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Perspectives on proximity tourism in Fryslân

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Chapter 7

Conclusions
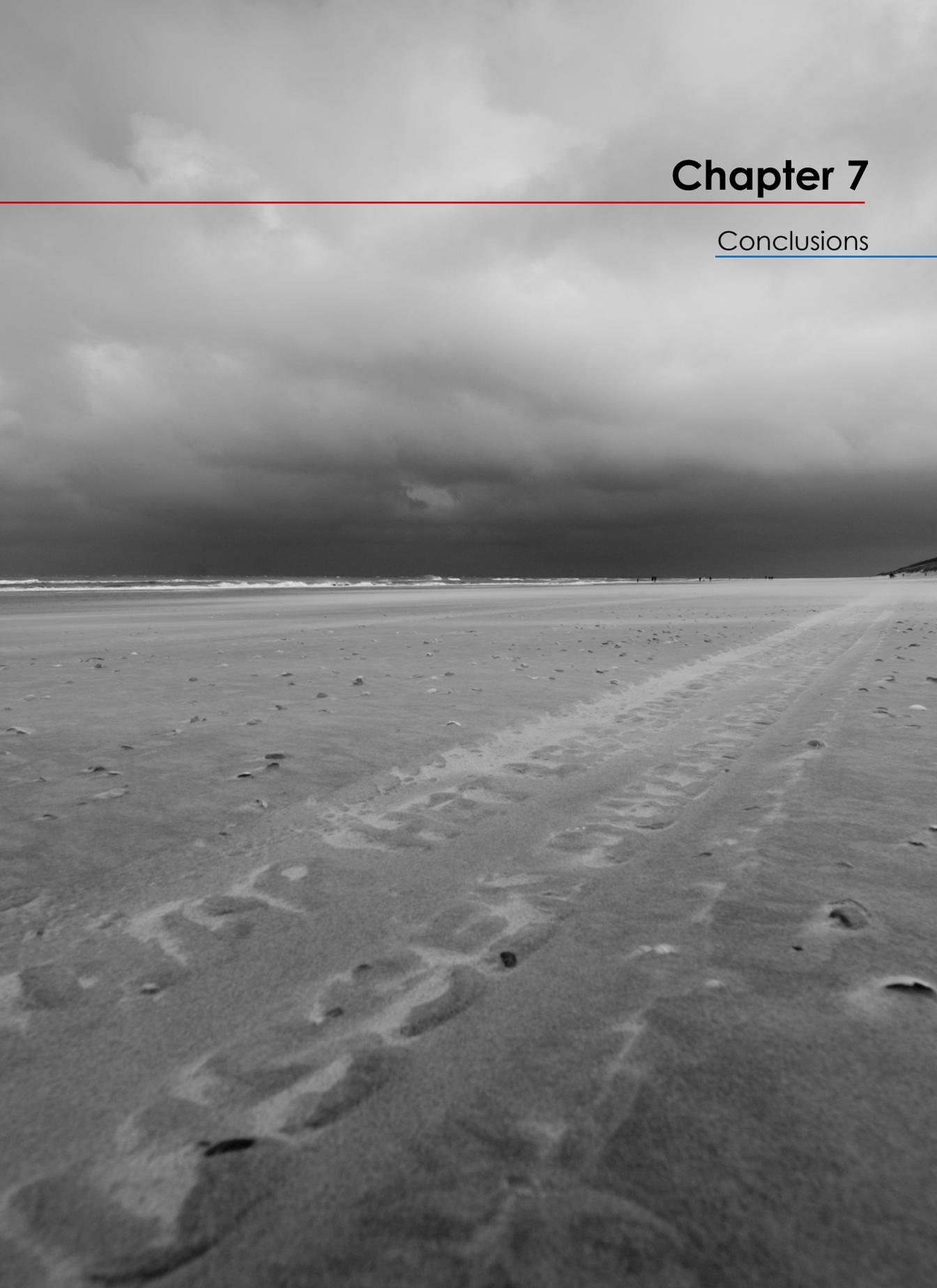
Chapter 7

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to better understand how discursive, behavioral and experiential practices of socio-spatial identification depend on and augment/constrain touristic consumption/production of places near home. In the context of the Dutch province of Fryslân, from three stakeholder perspectives (tourism policy, entrepreneurs and residents), insights were gained on the extent to which touristic consumption/production practices transgress the boundaries between home and away on the regional level.

I referred to this transgression by using the notion of proximity tourism: the paradoxical production/consumption of touristic otherness within places that feel familiar. From this, the stakeholder perspectives could be scrutinized in order to make inferences as to what the implications are for Fryslân as tourism destination and for the ways residents make meaning of Fryslân as basis for socio-spatial identification, when boundaries between home and away dissolve.

In this final chapter I will shortly recap the main findings and conclusions per chapter (7.2). Then I will synthesize these in order to reflect on how the concept of proximity tourism contributes to conceptual knowledges of the blurring of tourism and the usual environment (7.3). From this I develop a number of theoretical and practical implications, by discussing proximity tourism as mode for regional development in terms of the political power of institutionalizing processes (7.4), the importance of citizen engagement (7.5) and sustainable tourism mobility (7.6). Finally, I discuss limitations of the research approach of this thesis and give suggestions for future research (7.7)

7.2 Results and conclusions per chapter

Chapter 2 started off with a study on the discursive positioning of Fryslân as tourism destination in regional tourism marketing strategies (Research Question 1). The study revealed various contradictions in how aspects of place brands, identity claims, target groups, roles and collaborations were used to position Fryslân. The regulating processes of touristic positioning are imbued with 'politically charged' representations of social and spatial meanings. This was exemplified by the hegemony of a homogenizing and externally oriented discourse. This led to the conclusion that Fryslân was primarily positioned as a place for touristic consumption for people from 'elsewhere', while the regional benefits were often reduced to incoming monetary revenue.

The strong reliance on holistic representations is at odds however with the intraregional social and spatial differences existing within the province. This brings along a challenge for destination marketers and policy makers as to how externally oriented images will be perceived and acted upon by internal stakeholders such as residents. Therefore, representations of difference and similarity employed in destination positioning should be balanced and support their socio-spatial narratives. This would furthermore account for and build upon the various roles of residents as both producers and potential consumers, which in turn can be a basis for engaging residents in place branding.

The notion of role attributions was picked up further by Chapter 3. It was explored how tourism entrepreneurs in Fryslân make meaning of their relationships with residents of the province by the way they attribute touristic consumption/production roles to residents of Fryslân (RQ2). Roles were attributed along four themes: 'Being a tourist', 'Discovery and unawareness', 'Life course experiences' and 'Ambassadorship'. It was concluded that relationships between entrepreneurs and residents are at risk of a behavioral lock-in: producers see residents as an unattractive target

group because they perceive residents as being unaware of near home touristic attractions, while a lack of interest in residents as potential customers reinforces that many residents remain unfamiliar with local attractiveness. The concept of re-consumption provided a conceptual and practical way out and gave rise to opportunities for pluralized and interdependent resident roles and entrepreneur-resident relationships. It was concluded that to facilitate the essential inclusion of residents in near home touristic consumption/production, efforts are required from entrepreneurs, regional government and, ideally also, residents. A basis for this could be the notion of role-switching, both within and between stakeholders: tourism SMEs may adopt touristic consumer roles themselves, and residents can become the producers, feeding them with local touristic knowledge and experiences, for instance. Role-switching both allows for and benefits from a conscious negotiation between what is seen as familiar, and what is seen as novel and thus can represent touristic value. For example when a visit of family or friends allows residents to be simultaneously a host and a tourist.

Chapter 4 then focused on the ways subjectivities of distance and proximity among residents of Fryslân affect the appreciation of their region of residence as a tourism destination (RQ3). The findings reflect the dominance of a belief that tourism and everyday life places are geographically separated: "home is here, my holiday is there." Interpretations of proximity and distance signified a hegemony of conventional touristic push, pull, keep and repel factors, such as weather conditions and cultural differences. Various nuances and non-linear ways of spatio-temporal positioning were found too. For example, the attractiveness of home and away was occasionally constructed in relative instead of absolute terms of space and time. Also, the appreciation of familiarity of and with Fryslân counters the impression that tourism destinations should only be framed as places to escape from home. Moreover, this opens up

the opportunity, but also highlights a need for Fryslân to acknowledge that it just as well is/can be a tourism destination for its residents.

It was concluded that this recognition is a challenge in terms of how to create near home tourist experiences. This challenge also raises the question whether a (re)discovery of the familiar home environment through tourism is a matter of responsibility and good citizenship. In this vein, Chapter 5 studied the engagement of residents in touristic promotion, to get further understanding of how touristic consumption/production can relate to notions of citizenship behavior. It was explored to what the extent residents of Fryslân feel responsible to engage in promoting the province as tourism destination (RQ4). Residents of Fryslân perceived responsibility for promoting Fryslân as tourism destination to be shared between the government, entrepreneurs and themselves, and as such their attribution patterns were found to be partly predictive of intentions to engage in both positive and negative Word-of-Mouth. It was concluded that, in principle, residents are willing to contribute to regional tourism development by WOM behavior. However this implies that as a precondition there is a need to facilitate meaningful touristic experiences for residents within their home region. For instance, touristic experiences near home and local knowledge are needed as a basis for the stories to be told to others.

Chapter 6 examined how the weather affects perceived attractiveness of domestic holidays in The Netherlands and which weather conditions form a basis for experienced differences between home and away (RQ5). Hereby, this chapter explored more in-depth the finding in Chapter 4 that the weather plays an important role in shaping spatial imaginaries along which home and away are negotiated. Respondents displayed a general high level of attentiveness to weather conditions, but how this relates to destination imaginaries and at-destination behavior, varies according to people's Weather Salience (perceived personal significance of the weather).

Furthermore, weather induced differences between home and destination appeared to vary on a small geographical level, with windy conditions being a major factor. It was concluded that weather is a meaningful socio-spatial characteristic, with important consequences for the attractiveness of domestic tourism in The Netherlands. The findings hereby point to the relevance of the weather for experiences of touristic otherness. It was suggested that weather deserves more attention in Dutch tourism management practices in terms of psychological coping, in addition to currently popular physical interventions to deal with inclement weather. Also, since weather shapes stereotyped ideas about the assumed familiar climate and weather of the home country and region, efforts to communicate more nuanced weather knowledge could positively contribute to perceived attractiveness of domestic tourism.

7.3 Reflections on proximity tourism

7.3.1 From lock-in to in-between-ness?

The prevalence of tourism meanings which benefit from the 'in-between-ness' (Bourdeau, 2012) that is enabled by overlapping dichotomies (i.e., home-away, tourist-resident), is still relatively limited and undervalued in the context of Fryslân. The different stakeholders concerned in this thesis seem to shape each other's spaces in which they can perform certain touristic practices along meanings which often reconfirm the taken-for-granted difference between what is unusual (and thus touristically attractive) and what is usual. This way, limited opportunities exist for engaging with alternative, hybrid practices (i.e., proximity tourism) as basis for socio-spatial identification and as foundation for attributing touristic value. The lock-in (Ma & Hassink, 2013) hinted at in Chapter 3 thus appears to extend beyond SME-resident relationships and affects various stakeholder relations, their touristic practices and how meanings of Fryslân inform and are informed by socio-spatial identities such as 'home' and 'away'.

Both the tendency of a lock-in and the opportunities for proximity tourism are embedded in the meaning-making powers generated in processes of circulation (Ateljevic, 2000; Du Gay, 1997). The interdependencies of practices which were addressed across various chapters exemplify this. For example, positioning Fryslân as tourism destination (Chapter 2) builds on holistic spatial identities to be supported by certain practices of Frisian residents. For this support, such as Word of Mouth communication (Chapter 5), touristic knowledge about and experience with residents' home region is crucial. Facilitated by active resident-entrepreneur relationships (Chapter 3), residents can build and reframe various spatial imaginaries of Fryslân (Chapter 6) by engaging in touristic activities (Chapter 4). In turn, to inform residents about the various touristic offerings in Fryslân, to facilitate consumption activities and resident-entrepreneur relationships, tourism marketing and policy need to facilitate resident oriented tourism (Chapter 2), which in turn can reinforce place attachment and a sense of citizenship. Such circular interdependencies indeed make any touristic practice a delicate endeavor.

At worst, circulating forces result in the marginalization of meanings and interests of certain stakeholders at the expense of others. To that end, the apparent external orientation in destination marketing on incoming visitors (Chapter 2) from ever further away (e.g., attempting to attract visitors from Asian countries such as China and Japan) risks overlooking and misunderstanding local stakeholders (e.g., residents). But also when relationships between tourism entrepreneurship and the community in which it is embedded are absent (Chapter 3), opportunities are likely missed in terms of knowledge circulation and ambassadorship. This limits the symbolic drivers of tourism (i.e., discovery, curiosity, comfort, otherness) to transcend into and be inspired from socio-spatial characteristics of places, people and activities that are closer to home and associated with everyday life. At the same time, not acknowledging the touristic value of

familiarity or the touristic character of near home holidays does not do justice to the societal importance of tourist practices on small geographical levels and within familiar contexts. This means that certain practices that are undeniably imbued with touristic value remain under the radar (e.g., Visiting Friends and Relatives, VFR tourism) and that certain motivations and benefits of 'typical' near home tourists (e.g., temporarily inhabiting second homes or seasonal camping spots) remain little understood and unacknowledged.

At best however, the dynamics of circulation further integrate tourism into everyday life, by bringing out a renewed interest for and valuation of what was deemed familiar and known. Creative and innovative ways of constructing touristic value consciously negotiate and build on the paradox of physical proximity imbued with experiential novelty. Similarly, citizen participation is not only considered in terms of production (e.g., hospitable hosts, brand ambassadors) but also acknowledges its precondition of consumption (tourism as a way to learn about the home region) (Chapter 3 & 5). Moreover, residents feel a responsibility to engage with their home region through tourism. Tourism policy embraces the potential of touristic role-shifting between various stakeholders (Chapter 3) and entrepreneurs are considering how to make most of the mutual interests of themselves and of people living in the proximity of their businesses.

This thesis only provides insight in a small part of these inherently complex and interdependent processes. However, it does show that circulation is a powerful mechanism of constructing, confirming, reconfirming and contesting meanings. Specifically, there seems to be plenty of room for tourism stakeholders in Fryslân to increase their awareness about its potential and be attentive to the opportunities that are embedded 'in-between' the production and consumption of here and elsewhere.

7.3.2 The latent exoticness of assumed familiarity

In any case, for all stakeholders it seems unavoidable that they have to deal with the continued blurring of meanings in the era of 'after-tourism' (Bourdeau, 2012): conventional touristic places are becoming increasingly ordinary and interchangeable, while mundane and everyday places are infused with exoticness. Alongside this process, tourism has grown into a cultural phenomenon that dominantly shapes people's worldviews and identities. At the same time tourism destabilizes the meanings of home and away by its transient spatio-temporal nature. This creates a paradox in which the ephemerality of touristic consumption/production feeds from a reconfirmation of absolute dichotomies that (artificially) delimit the usual and the non-usual. The meaning-making flexibility of the 'after-tourism' era thus owes to the popularity of dualisms serving as stable, established socio-spatial anchors. The exoticness of the ordinary then lies in its peripheral, latent nature, situated not at the edge, but in-between polarized extremities. And it is exactly within such overlapping margins, in the shadow of hegemonic touristic practices, where innovative, multiple meanings and practices of 'new' touristic otherness can emerge.

So, the paradox of destabilizing forces of touristic dualisms is not just an undesirable consequence of globalizing dynamics or an externality of profit-oriented approaches to tourism. From the optimistic perspective this thesis has aimed to embrace, a hybridization of everyday life and tourism is primarily creating a promising space for rediscovery of what is assumed familiar, an exoticization of the everyday (c.f., Larsen, 2008). While this might mean that tourism 'dissolves' into everyday life (Bourdeau, 2012), at the same time thus new opportunities arise for tourism to be a meaningful way for people to grapple with the transition of 'spaces of place' to 'spaces of flows' (Govers, Van Hecke, & Cabus, 2008). Various forms have emerged already, from guided walks for residents to train stations that become shopping centers, from staycationing (holidays at home) to glamping

(luxury camping). The inventions of new meanings and practices is an exploratory –and timely– adventure in itself.

At the same time, given the latent nature of proximity tourism, it would be unreasonable to expect from this thesis to find more than occasional examples of proximity tourism in Fryslân. But the examples found throughout this thesis that do reflect an appreciation of the touristic value of what is relatively nearby are to be taken as promising signs for the innovative capacity of tourism in Fryslân and for the flexibility of tourism as cultural phenomenon.

7.3.3 Tourist experiences in a usual environment

Aligning with these notions, the findings also provide conceptual input for understanding the relation between spatial (un)familiarity and the construction of tourist experiences. For example, Elands and Lengkeek (2012), by building on Cohen's phenomenological approach to tourist experiences (Cohen, 1979), argue that a certain level of consciousness is necessary in order to experience 'out-there-ness'. This implies that people need a certain state of mind in order to appreciate any kind of touristic experiences. This intentional precondition is also referred to as 'distancing' (Diaz-Soria, 2017). For instance, residents as touristic consumers thus can contribute themselves to an integrated approach of touristic production and consumption, by adopting such a conscious interest in exploring ways to experiences exoticness near home. This requires an effort –psychological and behavioral– in the form of 'becoming' a tourist: visit a local museum, spend a night at a nearby bed & breakfast, rent a boat with a local entrepreneur, join a guided tour in the city of residence, visit an event in the neighboring village, to name only a few of the many options.

However, distancing is primarily a mental activity (Diaz-Soria, 2017) which might include but not depends on physical travel outside the usual environment. Thus, instead of predefining what is usual and unusual, the

boundary between home and away is shaped by the experiences itself and by the intentionality of the individual. This aligns with what de Certeau (1984) calls a 'bridge': the frontiers between home and away are not mere divisions that belong neither to 'here' nor to 'elsewhere'. These frontiers are actively negotiated and are spaces of interaction within which (touristic) stories can unfold. The findings from Chapter 4 illustrate this in the different ways people attribute meanings to and derive spatial identities from Fryslân as tourism destination *and* as place of residence: calling Fryslân 'home' makes it (for some) completely impossible to see the province as place for spending a holiday (i.e., they accept and reconfirm established frontiers between the usual and the unusual). For others, living in Fryslân means that they have the experience of being on holiday every day of the year. They actively negotiate (bridge) the familiarity and unfamiliarity provided by different meanings Fryslân has for them.

Next to psychological aspects, the social context obviously also affects what is seen as usual and unusual. For example, as becomes clear from Chapter 3, the hosting of family or friends provides for a context in which familiarity and attractiveness within a 'usual' environment are renegotiated and even inversed: finding novelty in familiar places becomes the touristic value itself. Residents not just *host* their guests, rather they *join* them as proximity tourists, for example on a guided citywalk or to a museum that none of them had visited before.

That is not to say that physical travel and specific environmental conditions become less relevant. On the contrary, evidence was found at various occasions that the physical environment and particularly the movement within it contributes to experiences of being away from home. But the physical distances need not to be extensive, and touristic otherness thus can be experienced even when travelling only small distances. Exemplary for this in the Frisian context is that the crossing of the Wadden Sea to Wadden Islands can provide a sense of being away (Chapter 4).

Furthermore, the physical environment itself is 'on the move' too and hereby can invoke experiences of difference: weather conditions in all their unpredictability and ephemerality can contribute to touristic experiences near home (Chapter 6). On a holistic level the Dutch climate often is a push factor (Chapter 4), as it is perceived as relatively uncomfortable and not aligning with the reinforced tourism imaginaries of blue sunny skies. On the personal level of micro experiences though, weather becomes a spatial characteristic of destinations and affects touristic practices in a much more nuanced way (c.f., Jeuring & Peters, 2013). As such, weather conditions can make the most familiar places an unusual environment and they can make the most routine activities an exciting adventure (or a trauma). More generally then, much is still to be learnt about the cultural significance of weather in tourism contexts, for example in terms of how weather variability is perceived from a longitudinal perspective, throughout a vacation, or how specific weather experiences are forming broader attitudes toward destinations. Also, other ephemeral phenomena on the micro-level, such as tidal changes or seasonal variability (e.g., Cannas, 2012) could provide for a broader conceptual context to advance the knowledge of how spatio-temporal characteristics of the environment affect near home tourist practices.

7.4 Politics of regional institutionalization

7.4.1. Rethinking successful tourism development

The increased 'tourism reflexivity' –the interest of regions and cities to explore and develop their touristic potential– has resulted in a growing concern with spatial identification as part of regional development policy (Govers et al., 2008). As such, touristic identification processes are increasingly politically charged (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003). Spatial identities and representations are attempted to be regulated, with important implications for the ordering of production and consumption practices

across stakeholders: what is found attractive by consumers is not only decided by themselves, but just as much by the imaginaries reinforced by tourism marketing, for example through place branding. When such tourism practices are a form of spatial institutionalization, the practices studied in this thesis thus far tend to limit proximity tourism to be part of this institutionalizing process.

Indeed, the importance attributed to competitive identities (Anholt, 2007) as basis for tourism development (Chapter 2) is problematic, as such an approach often does not align with the interests of internal stakeholders such as residents, let alone that it accounts for the multiplicity and interdependence of the roles they can take up. For example, Fryslân's image as tourism destination is constructed in a way that does not fully benefit from its internal heterogeneity. Also, the potential of internal stakeholders as place ambassadors pertains to much more than 'living the brand', or fulfilling roles as informal place promotors, to be used whenever convenient.

Nevertheless, being recognized as tourism destination seems to have become an indicator of prosperity for cities, municipalities, regions and countries. Arguably every region and city wants a piece of the tourism pie and jump on the bandwagon of global touristic mobility. The way this touristic success is often measured and hereby strived for however –in terms of (international) visitor numbers, overnight stays, et cetera– narrows the potential of tourism being a social force with benefits that reach beyond revenue. For example, by celebrating 'elsewhere' at the expense of 'here', a division between immobility and mobility is created (Salazar, 2012). Next to a general ignorance toward local stakeholder interests, this might result in residents being hesitant to engage in activities that are associated with the label of 'tourists' (Singh & Krakover, 2015). Obviously then, such sentiments counter the possibilities of tourism near home to be appreciated more fully.

While not unique for Fryslân, this tension between regional institutionalization for the purpose of tourism and the varieties of socio-spatial identification of residents is a problem inherent to the touristic commodification of socio-spatial identities more generally (Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013). In this vein, this thesis points to the need to rethink how 'successful' tourism development is to be defined. Clearly, the 'tourism as an industry paradigm' which appears to prevail might have to give way to a 'tourism as social force paradigm' (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006) in order to rightfully address these issues.

7.4.2 Empowering intraregional touristic mobility

Spatial meanings serve as anchors to position places and people in relation to other(s), signifying what and where they are (not) (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). This double process of identification is imbued with (dis)empowering forces that establish boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, between what is meaningful and what is redundant. While this boundary making pertains to many aspects of tourism (and to cultural dynamics in general), the ways Fryslân is positioned as tourism destination makes it familiar for its residents and unfamiliar for visitors from elsewhere (Chapter 2). In other words, the holistic imaginaries used as institutionalizing instruments that work well to connect people and places through tourism on the global level, fall short as mechanisms to grapple with the complex ways touristic mobilities and experiences can be enjoyed near home. For instance, residents attributed touristic meanings to Fryslân (Chapter 4) by saying that 'living in Fryslân means being on vacation everyday'. This highlights the need for policies aimed at regional livability to be sensible to how tourist experiences and activities can contribute to people's socio-spatial identification and well-being within the spatialities where people live their everyday lives. As such, there is a clear need for in-depth knowledge about intraregional touristic mobility on small geographical levels.

Furthermore, despite the holistic and externally oriented destination positioning discourse found in Chapter 2, the acknowledgement that internal stakeholders such as residents can contribute to tourism development in *multiple and mobile ways* (as opposed to being passive, immobile hosts of visitors from elsewhere, or merely being 'attractions' to be gazed at) can form an alternative way for integrating 'local' interests into tourism policies. This acknowledgement would also help strengthening the multiplicity of relations between stakeholders (e.g., entrepreneurs and residents, Chapter 3), for example along the role-switching dynamics inherent to the interdependencies of production and consumption.

In sum, it can be stated that when regions have the intention to incorporate tourism as a tool for socio-spatial transformation, the foundation for this might have to be built around the ways residents engage with their near home environment through tourism. Empowering intraregional touristic mobility therefore deserves to be high on the agenda of both tourism researchers and policymakers.

7.5 Citizen engagement and place attachment
7.5.1 Proximity tourism for all: rights and responsibilities
The power to influence socio-spatial transformation through territorial legitimacy is increasingly contested (Zimmerbauer & Paasi, 2013). This development is signified and reinforced by a decentralization of governance processes toward lower spatial levels (e.g., sub-national regions) and enhanced by bottom-up processes (Lugosi, 2014), for example by giving voice to residents. This thesis then points to the importance to account for the multiple roles of local tourism stakeholders (particularly residents) (e.g., Chapter 3) as both consumers and producers. In that sense, the notion of proximity tourism gives residents both new rights and responsibilities in how they shape their socio-spatial identities through

tourism and how they contribute to tourism as tool for socio-spatial transformation.

Rights are relevant when, for example, residents are increasingly acknowledged as producing forces in tourism, because this automatically means (for example based on the notion of re-consumption) that their consuming activities need to be facilitated as well. An important question to ask then is for who tourism –as socio-spatial practice near home– is available and accessible and in which ways? This question goes beyond the development of physical infrastructure and attractions. It pertains more than anything to the symbolic, societal value attributed to 'tourism' (Hibbert, Dickinson, Gössling, & Curtin, 2013). Availability and accessibility of leisure time and touristic mobility are symbols of modernity and affluence: access to tourism is indeed a right for all (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). However, when near home leisure activities are then framed as *recreation* –thus as *not tourism*–, this arguably contributes to a relative devaluation of leisure practices on small geographical levels. For people who for some reason are limited in their potential to 'get global', or who simply do not wish to do so and prefer to stay at or near home (Chapter 4), this means that they are at risk of being overlooked when it comes to their preferences or interests. But also, they remain little understood in their motivations and experiences. At the same time, an artificial distinction between tourism and recreation might result in people who are relatively mobile, affluent and who have more generally access to 'global' tourism activities, spending their vacation near-home is likely an unattractive option. In other words, exclusively relying on 'international' and 'physical distance' narratives could result in an marginalization of certain activities and places from the touristic realm that form essential ways for people to value themselves and the places they inhabit.

This thesis also points to certain responsibilities for residents. For example, residents have a certain obligation to acknowledge their multiple

roles in tourism development within their region of residence. Citizenship and citizen participation depends on a felt responsibility to take care of both the physical places and activities near home *and* a sensibility toward their societal symbolic meanings. The topic of place branding and the role of resident Word of Mouth (Chapter 5) exemplifies how residents can help promote their region. These practices have a lot of potential but are at risk of being experienced by residents as being enforced upon them. Ideally then, being a place ambassador should be rooted in an intrinsic motivation. This is an important challenge for tourism policy, for which the 'lock-in' described in Chapter 3, and the paradox of perceiving Fryslân as attractive tourism destination, but only for others (Chapter 4) are exemplary. In sum, as long as there is a disconnect between meanings of tourism and people's attachment to places where they live, the integration of touristic consumption/production that seems so promising in theory will remain underdeveloped in practice.

7.5.2 Playful learning: building social capital through tourism

The broader context in which these issues are embedded pertains to the ways people develop attachment to places, feel that they belong somewhere and employ spatial identities. To this end, the relevance of proximity tourism lies in its potential to build on and develop social capital within small spatial units that are meaningful for such spatial identities. Indeed, successful intraregional tourism destinations, as stated by Canavan, are 'accessible to locals, providing social interest and leisure opportunities, supporting community infrastructure and industry, and ultimately [are] contributing to social cohesion and civic pride' (Canavan, 2013, p. 349). This statement clearly reflects the interdependent and circulating dynamic between different stakeholders and the socio-spatial meanings attributed to tourism that have been placed in the spotlight by this thesis.

For tourism to strive for such an integrated role in local societies seems an ideal central objective for any practice of touristic production, *and* consumption. Throughout the last decades though we have unlearnt to think this way about tourism, influenced by various powerful societal developments that have put economic profits above social benefits. But a major opportunity lies in the capacity of tourism itself to be an educational tool, a learning practice through which knowledge and awareness is generated. Therefore, it is suggested to stimulate proximity tourism as an opportunity for playful learning (Bos, McCabe, & Johnson, 2013). This potential is exemplified by one entrepreneur (Chapter 3): *"Learning should be fun, but even more importantly, you should not notice that you are learning. This makes all educational aspects similarly attractive for touristic purposes."* This way, tourism is more than a hedonic activity in search of pleasurable experiences. Tourism in general becomes part of people's lifelong learning (Falk, Ballantyne, Packer, & Benckendorff, 2012) about the world around them – including the places they call home.

Moreover, an increased emphasis on learning about a region's history, present and future, can provide destination branding with new routes for communication, and entrepreneurs with new business models and clientele. It is this integrated approach to tourism, embedded in people's everyday lives, that is the key message put forward by the notion of proximity tourism. In that vein, there is a clear link to be made in policy between educational programs and tourism within locales such as cities and regions. Facilitating school trips and developing touristic educational programs within young people's living environment are ways to communicate knowledge, create awareness and learn social, cultural and practical skills. These could be made a priority in regional policies that aim to build on tourism for regional development.

However, as has hopefully occurred naturally by now, tourism as learning practice indeed is not just another mode of consumption. It is also

a key precondition of any production practice. Therefore, engaging with learning through tourism is as important for tourism entrepreneurs as it is for residents. Being curious, 'a Marco Polo' (Chapter 3), and be willing to educate and be educated by residents and other entrepreneurs should also be part of the repertoire of any business activity.

7.6 Proximity tourism in the context of sustainable travel

The experience of being on the move, travelling from one place to another, is an important motivation for touristic behavior. People's 'need for distance' (Larsen & Guiver, 2013) is inherently related to how home and away are negotiated, which was also confirmed in this thesis, particularly in Chapter 4. Other places with different nature, scenery, climate or cultures will keep pulling people and make them willing to cross significant distances. Travel will always be a central aspect of tourism.

However, since the era of fossil fuel will inevitably come to an end, a momentum is emerging to replace unsustainable modes of transport on which tourism is currently depending so strongly. This momentum extends beyond the need for innovative technologies based on alternative energy resources. The symbolic importance attributed to physical travel forms a point of concern that deserves as much attention. First of all because travel has become an indispensable pre-condition for identifying oneself as tourist and second because it shapes the ways we identify places as (in)appropriate for touristic consumption. This has direct consequences for how far and how often people travel for their touristic needs. Indeed, the incentives to travel the world by airplanes are everywhere. Budget airlines often offer cheaper tickets than rail companies. This hegemonic paradigm of cheap travel and selling kilometers dominates tourism meanings and feeds the cultural valuation of physical distance. To counter such imaginaries, developing proximity tourism could indeed be a promising but challenging avenue (Dubois, Peeters, Ceron, & Gössling, 2011).

Therefore, tourism industries need to find ways to make the near home environment touristically valuable. The province of Fryslân could become a frontrunner in shifting the paradigm, for example based on its geographical layout: the Wadden Islands are arguably places perfectly fitting imaginaries of near-home otherness. Surely, such environmental contrasts are to be found in many places across the world. Similarly, the increasing popularity of cycling as touristic activity and as transport mode brings along promising opportunities for new ways of exploring places. Particularly e-bikes, made in Fryslân and used to explore the province, could serve as a symbol for sustainable approaches to tourism by linking with current developments around the transition to renewable energy sources. Obviously, this could also be placed in the context of watersports, for example by framing sailing and electric boats as sustainable transport modes on the Frisian lakes. Such developments would make Fryslân a genuine living laboratory, in which the integrated social, environmental and economic benefits of proximity tourism could play a central role.

However, as long as tourism industries are built on business models which favor and reconfirm imaginaries in which touristic otherness is coupled with travel to places that necessitate unsustainable modes of transport, tourism is undermining its status as symbol for modern cultures and limits its enormous potential to contribute to societal progress on both global and local levels.

7.7 Limitations and future research

Some limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the findings of this thesis. While Fryslân serves as an interesting context for research concerned with touristic processes and regional institutionalization, generalization to other regions however is limited due to the specific socio-spatial organization of Fryslân within the Dutch nation state. The particular spatial imaginaries and an arguably strong Frisian regional identity make the

context unique. Therefore, future research might want to take a comparative approach between different regions, either within The Netherlands or abroad, in order to the findings here into a broader context.

I have used the Circuit of Culture (Du Gay, 1997) as a metaphor to structure the outline of this thesis. While I have actually not traced down all the articulations of how meaning is made of tourism in Fryslân, this metaphorical use has provided some interesting insights in the construction of tourism as a cultural phenomenon. The findings give rise to plenty reasons to analyze certain touristic Frisian artefacts by employing the Circuit in a more comprehensive way. For example, a worthy suggestion for future research in order to understand how tourism contributes to socio-spatial identification would be to focus on how symbolic use of identity materials in tourism (such as the Frisian flag) are negotiated in various cultural processes.

Furthermore and importantly, there is a clear need for a continued qualitative and quantitative monitoring of touristic mobility on the 'microdomestic' level (Canavan, 2013). This is necessary to understand the complex ways touristic and everyday experiences are intermingled and feeding off each other. Since everyday life is imbued with leisure practices and opportunities for experiencing touristic otherness, the various practices (discursive, behavioral, experiential) which facilitate or constrain such experiences should be observed, in order better understand tourism as social force (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006), instead of just a profit-driven industry. Therefore, there is a clear task for research organizations to strengthen quantitative insights in intra- and interregional tourism mobility on small geographical levels. In the Dutch context this could for example be embedded in the already existing 'Continu Vakantie Onderzoek' (Continuous Holiday Survey) by NBTC-NIPO and the Dutch Bureau for Statistics (CBS). In the Frisian context this could be a task for the Fries Sociaal Planbureau/Partoer, with which I collaborated to gather the data for Chapter 4 and 5.

Likely, new indicators would have to be developed to account for the nuanced nature of such tourism mobility. At the same time, qualitative insights are needed to further develop the notion of proximity tourism. For example, this thesis only provides a partial insight in which groups are engaging in proximity tourism and what their social circumstances are. Much more knowledge is to be gained on their preferences, experiences and ways of socio-spatial identification. Similarly it would be worth getting an overview of entrepreneurs who explicitly or explicitly provide products which attract local customers within regions such as Fryslân.

Following the notion that tourism is dissolving into the practices of everyday life (Bourdeau, 2012), there is a conceptual challenge in understanding 'touristic everydayness' and the everyday and ordinary practices that in certain circumstances become touristically valuable. This extends and inverts the notion of de-exoticization (Larsen, 2008), which already pointed to the importance of routines during holidays. There is a need for knowledge (both quantitative and qualitative) about, for example, the volume of regular guests and seasonal camping places in domestic tourism (Blichfeldt, 2004), but also VFR tourism and second home tourism in Fryslân.

Another line of research pertains to the way touristic discourses (e.g., of attractiveness, otherness) develop within regions and how they relate to local political, social and environmental circumstances. Particularly retrospective longitudinal analyses would be valuable to better understand how and why certain meanings of tourism develop and how they align or differ between regions. Such research would benefit from research on regional institutionalization (Paasi, 2012; Zimmerbauer & Paasi, 2013). This longitudinal approach would also provide a strong basis for putting currently popular practices of touristic marketing and place branding (Eshuis, Klijn, & Braun, 2014; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013) into a temporally sensitive context.

Finally, an important research gap, one that extends beyond the context of proximity tourism, concerns the rather shallow qualitative and arbitrary quantitative conceptualization of the 'usual environment' (Govers et al., 2008). Socio-spatial identification, just as any form of identification, is a double edged sword that cuts off what 'is' from what 'is not'. It is therefore always imposing its power into multiple directions. In-depth understanding, let alone conceptualizations of the dynamic interaction between meanings of tourism and of the usual environment are often lacking and taken for granted. This thesis only partly addresses this problem. Yet, it was my aim to provide an alternative way of thinking about tourism that shifts the attention to small spatial levels and gives some contra weight to the one-sided paradigm of internationalization that has been dominating tourism practice and scholarship for so long. In that sense, I hope this thesis helps to put more prominently on the agenda the touristic potential embedded in the assumed familiarity of near home places and that it is an encouragement to look closer.

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