attracting new visitors did not hold because a different strategy is pursued that targets domestic visitors. This results in fewer visitors, but visitors who are able to come back again frequently. Consequently, the touristic map by *Water, Land en Dijken* targets “people who are going cycling for a day, residents who are going out mostly” (*Water, Land en Dijken*).

Paradoxically, the non-agricultural food tourism stakeholders, whose issues of overcrowding or overavailability of tourists was temporarily dissolved through the COVID-19 pandemic, still did not engage in food tourism activities for the time after. On instruction of the *Cheese Museum* in Alkmaar, the *VVV Alkmaar* had been working on establishing a “cheese package” that includes the *Cheese Museum*, cheese shops and restaurants with local cheese and would work through reciprocal promotion discount giving. The approached businesses, however, were not ready to participate, so that not a single business was communicable after half a year of efforts (*VVV Alkmaar*).

Perhaps it is due to so such experiences that none of the interviewed organisations sees it as their permanent task to encourage the touristic opening of cheese producers and farmers. The DMO *Laag Holland* made similar experiences:

*“We did try to give them like a set of tools so that they could make those tours, but they didn’t really use it and it turns out that they didn’t really sort of carry the idea because it didn’t come from themselves. So, we stopped doing that” (Laag Holland).*

Social capital was expected to act as an enhancer of cooperation that can be created or facilitated by institutions. It is only logical that a lack thereof acts as a barrier to innovation and cooperation like in another case described by the DMO *Laag Holland*'s interviewee:

*“They would be frustrated to promote somebody else’s business in their own business. I think there is a lot of personal things going on, why certain businesses work together as well, because they should or could” (Laag Holland).*

What was not so much anticipated by the literature was that social capital is not only important for cooperation between entrepreneurs, but in this case as well as in the case of Bregenzerwald, social capital is perhaps even more relevant towards visitors.

In addition to farming knowledge, food tourism activities require some social skills of a salesperson or a service provider. But essentially, food tourism changes the operations and the daily life of farmers completely once guests are present on their property (*Water, Land en Dijken*).

Based on the literature, it was expected that a lack of competitiveness, especially among small businesses, presents an incentive to actively engage within an integrative food tourism platform, and trust and social capital are a facilitator for the projected acceptance or success of their initiatives within the platform. In Noord-Holland, scale was the only factor that was noticed to correlate with engagement in the management of food tourism product offerings. This derives from the capacities related to the size of the business, but also to the number of tourists that can be attracted and hosted. Factors that potentially discouraged engagement were found. The existence of many smaller organisations also has the consequence that there is no big network that integrates the interests of a larger group of stakeholders and pools resources. This reduces the range of valuable output that single stakeholders could demand in return for their input. Furthermore, a willingness to influence the management of the food tourism in the region arguably requires an interest in attracting more foreign visitors to food related businesses. This is often not the case with smaller businesses in Noord-Holland for which social capital must be regarded in their personal relations towards visitors.

#### 4.1.4. Is a regional agency/platform for food tourism additional to existing tourism administrations necessary?

*"I am not sure [if there should be or could be an organisation that works closer with the agricultural businesses for tourism] because everybody in the end has [their] own interests. For example, if you look at the Gruyere in Switzerland, they sell the Gruyere worldwide and they promote it as one theme. And the Gouda, everyone fights for his own sandwich here. Everybody say[s]: 'Hey, I have the best Gouda ever!' And then you taste it and it's rubbish, but everybody... There's quite [some] producers and lots of traders that actually buy the product and put their name on it, and then they start shouting: 'Hey, this is the best product ever!' This market is too fragmented to get one lot [together]" (CONO Kaasmakers).*

As stated above, there are currently several organisations that deal with the interests of farmers and gastronomes in order to shorten supply chains so that they can offer customers and visitors local products and regional speciality dishes directly. This corresponds to a need for close cooperation with the partner businesses and farmers. At the same time, the scope is so narrow that the expectation of an inclusive organisation or platform that connects the interests of the different stakeholders was not confirmed in Noord-Holland. Moreover, organisations that reach out to tourists are separated between those who host and advise the visitors at the holiday destination and those who work with the touristic product itself that is promoted to potential visitors.

An advantage of this fragmentation is that the multiple sectors that an overarching platform would have to reach out to are now dealt with by organisations that specialise in the issues they know best about. A disadvantage is that overarching principles are not transported in a holistic manner. There does not seem to be a consensus among food tourism stakeholders in Noord-Holland to have their region primarily associated with cheese. Therefore, none of the organisations have been working on convincing (potential) tourists to associate the region as the place to try the best Dutch cheese or to ensure that those stakeholders with the best cheese are promoted. Overall, the asset "premium quality" is found to be used only by cheese producers to promote their own product, but was not used by the interviewed organisations to particularly attract and direct a niche crowd.

There was no approach observed where quality of cheese was considered as a criterion for who is promoted. This again may have to do with the spatial fragmentation of the relevant organisations that could organise such quality measurements for a larger region than just the municipality of Alkmaar or just the rural areas ascribed to Laag Holland. On the other hand, the large number of organisations allows a higher number of stakeholders that are interacting with regional organisations due to the proactive outreach actions by the organisations. Given the stated experiences by the DMO *Laag Holland*, where small businesses simply let go of the responsibility of marketing measures for themselves, this may be a positive aspect to keep smaller businesses involved. Accordingly, *Water, Land en Dijken* takes up their role as supportive or advisory agency as well:

*"These farmers don't always have their own website for example, and everyone asks if you start to go out [to promote your product or activity]: 'What is your website?' 'I don't have a website, but I do make lovely cheese, and I want people to know'. 'So, if you don't have a website, we won't promote it'. Then it ends. And I think that's wrong. So, we try to help them this way" (Water, Land en Dijken).*

What the theory suggested, however, is that an institution that recognises prevalent issues can both solve them sustainably and incorporate the stakeholders with such issues into an overall touristic offering with a fair chance to profit from it. If the latter steps have to be done by a different organisation or are dependent on a different organisation, it cannot be ensured that these steps take place. That is where it becomes an issue that there is no consensus on the goals between the organisations and a lack of awareness what the different organisations or businesses are doing.

*"What I know about is like the tourist, I know what they want to see and what they want to [do] but I don't know the reasons and the ideas of the producers" (VVV Alkmaar).*

Based on the literature, it was expected that – irrespective of the limits to the capacities of tourist offices – a platform specialised for food tourism promises better outcomes because of more complex tasks to be covered for food. In Noord-Holland, no such platform or network was found, but instead many smaller organisations took on particular tasks for particular aspects of food tourism. While this accommodates the complexity of multi- and transsectoral

tasks, this does not solve the issue of holism or overarching goals that are shared between the stakeholders of different sectors. These issues would require a platform or a publicly led organisation with leadership competences.

4.1.5 How important is the complementarity of food tourism offers with "other visitor products such as cultural and natural heritage attractions" (Hall, 2012, p.50)? Are they competitors for public support?

Overall, there is an awareness for the embeddedness of food tourism and a shared offering of cultural heritage attractions among all interviewed stakeholders. As mentioned above, this awareness has not been negotiated into one story line in which cheese-production, -selling and -consumption are fitted into a holistic picture that is presented from different perspectives by different stakeholders. Thus, from a touristic perspective, that package offered to tourists contains many different attractions, but the package is not holistic in a sense that there is a common understanding of what makes this region interesting to visit and how those things fit in with each other. Consequently, the different tourist attraction providers are competitors for marketing support by the different organisations. While *Laag Holland* said "our main focus lies on hiking and biking, not as much on gastronomy", *Water, Land en Dijken* has been working on putting farmers and their specialty products on a map. *VVV Alkmaar*, on the other hand, stressed the word "package", in which many traditional tourism and sightseeing activities were included in addition to a visit to the cheese market in Alkmaar.

*"The Cheese Market is not like a whole day activity, so people most of the time want to make a combination, so then it's like a canal tour or a city walk. [...] there's not that [many cheese attractions] ... It's like Cheese Market and Cheese Museum and some cheese shops but there are no other specific cheese things. So, like day packages, it's always a combination with something which can be done in the city, to explore the city. So, it's more in the city centre of Alkmaar. So, it's not all about the cheese" (VVV Alkmaar).*

This again has to do with the fact that organisations closer to smaller businesses and farms like *Laag Holland* and *Water, Land en Dijken* focus on domestic visitors and the larger producers focus on foreign tourists. Furthermore, food tourism at smaller producers is not always seen as a viable option to avoid overcrowding. A few existing small-scale tourism operations that focus on food or a combination with other aspects of the cultural heritage were mentioned throughout the interviews, but none seemed to have served as an example for engagement by any organisation or business for more small-scaled food tourism activities.

However, cultural heritage and embeddedness is anything but unimportant to the large cheese producers. They play a major part in the existing and planned experiences by *Henri Willig* and *CONO Kaasmakers* and the story that is told there about cheese and their business. Yet, their attractions are often not combined or easily combinable with activities which small businesses

may profit from. This may apply to commercial tours offered at the side of traditional cheese markets as mentioned earlier, or offered in a package prior to the visit alongside other mass-tourism sites like *Keukenhof* or the *Rijksmuseum* (*Henri Willig*).

Regarding public support on their planned *Beemster Experience*, the *CONO Kaasmakers* interviewee said that there is no financial support and they really have to “push and convince people to make this happen”, given the strict regulations of the UNESCO heritage protection of the *Beemster polder*. Furthermore, he expressed understanding therefore:

*“In Noord-Holland, the question is ‘Okay, it’s so busy here, we don’t want more’. So, of course other Provinces will get more support because it’s in their interest. Here, in our province they say ‘Yeah, it’s busy enough. So, we’re not going to spend money to get even more tourists. They will come anyway” (CONO Kaasmakers).*

Further insights on public support would have required interviews with members of government administrations which unfortunately were not granted.

Based on the literature, it was expected that all tourism stakeholders realise that integrating various tourist attractions to a holistic tourism package is advised in rural areas. However, public institutions may have reservations to cooperate in order to protect their range of operation for which they receive funding. In Noord-Holland, food tourism can be regarded as an addition to traditional tourist attractions or activities. Complementarity in a narrow sense would, however, require a setting of food tourism presented or conducted in a form of togetherness that combines tourism elements like cheese and nature for instance. There are single attractions or activities that embed cheese or food in another touristic setting like cycling routes that pass by agri-food businesses (*Laag Holland*). These, however, are targeted at domestic visitors, which leaves the impression behind that every organisation feeds for themselves and their own stakeholders. During the respective interviews, no signs of competition or rivalry were noticed between the organisations. One interviewee indicated that there is enough funding available for the many organisations to do their own thing. Representatives of public administration were, however, not available to confirm or dismiss this (*Water, Land en Dijken*).

#### 4.1.6. What role do landscapes, peripherality and transportation infrastructure play for establishing a food tourism product?

*“We refer to ourselves as well as Amsterdam’s backyard, so I think we benefit a lot of our location that it’s so close to Amsterdam and that it’s easy for people to come to the region and also I think like the image that a lot of foreigners have of the Netherlands in general is of course, you know, the traditional costumes, the clogs, the cheese, the cows, it’s flat, windmills, you know the whole standard fixture. That you can find it in Laag Holland because it’s a bit like the time has stood still, because it’s still very rural, you can find everything that I just mentioned and still it’s only 10-15 min from Amsterdam*

*so it's very easy for foreigners that come to Amsterdam to get to see the traditional Holland and in that case traditional Dutch cheese" (Laag Holland).*

If peripherality is defined by large distances to the next larger centre of economic activity, then it is clear that Noord-Holland and the area studied in Noord-Holland will not classify as particularly peripheral. Looking at distances to potential foreign visitors and their transportation options, Noord-Holland will seem rather remote for most countries. A direct consequence is that a focus must lie on the domestic market and typically, large operators find it easier to apply foci on separate target groups.

As in most rural areas, tranquillity is found to be valued highly, but the difference in Noord-Holland is that it is not always the status quo, but a pursued goal:

*"It's horrible because it's so crowded. And people just stay for three hours and then they're out again. So, we do try to focus on getting people to stay a bit longer and not just sort of in and out. So, there is a plus side to it, but there's definitely also a down side, that is short visits and then they will go back to Amsterdam" (Laag Holland).*

The mentioned plus side is that residents from Amsterdam and its surroundings give stakeholders of tourism in general and small food producers in particular the possibility to choose a different target group other than foreign visitors that come from Amsterdam in an organised bus trip and the seasonal group of families that above all stay in proximity to the coast west of Alkmaar. According to *Water, Land en Dijken*, it also has another positive impact in many domestic organisations that deal with local products, and food supply chains are attracting more and more attention, which in turn creates even more awareness for the cause.

The touristic value attached to the landscape by the interviewees did not become entirely clear as the stakeholders of the region have yet to determine if they want to promote tourists discovering the rural landscapes of Noord-Holland or keep tourists away from the landscape and rather keep them focused at the big attractions to which they have predominantly been coming so far.

*"If you stimulate more visitors on farms, if the rural area then... You don't want on all those small roads, you don't want touring cars then you can't get there, the soil is [...] peet. You cannot have touring cars on those roads, it's a rural area. You're disrupting the nature, the birds. It's not... You don't want that" (Water, Land en Dijken).*

Both *Water, Land en Dijken* and the DMO *Laag Holand* aim at making landscapes available primarily for individual cyclists, while CONO *Kaasmakers* are building a *Beemster Experience* in the grassland landscape where they have no experiences on tourist numbers to expect.

*"If you drive here, it's beautiful, [but] it's not like the Eiffel Tower. [...] Tourists will always come because there are so many tourists here always, the whole year round" (CONO Kaasmakers).*

Based on the literature, it was expected that peripheral areas and their landscapes attract tourists seeking an escapist holiday, but create a hindrance due to the length of their journey. Transportation infrastructure is expected to play less of a role for tourists. In Noord-Holland, natural landscapes beside the sea are generally not regarded as the forte or backbone of tourism in the area. More importantly for the establishment of food tourism, the region under review cannot be classified as peripheral by all definitions. People with a permanent or holiday residence in Amsterdam find the regions of Alkmaar and Zaanstreek-Waterland in a distance often attributed to suburbs. This puts stress to the transportation mode of choice. The coach by which many foreign tourists visit the region has a hindering effect on the willingness of potential food tourism stakeholders to engage in food tourism on a smaller scale.

## **4.2. Bregenzerwald**

### 4.2.1. What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?

*“And if we succeed to link those values, those emotions, those stories, [...], if it is possible to link these attitudes with the product, then perhaps the price is no longer the decisive criterion for the consumer, but then he may find some values that are more important to him, and the argument of price then moves a little further into the background” (Metzler Käse-Molke).*

Overall, there is an understanding that food tourism is a tool to convince potential customers that cheese from Bregenzerwald is special through showing them how it is produced and consumed. Revenue can therefore be confirmed as an eventual goal – whether that means to maintain or to increase revenue. The interviews collectively showed that the strongest indirect effect which cheese-stakeholders in the region hope for is that food tourism facilitates marketing efforts. Marketing the product as well as marketing the region go along the lines of “small-scale production, of high-quality products, of regional production, of sustainability in the agricultural sector, the tourist sector and the commercial sector” (*Tourismus Bregenzerwald*).

Knowing that they make expensive cheese, farmers and cheese producers have decided to present themselves to tourists via their *CheeseRoute* organisation in order to justify the premium price they are asking for. The *CheeseRoute* organisation’s main responsibility is to promote all member businesses, i.e. cheese producers, processors (gastronomes), sellers and other touristic partners in the region through a set of actions. Mostly this is done through promoting the organisation and the brand “*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*” (*CheeseRoute Bregenzerwald*) itself (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*).

*“The original idea at that time was surely to say: we are part of this network; we are pooling our strengths in terms of marketing and of course expect a direct benefit in terms of sales and price” (KäseStraße Bregenzerwald).*

The responsibility for sales, however, lies independently with the member businesses. Each cheese-maker can therefore decide whether they focus on sales of their cheese to the retail and gastronomy sectors or on direct marketing to local consumers or visitors.

The *CheeseRoute* organisation itself sells a premium brand of cheese produced by *CheeseRoute* members in order to promote the brand *KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*, given that it has no control over how the cheese-makers pack and market their cheese and there is no guarantee that the brand *CheeseRoute* is promoted (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*) – an action from which all *CheeseRoute* members (also their competitors) would profit.

It is important to record that also in Bregenzerwald, the domestic consumer market plays an important role for the cheese producers. In fact, even the foundation of the *CheeseRoute* was built on concerns related to Austria's accession to the EU. Fearing that cheap milk would pour into Austria and the region Vorarlberg, the *CheeseRoute* was founded to proliferate the region as one of special cheese among Austrian consumers (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald, Tourismus Bregenzerwald, Regio Bregenzerwald & Metzler Käse-Molke*).

This was also mirrored in the descriptions of the beginnings of *Metzler Käse-Molke* in 1996: "My wife and I took over the farm, which was then a very small cattle farm. It was clear that there were two ways of either stopping or looking at alternatives" (*Metzler Käse-Molke*). Alternatives can of course take many forms, from producing different kinds of products to offering services like tastings, bed and breakfast on the farm, guided tours etc. Others simply try to stand out through visibility of their high-quality. With the *Netzwerk Kulinarik* (network culinary) there is another organisation that offers certifications and a wide range of advertising and training measures. Businesses in the agricultural, retail and gastronomy sectors therefore have multiple opportunities to reach out to tourists as far as they would like.

Attracting external resources – as far as the interviews have shown – play no role for the individual farmers or businesses. But there is an awareness that organisations with a professional management that act super-partes, like regional development agencies or the *CheeseRoute*, are able to attract public funding wherever possible.

Based on the literature, it was expected that businesses participate in food tourism offerings in order to directly increase their revenue or indirectly capitalise from synergistic cooperation with partner and supply businesses. In Bregenzerwald, synergies are expected to be achieved through the pooling of resources in the *CheeseRoute* organisation, not necessarily through self-initiated cooperation. In fact, the *CheeseRoute* was founded in order to market the region's cheese better and coherently. Making the region's cheese more accessible to tourists aims to increase the value of the cheese in the eye of the consumer. In the end, cheese producers hope for higher revenue from the cheese exported out of the region. Additionally, many, but far from all have added touristic activities or services to gain alternative, direct streams of income.

#### 4.2.2. Are food trails and local markets both adequate food tourism measures to encourage shortening local food supply chains?

*“The Käsestraße Bregenzerwald has been a network since 1998, not only [consisting] of cheese makers, cheese producers and dairies, but also [of] the craft, retail, gastronomy and hotel sectors. In principle, the CheeseRoute unites all those involved along the entire value chain, who at the time set themselves the goal of strengthening regional cooperation and simply expanding, developing and, of course, preserving the value creation in the region around the flagship product cheese” (KäseStraße Bregenzerwald).*

The fact that many businesses which do not deal with cheese directly participate in the *CheeseRoute* and pay membership fees (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*) shows that they expect to profit from the success their business partners are having. Moreover, there is a shared awareness by tourism stakeholders that marketing the cheese through the place is beneficial for both as vice versa, the place can also be marketed through the cheese (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald, Tourismus Bregenzerwald, Regio Bregenzerwald & Metzler Käse-Molke*). The idea is that having a platform which highlights and promotes businesses that engage in regional cooperation facilitates the interest of businesses to work together and shorten supply chains. Of course, this is not achieved through the existence of the food trail as an attraction on its own, but through a network in which collaboration can be facilitated by an organisation or by multiple organisations together.

An important partner for the *CheeseRoute* organisation when it comes to shortening supply chains is the *Netzwerk Kulinarik*. Participating businesses across the whole of Austria get a legal certification of the region of origin of their food supplies, be it Bregenzerwald, Vorarlberg or Austria (*Netzwerk Kulinarik*). The possibility for agri-food businesses to stand out through an independent, legal certification of quality and origin is something the *CheeseRoute* organisation has also been promoting among its members:

*“In Vorarlberg, of course, we have already had a lot of contact with the CheeseRoute Bregenzerwald who are showing great commitment to have their businesses certified with the ‘AMA Genuss Region’<sup>6</sup> seal. Some of them have already done so and some of them are in the process of doing so” (Netzwerk Kulinarik).*

Moreover, the *Netzwerk Kulinarik* offers to promote all its certified members through all of its own promotional activities and to assist in searches for regional suppliers through a matching tool.

For a gastronomy business, regional cooperation is of course something inherently different than for a business that wants to develop a tourist attraction. Organisations like the *CheeseRoute* exist for such innovative processes in which the development of an idea requires

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<sup>6</sup> “AMA Genuss Region” translates to “savoury region” by the Austrian agency for the agricultural market.

the help of a partner or supplier. The relevant question is: does the *CheeseRoute* encourage the development of innovative ideas by its members?

*"One could believe it could be counterproductive for the platform and for the organisation CheeseRoute if we are no longer needed as initiators or promoters or conductors of cooperative projects. But I don't think so. I think it would be justified to have both and to be honest, [...] I would very much like it if the idea of cooperation would not always have to be carried by us [in] the direction of our members, but the impulse would come from the other direction. It works in some cases" (KäseStraße Bregenzerwald).*

This means the *CheeseRoute* organisation would like to see more ideas carried by its members that it could facilitate as a network partner on the side. But the reality is there are only few proactive members that reach out to the organisation with ideas of their own (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*). As a consequence, the *CheeseRoute* organisation develops own ideas on behalf of its members, such as a new cook book that connects the cheese producers and the cheese processors (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*). This book can provide a short-term boost for marketing the cheese and the region as a food tourism destination, but is unlikely to lead to long-term cooperative ties between regional businesses that haven't already worked together before.

Questioned about more innovative food tourism attractions, the tourist board's opinion was clear: "I don't think all businesses are able to do that as well, I think there are individual businesses that are very good at creating an interactive experience, they also see it as a business model in quotation marks and consciously decide to offer their clients that they can literally dive into the matter" (*Tourismus Bregenzerwald*).

According to the tourist board, there is an understanding that customers want to know where their products come from and that has to be shown comprehensibly and authentically (*Tourismus Bregenzerwald*). "Then of course these small structures help in principle because it becomes somehow obvious and visible where the products actually come from. And I think it's more about that than about staging it" (*Tourismus Bregenzerwald*).

Whether agricultural businesses engage in something attractive for tourists or not, or whether they want to position themselves as a high-quality producer or as affordable cheese suppliers in supermarkets across the country, is in the end an individual decision. While all four different types can be found in Bregenzerwald, some issues were noticed that can also be considered a hindrance to deciding in favour of high-quality production and in favour of food tourism at the same time. Firstly, and perhaps obviously, there are great technical difficulties to combine these two as *Metzler Käse-Molke* put it: "If I have a very large facility, I can't simply put my emphasis both on absolute hygiene and visitor attractions and just make it transparent in some way. This involves a lot of investment." Secondly, the existing organisation may perhaps offer support to the created attraction, but the private investment most likely does not qualify for public funding. As far as food touristic cooperation requires investments, they present a significant

hindrance to economic actors who in their main trade do something different (such as agriculture). Thirdly, there is still a lot of potential for reciprocal promotion of members of the *CheeseRoute*, especially across sectors. In consequence, there are still voices raised that not enough local agricultural produce finds its way into the tourism and the gastronomy sector, which in turn profit greatly from the agricultural care of the landscapes.

Based on the literature, it was expected that a food trail is more likely to be the adequate food tourism measure to encourage shortening local food supply chains than a local market. In Bregenzerwald, shortening supply chains in a narrow sense has been mostly outsourced to the *Netzwerk Kulinarik* – the responsible body of the national agri-food agency – that certifies the origin and quality of food supplies and ingredients. These facilitating actions, that encourage certification by its members, could be carried out by any organisation and have nothing to do with the format of a food trail. Cheese producers and other stakeholders, however, showed to already have a high consciousness regarding the particular origin of their cheese. Shortening food supply chains is therefore a more important issue regarding other foods beside cheese. Furthermore, regional cooperation in a broader sense is an overarching goal of the *CheeseRoute* organisation. It is enforced most notably within the marketing activities by the *CheeseRoute* organisation through aiming to let all its different groups of members profit thereof. Ideally, the idea of cooperation would be initiated by stakeholders themselves and facilitated through the *CheeseRoute* organisation. Efforts to encourage such initiatives have had limited success according to own statements. Thus, it is not the mode of the central food tourism attraction, but rather the central food tourism organisation that is ultimately decisive for shortening local food supply chains in the region. Between a food market show and a food trail, the latter will inherently have more members supporting the actions of that organisation, but these actions could also be conducted by a food tourism organisation not affiliated with one particular attraction.

#### 4.2.3. Which factors can encourage regional actors of the agricultural and hospitality sectors to become involved in the definition and the management of food tourism product offerings?

*“Personally, I would like to see more cooperation. Under the title ‘even stronger together’ we could go further than everyone on their own. We’ve proven that it is possible and that it can be done in a big way, already with the pilot project and the cheese cellar. Everyone realised the merits at the time” (KäseStraße Bregenzerwald).*

Initially, the *CheeseRoute* was founded due to the expected negative consequences of Austria’s accession to the EU. After economic necessity brought the cheese-producing and selling stakeholders together, a professional organisation was established that has acted very proactively and to some extent perhaps independently (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald & Tourismus Bregenzerwald*). Big questions like who shall shoulder the *CheeseRoute* organisation financially and which responsibilities over the food tourism offering shall lie with the *CheeseRoute*

organisation have been resolved, but that has not necessarily led to finding ways to mobilise members for input (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*). Social capital, on the other hand, plays an unexpected role that has more to do with operating food tourism itself than with engaging in the regional management thereof (*Metzler Käse-Molke & Tourismus Bregenzerwald*).

One is left to believe that the institutional structures have eliminated economic necessity as a motivating factor to engage within the network because it appears to be the other way round. The small-scale enterprises that struggle with “financial hardship and time scarcity” (*Regio Bregenzerwald*) are often those who think only in the short term. In fact, the more competitive businesses engage more intensively and those are the businesses “that invest in their development themselves and stand where they are because of that” (*Regio Bregenzerwald*). The *CheeseRoute* organisation believes that economic necessity at the moment perhaps does not apply to most of their producing members, but that could change in the future and “then I think it can happen very quickly, that everyone sits down to think cooperatively about how to proceed” (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*).

A way to view the prevalent institutional structure is that the organisations act as an on-call caretaker. They are available for any help if needed, but carry out their duties without a partnership-like exchange where projects are shouldered with distributed responsibility. Moreover, the organisations have to organise a process to find out in what direction they shall go in the future themselves. To make that process participative, stakeholders need to be engaged to create and present their own proposals. In the case of the *CheeseRoute*, this is particularly difficult because the stakeholders that financially shoulder the organisation are the cheese maker cooperatives, i.e., co-productions of a small group of dairy farmers. They are expected to contribute the most to the definition of the goals of the organisation, but this responsibility was somewhat involuntarily laid into their hands:

*“Tourism and retail deliberately withdrew and said: Dear farmers, think about what you actually want to do with your CheeseRoute. And that’s why things are good again, because now it’s their thing [...] and they identify with it. Otherwise, the protagonists, or those who are supposed to shoulder it, withdraw, and that’s not good, and so [...] you have to make sure you don’t mix too much who is responsible for what” (Tourismus Bregenzerwald).*

In order to use the strengths of the individual organisations instead of doing things parallel, there are regular meetings of the directors of the regional organisations (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald & Tourismus Bregenzerwald*). It did not become clear whether this development proved engagement-enhancing through the multiple channels that allow stakeholders to give input or if the sight of a small group of directors sorting out the important issues among themselves has had a discouraging effect. The former would at least comply with the self-set goals to create and operate the organisations in a way that those who shoulder it financially can identify with it, feel that their interests are represented and feel that they can contribute to it (*Tourismus Bregenzerwald*).

The decisive aspect next to having ideas and the motivation to share them is the possibility to share them. The *CheeseRoute* organisation uses their General Assembly in particular to collect input, but also to communicate their openness throughout the year: "If you have ideas, wishes, suggestions, complaints, anything you need to make your work useful, to make it profitable, to expand, then send it to us! We'll try to take it up, and bring the people together" (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*). However, it only worked in singular cases, which was explained through the mentality of focusing on oneself (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*). The *Regio Bregenzerwald* also mentioned the factor mentality which "can also be seen as being sceptical at first, but then when it is decided, to follow and stand behind it", which at least would suggest support for the decision that the organisations take without the input of the stakeholders.

Social capital also proved influential in a new aspect that was also found in Noord-Holland. It plays a role in how intensively one wants to engage in food tourism:

*"It's quite a balancing act to professionally operate a food production and then to deal with the 'city-people' in the same breath. [...] And there is one very big prerequisite: You have to like people. And these people need to be the centre of attention" (Metzler Käse-Molke).*

Overall, there is a substantial number of organisations that actively communicate to their members and partners that their input is very welcome (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald, Tourismus Bregenzerwald & Regio Bregenzerwald*). While they eliminated negative factors like economic necessity to influence platforms, efforts to work better together in an open network under the administrative leadership of the organisation are ongoing. The interviews also showed that continued efforts are necessary to mobilise stakeholders to actively engage within the organisations when it comes to food tourism. As regards the *Netzwerk Kulinarik*, it is too early to assess whether efforts to match business and supplier and to connect stakeholders through events like the planned "Farmer meets Host" can lead to more engagement beyond their business partnership (*Netzwerk Kulinarik*).

Based on the literature, it was expected that a lack of competitiveness, especially among small businesses, presents an incentive to actively engage within an integrative food tourism platform, and trust and social capital are a facilitator for the projected acceptance or success of their initiatives within the platform. In Bregenzerwald, engagement within the *CheeseRoute* organisation is low and input from those who shoulder the organisation financially – the cheese producers – is mostly absent. While economic necessity has become a non-factor for food tourism, the influence of social capital was noticed in a different way than expected. Originally, the *CheeseRoute* and consequently the beginnings of food tourism in the region were founded on the basis of economic necessity. In the meantime, more competitive businesses appeared be reach out more to the regional organisations compared to less competitive businesses. This is in line with the findings in Noord-Holland, where those with the more marketing-know how were cooperating more intensively with organisations, although these businesses in Noord-Holland are of much larger scale.

The managers of the relevant organisations are well known throughout the region. Therefore, there was no indication that social capital in the anticipated way plays a role in the lack of engagement of stakeholders. However, social capital proved decisive in relation to the customer who now needs to be treated not only as a consumer but also as a guest. If one then decides not to offer a service to tourists next to the sale of their cheese, there is often less of a reason to engage in active exchange with the *CheeseRoute* organisation or the tourist board.

#### 4.2.4. Is a regional agency/platform for food tourism additional to existing tourism administrations necessary?

*"We make sure to get support through EU projects, state funds, federal funds. And when the time is ripe, so to speak, for the children to be able to walk and everyone to discover their independence, [then we let go again]. This is how the CheeseRoute was created, on initiative of the tourism and the agricultural sector" (Regio Bregenzerwald).*

The *CheeseRoute* would grow to engage in cheese-related food tourism from start to end including the developing and making of tourist offers. Although this changed in 2011, there is still an overlap in touristic duties realised by the *CheeseRoute* organisation and the tourist board. The *CheeseRoute* organisation follows through with marketing the product in multiple ways. But none of the interviewed organisations are redundant because of overlaps.

*"The CheeseRoute was encouraged to refocus on the product and the placement of the product, although this always happens via touristic offers, corresponding events etc." (KäseStraße Bregenzerwald).*

As a consequence, the overlap in the interaction with tourists has been mostly resolved. Refocusing on marketing cheese from Bregenzerwald through marketing the region as a cheese region however has led to new parallel structures. The overlap in the marketing of the region is justifiable due to the different foci applied. Arguably, it is important that both organisations agree on the key elements of their strategies, as the tourist board states:

*"Agriculture, agricultural produce, cheese, etc. and also cuisine, these topics are simply a constant in this region. It goes without saying that we carry and display those basically anytime and anywhere" (Tourismus Bregenzerwald).*

When it comes to concrete tourism activities, the tourist board is not only "glad" to be able to display experiences that "underpin the region's competence in these areas" (*Tourismus Bregenzerwald*), but it is also a go-to instance for advice and an assessment of the touristic potential in development stages of ideas, as did apply to the case of *Metzler Käse-Molke*.

What is true, the *CheeseRoute* organisation takes up additional tasks. It conducts different forms of marketing that are centred around only one touristically marketable product (cheese) and those require a lot of capacities. The *CheeseRoute* organisation also reaches out to multiple sectors as suggested by the literature. As mentioned above, this includes marketing the

product itself under the brand name of the *CheeseRoute*. Most notably, cheese branded by the *CheeseRoute* can be found in German supermarkets, where placing a premium priced brand can be considered a balancing act in light of extensive competition along the price variable.

Given that, it makes sense that the *CheeseRoute* organisation and the tourist board work both next to each other and with each other. According to the *Regio Bregenzerwald*, "an umbrella organisation has also been considered for the many individual organisations, but then it is only possible to follow the projects in the beginning." Letting bilateral projects go at early stages is considered problematic because the existing lack of initiative would only increase and lead to even less willingness to shoulder responsibilities. If members would then get the impression that the umbrella organisation could not follow them through the different steps, this might discourage them from their innovative idea.

Quality management as another task of food tourism organisations is something that can be considered left to agri-food organisations like the *Netzwerk Kulinarik*, but it is something the local organisations also acknowledge: "This is becoming increasingly crucial: the search for objective quality criteria that can also be marketed, also for food tourists" (*Regio Bregenzerwald*).

The *Netzwerk Kulinarik* certifies agri-food businesses with the state-recognised seal of quality and origin assurance called "AMA Genuss Region". The *Netzwerk Kulinarik* also takes up quality management in areas other than the production and processing of the food, such as their web presence and overall appearance. Financed workshops and other services to professionalise the businesses through photo shoots, for example, are initiatives especially small businesses which need intensive exchange profit from.

Based on the literature, it was expected that – irrespective of the limits to the capacities of tourist offices – a platform specialised for food tourism promises better outcomes because of more complex tasks to be covered for food. In Bregenzerwald, the broad platform specialised in food tourism exists, but it is not the only organisation that deals with aspects of food tourism. The *CheeseRoute* organisation is now shouldered by the cheese producers, the only group of stakeholders that traditionally does not deal with tourism directly. Consequently, the *CheeseRoute* organisation applies a focus on the marketing of the product, something that is far beyond the tasks and possibilities of a tourism administration. Therefore, both can be considered necessary for food tourism. The involvement of other organisation has worked out rather well in Bregenzerwald, but depends on the capacities of each organisation. The *Netzwerk Kulinarik* as a national actor, for example, has capacities for other supportive actions than regional organisation which in turn know the local circumstances better. The most vital aspect, however, is that these organisations cooperate with each other – which had to be learnt in Bregenzerwald.

4.2.5. How important is the complementarity of food tourism offers with “other visitor products such as cultural and natural heritage attractions” (Hall, 2012, p.50)? Are they competitors for public support?

The answer to the question how well food tourism is incorporated in the overall touristic offering and the story line along which the region is promoted appears straightforward. Other than in Noord-Holland, there is a consensus among all organisations and members of organisations, that cheese, i.e. experiencing the production, the processing and the consumption of local cheese, is a central aspect of what makes this region worth visiting. What remains interesting are the implications of food tourism being transsectoral and whether public support plays a role for the establishment of food tourism.

“Bregenzerwald is not a region that is highly developed for tourism, that has always aimed at mass tourism. The adjacent Arlberg region is a different case” (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*). This means that too many tourists are not a problem as far as it regards impeding lives of locals directly. Fears of overcrowding through food tourism exist rather on a theoretical basis, as the *Regio Bregenzerwald* states: “If it means more guests, then it is negative, because even more hotels mean less agricultural land and à la longue possibly a lower quality product.” It remains questionable, however, whether enough skilled personnel could be found for further hotels and restaurants.

Overall, the three interviewed local organisations showed that they believed that complementarity is important, both touristically as well as economically. On the one hand, the organisations cooperate in a way that they do not hesitate to refer to each other or refer to attractions for which they are not responsible (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*). On the other hand, the *CheeseRoute* organisation and the tourist board both became active in creating a food tourism product because their respective focus was not complemented by something adequate that would lie in the sphere of the other. The *CheeseRoute* organisation produced an adventure guide to physically hand out to visitors “to really be able to tell [the guest] who of the *CheeseRoute* is there once, he’s in this particular place [...]. Then he can look that up in there and there are not only additional tourist offers from members, but also other attractions or themes that might be interesting in this place” (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*). Despite the mentioned agreement that the *CheeseRoute* organisation may not overstep in the touristic sphere, they clearly felt that the tourist board failed to produce a joint overview of cheese-related and -unrelated attractions for visitors (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*). At the same time, the tourist board, that applies a focus on the landscapes and on hiking, developed culinary hiking tours due to a lack of initiative in that regard (*Tourismus Bregenzerwald*). What is interesting is that those hiking tours include several restaurants and inns on the alpine pastures that are members of the *CheeseRoute*.

Despite affirmations by the tourist board to the *CheeseRoute* organisation that local agriculture as a whole is transported more than any other branch through the tourist board’s activities, the *CheeseRoute* organisation feels excluded in the concrete actions and materials that the tourist

board conveys to visitors in situ: "The word *CheeseRoute* is used very, very marginally. This has always been a point of criticism, a very strong point of criticism" (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald*).

Unquestionably, both cooperation as well as tensions between the organisations underline that food tourism plays an important part in the region's touristic appearance. At the same time, it has to be said that some potential is dropped in terms of touristic appearance and consequently in economic development. Yet, given the existence of a separate food tourism organisation, food tourism operators enjoy two arrays of support and promotion, through the touristically focused organisation and the product focused organisation. With help of the *Netzwerk Kulinarik* organisation there is even a third organisation that supports those businesses that certify their quality and origin in regard to both product and tourism/promotion.

While the literature remained vague on the importance of public support, two findings can be presented here. Firstly, the transsectoral efforts of the *CheeseRoute* organisation come along with subsidies for two sectors – agriculture and tourism. It may be encouraging for other regions that, in this case, creating more extensive added value has paid off for the organisation itself in terms of funding. Secondly, new ideas need convincing of the positive impact for the region. *Metzler Käse-Molke* described their need of a statement by the tourist board affirming "they think this project is good for tourism, that it is awarded realistic chances, etc" in order to finance his projects. Similar to *CONO Kaasmakers* in Noord-Holland, the need for a broad consensus in terms of permissions for spatial planning was stressed. The case of *Metzler Käse-Molke* demonstrated where public support can decide which project is followed through, particularly when the project is as extraordinary as the production of cosmetic products from whey. In effect, the positive outcome for *Metzler Käse-Molke* indicates that there is a broad public consensus on the flagship position of cheese and its producers in the region.

Based on the literature, it was expected that all tourism stakeholders realise that integrating various tourist attractions to a holistic tourism package is advised in rural areas. However, public institutions may have reservations to cooperation to protect their range of operation for which they receive funding. In Bregenzerwald, both expectations can be confirmed. There is a general understanding of cheese as an important contributor to what makes the region special within a broader rural tourism setting that involves the mountainous landscape and different forms of enjoyment thereof. At the same time, there has been a slight rivalry between the *CheeseRoute* organisation and the regional tourist board for the development of tourism offers that are related to the products and services by the members of the *CheeseRoute* organisation. As far as the interviews showed, public support plays a minor role in this (former?) rivalry, although it is noteworthy that the *CheeseRoute* organisation receives funding from the agricultural as well as the tourism department of the regional administration. This might help to explain why the *CheeseRoute* organisation is eager to not let tourism completely out of their sphere of competences. Finally, public support is necessary for the development of food tourism attractions. This means that public support determines how well it fits into the region, i.e., how complementary food tourism is regarded.

#### 4.2.6. What role do landscapes, peripherality and transportation infrastructure play for establishing a food tourism product?

*“Also, from the point of philosophy, we are talking purely of a gentle tourism in accordance with nature, where it is quite clear that this cultural landscape in Bregenzerwald, which is not a natural landscape, but a cultural landscape, cultivated by hand, developed by hand, would not exist if it were not maintained by agricultural structures. It is clear that our Alps and the cultivation of the Alpine pastures make up an important part of tourism” (KäseStraße Bregenzerwald).*

Landscapes play an important role, beginning with the scenery that acts as an omnipresent background. All interviewees are aware of the positive assets of their rural location. At the same time, they do not feel too peripheral given fast road connections to economically potent regions.

A heavy focus is applied to experiencing the landscapes through hiking, but also to experiencing traditional lifestyle in mountainous landscapes. However, the interviewees from the tourist board and the development agency clearly mentioned a neglect of keeping traditions alive only for the sake of attracting tourists:

*“I mean, I don’t want the region to turn into a museum, and I don’t know, to just stage being rural and idyllic” (Tourismus Bregenzerwald).*

In light of the peripheral location, sustaining economic activity is a shared goal. “For us it’s important that the region is and remains a living space, not such sleeping regions where you become such beautiful tourist regions, where people work in the conurbations, buzz out in the morning and come back in the evening” (*Regio Bregenzerwald*). The local organisations are therefore committed to assist “innovation and creativity in the region in one form or another” (*Tourismus Bregenzerwald*), which goes beyond the agricultural and tourism sector and includes the retail, crafts and industry sectors.

Due to the lack of mass tourism, business opportunities are closely aligned with preferences of local consumers and customers who are recurring:

*“A restaurant here can’t afford to offer low quality, then it won’t have any customers at all, because the people here themselves, when they go out to eat, they want to have something nice. [...] Some things simply don’t stand a chance here. So, there is still no fast-food restaurant in the region, only one discounter supermarket for a few years, in the whole valley with 23 communities and 30,000 inhabitants” (Tourismus Bregenzerwald).*

The low number of local consumers and customers, however, means that tourist demand is able to influence the spectrum of services provided. This facilitates the development of multifunctional businesses like *Metzler Käse-Molke* which produces cheese and cosmetic products from whey, conducts a cheese making workshop, and offers on-site gastronomy and

guided tours through production facilities and stables. Their animal-centred offerings are well calculated in the light of a 200km radius, which is "a journey to be covered in a manageable time, even with a family, with children. And that applies to, for example, Munich" (*Metzler Käse-Molke*). All interviewees from Bregenzerwald emphasised that the region is lucky to be situated so moderately distant to Zurich, Munich and Stuttgart and the respective conurbations, which are important, "in order to be relevant for tourism" (ibid.). Visitors from these regions are typically financially strong and appreciate high-quality. For that target group in particular, the transportation infrastructure for individual traffic is also seen fit and difficult interregional public transportation considered less problematic (*KäseStraße Bregenzerwald, Tourismus Bregenzerwald, Regio Bregenzerwald & Metzler Käse-Molke*).

Finally, one aspect regarding the peripheral location of the region was brought up as fortunate, namely to be an eligible region for significant EU funds. This has helped the region to establish organisations, most noteworthy the regional development agencies, that can be consulted for projects for which they offer advice and help with the funding modalities (*Regio Bregenzerwald*).

Based on the literature, it was expected that peripheral areas and their landscapes attract tourists seeking an escapist holiday, but create a hindrance due to the length of their journey. Transportation infrastructure is expected to play less of a role for tourists. In Bregenzerwald, values that are typically associated with rural tourism, such as tranquillity and being close to nature, are held highly. But at the same time, the interviewees take it seriously that the region is not reduced to these values. Nevertheless, the mountainous landscapes that are cultivated by the farmers play a very important part in the tourism offer of the region. Bregenzerwald can be considered peripheral from its location within in Austria and in terms of population size. At the same time, Bregenzerwald is in moderate distance to large economic centres in Germany and Switzerland, which means that in numbers, tourists play a significant role as customers in relation to locals. Road transportation infrastructure is seen as sufficient for high quality demanding guests from the neighbouring regions with strong purchasing power.

## **5. Strategic analysis of the case studies**

The answers to the six activity-oriented research questions have shown where exactly the differences in the institutional settings manifest, which guide food tourism in Noord-Holland and Bregenzerwald. As outlined in the introduction chapter, the goal of this work is to carve out the aspects that are directly influenceable by institutions and their decision-makers. Therefore, the findings are summarised in the three categories identified by Lee et al. (2016) as “facilitators” for the development of geographical concentrations of inter-connected agri-food and gastronomy businesses. Building upon the findings in chapter 4, this is done in an interpretative manner, based on the interviews of the respective regions collectively. Chapter 4 has analysed the real-life application of food tourism from an actor-oriented perspective. Chapter 5 brings these findings to the strategic level. It discusses the influenceable aspects which can lead to a stronger inter-connection and higher concentration of agri-food and gastronomy businesses and thus economic development in the area.

Chapter 5 is structured in the three mentioned facilitators by Lee et al. (2016): stakeholder collaboration, leadership and information and communication flows. Through direct comparison of the regions, I will not only dismantle which institutional settings prove more instrumental for economic development, but also give reasons for these conclusions. This is done in order to gain a better understanding of the effects of structures within these facilitators, before policy recommendations are deducted thereof in chapter 6.

### **5.1 Stakeholder collaboration**

The first eye-catching difference between the regions in their stakeholder collaboration concerns the channels of collaboration. In Noord-Holland, collaboration appears much more fragmented in a sense that many different organisations work with different stakeholders. In Bregenzerwald, on the other hand, collaboration is centred around the three most important organisations, but it is interchangeable. Directed by the prevalent issue, the suited organisation is able to find a partner for one’s request. This way, matching is optimised.

Moreover, collaborations in Noord-Holland are not highlighted touristically, i.e. perceptible for tourists, as regards branding and reciprocal promotion. Likewise, there was no notice of reciprocal promotion by any private stakeholders in Bregenzerwald, but there are branding and highlighting efforts in place, particularly by the *CheeseRoute* organisation.

Of course, collaboration between a business and its supplier, for example, takes place behind closed doors and is not always suited to be presented to tourists. But visualising local origin of a product or parts of a service offered is a distinctive feature which makes an impression on visitors that have come to experience local or regional culture. Interestingly, in Noord-Holland, there is an awareness of the specialty of local origin for attracting domestic day visitors, but

not for foreign tourists. In Bregenzerwald, stakeholders originally decided to collaborate and to found the *CheeseRoute* in order to position the product cheese in a competitive market. Since then, collaboration has been something driven by making impression on people from outside the region. While lots of local cheese can also be found in regional supermarkets, efforts to shorten supply chains and to bring more local produce in local gastronomy still need to be continued.

Next to a lack of showcasing regional collaboration in Noord-Holland, there is also a de facto lack of collaboration around the cheese markets that were expected to act as a starting point for food tourism in the region. There are no linkages of any stakeholders to the cheese market, except for the large companies selling their cheese there and thus there is no collaboration. Large producers have their own network in which they organise the different stakeholders they need for their business operations. Collaboration is aimed to be tight and explicit in transporting the brand names. Meanwhile, the *CheeseRoute* organisation in Bregenzerwald, in general, is not only the go-to partner for food tourism initiatives for the members, but also the originator of many collaborative ideas such as the new cook book, as mentioned above.

To conclude, one could argue that parallel efforts of organisations to increase stakeholder collaboration centred around the single respective organisation like in Noord-Holland can limit the potential of stakeholders collaborating in the wider food tourism network. Whether local businesses would then claim that they are not interested in participating in multiple initiatives because they are already part of another smaller initiative could possibly be verified through inquiries at a large number of agri-food businesses. Compared to Noord-Holland, the biggest difference in Bregenzerwald is that the organisations there communicate that they work together on projects with shared responsibility, which then may incorporate different stakeholders thanks to targeted outreach.

## **5.2 Leadership**

Judging by the central food tourism attraction, it was expected that leadership regarding food tourism would either be taken over by an organisation that operates the respective attraction or by an organisation that ensures to link stakeholders to that attraction. In Noord-Holland, there is no separate organisation that operates the cheese market, instead the management of the cheese market is taken over by the marketing organisation or by the department of the municipality. *Alkmaar Marketing*, however, did not consider connecting other cheese and food tourism stakeholders to the market to be part of their responsibility. In Bregenzerwald, the *CheeseRoute* is not an attraction at just one spot in the region, as is the cheese market in Alkmaar or in Edam, even though it does have a starting point in the "Cheese Cellar". Connecting stakeholders that offer food tourism attractions is already more inherent to the idea that presupposes the *CheeseRoute* organisation as a central administration unit. The *CheeseRoute* organisation, therefore, takes over the leadership in many operative and

administrative processes that single private actors would deem uneconomical. Yet, leadership in innovative processes is still supposed to be borne by the private actors.

In both regions, organisations have tried to take the lead in innovative processes only for the developing phases with the goal of later letting responsibility go over to the benefitting stakeholders. This, however, has not worked out in either region. In Noord-Holland, stakeholders failed to acknowledge opportunities provided by the DMO *Laag Holland* due to a lack of marketing knowledge and social capital. The *CheeseRoute* organisation in Bregenzerwald, which receives membership fees by its members has perhaps a stronger mandate to follow through with innovative projects on their own. The perception of strong leadership of the *CheeseRoute* organisation and other organisations puts a question mark on the perceived necessity of active participation by individual members.

From the interviews in Noord-Holland, there was no leadership signalled in terms of quality of the product, neither regarding assessing nor ensuring or promoting the high-quality of the cheese produced in the region. The Dutch association of farm dairy producers (*Bond van Boerderijzuivelbereiders*), who was not open for an interview, would do so according to their website (Bond van Boerderijzuivelbereiders, 2021), but other interviewees, such as the agricultural organisation *Water, Land en Dijken*, had not even heard of the organisation. This shows that leadership requires active and proactive outreach activities, even if one is already in the lead position as a specialist for an area. In Bregenzerwald, the *CheeseRoute* organisation has supported the outreach activities by the *Netzwerk Kulinarik* that was established by the Austrian government to legally certify quality and origin of produce and supplies. Furthermore, the *CheeseRoute* organisation also presents the winners of cheese prize awards.

What is more, organisations in Noord-Holland aim to provide leadership for making local produce more available and local businesses more accessible to domestic consumers. Small-scaled food tourism activities, which would be predominantly interesting for committed food tourists, play only a minor role in the managing duties of *Water, Land en Dijken* and the DMO *Laag Holland*. Moreover, large operators like *CONO Kaasmakers* and *Henri Willig* are in dominant positions regarding the direction that food tourism is to take in Noord-Holland. This, however, cannot be set equal to leadership as they are of course not obliged to include stakeholders in their business decisions. The dichotomy of consumers from the region and visitors from beyond has had different implications in Bregenzerwald. Leadership for relations to touristic visitors has been rather contested between the *CheeseRoute* organisation and the regional tourist board. Despite having many members in the hospitality sector, the *CheeseRoute* organisation ceded leadership on strictly touristic tasks, but it still reaches out to potential visitors through making them consumers first.

### **5.3 Information and communication flows**

According to Lee et al. (2016), communication flows should evolve around a “strategy to bring in new ideas, encourage consensus, and share accumulated knowledge and know-how” (p.77). Needless to say, the broader these communication flows are conducted, the better the outcome for the region overall. What was left unmentioned are the consequences of slim communication flows – which apply to Noord-Holland – and the difficulties of ensuring broad communication flows – which apply to Bregenzerwald.

It could be possible that less ambitious strategies or a lack of consensus have led to a small-scaled, fragmented picture of many organisations working parallel to one another and thus have resulted in slim communication flows. It is definite, however, that the consequence of parallel work is slim consensus and low and unlinked accumulation of established know-how and new ideas. The *CheeseRoute* organisation has relied heavily on their General Meeting once a year to share news, experiences and developments from the last year as well as to give an outlook and call for input. Due to the fact that communication predominantly follows the direction from organisation to member, the *CheeseRoute* organisation backs up its plans through regular exchanges with the other regional organisation that represent stakeholders in different sectors. As mentioned above, this enables using the strengths of the individual organisations, but it is not clear what effect that has on mobilising more bottom-up engagement and thus communication.

A vital goal of communication flows from organisations towards stakeholders is to ensure that they are known as the go-to instance for the range of topics and tasks that the individual organisations have focused on. The fact that food tourism organisations in Noord-Holland, whose task it is to network, are unaware of other specialised organisations may be an indicator that communication flows in terms of food tourism are not broad enough to profit from an accumulation of know-how. The regional organisations as well as their managers are very well known in Bregenzerwald, which arguably facilitates their work, but may also have to do with the fact that the region is less densely populated.

## **6. Discussion**

Chapter 6 provides the final conclusions to the analysis chapters 4 and 5. Firstly, the policy recommendations are deduced on the basis of the strategic analysis which in turn is built on the findings to the research questions. Secondly, the academic takeaways discuss ideas how to prevent or handle issues that I have faced throughout my research endeavour as well as new insights into the field of food tourism and its potential for regional development.

These conclusions are again conducted in an interpretative manner based on the findings that stem from interviews directly (see [chapter 4](#)) or from the comparative analysis (see [chapter 5](#)). In contrast to the previous chapter that has analysed the performance of institutions and is therefore interesting for decision-makers within regional organisations, the conclusions in chapter 6.1. are targeted at policy-makers. These include framework aspects that fall in the direct responsibility of regional and national policy-makers but also criteria policy-makers should demand from regional organisations when receiving funding for the purpose of regional development. In chapter 6.2., the insights in the matter shall serve as inspiration to researchers in tourism, economic and geographic disciplines to engage in this inter-disciplinary field. My academic conclusions cover new and unanswered research questions that can serve as important input for regional development efforts in rural areas.

### **6.1 Policy recommendations**

In the concept of Lee et al. (2016), stakeholder collaboration, leadership and information and communication flows facilitate both the set up as well as the management of a food cluster or a “place with a geographical concentration of inter-connected firms and service providers offering culinary and cultural products and programs” (Lee et al., 2016, p.73). The goal of creating “local and regional networks of trust, cooperation and competition” (Pike et al., 2017, p.206) is to increase, sustain and/or upvalue economic activity, also in rural areas.

This already shows that there are several potential institutional bottlenecks to the implementation of food tourism as a tool for regional development. The lessons learnt from the two case studies lead to the following policy recommendations that shall answer the overarching research question: *How can food tourism facilitate economic development in rural areas?*

- A common and strategic vision for food tourism

Food tourism needs a strategy that enjoys broad acceptance by stakeholders to be economically relevant for a region because the idea how to highlight a food product and how to develop ways to experience it must come from the supply side, the side of the experts. The

strategy must clarify which groups of food tourists are the target group and how food tourism fits in with traditional tourism activity in the region. The most important aspect is perhaps to set out the goals for participation: Who contributes operatively and who contributes financially in order to carry out the strategy? It must be clear that a culinary program or any project that underlines the competence of the region with regard to the particular food product requires efforts beside producing or selling it. On the one hand, this is necessary to present a coherent offering to visitors that represents a standard that is approved by the local stakeholders themselves and not just by someone who takes advantage of the fact that visitors are no experts on where to find the best quality. On the other hand, this is necessary to have a clear mandate on who to attract and how to profit from the position as food tourism destination in a broadly distributed way. Access to marketing intelligence and joint marketing are two of the biggest advantages of amalgamations. Finally, a consensual agreement on the role that food tourism shall have for the region's stakeholders also defines to what extent it needs to be included in branding strategies.

➤ Multi-level governance frameworks

The inclusion of multiple groups of actors (public on different scales, private in different sectors, and non-profit for special issues) in a food tourism strategy is no end in itself. It rather is essential where there are gaps in the competences which are necessary for tailored programs or projects and where there are gaps in the tasks which stakeholders see the benefit from, but cannot (afford to) do them alone. In Bregenzerwald, the network involves strong organisations that are non-profit in character but are mandated by private actors (*CheeseRoute*) or by municipalities (tourist board, *Regio Bregenzerwald*). There is no need for involvement of the state government because there are no gaps in the competences required to operate and promote food tourism in the region adequately. In Noord-Holland, there is a lack of leadership on a regional scale. Tourist information offices act locally, marketing organisations act locally or in small unions of municipalities and different agri-food organisations act on multiple scales, but there is no leader that tries to bring the different goals of the multiple organisations together. A coordinative actor may therefore be able to design and follow through a process of collective decision making. In prior, however, this requires a shared view on a set of collective goals and benefits to be achieved better or faster together.

➤ Mobilise stakeholders to engage

It was expected that certain stakeholders, especially smaller farms and businesses, would see an obvious incentive to engage in food tourism and its management in order to secure high margins on direct sales. Except for the foundation of the *CheeseRoute* in Bregenzerwald, this was not confirmed. In fact, even the meeting invitations to discuss or develop ideas together under the leadership of the *CheeseRoute* organisation or the DMO *Laag Holland* have failed to

achieve a sustained engagement by members/stakeholders. It is of course neither efficient nor desirable if public or super-partes organisations have to take over the innovative process of developing ideas up to a stage where members just have to execute, just to mobilise the members. Unused potential to mobilise stakeholders was, however, identified in regard to the lack of convincing them of the benefits of joint food tourism. In fact, of all the interviewed organisations only the tourist board in Bregenzerwald possessed actual data on visitors, their behaviour and attitudes. The potential by food tourism therefore has not even been assessed. Thus, measures to mobilise food tourism stakeholders should contain gathering information on current demand to be able to share information on the potential of food tourism activities for private actors. Additionally, surveys among internal members or stakeholders can also proactively give the impression that their input counts.

➤ Interconnect businesses and suppliers

There are many initiatives to promote local produce in local gastronomy and many gastronomic businesses are already doing that out of conviction on their own. The efforts are continuous because agronomists still have to export a great share of their produce. This is a result of specialisation and no different in regions that are known for their cheese. Yet, the touristic utilisation of local supply chains or of partnerships for that flagship product is also significantly underused. The premise of reciprocal promotion has noteworthy been acknowledged by the DMO *Laag Holland* but local businesses would refuse to promote other businesses within their own business. The idea of going to one food tourism attraction and to learn about a different attraction with a different focus has not been followed through at all in Noord-Holland. In Bregenzerwald, this idea is replaced by the amalgamation of *CheeseRoute* members that can be looked up in information material which is available at all members' facilities. In general, knowing about other interesting options to experience the product is essential so that visitors come in a position where they want to stay longer, spend more or come back again. Interconnecting smaller businesses is therefore advised to attract more attention to them in comparison to large-scale competitors. The status quo in Noord-Holland favours the large-scale companies that are able to invest in promotion.

➤ Residents and visitors should not have to be rivals but create synergies

Food tourism is considered promising for regional development because it gives additional uses to the agricultural and the gastronomy sector as well as to the hospitality sector. Beside the mentioned synergies for export-oriented cheese producers – in which case consumer and visitor are potentially the same person – they also mitigate negative developments in one sector through the other – be it low milk prices or currently the COVID-19 pandemic. Typically, in regional development plans – also the one executed by the *Regio Bregenzerwald* – the focus is not distributed equally, but in favour of the needs of the residents. That is also economically

rational because tourists enjoy the “economic infrastructure”, i.e. shops, cafes, restaurants etc. that the locals keep running the whole year round, even off season. Also, authenticity has a touristic value and builds on locals going to the same places. At the same time, selling products or touristic experiences that locals would not buy often brings higher margins than the daily business.

Moreover, products for tourists need not to be of lower quality than locals would demand due to their better knowledge about the quality. Tourists are often willing to pay premium prices on holiday. Instead of exploiting that through selling a sub-premium cheese for a premium price, this can be used to find a bigger market for high-quality produce that is more expensive to produce. In order to make high-quality production rentable, tourists need to be guided in how to find or discover high quality. The demand by tourists can then support the demand by locals in order to make the production economical. This requires a credible way of signalling where high quality is to be found and then tourists and locals can support each other as consumers in making high-quality produce available. In Bregenzerwald, signalling and highlighting only those businesses that comply with the defined quality standards is what the *CheeseRoute* organisation and the *Netzwerk Kulinarik* are already doing. In Noord-Holland, *Water, Land en Dijken*, who represent the interests of the farmers, however, perceived the presentation of touristic options to farmers under economic restraints as a solution at the wrong end – namely at the end of tourism and not at the end of the price for agricultural produce. Quality regulations should therefore not necessarily be competitive for (potential) members but aim to be inclusive in order to lift the quality of a broad base of producers. These efforts could then be financed by more visitors who are able to take better notice of quality-certified stakeholders – under the premise that one cherishes more visitors.

➤ Continuity and coherence of economic development plans/policies

In general, it was perceived that in Noord-Holland, many interests were thought in dichotomies: agriculture vs. tourism, local consumers vs. foreign tourists, high quality vs. low quality. The question “How can tourism help agriculture?” has not been asked on a highly-perceptible scale. As for any place-based development strategy, the case studies proved that there is a clear need to evaluate what the locally-anchored issue is, where underutilised potential lies and how that can be used in accordance with the needs of the economic actors in the region (Pike et al. 2016, p.189ff.). It can be beneficial to establish an independent regional development agency as is only planned in Noord-Holland. This, however, is only true if it is able to sustain a “proactive and comprehensive regional planning” (ibid., p.193).

## **6.2 Academic takeaways**

Rural areas are typically considered to lack the critical mass that is often associated with “the external economies of agglomeration that generate innovation and increasing returns” (Pike

et al. 2016, p.280). The essence of external effects, such as knowledge spill-overs or the availability of specialist suppliers in proximity, lies in the fact that transaction costs are significantly reduced. Innovative ideas are much more likely to be followed through because it is likely to find a supplier and other partners for all the puzzle pieces needed to develop that idea. However, this can also be achieved through a mediating organisation that is known for and competent in facilitating collaborations. This research has shown that it is important to not only look at whether such organisations exist, but also at how they operate. Lee et al. (2016), who conceptually inspired the theoretical framework, adapted the cluster model through including institutional facilitators, but did not analyse their performance. Comparing the two cheese regions, this research can join recent efforts to reject assessing “institutional thickness” and instead to emphasise “quality and performance of institutions rather than their density” (Pike et al. 2016, p.163).

It is no secret that the more facets, the more methods and the more case study objects and subjects are examined, the better the insights will become. However, two points of study enlargement can be highlighted that would have clearly improved this research: two-staged interviews and in-field research, ideally between the interview stages. Similar to the “Structure Formation Technique” interviewees could be confronted with their statements and the way the researcher would conceptually integrate these statements in their analysis-structure (Flick, 2011, p.205ff.). This could be combined with new insights from the in-field research. The in-field research can help identifying more or other stakeholders that are not so present online because it still appeared that tourists physically present in Noord-Holland receive more information than is available online. Furthermore, the in-field can help identifying relations that were invisible from distance and also the quality of the relations. If stakeholders ought to engage in food tourism, it is anything but irrelevant how they subjectively perceive leadership and communication processes. The second stage of interviews could then help to gain a broader understanding of the original statements. One could confront interviewees with divergent opinions gained from the in-field study and better identify the subjective assessment of a single person from assessments that are common knowledge in the region.

Over the course of this work, the effects of personal relations proved increasingly interesting – not for methodological reasons but because social capital was found to be influential in more ways than anticipated. The ways in which social capital appeared to play a role were threefold: for finding partners and collaborating with them, for working with customers and other guests and for gaining acceptance and support of a broad public and those shaping the legal/economic framework. Social capital is known to be hard to measure. However, within qualitative research methods there is a set of skills to approach issues in various disciplines purposefully. The main problem identified during the execution process of the prevalent research design was the scope of the time and effort required to follow-up on the information gathered and the therein mentioned actors.

The substantial extent and the necessary sensitivity to conduct qualitative research in a representative and reproduceable manner often deters researchers from larger qualitative

undertakings. The expected benefits of the prevalent case study comparison, however, manifested. Firstly, I was able to gain a reference perspective to assess where things are going well. This proved of high value in this case study related to tourism because interviewees who do promotion as their job will also promote what they or their organisation do in research interviews. On the other hand, when issues in one region appear that are no topic in the other region, one can deduct concrete policy recommendations. Ideally, this would again be reconfirmed in a second stage of interviews to assure that this topic is really a non-issue in the reference region. Regarding cheese, it can be confirmed that cheese allows for a large range of tourism activities but most of them are product-focused and only a minority can be regarded as interactive or experimental. Due to a less obvious connection between cheese and the gastronomic processing of cheese, findings from gastronomy tourism with a stronger focus on restaurants are probably not always comparable. As seen in Bregenzwald, gastronomic businesses can, however, be very well included in a holistic food tourism offering and they are also very relevant for economic development. The topic of shortening supply chains becomes most visible with gastronomy businesses. Furthermore, who they choose as their suppliers and partners and how they position themselves has a strong effect on their compatibility for foreign and local guests. Amidst large tourist masses, gastronomic businesses often find themselves at crossroads between quantity and quality, whereas food tourism is clearly positioned as an idea of sustainably creating value through upvaluing the product.

Mass tourism, in fact, played an unexpectedly important role in interfering food tourism in Noord-Holland. Food tourism was expected to be a way to avoid overcrowding. It was also expected to be associated with the cheese market. Only the latter was confirmed because it appears that food tourism was predominantly connected to overcrowding as a consequence thereof. Many farmers pictured food tourism not primarily in harmony with nature where people appreciating local culture and local specialties can be turned into some side cash to their main agricultural business. Promoting farms to open up to tourists was immediately understood as opening up to busses full of tourists instead of individual travellers. While the negative consequences of mass tourism can be found elsewhere, it is noteworthy that the bus reoccurred as the transportation vehicle to despise. It brings a lot of people precisely to one spot, where there is often only one business to profit from most of the time. The economic development goals of food tourism would be the opposite: large distribution of guests. It was also brought up that the mode of transportation is in accord with a certain age minimum. This matter and the question of bus tourism after the many insolvencies due to the COVID-19 pandemic will hopefully be answered in the future.

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## **Appendix A**

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Expectations from the literature</b>	<b>Targeted data to be collected from the respective interviews</b>
#1 <i>What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?</i>	Businesses participate in food tourism offerings in order to increase their revenue or capitalise from synergistic cooperation with partner and supply businesses.	The interview with the main food tourism organisation of the region shall be used to determine the goals and priorities of the organisation and its members and the relative importance of simple increases in revenue and complex synergies through cooperation within those. Interviews with tourism and marketing organisations shall prove whether they offer marketing or promotion assistance to food tourism stakeholders in particular and whether that is done proactively by the organisations. Other interviewees shall provide a more distant or outsider view on cooperation between food tourism businesses and potential leadership roles in the region's food tourism.
#2 <i>Are food trails and local markets both adequate food tourism measures to encourage shortening local food supply chains?</i>	A food trail is more likely to be the adequate food tourism measure to encourage shortening local food supply chains than a local market.	All interviewees shall firstly be asked to assess the role of the respective attraction for food tourism in general and the organisation's connection to it, which is expected to be different for all stakeholders. Secondly, it shall be determined whether regional cooperation takes place and short supply chains have been an established goal in the respective region. Every organisation has a different angle at promoting cooperation or a different sector in which cooperation can be pursued. The latter is more obvious and can be prepare in advance to the interview. The former must be picked up during the interview. These two approaches shall allow an analysis whether regional cooperation takes place in connection to the attraction (food trail or market). The organisation most strongly connected to the respective attraction will be asked on their efforts to increase regional cooperation and reciprocal promotion.
#3 <i>Which factors can encourage regional actors of the agricultural and hospitality sectors to become involved in</i>	A lack of competitiveness, especially among small businesses presents an incentive to actively engage within an integrative food	The interview with the main food tourism organisation of the region shall be used to determine the participative behaviour of its members. A focus on a potential effect of competitiveness shall be applied. The interview with the regional tourist board shall give insights in how and which businesses approach

<p><i>the definition and the management of food tourism product offerings?</i></p>	<p>tourism platform, and trust and social capital are a facilitator for the projected acceptance or success of their initiatives within the platform.</p>	<p>the experts on tourism matters. A focus on the potential effect of trust and social capital within the region shall be applied.</p> <p>All interviews shall be used to determine whether the small-scale businesses in particular are involved in an environment of economic necessity and food tourism is perceived as a way out by the stakeholders themselves, but also by the organisation.</p>
<p>#4 <i>Is a regional agency /platform for food tourism additional to existing tourism administrations necessary?</i></p>	<p>Irrespective of the limits to the capacities of tourist offices, a platform specialised in food tourism promises better outcomes because of more complex tasks to be covered for food.</p>	<p>All interviewees shall be asked to explain their range of tasks in order to distinguish existing roles – particularly between the respective main food tourism organisation, the regional tourist board and/or the destination marketing organisation.</p> <p>All interviews shall be used to determine the relative importance of local food producers for tourism/tourists as well as the relative importance of tourism/tourists for the food producers. The main food tourism organisation and the tourist board are expected to be vital for the answer of the former question while development and agri-food organisation are expected to better determine the latter question.</p>
<p>#5 <i>How important is the complementarity of food tourism offers with "other visitor products such as cultural and natural heritage attractions" (Hall, 2012, p.50)? Are they competitors for public support?</i></p>	<p>All tourism stakeholders realise that integrating various tourist attractions to a holistic tourism package is advised in rural areas. However, public institutions may have reservations to cooperation to protect their range of operation for which they receive funding.</p>	<p>All interviews shall be used to determine how interconnected agriculture and tourism are in the region in general in order to analyse how well food tourism is applied in the region.</p> <p>The interview with the regional tourism administration shall be used to determine how integrated food tourism is in the overall touristic package of the region. Determining the suitability of the institutional settings shall be done through checking for barriers to the cooperation between the main food tourism organisation and the regional tourism administration.</p> <p>Competition between the organisations for public support shall be checked implicitly and explicitly – especially between the main food tourism organisation and the tourist board/destination marketing organisation.</p> <p>Other interviews will serve similar purposes to establish in which areas barriers to cooperation exist and in which cooperation flourishes. They shall also provide insights which organisation works with whom for the sake of complementarity, a holistic appearance and a broad economic effect.</p>
<p>#6</p>	<p>Peripheral areas and their landscapes attract</p>	<p>All interviews shall be used to compare the regional food speciality with other geographical indicators</p>

<p><i>What role do landscapes, peripherality and transportation infrastructure play for establishing a food tourism product?</i></p>	<p>tourists seeking an escapist holiday but create a hindrance due to the length of their journey. Transportation infrastructure is expected to play less of a role for tourists.</p>	<p>that attract tourists to the region. If available, data on the travel motivations will be requested. The role of landscapes and transportation possibilities on attracting food tourists shall be asked directly to all interviewees. All organisations shall be asked about the target group of their campaigns. The interview with the regional tourism administration shall be used to determine the profile of the average tourist visiting the region. Other interviews shall also be used to assess the self-image of the region as a tourist destination.</p>
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*Table 3 – Targeted data from individual interview groups by research question*

## **Appendix B**

### **Semi-structured interview outlines**

#### **B.i. Highest or central food tourism institution in the region**

- Please describe in short your organisation and its range of tasks and your position within that!

*RQ4 - Is a regional agency/platform for food tourism additional to existing tourism administrations necessary?*

- Does your organisation initiate the development of new tourist attractions in the region like ... (themed walking tours)? Are you planning any tourist experiences or collaborations with regional businesses regarding food or cheese in particular?

*RQ2 - Are food trails and local markets both adequate food tourism measures to encourage shortening local food supply chains? (different for Noord-Holland and Bregenzerwald)*

- Are you witnessing increased cooperation between agricultural other regional businesses been in order to offer cheese relation tourist attractions?

Noord-Holland only:

- What is your relation to the Cheese Market Alkmaar? Who organises or manages it?
- Does the Cheese Market reach out to restaurants or hotels or farmers on how to market its cheese better or are there already sufficient ties in place?

Bregenzerwald only:

- In what ways does the *CheeseRoute* contribute to regionalising or shortening supply and value chains?
- Do you see yourself as a marketer of the cheese producing and gastronomy businesses or as a mediator between those businesses?

*RQ1 - What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?*

- Are you facilitating cooperation between agricultural and other regional businesses in order to offer cheese relation tourist attractions?
- How important are tourists for the cheese producers in the region?
- How important are the cheese producers for tourism in the region?
- Have you seen an increase in tourists travelling to the region for its cheese? Is there a congruent awareness of its potential from stakeholders in the region?

*RQ3 - Which factors can encourage regional operating actors of the agricultural and hospitality sectors to become involved in the definition and the management of food tourism product offerings?*

- Can you recognise a relationship between the competitiveness of businesses and their participation or development of food tourism attractions?
- Are those businesses which are more competitive more active/engaged within your organisation or those which are less competitive?
- Would you say that there is a level of trust between the cheese producers (farmers and makers) and the tourism sector, upon which (even) better cooperation can grow?

*RQ5 - How important is the complementarity of food tourism offers with "other visitor products such as cultural and natural heritage attractions" (Hall, 2012, p.50)? Are they competitors for public support?*

- How would you best describe the Cheese Market Alkmaar/CheeseRoute Bregenzerwald and its importance for food tourism in the region?
- Are there joint projects / campaigns of the Cheese Market Alkmaar/CheeseRoute Bregenzerwald with the regional tourist board?
- Do/Would you consider it to be beneficial or even necessary, that there are separate organisations for the agricultural maintenance through tourism and for tourism in general?
- Do you feel the food tourism attractions are treated like any other cultural tourist attraction that has to compete for public support?

*RQ6 – What role does peripherality and transportation infrastructure play for establishing a food tourism product?*

- What role does the geographical location play for the attractiveness of the region for food tourists?
- Who is the target group of food tourism and how well are you reaching them?
- Has the number of guests who come to the region also for its food increased over the last years? Do you record such guest data?

## **B.ii. Regional tourist board/DMO**

- Please describe in short your organisation and its range of tasks!

*RQ4 - Is a regional agency/platform for food tourism additional to existing tourism administrations necessary?*

- Does your organisation initiate the development of new tourist attractions in the region like \_\_\_? Are you planning any tourist experiences or collaborations with regional businesses regarding food or cheese in particular?

*RQ2 - Are food trails and local markets both adequate food tourism measures to encourage shortening local food supply chains?*

- The food tourism attractions that you offer are among others ... . Since when are you specifically promoting these?
- Does an increased demand for such attractions stand in any relation to the (CheeseRoute Bregenzerwald/Cheese Market Alkmaar)?
- Would you consider the outreach by the \_\_\_\_ (Cheese Market/CheeseRoute) and the ties between them and local restaurants, hotels or farmers as sufficient?

*RQ1 - What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?*

- Are you cooperating with farmers who offer touristic attractions/experiences?
- Is there any cooperation in the region between agricultural and other businesses in order to offer cheese related food tourism attractions?

*RQ3 - Which factors can encourage regional operating actors of the agricultural and hospitality sectors to become involved in the definition and the management of food tourism product offerings?*

- Would you say that there is a level of trust between the cheese producers (farmers and makers) and the tourism sector, upon which (even) better cooperation can grow?

*RQ1 - What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?*

- Are you taking up the role of a mediator between the businesses?
- How important are the cheese producers for tourism in the region?
- How important are tourists for the cheese producers in the region?

*RQ3 - Which factors can encourage regional operating actors of the agricultural and hospitality sectors to become involved in the definition and the management of food tourism product offerings?*

- Can you recognise a relationship between the competitiveness of businesses and their participation or development of food tourism attractions?

*RQ4 - Is a regional agency/platform for food tourism additional to existing tourism administrations necessary?*

- How would you best describe the \_\_\_\_\_ (CheeseRoute Bregenzerwald/Cheese Market Alkmaar) and its importance for food tourism in the region?
- Do you consider it to be necessary, that there are separate organisations for the agricultural maintenance through tourism and for tourism in general?

*RQ5 - How important is the complementarity of food tourism offers with "other visitor products such as cultural and natural heritage attractions" (Hall, 2012, p.50)? Are they competitors for public support?*

- Are there joint actions of the \_\_\_\_\_ (CheeseRotue Bregenzerwald/Cheese Market Alkmaar) with your organisation?
- Is the \_\_\_\_\_ (CheeseRoute Bregenzerwald/Cheese Market) competing or have you been competing for public/political support with other tourist attractions?
- Do you feel there is enough public support for integrating cheese into the tourism world, to create tourist attractions or cooperation between producers and the tourism or gastronomy sector?

*RQ6 – What role does peripherality and transportation infrastructure play for establishing a food tourism product?*

- What role does the geographical location play for the attractiveness of the region for food tourists?
- Who is the target group of food tourism and how well are you reaching them?
- Has the number of guests who come to the region also for its food increased over the last years? Do you record such guest data?

### **B.iii. Regional development agency**

- Please describe in short your organisation and its range of tasks!

*RQ1 - What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?*

- What are the goals of your food-touristic initiative called \_\_\_\_?
- In what regard/to what extent do you promote the cooperation of regional businesses which perhaps did not cooperate in forehand?
- In the last few years, did new collaborations between agricultural and other regional businesses in regard to cheese come to exist?

*RQ3 - Which factors can encourage regional operating actors of the agricultural and hospitality sectors to become involved in the definition and the management of food tourism product offerings?*

- Would you say that there is a level of trust between the cheese producers (farmers and makers) and the tourism sector, upon which (even) better cooperation can grow?
- Is it rather the competitive businesses who are approaching you or the ones that are struggling and in need to change?

*RQ4 - Is a regional agency/platform for food tourism additional to existing tourism administrations necessary?*

- Why are there so many organisations in the region? Does that have to do with a lack of initiative bottom up?

*RQ1 - What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?*

- Are you taking up the role of a mediator between the businesses?
- How important are the cheese producers for the economic development of the region/rural parts of the region?

*RQ5 - How important is the complementarity of food tourism offers with "other visitor products such as cultural and natural heritage attractions" (Hall, 2012, p.50)? Are they competitors for public support?*

- How important is it to you to offer a holistic tourism package to tourist, one where cultural heritage is made accessible along the same sort of story line?
- How do you decide who you work with?

#### **B.iv. Food or agriculture development agency**

- Please describe in short your organisation and its range of tasks and your position within that!

*RQ5 - How important is the complementarity of food tourism offers with "other visitor products such as cultural and natural heritage attractions" (Hall, 2012, p.50)? Are they competitors for public support?*

- Does *Water, Land en Dijken* operate based on a membership principle or a partnership principle? How do you decide who you work with?

*RQ1 - What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?*

- In which ways are you promoting or facilitating the cooperation of regional businesses and farmers that maybe haven't been working together before?
- What are the goals of the businesses that join your organisation?

*RQ2 - Are food trails and local markets both adequate food tourism measures to encourage shortening local food supply chains?*

- In the last couple of years, have you witnessed a development of new collaborations of regional businesses and farmers related to cheese?

- Are you involved in making regional produce more available at restaurants, bars, shops?

*RQ3 - Which factors can encourage regional operating actors of the agricultural and hospitality sectors to become involved in the definition and the management of food tourism product offerings?*

- Would you say there has been a sort of reluctance of agricultural businesses to go into tourism? How good are the relations between the agricultural and the touristic businesses?
- Are you rather approaching the less competitive businesses that are struggling and need to adapt parts of their traditional business model? Or are the more competitive businesses approaching you for support in their development?

*RQ1 - What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?*

- Are you taking up the role of a mediator between the businesses?
- How important are the cheese producers for the economic development of the region/rural parts of the region?

*RQ4 - Is a regional agency/platform for food tourism additional to existing tourism administrations necessary?*

- Why are there so many organisations in the region?
- Who is the target group you want to reach?

### **B.v. Prominent private food tourism stakeholder**

- Please describe in short your organisation and its range of tasks and your position within that!
- Are you currently collaborating with the regional tourist board or planning to do so in the future?
- Do your farmers offer tours other attractions tourists that you know of? And if yes, are involved in the touristic attractions or experiences they offer?

*RQ2 - Are food trails and local markets both adequate food tourism measures to encourage shortening local food supply chains?*

- What is your relation to the \_\_\_\_ (Cheese Market/*CheeseRoute*)?
- Do you reach out to restaurants, bars or hotels via the cheese market on how to market your cheese better to tourists or are there already sufficient ties in place?

- Have you seen an increase in tourists travelling to the region for its cheese? Is there a congruent awareness of its potential from stakeholders in the region?

RQ1 - What benefits to the regional economy do food tourism stakeholders strive for?

- How important are the cheese producers for tourism in the region?
- How important are tourists for the cheese producers in the region?
- Is there any cooperation in the region between agricultural and other businesses in order to offer cheese related food tourism attractions?

RQ3 - Which factors can encourage regional operating actors of the agricultural and hospitality sectors to become involved in the definition and the management of food tourism product offerings?

- Would you say that there is a level of trust between the cheese producers (farmers and makers) and the tourism sector, upon which (even) better cooperation can grow?
- What was the reason for deciding to do \_\_\_\_ (respective tourism attraction) and what were the expected goals?

*RQ5 - How important is the complementarity of food tourism offers with "other visitor products such as cultural and natural heritage attractions?" (Hall, 2012, p.50) Are they competitors for public support?*

- Have you ever sought public support, either financial support or political support?
- Do you feel the food tourism attractions are treated like any other cultural tourist attraction that has to compete for public support?

RQ4 - Is a regional agency/platform for food tourism additional to existing tourism administrations necessary?

- Would you consider it to be beneficial or even necessary, that there are separate organisations for the agricultural maintenance through tourism and another one like the existing one for tourism in general?

RQ6 – What role does peripherality and transportation infrastructure play for establishing a food tourism product?

- What role does the geographical location play for the attractiveness of the region for food tourists?
- Who is the target group of food tourism and how well are you reaching them?
- Has the number of guests who come to the region also for its food increased over the last years? Did you record such data before planning the tourist experience for example?