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Consultancy Report

Tourism in the Lauwersmeer region: a fit-gap analysis

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Course: BA International Tourism Management

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Declaration of own work

I herewith declare that:

1. This work is composed by me.
2. This work has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree or diploma by me or anyone else.
3. The work of which this is a record is done wholly by me.
4. Any research, of which this work is a result, was done wholly by me.
5. Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools have not been used in the creation of the assessment.
6. All citations have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of my information have been specifically acknowledged.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "OSCAR" in capital letters, followed by a stylized underline.

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I would like to thank a number of people who helped me during this consultancy report.

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Management summary

This consultancy report provided by the Vrijetijdsregio Noordoost Friesland is for the organisation's goal of improving tourism across five connected regions in Northeast Friesland. The focus is on the Lauwersmeer region where tourism faces opportunities and challenges. The main issue involves identifying the gaps between existing tourism offerings and the needs and preferences of visitors. By highlighting these gaps the report aims to provide strategic recommendations for improving them and enhancing overall visitor satisfaction.

A fit-gap analysis was chosen as the primary framework by the researcher to compare the current state of tourism with the desired state set by visitor needs and expectations. This method shows where the Lauwersmeer region already performs well and where it needs to improve especially in terms of creating year-round tourism, addressing cross-border cooperation and having more unified branding. Other models like the 5A analysis, PESTEL analysis and a SWOT analysis were used to understand both the internal capabilities and external factors of tourism in the area. The used research methods include interviews with different stakeholders. By having a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling the research gave qualitative insights on visitor experiences, local operations and other broader constraints. Coding and other analysis then showed key points about inconsistent branding, seasonality problems, environmental considerations and different degrees of stakeholder cooperation.

Six major gaps were identified with topics such as the short tourism season, low collaboration with the province of Groningen, a missing central brand identity and an unfulfilled sustainability potential. In response targeted recommendations were proposed, prioritised by the client to address important needs first. That is extending the high season, improving cross-border collaboration and creating a unified brand. The final chapter of the report is an implementation plan for these top three measures integrating sustainability into each one. By addressing these gaps the Lauwersmeer region can grow into a competitive, environmentally responsible destination for visitors throughout the entire year.

Keywords: Lauwersmeer region, fit-gap analysis, current tourism offerings, visitor needs, desired tourism state

Word count: 14.664

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1. Introduction

This consultancy report will be written on behalf of the organisation Vrijetijdsregio Noordoost Friesland, with the assignment provided by Henk Rigter and Jorinda Ballering, with the latter being from NHL Stenden. The overarching goal of the project set by the Vrijetijdsregio is to improve and expand tourism in the 5 connecting regions in the Northeast region of the province Friesland (Elfstedenstad Dokkum, Werelderfgoed Waddenzee, Nationaal Landschap Noardlike Fryske Wâlden, Nationaal Park Lauwersmeer and Nationaal Park De Alde Feanen) in The Netherlands. The Northeast Friesland region, despite its natural beauty and recreational opportunities, faces challenges in meeting the expectations and needs of its current and potential visitors. The Vrijetijdsregio Noordoost Friesland decided that each region should get its own consultancy report and that a fit-gap analysis should be used to assess the regions. This consultancy report will focus on the Lauwersmeer region, as there is a big focus on sustainable tourism which is something that is important and becoming a crucial part of tourism in the future.

There is a need to understand the gaps between the existing tourism activities and amenities and the preferences of the target audience. A fit-gap analysis will help identify these gaps and provide recommendations for improving the region's tourism appeal. The fit-gap analysis has been selected as the main framework by the client. This framework will be used to systematically identify and analyse the distances between the current state (existing tourism offerings) and the desired state (visitor needs and preferences) of tourism in the region. A fit-gap analysis provides a good approach to show areas that need to be improved in the future and provides clarity on where improvements are needed.

The fit-gap analysis framework is a fitting choice for addressing the consultancy issue of evaluating and improving tourism offerings in the Lauwersmeer region. This method identifies the distance between the current tourism offerings and the desired performance levels of visitors which is a desired outcome of the client. By comparing the existing activities, facilities and services against visitor expectations the fit-gap analysis helps to highlight the areas where the Lauwersmeer region operates well and where it can improve. This approach ensures that resources and efforts are focused on the most important areas that need improvement whether it is coming up with new activities in the region or improving accessibility facilities. The fit-gap analysis allows for prioritisation of these gaps, enabling the possibility to develop good plans that directly address visitor needs and demands. The fit-gap analysis supports sustainable tourism development by showing areas where environmental and cultural aspects of the region might be

undervalued, ensuring that improvements align with the sustainability goals of the client and the region. Because of the need for actionable plans to enhance visitor satisfaction and the strategic positioning of the region, the fit-gap analysis is the most effective and efficient method for this consultancy report.

The aim of this consultancy report is to present a comprehensive fit-gap analysis of the tourism offerings in the Lauwersmeer region and have developed recommendations based on this to enhance the region's tourism appeal. The following objectives have been formulated for this consultancy report:

- To make a comprehensive analysis of existing tourism offerings in the Lauwersmeer region.
- To develop a profile of the target audience and assess their needs.
- To perform a fit-gap analysis, highlighting any distances between the region's present tourism offerings and visitor expectations.
- To formulate strategic recommendations aimed at enhancing the Lauwersmeer region's tourism.

The objectives above can be defined into one problem statement:

"To identify the gaps between the current tourism offerings in the Lauwersmeer region and the needs and preferences of the target audience and to provide recommendations to bridge these gaps."

2. Business environment analysis

To examine the business environment of the Lauwersmeer region and its impact on the tourism sector, a business environment analysis will be conducted. Multiple analysis tools have been used for this. First a 5A analysis will be used to analyse the attractions, amenities, accessibility, activities and accommodations of the region. Then, a PESTEL analysis is conducted on the region. Finally, a SWOT analysis is conducted to assess the internal and external factors that influence the region.

2.1 5A analysis

The 5A analysis model assesses the attractions, amenities, accessibility, activities and accommodation of a tourism destination. It offers a structured approach to assessing the appeal and visitor experience of the Lauwersmeer region (Thompson & Schofield, 2007). This analysis shows its current strengths, challenges and opportunities to give a good overview of what is available in the region and serves as a good component of a business environment analysis.

2.1.1 Attractions

In the Lauwersmeer region there are numerous attractions to do as a tourist. In 1969 the area was transformed from sea to a lake to protect the mainland from flooding. This transformation has given the area numerous nature activities such as birdwatching, the Dark Sky Park, watchtower Reiddomp, water sport, safari, fishing and other recreational activities such as hiking and cycling (Stichting RMT NOF, n.d.).

The main attraction in the region starting 2025 will be the newly constructed Werelderfgoedcentrum (WEC) in Lauwersoog. This centre will become a central hub for experiencing the Wadden Sea region and house the seal protection centre Pieterburen. The WEC will become a place to experience the region and integrate research, education and public engagement (Zeehondencentrum Pieterburen, 2024).

2.1.2 Amenities

The Lauwersmeer region caters to visitors with essential services and facilities. The Toeristisch Informatie Punt in Lauwersoog is the central information hub of the region, which provides information, maps, guides and other information regarding activities within the park and its surrounding areas. There are also numerous restaurants in the region, such as Raadsel van de Wadden, Brasserie De Waegh, Restaurette Schierzicht, Strandpaviljoen Meerzicht and others.

Some restaurants in the area, especially those not located in Lauwersoog, are closed many times in the week and especially outside the high season which is a shortcoming (Stichting RMT NOF, n.d.).

2.1.3 Accessibility

Public transport comes short regarding accessibility. The closest train station is Buitenpost, but most buses do not go directly to the area. It is usually faster to go to Groningen or Dokkum and then take a bus directly to the region. But only the north side of the region is accessible by bus, as it only drives over the N361 next to Lauwersoog. Reaching the southern part of the region would require a relatively long walk from the nearest bus stop (9292, n.d.). The Lauwersmeer region is quite reachable by car or bike with enough roads and bike paths which are well-maintained. Visitors seeking a more immersive experience can use one of the numerous well-marked cycling and walking routes. Trails such as Rondje Lauwersmeer provide scenic routes that go through the whole countryside, offering unique views which make it popular with tourists (Stichting RMT NOF, n.d.).

2.1.4 Activities

Activities in the Lauwersmeer region are suited for outdoor enthusiasts. The lake itself hosts various water sport activities such as sailing, kite surfing, canoeing, wind surfing, boat rentals and boat excursions. The newly opened Súd le route route also increased accessibility for boaters. Bird watching is one of the most popular activities in the region thanks to multiple observation areas located at different places throughout the region. The Dark Sky Park Lauwersmeer is also a unique activity which is possible due to the very low amount of light at night. Other activities consist mostly of hiking and cycling throughout the area (Stichting RMT NOF, n.d.), meaning that the region is not abundant of activities.

2.1.5 Accommodation

There are various options regarding accommodations in the Lauwersmeer region. Popular options are the two Landal resorts (Esonstad and Suyderoogh). These holiday parks offer fully equipped houses to rent together with activities and amenities for the whole family. Furthermore, there are numerous camp sites around the area as well, such as the Siblu camping, Natuurlijk Kollumeroog and it Dreamlân. There are many B&B's around the area in the nearby villages as well (Stichting RMT NOF, n.d.), meaning that overall there are many different types of accommodations around the Lauwersmeer region which all serve a different type of visitor.

2.2 PESTEL analysis

The PESTEL analysis is a suiting analysis model because it shows the bigger macro-environmental factors that affect the Lauwersmeer region's tourism industry. By analysing political, economical, social, technological, environmental and legal factors the framework provides insights into external conditions such as government regulations, economic trends or environmental policies (Whittington, Regnér, Angwin, Jonhson, & Scholes, 2020). It ensures a thorough view of both the internal dynamics and external influences helping to form a well-rounded business environment analysis. This balanced approach analyses the business environment with more relevance and depth compared to other techniques.

2.2.1 Political

In the Netherlands the ministry of economic affairs and climate policy is responsible for developing national tourism policies. This includes simplifying regulations and promoting the Netherlands as a tourist destination. At a regional level provinces like Friesland and Groningen (which includes the Lauwersmeer area) handle coordination with municipalities, environmental planning and regional promotion. The municipalities within these provinces develop specific tourism strategies, handle tourist taxes and manage recreational and natural areas to support tourism (European Committee of the Regions, nd). These different layers of governance highlight the collaborative approach necessary for tourism development in the Lauwersmeer region where both national policies and regional initiatives come together to address the tourism in the area and its growth and sustainability. Vrijetijdsregio Noordoost Friesland is an organisation that is created to enhance the attractiveness of Northeast Friesland as a tourist destination. The foundation works on behalf of the municipalities and is subject to political decisions from above (Vrijetijdsregio Noordoost Friesland, 2022).

2.2.2 Economical

The tourism sector of the Netherlands has been growing steadily over the past 10 years, with the exception of 2020 and 2021. The total number of tourists increases each year with an average of 5% and the NBTC expects that this number will continue to increase over the upcoming years (NBTC, 2024). The economic condition of the Northeast Friesland region impacts the Lauwersmeer area. These conditions, including employment rates, disposable income levels and regional GDP influence the ability of local residents and businesses to invest in tourism amenities in the region. Economic growth in the area is driven by sectors such as renewable energy and technology innovations and can provide additional support to tourism. Investments

in infrastructure such as public transportation and tourism facilities are important for expanding tourism in the Lauwersmeer region. Both public investments by regional governments and private investments by businesses are needed to maintain and improve the quality of tourism services (Bulkeley, Almassy, Fransen, Maia, & Toxopeus, 2023).

The tourism industry in the Northeast Friesland region provides work opportunities for local residents, from hospitality and retail to environmental conservation jobs. The availability of these jobs is important for maintaining and improving the region's economic status particularly in areas in the region where alternative job opportunities are low. Income levels in the region from tourism and other industries impact the standard of living and the ability to reinvest in the region. Higher income levels can lead to bigger spending in local amenities contributing to economic growth (UNWTO, 2018). There is a focus on expanding tourism of the Lauwersmeer region to more villages close to the region. This is to relieve the nature centre of the region of tourists and to improve the economic conditions of more areas close to the Lauwersmeer region (Laos Landschaps Architectuur, 2024).

Tourism in the region has also seen significant growth, particularly between 2018 and 2023. The number of businesses increased by 38%, especially in terms of accommodations and hospitality. There has also been a 23% increase in full-time jobs across the region, contributing greatly to economic growth. Challenges such as seasonality are still present however and economic contribution remains a driving factor of development of the region but this must be balanced with maintaining with the local quality of life (ETFI, 2024).

2.2.3 Social

Many different types of local stakeholders contribute to the development of the region currently and in the future. Vrijetijdsregio Noordoost Friesland has developed a basis infrastructure in order to connect these stakeholders in order to work towards a common goal. This basis infrastructure has been developed to create a robust touristic recreative region together with the input of all the local stakeholders. These stakeholders include government domains, entrepreneurs, organisations, inhabitants, services and amenities (Vrijetijdsregio Noordoost Friesland, 2022).

Regarding the demographics Lauwersmeer region (and the Northeast Friesland region as a whole), it is mostly characterised by an older population. This is a common trend in urban-rural areas. This needs for tourism in region are affected as older visitors usually prefer more relaxed and nature-based activities such as hiking or watching animals, which are present in the

Lauwersmeer area. The older local population could also influence the type of services and amenities developed in the region focusing more on accessibility and comfort (European Commission, 2022). Travel preferences of tourists are shifting towards more sustainable travel which aligns well with what the Lauwersmeer region offers. Visitors are nowadays more likely to search for destinations that provide opportunities for sustainable activities, eco-tourism and a break from urban life. This trend is particularly noticeable among younger travellers and the older population who value relaxing experiences such as wildlife observation, hiking and enjoying sustainable amenities (UNWTO, 2019).

Tourism in the region plays an important role in enhancing social and cultural identity. It helps to retain younger generations by offering more employment opportunities. There is a growing concern among the local population about the increased pressure of tourism on the region's infrastructure and environment. The public sentiment has shifted towards a perception that tourism impacts these things negatively (ETFI, 2024).

2.2.4 Technological

The improvement of technologies and mobile applications can significantly enhance the tourism visitor experience in the region. For example, apps that provide real-time information on weather, wildlife sightings or available activities can make the travel to the region more interactive and enjoyable. Also, the use of mobile apps for navigation and self-guided tours can help visitors explore the area more independently and informatively (Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang, & Koo, 2015). New technological infrastructure in the region including fast internet and reliable mobile connectivity is important for tourists and stakeholders in the Lauwersmeer region. Tourists require access to digital services during their travels, such as Wi-Fi availability in accommodations for private use and public areas for information on touristic amenities or sites that are being visited. For other stakeholders such as local businesses a reliable connectivity supports the use of modern payment systems, digital marketing and efficient communication with customers. This modern infrastructure also supports the cohesion of the different areas in Northeast Friesland (Hjalager, 2010).

The government of the Netherlands and EU funding programs have supported infrastructure improvements in the region aimed at enhancing accessibility and sustainability. These investments are essential for attracting more tourists and ensuring that the region can compete with other popular destinations (OECD, 2024).

2.2.5 Environmental

Climate change is a significant threat to the Lauwersmeer region. Rising temperatures, changing weather patterns and the increased possibility of extreme weather events will negatively impact the region's ecosystems. For example, shifts in the climate can change the habitats of bird species for which the Lauwersmeer National Park is known possibly reducing its attractiveness to birdwatchers and other nature tourists (IPCC, 2023). The Lauwersmeer region is also an important habitat for many other species, including plants and animals and several that are rare or endangered. Conservation activities are important for maintaining this biodiversity which is also a big draw for eco-tourism in the region. Environmental regulations and conservation initiatives such as these created by the EU's Natura 2000 network help to protect these habitats from degradation caused by human activities such as tourism. The Lauwersmeer region is subject to strict regulations of this Natura 2000 network due to its protected status. Compliance to these regulations is important to maintain the area's environmental health and its appeal as an environmental or nature-based tourist destination (European Environment Agency, 2023). The Lauwersmeer region has been a part of this network since 2003. While the Lauwersmeer region is known for its Dark Sky Park, forests and water attractions, these tourist attractions obstruct the region's environmental goals and obligations regarding the Natura 2000 network (Laos Landschaps Architectuur, 2024). Because of these environmental pressures, investments in environmental conservation and eco-friendly tourism are necessary for supporting sustainable growth (ETFI, 2024).

2.2.6 Legal

The Lauwersmeer region is part of the EU's Natura 2000 network which is a European Union initiative created for protecting habitats or nature areas. It is subject to certain environmental protection laws that regulate activities within the Lauwersmeer region to prevent ecological destruction. These laws consist of restrictions on how land is used, pollution and waste and regulations on activities that can harm wildlife or disrupt the natural habitats. Compliance with these regulations is mandatory, otherwise there will be legal consequences (European Environment Agency, 2023).

2.3 SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis provides a general summary of the strengths and weaknesses explored in an analysis of resources and capabilities and the opportunities and threats explored in an analysis of the environment (Whittington, Regnér, Angwin, Jonhson, & Scholes, 2020). In 2019, the

municipality of Northeast Friesland and other stakeholders such as the foundation Regio Marketing Toerisme Noordoost Friesland, created a vision for the region in the period 2019-2030. A SWOT analysis was conducted for the region in this vision report. These results are used for the model shown below. The items marked with a bold letter and number use the source of Kamstra, et al. (2019) and the other items are taken from the previous business environment analysis parts.

Strengths	Weaknesses
S1. The Lauwersmeer National Park is a very attractive area for birdwatchers, including the sea eagle. S2. Unique experiences, such as the ‘Dark Sky Park’, can be undertaken in the area with associated activities to really experience the darkness. S3. On the edges of the area are several distinctive - aimed at a different type of tourist - and large-scale recreational accommodation facilities, such as It Dreamlân and Esonstad. S4. There is a direct sailing connection from the area to Schiermonnikoog, both from Lauwersoog and from Esonstad. S5. The unique features of the area - Dark Sky and a unique bird area - are particularly attractive to a specific niche market (such as the creative and inspiring red/adventure seekers target group and pioneers). S6. Scenic cycling and walking route “Rondje Lauwersmeer,” which is well-marked and popular with nature enthusiasts. S7. Newly opened “Súd le route” route increases accessibility for boaters, highlighting the region’s appeal to water sport enthusiasts.	W1. The Lauwersmeer is now mainly presented in the profiling as a Groningen nature reserve, mainly due to the marketing efforts of Marketing Groningen. As a result, the association with Friesland is limited. W2. The cooperation with the Groningen side is still limited. W3. The Lauwersmeer is still relatively unknown as a National Park compared to other National Parks (in 11th place, 17% of the Dutch have heard of Lauwersmeer National Park) W4. The population density in the area is extremely low and there is shrinkage, which makes it difficult to maintain facilities and make initiatives viable. W5. Some restaurants beyond Lauwersoog open only sporadically, particularly outside the high season, limiting dining options. W6. Few indoor or year-round activities reduce the region’s attractiveness during colder or wetter months. W7. Limited public transport, especially in the southern areas, makes it difficult for non-driving visitors to fully explore.
Opportunities	Threats
O1. The possible development of a World Heritage Centre at Lauwersoog (just in the province of Groningen) can contribute to the experience of the Wadden area and as a new tourist attraction attract more tourists and recreationists to the area. O2. The Wadden Fund provides resources for (sustainable) tourist development of the area. O3. Steadily rising national tourism (around 5% annual growth) can bring in more potential visitors if promoted effectively. O4. Growing preferences for environmentally responsible holidays align with the Lauwersmeer region’s natural and sustainable character, offering a chance to attract eco-minded travellers.	T1. Climate change and extreme weather events may damage local ecosystems and diminish key attractions (e.g., bird habitats). T2. Strict environmental regulations (Natura 2000) can restrict certain types of development or expansion.

Figure 1: SWOT analysis (Kamstra, et al., 2019).

2.4 Preliminary problem map

A preliminary problem map will guide the problem analysis and diagnosis. This map will visually represent the key issues and their interconnections. This map will serve as a foundation for identifying the causes of the gaps between current tourism offerings and visitor expectations. Based on the information gathered so far and with the wishes of the client in mind, the preliminary problem map shown below is created. This map shows the main problem and connecting causes and consequences.

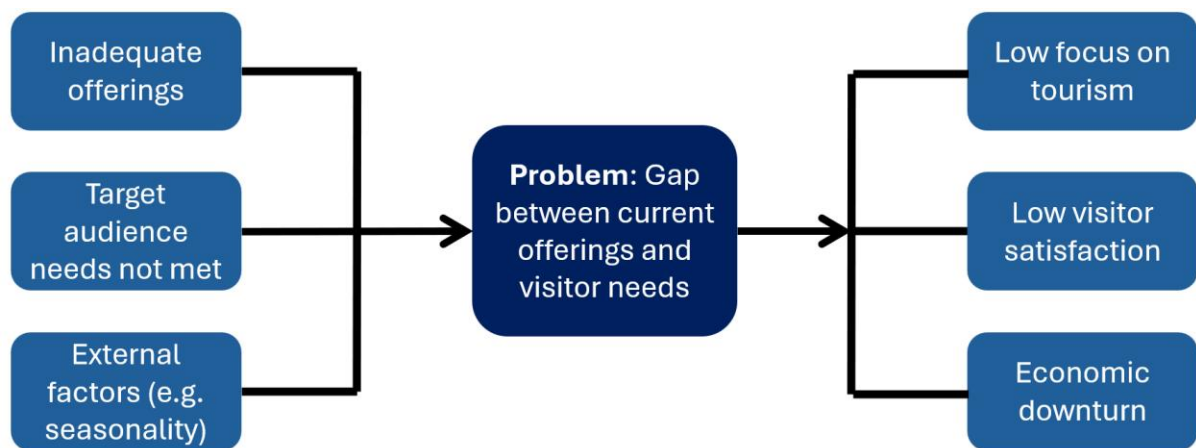


Figure 2: Preliminary problem map

The core problem of this preliminary problem map is the gap between current offerings and visitor needs. This shows a mismatch between what is currently provided (services, attractions or facilities) and what visitors actually want or expect when they come to the region. Analysing this gap is crucial for improving tourism satisfaction in the region. Causes for the problem are inadequate offerings, a not met need of the target audience and external factors such as seasonality. Consequences of this problem are a low focus on tourism, low visitor satisfaction and economic downturn in the region.

3. Theoretical framework

This chapter deals with the selection and evaluation of an appropriate analysis tool that will help establishing a definitive diagnosis for the consultancy issue. The analysis tool will be described in detail and the choice is justified based on the consultancy issue at hand.

3.1 The fit-gap analysis

The fit-gap analysis has been selected as the main framework by the client in order to gain clear insights into tourism problems in the region. This model is used to systematically identify and analyse the distances between the current state (existing tourism offerings) and the desired state (visitor needs and preferences). A fit-gap analysis provides a good approach to show areas that need to be improved in the future (Murphy & Murphy, 2004). A fit-gap analysis provides clarity on where improvements are needed and market segmentation ensures that the needs of different visitor groups are clear and addressed (Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005).

3.1.1 History

The fit-gap analysis was conceived by J. Michael Scott from the University of Idaho in the United States in the 1980s. There was a need to analyse endangered animal species on US soil and Scott designed the fit-gap analysis model to address this. The fit-gap analysis was first used in 1989 to analyse endangered bird species on Hawaii by assessing (at the time) current populations with desired populations and mapping these species using complementary tools. Since then, the model has been used for many different use cases, such as analysing business components and analysing consumer behaviours (Scott et al., 1993).

3.1.2 How to conduct a fit-gap analysis

As stated by Franklin (2006) a fit-gap analysis can be conducted through the following steps (applied to this consultancy report):

1. *Identify the current state:* review existing literature on the region and topic and use tools such as a SWOT or other analysis to assess parts of the current state.
2. *Establish the desired future state:* create the ideal outcome of the consultancy report by addressing the needs and wishes of the client.
3. *Identify the gaps:* compare existing state with desired state by using literature, research in the field and other research instruments. Look for theoretical, methodological and practical gaps.
4. *Analyse the gaps:* work out the results, analyse the identified gaps and show why these exist.
5. *Propose recommendations to close the gaps:* create an implementation plan which consists of valid recommendations based on conducted research and analysis (Franklin, 2006).

3.1.3 Justification

The fit-gap analysis framework is a fitting choice for addressing the consultancy issue of evaluating and improving tourism offerings in the Lauwersmeer region. This method identifies the distance between the current tourism offerings and the desired performance levels of visitors which is a desired outcome of the client. By comparing the existing attractions, facilities and services against visitor expectations the fit-gap analysis helps to highlight the areas where the Lauwersmeer region operates well and where it can improve. This approach ensures that resources and efforts are focused on the most critical areas that need improvement whether it is coming up with new activities in the region or improving accessibility facilities. The fit-gap analysis allows for prioritisation of these gaps, enabling the possibility to develop actionable plans that directly address visitor needs and demands. The fit-gap analysis supports sustainable tourism development by showing areas where environmental and cultural aspects of the region might be undervalued, ensuring that improvements align with the sustainability goals of the client and the region. Because of the need for actionable plans to enhance visitor satisfaction and the sustainable positioning of the region, the fit-gap analysis is the most effective and efficient method for this consultancy report.

3.1.4 Strong aspects of the model

One of the main benefits of the fit-gap analysis is the ability to clearly identify and show the difference between the current state and desired state. This clarity helps stakeholders to clearly understand where improvements can be made. Another benefit is its simplicity. The model is easy to use and straightforward, making it accessible for non-experts of smaller organisations without advanced tools. Finally (and most importantly for the client), it has a great focus on actionable outcomes. The model offers foundations for actionable plans as it focuses on areas for improvements, resulting in better prioritisation towards achieving desired goals (Franklin, 2006).

3.1.5 Weak aspects of the model

Hayes (2024) mentioned two downsides of the model. The first is the high reliance on accurate data, if inaccurate or incomplete data is used the findings can be flawed, leading to potential unreliable results. The second is changing conditions, organisations such as the client are subject to cooperation with many other stakeholders and their wishes that have to be taken into consideration. Before the final implementation plan is implemented the desired state of the region can change, meaning that the gathered results may become irrelevant (Hayes, 2024).

3.1.6 Comparable models

The most comparable model is the root-cause analysis. This model is a form of gap analysis where the focus is on why the gap exists, helping organisations to solve problems at the root (Franklin, 2006). Another is the balanced scoreboard model. This is a strategic management system that helps organisations align their activities with their strategic vision. Comparable to the fit-gap analysis, it also identifies distances between current and desired performances (Kaplan, 2010).

3.2 Conceptual model

A visual conceptual model is developed to provide a clear representation of the research concepts and their application to the consultancy issue. This model is based on information gathered so far.

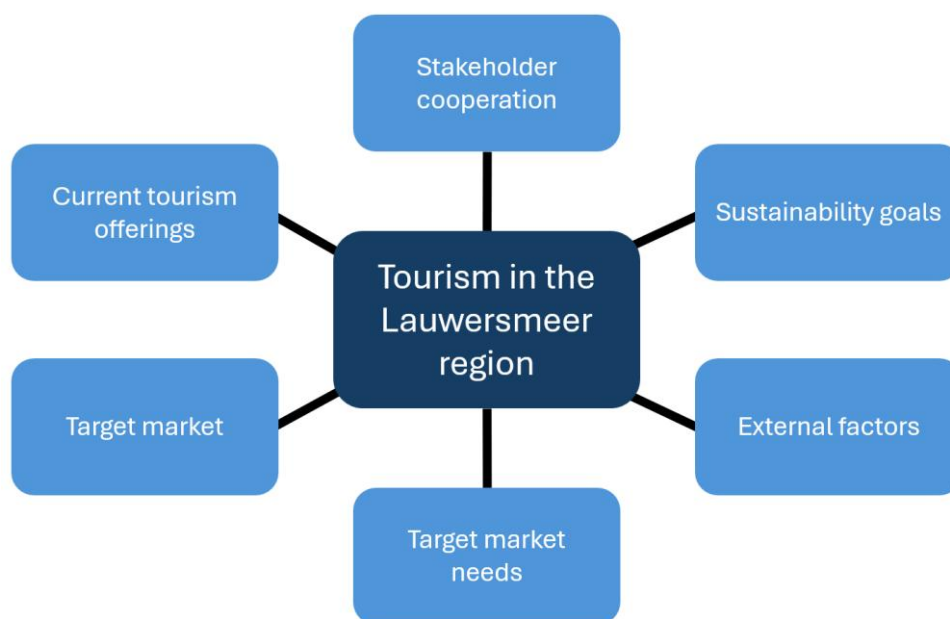


Figure 3: Conceptual model

This conceptual model shows the relationships between current tourism offerings, target audience and their needs, external factors, stakeholder cooperation and sustainability goals. This model serves as a basis for the research phase and creation of research questions.

4. Methodology

In light of the theoretical framework selected, suitable research methods will be explained for the created research questions. Afterwards, the research instruments will be discussed. After that the sampling procedure of the research process will be explained. Furthermore the validity, reliability, limitations, ethical considerations, process model and the used interview questions will be discussed. Finally the way the research has been analysed and a description of the research population is mentioned.

4.1 Research questions

A number of research questions have been formulated, which are based on the conceptual model. These questions have guided the research, focusing on showing the gap between current tourism offerings and visitor needs. Together these research questions provide a clear overview for conducting the fit-gap analysis.

1. Who is the target market of the region?
2. What are the current tourism offerings and how are they experienced?
3. What is the target market missing when visiting the area?
4. What (external) factors are contributing to the inadequacy of the current tourism offerings in the region?
5. What sustainable development goals have to be addressed?
6. Which stakeholders have to be involved in the process?

4.2 Research methods

This consultancy report utilises both primary and secondary data and uses interviews as a qualitative research method. This is the wish of the client and suits the research questions and problem statement best. Qualitative research focuses on finding out the actual experiences, opinions and attitudes of the participants. This form of research is used mostly through interviews. By using qualitative research methods for this consultancy report, more nuanced insights and descriptions of the issue at hand is analysed (Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton, 2005). This research method was the wish of the client as previous research utilised quantitative research methods and more personal insights from different types of stakeholders was desired for this consultancy report.

4.3 Interview questions

The interview questions were based on the research questions. The research questions were first put into concepts. For example the question ‘who is the target market?’ led to the concept ‘target market and visitor demographics’ while ‘what sustainable development goals should be addressed?’ produced the concept ‘sustainability targets’. After identifying these concepts each was given a clear definition. For example understanding ‘target market and visitor demographics’ required learning about tourist places of origin and travel motivations. And ‘sustainability targets’ required finding out about local businesses eco-friendly practices. It was then important to see which type of stakeholder would provide the needed information. Local business owners might know about visitor feedback or any shortfalls in current offerings and tourists could speak about personal experiences in the region. Then the research questions were transformed into interview question for those different stakeholder groups. For example local business and residents were asked ‘what are visitors missing when they visit the area?’ while tourists were asked ‘were there any activities or services you would have liked to see but could not find?’. Both address the same concept of unmet needs but each is worded to suit that stakeholder perspective. By using the same structured approach for all research questions the interview design became consistent.

The full interview matrix can be found in *appendix 1H*. Not every interview question is in this table as some questions are introductory or do not correspond to a research question directly. Only the questions that answer the research questions directly are included in the interview matrix. The complete interview questions per stakeholder group can be found in *appendix 1A* to *1G*. These tables also show the subject of the research questions with the corresponding interview questions.

4.4 Research population

In order to find different stakeholders and tourists the client was of great help to establish contact with these groups. Tourism in the Lauwersmeer region is mostly present during the summer months, making it challenging to find stakeholders and especially tourists to participate in my research. The data gathering phase of this consultancy report was in the months October to December, which is the low season. Henk Rigter (the client supervisor) has been of great help to find the potential interviewees. His extensive network of contacts in the region helped to find the different stakeholders that have been interviewed.

Even with Henk’s network, potential tourist participants was scarce. Even while contacting many different accommodations or other tourist related organisations it was not possible to find

tourists as there were practically none during these months. A message in a Facebook group was used as well to contact entrepreneurs in the region but to no avail. In the end, a few tourists were found through personal contacts. These people had visited the region in the past. But more tourist opinions were needed. After consulting with Jorinda Ballering, it was decided to apply field research for this phase. By shortening the interview questions from 20+ to about 6 key questions the aim was to make participating less time consuming and more easy to encounter tourists in the region itself. Popular tourist locations were visited to approach people directly. This approach proved successful and gave new insights into the opinions of tourists in the region.

In the end the following participants have been interviewed:

- 4 local businesses (B&B owner in Ljussens, restaurant & booking website manager in Oostmahorn, accommodation owner in Kollumerpomp and a boat rental owner in Kollumerpomp)
- 1 local from Anjum
- 1 manager from IVN Lauwersmeer
- 1 councillor of Northeast Friesland and 1 policy officer of Lauwersmeer
- 1 person on behalf of the client
- 2 tourists (long interviews)
- 21 tourists (short interviews)

These were all suitable participants for this research, but they were also the only participants willing to participate in this research. Despite this, a solid level of saturation was reached among the participants but especially the local businesses and tourists. All the answers led to the same conclusions which are discussed during the next chapters. In the end the combination of supervisor assisted stakeholder identification, social media and direct field interviewing gave a solid and balanced set of data to use for this consultancy report.

4.5 Research instruments

Primary data is original information collected during the research phase. Primary instruments that are used are interviews among stakeholders. This instrument is applied to different types of stakeholders and afterwards these interviews are transcribed. Secondary data refers to pre-existing information that has already been collected by others. This data has given a contextual understanding of trends in the region and allows for benchmarking with primary data and gap identification (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

For interviewing the tourists in the field a physical notepad was used to quickly write down in bullet points what their answers were and all other participants have been interviewed using a laptop with Microsoft Word's automatic transcribe function.

4.6 Sampling procedure

The sampling procedure of this consultancy report is for the qualitative instrument purposeful sampling and convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling consists of selecting participants who have specific knowledge or experience relevant to the research topic. This method is effective to get insightful qualitative information from stakeholders such as industry experts, managers or other local stakeholders who can provide valuable information. This sampling method helps in obtaining a broad range of visitor experiences and preferences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which have been important for writing the recommendations. Convenience sampling is a sampling technique where participants are selected based on their easy accessibility and availability (Bryman, 2016). This type of sampling has also been used as participants were selected based on simply being present on the location of where the researcher was at that time.

4.7 Research analysis

The gathered data through interviews are analysed by segmentation and coding. As this research contains interviews with different types of stakeholders, which have unique questions and thus separate coding tables, there is a need to highlight and show relationships across different interviews. To make sense of data across multiple transcribed interviews a set of segmentation categories was developed. These categories highlight key aspects of the tourism landscape and help organise the information gathered (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). These coloured segments of the transcriptions are connected to the research questions. These categories highlight key aspects of the tourism landscape and help organise the information gathered. These categories are based on the research questions.

- Demographic and psychographic segmentation: focuses on the backgrounds, interests and motivations of people involved in or visiting the area.
- Behavioural segmentation: looks at how people actually behave, their travel patterns and choices made during their visits.
- Environmental and economic segmentation: examines environmental impacts, resource use and economic factors that affect long-term viability.

- Sustainability segmentation: examines sustainability elements, resource management and ethical practices.
- Stakeholder segmentation: identifies different stakeholders and their interests and roles in shaping the region's tourism.
- Gap analysis segmentation: pinpoints areas where the current state differ from what is desired showing where action is needed.

After this initial segmentation of data, coding was applied. Open, axial and selective coding is applied using tables. Open coding analyses the transcribed interviews in the order of the interview questions. Then axial coding categorises and combines the open codes. Finally selective coding enables the integration of data from the axial coding phase to cohesive and meaningful actions (Williams & Moser, 2019). The coding process involved reading each interview transcript and labelling parts of the transcript. During open coding initial categories come up from the interview data. Axial coding then organised these open codes into more structured groups and highlighted the relationships among them. Finally selective coding combined these axial categories into clear themes ensuring that each coding step gradually refined and integrated the data into meaningful insights for final recommendations.

4.8 Validity, reliability and transferability

The validity of the research for this consultancy report is achieved by implementing both types of research methods adequately. The validity was improved by comparing the collected data (from multiple sources such as interviews and secondary literature) and cross-checking the findings. This has reduced the bias and has improved the accuracy of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

As reliability refers to the extent to which the research can be replicated under similar conditions (Bryman, 2016), it has been achieved through a good design of the research methods and a consistent use of these methods. By establishing clear research protocols for conducting and data collection, reliability is ensured. For the qualitative research, reliability is achieved by creating a structured interview procedure and maintaining this across all participants. Furthermore, all interviews are recorded and documented accurately and consistently across all participants as well as this also helps to ensure reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Regarding the transferability of the data, the research question and the scope such as the region limit the transfer of data. However the gathered data and created recommendations can be used by other participants for execution or future research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4.9 Limitations and ethical considerations

This research has encountered a number of limitations that affected the accuracy and conclusion of the findings. A limitation is the sampling bias during the purposeful and convenience sampling phase of the qualitative research. These research methods consists of selecting participants which are certain stakeholders which may not fully represent the diversity among all the possible participants (Bryman, 2016).

Limited access to data, for both primary and secondary research, has been another limitation. Obtaining the data from stakeholders was constrained as the low season was present at the time of data collection and with the region being sparsely populated as it is. The Lauwersmeer region has not been researched that often in the past as well, meaning that secondary data was not abundant (Kamstra, et al., 2019). The most recent data from a report about the region was from Kamstra et al., 2019. Unfortunately more recent data was not available at the time of writing this report.

Time constraints has limited data collection during the research phase as well. It is the case that not enough responses were collected during the available time, reducing the validity of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In conducting tourism research in the Lauwersmeer region, ethical considerations include obtaining consent from participants, respecting privacy and anonymity and ensuring transparent use of collected data (Bryman, 2016). The researcher has kept these considerations in mind during the whole research process. Consent was obtained from all participants and all collected data is presented as it was obtained and consistently with all participants.

4.10 Process model

The process model shown below is a visual representation of the activities within the research process of this consultancy report. It shows the steps that the researcher has taken to determine good recommendations for the client (Belcic & Stryker, 2024).

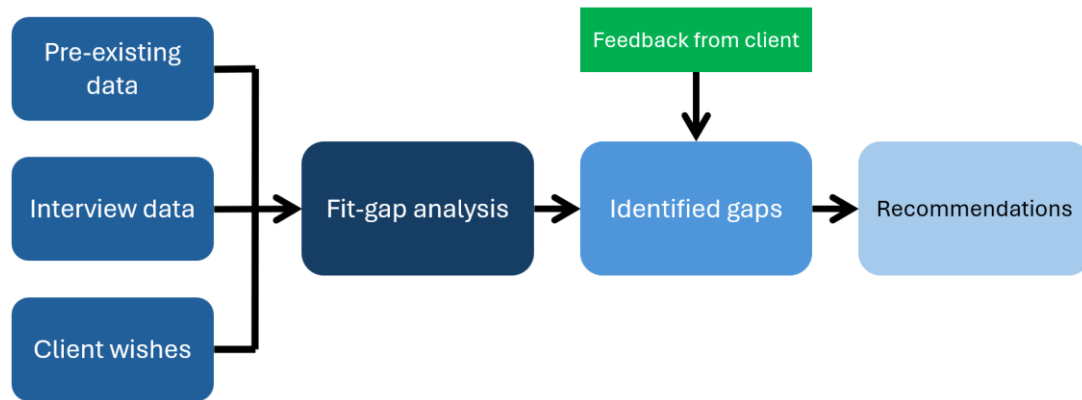


Figure 4: Process model

The figure above shows how pre-existing data, interview data and client wishes were used to conduct a fit-gap analysis. This analysis resulted in a number of identified gaps. These were presented to the client for feedback. After implementing this feedback, valid recommendations have been created with corresponding implementation plans.

5. Diagnosis

This chapter consists of a diagnosis of the collected data. This diagnosis will help to answer the problem of this consultancy report and create recommendations in the following chapter. The fit-gap analysis is part of this diagnosis chapter, as the outcome of it will enable the creation of recommendations and implementations. By performing a fit-gap analysis it can be identified where current offerings can or should be improved and which new elements can be developed to cater to the desired target group.

5.1 Answering the research questions

After the initial segmentation of data, coding (open, axial and selective) was applied to the data. The full interview transcripts and coding tables can be found in *appendix 2* and *3*. Combining all these results allows to answer the research questions for appropriate diagnosis.

5.1.1 Who is the target market of the region?

The Lauwersmeer region mainly attracts visitors who value nature and tranquillity. This typically includes middle-aged couples often from more urbanised areas like the Randstad or from Germany who enjoy the peaceful setting and activities such as cycling, walking or simply relaxing. There is a scope to attract younger, more international and more upscale groups interested in

working holidays or niche things like birdwatching, photography or sailing. Visitor demographics shift with the seasons: summer brings more families, while off-peak periods attract smaller groups, older visitors and a German audience. This variety shows that tourists come for multiple reasons from getting away from city life to exploring unique wildlife habitats. It also shows that new markets could be reached such as workers who work from home and value comfort and reliable infrastructure. In general the Lauwersmeer area is best for people who want to relax and enjoy nature rather than go to a big entertainment location.

The data suggests that the area already appeals to insight seekers (inzichtzoekers). MarketResponse's inzichtzoeker is a tourist persona that are typically men (76%) often aged 50 or older (67%). They tend to live alone or in two-person households and are frequently well-educated (50%) with average to slightly above-average incomes (44%). They are thoughtful, rational, introverted, curious and seek personal growth. They value rationality, decisiveness, privacy, a straightforward approach to life and personal freedom. They are serious-minded and appreciate having time and space to themselves. Inzichtzoekers enjoy quiet and solitude, whether they are at home or exploring cultural or natural attractions. They appreciate opportunities to learn and spend their free time consciously using it for self-improvement. They prefer activities like visiting museums, landmarks or nature and they enjoy travelling independently making their own choices. On holiday, inzichtzoekers gravitate towards nature, culture and freedom of movement. They prefer small groups and accommodations that offer well-organised practical amenities such as familiar hotel chains or bed & breakfasts and sometimes even choose to stay at home for the privacy and tranquillity they want. They are less keen on package-style holiday parks. Above all their travel choices reflect a desire to learn, explore and maintain their personal freedom (Toerisme VAN, n.d.).

5.1.2 What are the current tourism offerings and how are they experienced?

The region's main strength lies in its natural surroundings and outdoor activities. Visitors enjoy the many cycling and walking routes, the peaceful landscapes and the area's close proximity to the Wadden Sea. Holiday homes and small-scale accommodation are popular with guests seeking tranquillity, while the status of the Lauwersmeer as a Dark Sky Park appeals to tourists as well. However despite a strong natural foundation the overall tourism offering lacks supporting services. Dining options are too limited and there are few actual year-round activities. Many hospitality businesses close outside the peak season, leaving visitors with little to do beyond enjoying the outdoors. Additionally online information and marketing are fragmented,

making it difficult for potential visitors to discover what the region has to offer. As a result people often describe the area as beautiful but ‘empty’ and find it hard to justify longer stays or repeated visits.

5.1.3 What is the target market missing when visiting the area?

The tourists visiting the area highlight some issues that stop the Lauwersmeer from realising its full potential. There are too few restaurants, too few spots to visit and a shortage of distinctive activities. Families with children cannot really find indoor or off-season attractions and those interested in culture or good food have limited options. Information is scattered across multiple platforms making it hard for visitors to plan their trip and find what they are looking for. There is also a need for better positioning and branding. At the moment the region’s unique features such as its great natural environment, genuine low-density attractiveness and niche activities like birdwatching, sailing or the Dark Sky Park are not communicated clearly and effectively. Without a central source of information or a clear regional identity visitors miss out on a clear and memorable experience. In short they want more than just nature itself and they want accommodation, dining and activities to come together effectively supported by accessible and reliable information.

5.1.4 What (external) factors are contributing to the inadequacy of the current tourism offerings in the region?

A number of external factors are contributing to inadequate current tourism offerings. Environmental rules and conservation measures limit big developments, ensuring any new initiatives must respect the area’s fragile nature. At the same time economic and marketing challenges arise from a fragmented network of businesses, locals and marketing organisations that lack a shared vision. Weather and seasonality also affect visitor numbers. Because many activities rely on good weather, tourism falls off during low season months, showing the need for attractions and services that work in all seasons. Proposed defence plans by the government and other policy decisions add further uncertainty potentially changing the landscape or limiting access to certain areas. These challenges are made worse by weak, uncoordinated marketing. Poor online presence, no clear branding and limited cooperation among stakeholders mean the region’s natural strengths are not fully promoted and marketed. In short, environmental, economic and policy-based shortcomings made existing problems related to accessibility, information and year-round offerings.

5.1.5 What sustainable development goals have to be addressed?

Although sustainability may not always be that important for visitors, it is becoming increasingly important for the region's future tourism. Small steps towards greater sustainability goals include using locally sourced products, investing in greener infrastructure and developing regenerative tourism practices. Focusing on sustainability helps to protect the area's natural environment (its greatest and most important asset) while also meeting visitor expectations on sustainability. There is need to balance growth with sustainability. Managing tourism development with nature conservation and promoting tourism outside the peak season can reduce pressure during high season months. Indoor activities, nature education programmes and sustainable places to stay can all contribute to these sustainable development goals. By making sustainability a bigger part of the region's identity the Lauwersmeer can set itself apart and draw visitors who value nature and sustainable tourism.

5.1.6 Which stakeholders have to be involved in the process?

The data shows that working together and having a clear governance are important. Key stakeholders include businesses (local accommodation providers, restaurants and activity organisers), local councils, provincial marketing organisations like RMT NOF or the Vrijetijdsregio, nature management groups (IVN and Staatsbosbeheer) and local residents. Policy makers in charge of regional branding and promotion and infrastructure need to cooperate closely with businesses to coordinate all of the marketing efforts for the region. A more central and strategic approach by creating an overlapping group or using tourism services like Arrangie (Arrangie, n.d.) could align everyone's vision, share marketing resources and encourage innovation among local businesses. By ensuring each stakeholder understands and does their role the region can form a clear tourism identity, fix infrastructure issues and offer year-round activities that meet visitor needs while respecting local values and nature.

5.2 Identified gaps

After answering the research questions, the problem statement can be addressed. This is to identify the gaps between current and desired tourism offerings and later on provide recommendations. This final diagnosis of the consultancy issue is based on the executed analysis and serves as a conclusion for this consultancy report.

5.2.1 Gap 1 – Short tourism season

The Lauwersmeer region's tourism depends heavily on its natural environment. People come for the peace, quietness and beautiful scenery. Activities like walking, cycling and birdwatching are

popular. However at the moment the tourism offer is too focused on the summer season. When the weather is less pleasant or it is not the high season there is very little to do. This situation makes visitors see the region as a place for a short, weather-dependent trip rather than a destination worth exploring longer and year-round. Stakeholders say that after the summer, many restaurants close and there are almost no indoor or family-friendly activities. This creates a sense of emptiness in the off-season and reduces the chances that visitors will return. Competing destinations have broadened their offers beyond the summer months, by doing the same, adding more (indoor) activities, keeping dining options open longer and developing new attractions the Lauwersmeer area could encourage longer visits and repeat trips no matter the time of year.

5.2.2 Gap 2 – Region split between two municipalities

The Lauwersmeer region is spread out over two different administrative areas, which makes it harder to manage and promote tourist projects. Groningen with the municipality of Het Hogeland is on the other side, which uses the marketing project called Visit Groningen (Visit Groningen, n.d.). On the side of Friesland is the municipality of Noardeast-Fryslân and its own marketing networks, such as the Vrijetijdsregio and RMT NOF. Each group has its own rules and ways of getting money, but tourists probably don't see or understand these differences anyway. Because of this split, work is done twice and marketing campaigns are broken up which doesn't show the region's full potential. Different rules, subsidies and decision-makers make things harder for local business owners, which wastes time and money and stops them from coming up with new cross-border tourism services. Also some new sites on the Groningen side like the new WEC aren't fully connected to what's going on in Friesland. This makes it harder to enjoy the natural benefits that come from sharing large areas. When there isn't uniform planning and marketing it's harder to bring in more tourists outside of the busy summer months and deal with problems like businesses closing during the off-season. To get past these barriers and create a better visitor experience that benefits everyone, there must be better cooperation between the two municipalities.

5.2.3 Gap 3 – Missing clear marketing and cooperation

The current marketing strategy is another gap. Nature is the main attraction but visitors struggle to find clear and reliable information about what else is available. There is no single go-to website and instead details are spread across many different websites and brochures. Much of this information is out of date or incomplete making it harder for visitors to plan their trips or discover hidden attractions. Without a strong regional brand identity and better more centralised sources

of information potential visitors might never see all that the Lauwersmeer region can offer. Improving information and marketing such as by creating a main website, adding better signage and making sure all online details are up to date would help people feel more confident in choosing the region for a holiday.

Cooperation among local businesses, tourism agencies, nature organisations and councils also needs improvement. Right now many small businesses operate on their own 'islands', doing their own marketing and activities without working together. This lack of teamwork means missed opportunities for cooperative marketing, shared packages and good infrastructure projects. For example if restaurants, tour operators and accommodation providers came together to create combined offers visitors would have a more varied and interesting stay. Without better leadership, a shared vision and a willingness to cooperate the region's overall visitor experience and its competitiveness will be low.

5.2.4 Gap 4 – No focus on relevant target markets

Another big issue is that there is no clear strategy on the kinds of visitors the region wants to attract to the experiences it provides. Although the area appeals to visitors who enjoy tranquillity and nature it is not making the most of this strength. Potential visitor groups such as younger families, international tourists and people from big cities who might like working remotely in a peaceful setting remain largely ignored. Without a clear plan for which markets to target, how to design the right experiences for them and how to communicate these experiences effectively, growth will remain low and mostly limited to the summer months. Local businesses see a chance to attract city-based professionals but to do so they need to offer better internet, comfortable workspaces and a greater variety of high-quality restaurants and leisure activities.

5.2.5 Gap 5 – Poor tourism infrastructure and accessibility

Tourism infrastructure and accessibility also have some problems. Although visitors appreciate the landscape and cycling routes, they notice a shortage of basic (tourism) facilities. For example there are not enough toilets, rest areas or indoor shelters for bad weather days. Public transport in the whole region is poor making it difficult for those without cars to reach key spots. Some places only open in summer leaving few options for travellers to go to outside the summer peak season. If the region improved these things by adding more tourism facilities, stops, better public transport connections and indoor spaces visitors would stay longer and speak more positively about their experiences leading to better word-of-mouth recommendations.

5.2.6 Gap 6 – Potential for sustainability

Finally the region is not using its potential for sustainability. Although visitors come for the natural setting there are only a few visible efforts to manage visitor numbers across the year or adopt sustainable tourism solutions. Sustainability could mean using local sourced products in restaurants, installing solar panels on holiday homes or developing even more nature education programmes. Emphasising sustainable practices would protect the environment and attract a growing market of responsible travellers who care about the impact of tourism. Right now sustainability measures are low so the region misses an opportunity to stand out as a ‘green’ destination and to adapt well to changing environmental conditions.

5.3 Recommendations

In summary the Lauwersmeer region faces several connected gaps. By addressing these gaps the Lauwersmeer region could become a more attractive, competitive and resilient destination throughout the year. Six recommendations are created based on each identified gap.

5.3.1 Extending the high season and diversifying activities (addressing gap 1)

Most tourists come during the high season (mostly summer months) which means that many restaurants, shops and other touristic places are closed during the rest of the year. This makes the area feel empty and quiet for most of the year which makes it less appealing to visit in the winter or when the weather is less pleasant. To improve this people in the area need to change their touristic mindset. Instead of treating the months outside of peak season as the off season local business owners can work with the municipality and marketing groups to plan activities and promotions that run all year. For this to work it is important that all stakeholders of the region participate in this mindset change.

A new centralised website (further discussed in recommendation 3) is a project that can bring different services of the region together under one booking site. It can be a key tool for success in this area. This site makes it easier for tourists to plan their trips by putting together package deals that include accommodation, food, experiences and activities. This also makes it more profitable for local businesses to stay open after the high season. It could for example be used to plan a winter-themed weekend getaway that includes a rental holiday home, a guided walk with hot drinks, a dinner voucher with local food and the choice to visit the WEC all in one easy-to-book package. This method helps smaller businesses share both the work and the profits, so they can benefit from tourists when it's not the high season. Targeted advertising of these kinds

of off-season deals can bring in people who are looking for quiet vacations in beautiful places without all the crowds that come with summer. Using a local tool such as this also eliminates the need for bigger (international) booking sites that take commissions.

5.3.2 Improving collaboration with Groningen (addressing gap 2)

Because of the regions split tourism efforts the area should set up a cross-border tourism task force with members from the municipality of Noardeast-Fryslân and Het Hogeland and preferably also with RMT NOF, Vrijetijdsregio, Visit Groningen, local businesses and nature groups. This group should meet regularly to make a shared tourism roadmap. This would make sure that on both sides of the Lauwersmeer and its marketing efforts, infrastructure improvements and event planning go smoothly and are done cohesively. When budgets and goals are aligned people don't have to do the same work twice and can instead put their money into projects that help the whole area instead of just one side. This recommendation should improve the region's appeal to tourists greatly.

Another effective step is giving the Lauwersmeer brand a single look that people will know even when they cross from Friesland to Groningen. This could include using the same signs and marketing materials to show that the features of the Lauwersmeer are all part of the same place and can be reached from anywhere. Putting together events or packages that highlight important places on both sides is another way to do this. This makes it easy for tourists to see everything in one trip. This also means coordinating opening times, advertising activities that don't happen during the high season and sharing information about how people can come to the area. The Lauwersmeer region can show off its best features, boost year-round tourism and help people on both sides of this unique landscape make a living by working together as one instead of two different ones.

5.3.3 Creating a strong regional brand and improve cooperation (addressing gap 3)

A problem for many tourists is that there isn't a single reliable source of information about the Lauwersmeer region and things to do, places to stay, eat and attractions. It's hard to plan a trip because information is spread out on different websites social media pages. Making a single website that is easy to use is important for the region's brand. A website like this would have a list of all the activities, amenities and services in the whole region. It would be the website to go to for tourists and it also has to be at the top of internet searches when searching for the region. As of now the websites of the Staatsbosbeheer are shown at the top. Physical signs that are the

same all over the area could help visitors greatly as well. To find important scenic spots, local businesses or less obvious places of interest. Tourist information centres, hotels and restaurants should all have printed or digital maps of hiking trails, bike paths and public transportation choices. If everyone in the region agrees on a common logo, colour scheme and style then any sign, brochure or website can be seen right away as official and reliable. Not only would this help tourists find their way around but it would also help build a strong regional identity that makes Lauwersmeer stand out from other nature-focused national parks.

RMT NOF and the Vrijetijdsregio are already doing a lot to bring locals together and encourage them to cooperate on tourism development. They set up regular meetings where residents, local businesses and others come together to talk about new projects or goals of the region. The Lauwersmeer area can stay competitive all year by sharing ideas, working together to solve problems that come up during the off-season. Adding to these efforts giving small incentives or help with promotion to companies that work together on new packages could make people work together even more. For example if a restaurant works with a boat tour company or a B&B, RMT NOF/Vrijetijdsregio might help pay for some of the start-up costs or give the businesses more exposure. By making connections stronger with bigger tourism boards like Visit Wadden and Visit Groningen the Lauwersmeer area can attract more and new visitors. The region can continue to grow and come up with new ideas through building on what RMT NOF and the Vrijetijdsregio are currently doing.

5.3.4 Defining more target market strategies (addressing gap 4)

The natural beauty of the Lauwersmeer area draws tourists seeking tranquillity. Currently it focuses mostly on 'insight seekers' and it should continue to do so, as the region suits this target market best. As insight seekers are ready to spend a bit more money and would like to gain more inspiration about the region they are visiting, complete packages via the new centralised website would be suitable. An example of a package could be an overnight stay at a B&B, a cycling and/or hiking route, a visit to the new WEC and a dinner reservation at a local restaurant.

There are other target markets that should be focused on. For example workers who work from home are a new market. A lot of people who live in cities want to get away from it but they still need good Wi-Fi and a nice place to work. The area could cater to them with comfortable desks, fast internet and flexible check-in and check-out times. Tools like the new website could even work with local cafés and restaurants and nature guides to make special packages. This way visitors could switch between working and then relaxing in the region. Another potential market is families with children. Right now there isn't a lot of children friendly activities in the area which

keeps parents from coming here when the weather might not be good for outdoor things. The family market could grow a lot if there were more educational programs for kids, organised wildlife tours where kids could learn about birds and marine life or just simple treasure hunts in areas. While the IVN already does this for elementary school classes it could be extended to regular families.

5.3.5 Improving tourism infrastructure and accessibility (addressing gap 5)

The natural beauty of the area is a big part of its appeal but it can be a problem if tourists can't find their way around or aren't comfortable. Improving public features like increasing the number of bathrooms around the area and other tourism facilities are a key way to get tourists more satisfied. The area should also work on making its bike and walking paths clear by putting up clear signs at every turn. Each sign could have a QR code that leads to more detailed maps or helpful information about the area. Making changes like these gives people the opportunity to explore more.

Another option is to improve public transport. Qbuzz started in December 2024 as the new bus operator in Friesland (Qbuzz, 2024) but it does not go around the whole area and not often (Qbuzz, 2024). A local shuttle that runs around the area, provided by the municipality for example, could be a solution. It should go around the whole area, past larger accommodations, the WEC, nature spots and other touristic sites. It does not have to go that often even if it's only once every few hours, but it could make it easier for people who don't want to drive or who want to travel in an environmentally friendly way to enjoy the area. This shuttle bus service could be connected to tourism packages as well.

5.3.6 Embracing local sustainability (addressing gap 6)

The Lauwersmeer region depends on its natural environment but many eco-friendly projects are still not connected or aren't well promoted. Increasing attempts to be sustainable not only helps the environment but also attracts visitors who like to travel in a responsible way. Restaurants and other local businesses should be using fresh food from nearby farms and fish suppliers. This will highlight local food and lower the cost of transportation. But for local business owners to switch to green practices the city or town usually needs to offer incentives like small grants to cover the costs of switching to more environmentally friendly suppliers.

Smaller changes like putting recycling bins in nature areas and giving public praise to cafes or accommodations that promise to lower their carbon footprint show that the region commits

about sustainability. This is where a new centralised website can help by showing which companies are eco-friendly. A type of eco badge can be shown on their pages on these websites. At the same time organisations like IVN already have nature education programs that could be expanded to cover more themes like eco-friendly farming and eco-friendly hospitality. The Lauwersmeer region can show that caring for the environment is an important part of its character. This can be done by combining educational efforts with practical help from the municipality and active community participation.

5.3.7 Integrating the recommendations

Although each recommendation targets a specific gap, they are connected. For example upgrading infrastructure (gap 5) supports the creation of year-round attractions (gap 1), while building a centralised brand (gap 3) helps communicate sustainability measures (gap 6) and attract the right audiences (gap 4). Improving cooperation (gap 2) will make it easier to implement these changes and share costs, efforts and benefits. By thinking of these recommendations as parts of a single balanced strategy the Lauwersmeer region can lay the basis for sustainable growth. Rather than trying to do everything at once the client and/or relevant stakeholders should prioritise actions that give the most important improvements first. For example setting up a central website and making a basic visitors guide can be done relatively quickly boosting visitor confidence and increasing visits in the short term. Meanwhile more complex things like introducing year-round indoor activities or launching a seasonal shuttle service may take longer and require more investment, planning and negotiations.

6. Implementation plan

The prototypes of the recommendations from the previous chapter were presented to the client on 16 January 2025 in Burgum. In that meeting the client provided feedback regarding the scope and focus of these proposals. While they generally agreed with the overall content and only had very little feedback on that content, they suggested prioritising the first three created recommendations, extending the high season and diversifying activities (gap 1), improving collaboration with Groningen (gap 2), and creating a strong regional brand to enhance cooperation (gap 3). The third recommendation is the first and main focus of the implementation plan below, as this is the wish of the client. The client considers this the most important aspect of the recommendations as this needs to be addressed first before any other changes in the region can be made.

Furthermore the client advised that recommendations 4 and 5, defining more target market strategies and improving infrastructure and accessibility, could better be addressed in future research rather than in this report. These recommendations could be addressed by another student in the future. This is because the scope would otherwise get too broad and these two are less crucial to be addressed now. In addition the client emphasised that sustainability (recommendation 6) should be inserted into each of the implemented recommendations rather than treated as a separate one. As a result the implementation plan focuses on concretely developing three recommendations and making sure that sustainable principles are fully integrated. The prototypes of the implementation plans per recommendation can be found in *appendix 4*. These prototypes did not include any budget indications, which is also the case for most of the implementation plans below. Because of the nature of the consultancy recommendations of this report, the scope and uncertainty of the proposed implementations results in it being too difficult for the researcher to indicate proper and applicable budgets.

6.1 Implementing recommendation 3

6.1.1 Actions to be taken

Design new and unique brand with a shared logo, colours and style

The second action is crafting a unique brand which will be the region's instantly recognisable identity. This involves a new logo, a suitable colour palette and fonts and design templates. By adopting common elements across signs, brochures, digital channels and souvenirs the Lauwersmeer region becomes much easier to recognise, whether local or online. The brand should feature motifs reflecting the region's birds, water-based recreation and the nature. Colours should show the natural environment, using mostly green colours. Alongside the base elements it is important to produce sample website layouts, sign designs or brochure covers to show how the brand looks when it's fully applied. Below, prototype designs of the logo and promotional materials for the brand identity are shown.



Figure 5: Potential new brand logo with colours and style

The logo includes what makes the region unique and the colours and style match the region as well. This can be used on all sorts of elements, online or physical. As an example, a bag with the logo is shown below which could be used for souvenirs that will be sold in the new WEC.



Figure 6: Example of an item with the new logo

Create a unified online website listing all tourism activities, accommodations, amenities and more

Developing a user-friendly and unified website is the first major action. The aim is to have one location that displays everything about the region and what there is to experience and do. Achieving this requires close collaboration between RMT NOF and/or the Vrijetijdsregio and local businesses so that the site remains up to date. The website will list activities, accommodations, local dining options and upcoming events. Ideally it should also include digital booking features so visitors can instantly reserve a spot for certain activities, a play to stay or all these things combined.

Once the site is up and running, its success depends on accurate and consistent information. A system must be in place to remind businesses to keep listings updated especially if they change opening times or add new promotions. RMT NOF and/or the Vrijetijdsregio can lead regular check-ins to ensure the site remains solid by sending reminders to local businesses for example. The municipalities can help with data integration (such as bus routes and times) while local business owners provide details on pricing, seasonal schedules and unique selling points. Local businesses should have a simple way to edit their own listings or pages, preferably by providing log-in credentials to the website's portal.

To enhance the site's appeal visuals such as photos and videos should be included. A short introduction video with scenic footage of the Lauwersmeer or images of the local environment with the wildlife could provide an good sense of the region's appeal for tourists. In addition the logo and brand identity will appear consistently on the site. Furthermore the whole website should be available in Dutch, English and German. Below in figure 7 an example of a new centralised website is shown. The homepage prototype should present all available tourism offerings in a clear and intriguing way. Potential visitors will be greeted with the new brand style and a bit of information on where the region is and its history and appeal. On a page such as 'holiday packages' the newly formed packages from recommendation 1 can be shown, with booking features. An example of this type of page will be shown below the next subchapter in figure 8.



Figure 7: Prototype of new centralised website

Expand RMT NOF/Vrijetijdsregio efforts by offering incentives for tourism integration

By offering small subsidies, promotion packages or meeting sessions, RMT NOF and the Vrijetijdsregio can motivate local businesses to embrace the new brand. For example a restaurant that implements the style in its menu and advertising materials should receive a promotional boost on social media or a feature on the new website. Another idea is awarding extra marketing visibility to those who adopt eco-friendly measures which is in line with the area's desire for sustainability. Achieving a consistent local brand and solid website demands ongoing communication. Regular (online) meetings can keep the stakeholders updated on local brand guidelines, new features for the site or upcoming partnership opportunities. For signage municipal agencies must ensure they follow the brand style and unify existing signposts. Because the Lauwersmeer region crosses into the province of Friesland and Groningen involving local stakeholders and marketing organisations from the other side is vital as well. This includes bringing them into branding discussions and offering them the same incentives, ensuring visitors to experience a single 'Lauwersmeer identity'. This will also be discussed further in the next few subchapters.

6.1.2 Budget indication

According to the owner of a website builder company a fully extensive customised website will cost anywhere between €16,000 - €40,000 and take between 160 – 400 man hours to complete (Jongerden, 2024). A basic breakdown shows that it could cost between €1,000 – €8,000 for designing a professional brand identity (Strouken, 2023). These costs are rough estimates and can shift depending on the project complexity and the number of marketing materials produced. Furthermore the costs of hosting coordination in the region by RMT NOF (for example) is unable to say at this moment due to the researcher not having insights into the organisation and its costs.

6.1.3 Timeline

Short-term (0–12 months)

A style guide (colours, logo, etc.) should be drafted and the website's framework or skeleton be built. The brand can be piloted on a handful of signs or brochures and locals/local businesses can be approached to inform them about the changes.

Medium-term (12–24 months)

The full website is developed containing as well as the new brand and identity. Prototypes should be presented to stakeholders. Locals and local businesses can be approached for their input and to gather content for the website and feedback about the prototypes as well.

Long-term (after 24 months)

After two years the website and brand should be launched. Evaluations check how well the brand is recognised and whether the website effectively attracts visitors. Refinements should occur over time as well.

6.1.4 Simplified overview

Creating a strong regional brand and improve cooperation (addressing gap 3)
Actions to be taken: • Design new and unique brand with a shared logo, colours and style • Create a unified online website listing all tourism activities, accommodations, amenities and more • Expand RMT NOF/Vrijetijdsregio efforts by offering incentives for tourism integration
Involved: • RMT NOF / Vrijetijdsregio (brand coordination, marketing activities) • Groningen and its relevant stakeholders • Local businesses (restaurants, B&Bs, activity suppliers etc.) • Municipalities (guidelines, finances, support)
Necessary changes: • New centralised brand style • Single website showcasing the entire Lauwersmeer region and what there is to do • Coordination between businesses to insert the website with information
Budget indication: • Website: between €16,000 - €40,000 (estimate) • Brand: between €1,000 – €8,000 (estimate) • Coordination costs: not clear
Timeline: • Short-term (0–12 months): develop brand style guide and basic website framework, identify local businesses to contribute content • Medium-term (12-24 months): develop website and its complete content and the brand • Long-term (24+ months): launch full website with complete listings, implement new created brand, evaluate over time

6.2 Implementing recommendation 2

6.2.1 Actions to be taken

Form a tourism task force with Noardeast-Fryslân and Het Hogeland

The first action involves bringing together the relevant municipalities (Noardeast-Fryslân and Het Hogeland) and its tourism boards and marketing experts into a single task force. This task force should meet regularly, possibly every quarter, to discuss upcoming events, allocate budgets and share data on visitor numbers or marketing outcomes. The task force would include representatives from Noardeast-Fryslân and Het Hogeland, but also RMT NOF, the Vrijetijdsregio, Visit Groningen and important stakeholders from local businesses, nature groups such as Staatsbosbeheer and IVN and marketing specialists. Making sure all key stakeholders are heard early on can prevent misunderstandings, reduce duplicated efforts and imply a collective sense of ownership of goals in the region. Short-term goals should include forming smaller working groups focusing on topics like marketing campaigns or infrastructure upgrades (for example cycle paths that cross provincial lines). Each group can then report back to the main task force for final discussion. By setting a clear meeting schedule the task force can achieve and maintain momentum, evaluate progress and resolve issues relatively quick.

Create a shared roadmap for tourism, marketing, events and infrastructure

The second action is creating a shared roadmap that clarifies the region's collective tourism, marketing, events and infrastructure objectives. This roadmap should outline priority areas, proposed budgets and measurable targets. For example a yearly visitor increase of a specific percentage. A unified roadmap means that regional marketing, promotions or seasonal campaigns reflect the same overall message rather than each side of the Lauwersmeer advertising itself independently. The created roadmap should ensure no scheduling conflicts allowing visitors to attend multiple activities in one trip. Local businesses can coordinate special offers or packages around these cross-border events.

On the infrastructure side the roadmap might suggest standard signage design that includes references to both provinces or highlight which cycle routes or bus services to improve. The municipal role here is important, aligning budgets and applying for relevant incentives might help realise these plans more quickly. By setting clear deadlines and responsibilities the joint roadmap avoids confusion and duplication.

Align branding so visitors see the Lauwersmeer region as one

The third action is connected to the first implementation of this implementation chapter. It involves integrating the newly brand identity across both provinces. Whether shared through the new logo, consistent signage or common marketing materials travellers should perceive the entire Lauwersmeer area as a single destination regardless of whether they are in Friesland or Groningen. In order for the new brand identity to be fully integrated into the region, both municipalities need to adopt it. Aligning the new branding does not necessarily mean erasing distinct local identities. Instead it highlights common themes such as nature, animals and tranquillity. By featuring the same colour scheme and logo in brochures, signs and websites visitors feel continuity as they cross from one side of the region to the other.

6.2.2 Budget indication

The costs of forming a task force in the region is unable to say at this moment due to the researcher not having insights into the costs of people working for municipalities and how many people will participate in this project. The same is applicable for creating a roadmap, this involves too many (financial) factors that are unclear. Furthermore, the same is applicable for aligning the new branding. An estimate of the initial costs is explained in the previous subchapter, but the alignment itself is not clear to say.

6.2.3 Timeline

Short-term (0–12 months)

Identify and invite stakeholders to form the task force, create a quarterly meeting schedule and set up small working groups (for example marketing or infrastructure). Start with the beginnings of a shared roadmap, draft important objectives and set priorities.

Medium-term (12–24 months)

Continue the regular task force meetings and review early outcomes from working groups, refining focus areas if needed. Create a shared roadmap: Finalise detailed roadmap plans on marketing, coordinated events and infrastructure upgrades. Set annual visitor growth targets and secure partial budget allocations. Align branding (from implementation 1). Start displaying clear signage, produce consistent brochures and coordinate online promotion with the new unified identity.

Long-term (24+ months)

Form the actual tourism task force. Start full implementation of agreed projects, measure results and adapt strategies as necessary for solid cooperation. Execute the final roadmap initiatives and evaluate key performance indicators. Fully adopt the new shared brand across all channels and integrate it into new products or cooperative offers ensuring the Lauwersmeer area is viewed as one.

6.2.4 Simplified overview

Improving collaboration with Groningen (addressing gap 2)
Actions to be taken: • Form a tourism task force with Noardeast-Fryslân and Het Hogeland • Create a shared roadmap for tourism, marketing, events and infrastructure • Align branding so visitors see the Lauwersmeer region as one
Involved: • Municipalities of Noardeast-Fryslân and Het Hogeland • RMT NOF / Vrijetijdsregio • Visit Groningen • Local stakeholders, nature groups, marketing experts
Necessary changes: • New task force with shared plans outlining common tourism goals • Roadmap with unified signage, brochures, website and region identity • Joint event/activity planning and data-sharing
Budget indication: • Forming task force: not clear • Creating roadmap: not clear • Aligning branding: not clear
Timeline: • Short-term (0–12 months): identify and invite stakeholders to form the task force, create a quarterly meeting schedule. Set up small working groups, begin drafting a shared roadmap and define objectives. • Medium-term (12–24 months): continue regular task force meetings, review progress and refine focus areas. Finalise the roadmap. Begin branding alignment. • Long-term (24+ months): start with the tourism task force, implement final roadmap actions. Integrate the new brand, creating a cohesive identity for the region.

6.3 Implementing recommendation 1

6.3.1 Actions to be taken

Create low-season events and activities

The first action involves creating events and activities that can be done in the low season. These should encourage people to visit outside the typical peak summer months. These activities and events should be created in cooperation with relevant stakeholders in the region to ensure good implementation and success. Examples for more extensive implementation include the following.

- Tourism in the autumn: showcase the region's natural beauty by organising scenic routes at the height of autumn colours in the nature. Offer hot drinks, guided tours with local experts, night experiences like the Dark Sky Park and relaxing stays at the end of the day.
- Tourism in the winter: having short and cosy getaways in the colder months might feature birdwatching from heated hides or simple indoor workshops for example in the new WEC centre. Allow visitors to warm up in local cafés or communal locations afterwards. When there are snowy or icy conditions these could be implemented into a scenic walk or even ice staking in the area.

These low-season tourism activities can be very extensive but it is wise to first start with easy to implement events first. For example, the following tourism package can be created already.

1. Accommodation in Landal Natuurdorp Suyderoog for 2 nights (day 1)
2. Dinner voucher for Restaurette Schierzicht
3. Dark Sky Park excursion as night activity
4. Start the day with a visit to the WEC (day 2)
5. Cycling trip around the whole region
6. Walk through the Reiddomp area and its watchtower during the cycling trip
7. Experience the Wadden Sea from uitkijkpunt Waddenzee
8. Dinner voucher at Brasserie de Waegh

This potential tourism package is explained more in detail in the next subchapter, with a visual example. By creating these activities and events on a shared off-season calendar tourists learn that the Lauwersmeer region remains lively and worth exploring all year. Effective marketing can target visitors looking for quiet holiday experiences who enjoy meaningful and relaxing activities.

Implement tourism packages into the new website

The new website (as shown in more detail in implementation 1) can simplify trip planning for tourists by creating tourism packages that group accommodation, dining and activities into a single purchase. In the previous subchapter, an example of an easy to implement package is given. In figure 8 below this implementation is visualised as a page on the new website. This includes the details, a clear map and a function to make the booking directly and pay for it. Importantly, it also includes badges that show eco-friendly measures and that the product contains locally sourced products, which align with the region's desire for sustainability. This new platform unifies everything into a cohesive offer encouraging visitors to book entire trips rather than relying on separate websites or phone calls. This method increases convenience and attracts multi-night stays. A local approach also saves on commission fees usually taken by international booking sites. Ongoing communication with local businesses ensures availability, pricing and event changes.



LAUWERSMEER

Welcome to the

National Park Lauwersmeer

official tourism website

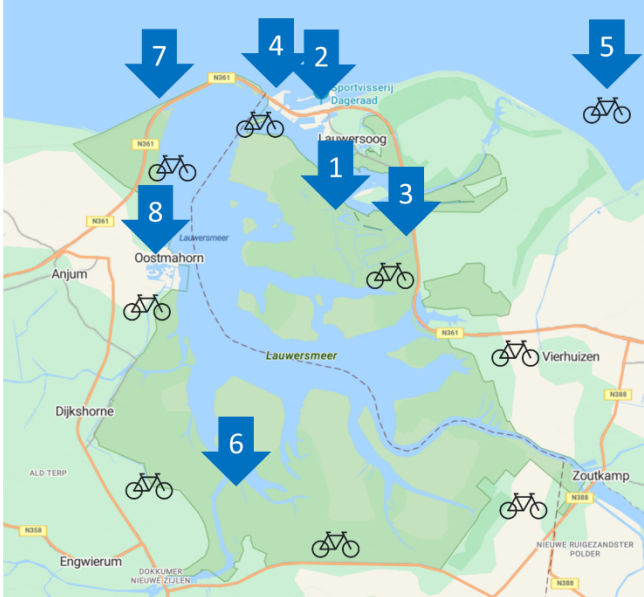
A shared initiative of



[Home](#)
[Activities](#)
[Accommodations](#)
[Amenities](#)
[Holiday packages](#)
[Transportation](#)
[Calendar](#)
[Contact](#)

Lauwersmeer Holiday Package 1

An easy 2-day trip for the low season



1. Accommodation in Landal Natuurdorp Suyderoog for 2 nights (day 1)
2. Dinner voucher for Restaurette Schierzicht
3. Dark Sky Park excursion as night activity
4. Start the day with a visit to the WEC (day 2)
5. Cycling trip around the whole region
6. Walk through the Reiddomp area and its watchtower during the cycling trip
7. Experience the Wadden Sea from uitkijkpunt Waddenzee
8. Dinner voucher at Brasserie de Waegh



This package supports local businesses



This package safe for the local environment

Book this trip here

Name(s)

Address

E-mail

Age(s)

Postal code

Special notes

Phone number

Country

Payment method

Total price: €XXX,00

complete booking

Figure 8: Prototype tourism package on new website

Support local businesses to adopt a year-round tourism mindset

Encouraging local entrepreneurs to see the off-season as an opportunity rather than a period of closing everything requires both incentives and a change in the mindset. Municipalities or marketing organisations could offer small incentives or subsidies for businesses that extend operating periods into the low-season months or launch a low-season activity. Funds should cover things like adjusting a restaurant's opening schedule or hiring new staff. Collaboration meetings or sessions led by RMT NOF or marketing organisations can highlight the benefits of low-season tourism, sharing ideas for hosting events, bundling packages or running social media campaigns. Such workshops also provide a platform for local businesses to brainstorm collaborative offers. A shift in mindset takes time but if even a handful of businesses sees results from low-season efforts, it can start broader enthusiasm and support a process of reinvestment in the area.

Funds or incentives are needed to convince the local businesses of extending their operating periods, otherwise the risk of financial losses during the start-up phase is too great. When all the other implementations of this report are implemented, the Lauwersmeer region's tourism should gradually increase and eventually reach a point where financial bonuses to local businesses are no longer needed.

6.3.2 Budget indication

The costs of creating activities in the region is unable to say at this moment due to the researcher not having insights into how many people will be working on this project and the costs of these people working for the project. The same is applicable for creating new tourism packages and adopting the new mindset, this involves too many (financial) factors that are unclear.

6.3.3 Timeline

Short-term (0–12 months)

Organise small working groups to set-up initial low-season events and promotions, start with creating low-season tourism packages and start with designing new introductory workshops guiding local businesses to see the low-season months as opportunities.

Medium-term (12–24 months)

Broaden the range of low-season such autumn and winter activities, finalise and refine package offerings, test on the website based, expand incentives for businesses that continue operating in low season and host more in-depth training sessions to implement the year-round tourism mindset.

Long-term (24+ months)

Fully implement a robust low-season tourism programme with new and large-scale events, implement the new and comprehensive booking system in the new website which supports multi-night packages and achieve a self-sustaining year-round model where local businesses operate confidently and cooperatively.

6.3.4 Simplified overview

Extending the high season and diversifying activities (addressing gap 1)
Actions to be taken: • Create low-season events and activities • Implement tourism packages into the new website • Support local businesses to adopt a year-round tourism mindset
Involved: • Local businesses in the whole region • Municipality (relevant policy officers) • RMT NOF / Vrijetijdsregio (marketing, joint campaigns, facilitating cooperation) • Website and its owners (implementing package deals and bookings)
Necessary changes: • Shared off-season tourism calendars with new activities • Collaboration on package deals for the new website to ensure fair and better profits • Shift in local mindset to view low season months as opportunities
Budget indication: • Creating activities: not clear • Creating packages: not clear • Adopting new mindset: not clear
Timeline: • Short-term (0-12 months): focus on forming groups to plan off-season events, begin drafting holiday packages based on first results and create the new sessions to guide local businesses towards year-round thinking. • Medium-term (12-24 months): expand the range of low-season events and tourism packages, design incentive schemes for businesses and refine the website's booking features based on initial feedback. • Long-term (24+ months): fully implement low-season activities, integrate packages into the website and ensure most local enterprises embrace an all-year approach.

By applying all the implementation actions from this chapter based on the identified gaps, the Lauwersmeer region will have more appealing, robust tourism offerings that give visitors reasons to come and stay at any time of the year. The efforts of locals, local businesses, marketing experts and municipality members paired with new innovative tools like the new website can transform how tourism is managed and perceived bringing benefits to the whole region.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview questions

Appendix 1A: Local businesses

The interviewee
1. Can you introduce yourself and describe your role in your organisation?
2. How long have you been involved in the tourism sector in this region?
3. Does your organisation do more for tourism in the region besides overnight stays?
Current tourism offerings
4. How would you describe the current tourism offerings in the region?
5. Which current offerings are most successful and why?
6. Are there areas where you feel the current offerings are inadequate or outdated?
7. What are visitors missing when they visit the area?
8. Are there offerings in the region that underdeliver to visitor expectations?
9. How is accessibility experienced by visitors?
Visitor demographics and behaviour
10. What type of tourists usually visit the region?
11. What are the reasons for tourists to visit this area?
12. Have you noticed changes over the past few years in terms of tourist demographics and preferences?
13. What feedback do tourists give about their experience of the region?
14. Are there particular visitor segments that you think the region is not effectively catering to?
Desired state
15. What is, broadly speaking, the desired state of tourism in the region?
16. What improvements or changes would you personally like to see in the region's tourism offerings in the future?
17. What kind of visitors would you like to attract in the future and how do you plan to adapt the offerings to cater to them?
Challenges and external factors
18. What are the main challenges while working in this sector?
19. How can these challenges be addressed in the future?
20. What are the external factors that influence tourism in the region?
21. How can these external factors be addressed in the future?
Sustainability
22. How important is sustainable tourism development in your opinion for the region?
23. What new or innovative practices would you like to introduce to improve sustainability in tourism offerings?
24. Are there any sustainable practices that you believe should be prioritised in the region's future offerings?
Stakeholder collaboration

25. How do you currently collaborate with stakeholders to improve tourism in the region?
26. Which stakeholders do you believe are most critical in shaping the future of tourism in the region?

Appendix 1B: Local resident

The interviewee
1. Can you introduce yourself and describe your role in your organisation?
2. How long have you been involved in the tourism sector in this region?
3. Does your organisation do more for tourism in the region besides overnight stays?
Current tourism offerings
4. How would you describe the current tourism offerings in the region?
5. Which current offerings are most successful and why?
6. Are there areas where you feel the current offerings are inadequate or outdated?
7. What are visitors missing when they visit the area?
8. Are there offerings in the region that underdeliver to visitor expectations?
9. How is accessibility experienced by visitors?
Visitor demographics and behaviour
10. What type of tourists usually visit the region?
11. What are the reasons for tourists to visit this area?
12. Have you noticed changes over the past few years in terms of tourist demographics and preferences?
13. What feedback do tourists give about their experience of the region?
14. Are there particular visitor segments that you think the region is not effectively catering to?
Desired state
15. What is, broadly speaking, the desired state of tourism in the region?
16. What improvements or changes would you personally like to see in the region's tourism offerings in the future?
17. What kind of visitors would you like to attract in the future and how do you plan to adapt the offerings to cater to them?
Challenges and external factors
18. What are the main challenges while working in this sector?
19. How can these challenges be addressed in the future?
20. What are the external factors that influence tourism in the region?
21. How can these external factors be addressed in the future?
Sustainability
22. How important is sustainable tourism development in your opinion for the region?
23. What new or innovative practices would you like to introduce to improve sustainability in tourism offerings?
24. Are there any sustainable practices that you believe should be prioritised in the region's future offerings?
Stakeholder collaboration
25. How do you currently collaborate with stakeholders to improve tourism in the region?
26. Which stakeholders do you believe are most critical in shaping the future of tourism in the region?

Appendix 1C: The client

The interviewee	
1.	Can you introduce yourself, your organisation and your role?
2.	How long have you been involved in shaping tourism for this region?
Current tourism offerings	
3.	How would you describe the current tourism offerings in the region?
4.	What do tourists miss when they visit the region?
5.	What are the objectives of the Vrijetijdsregio regarding tourism in the region?
6.	Which of the current offerings do you think is the most successful in achieving the region's goals?
7.	Are there areas where the current offering no longer fits with the long-term vision for the region?
Desired state	
8.	What are the main changes needed to achieve the desired state of tourism?
9.	What kind of visitors does the region want to attract more in the future and why?
10.	How can economic growth through tourism be balanced with preserving the character and environment of the region?
11.	What role does sustainability play in the future of tourism in the region?
12.	Are there specific goals that the Vrijetijdsregio has set to achieve the desired state of tourism?
Challenges and external factors	
13.	What are the main challenges of working in this sector?
14.	How can these challenges be addressed?
15.	How do external factors, such as regulations, economic conditions or environmental factors influence the region in achieving its tourism objectives?
Sustainability	
16.	What are the sustainable development goals of the region?
17.	What innovative or sustainable tourism practices would be a good fit to promote tourism in the region?
18.	Which sustainable initiatives should be prioritised to achieve the desired state of tourism?
Stakeholder collaboration	
19.	How does the Vrijetijdsregio currently work together with other stakeholders to shape tourism?
20.	Which stakeholders play a crucial role in realising the future of tourism in the region?
21.	What additional stakeholder collaboration is needed to achieve the region's tourism objectives?

Appendix 1D: IVN Lauwersmeer

The interviewee	
1.	Can you introduce yourself, your organisation and your role?
2.	How long have you been involved with IVN and the region?
Current tourism offerings	
3.	How would you describe the current opportunities for tourism and nature experience in the region?
4.	Which natural areas or activities attract the most visitors and why do you think that is?
5.	Are there aspects of tourism and nature experience that you think could be improved to better meet visitor demand?
6.	What do visitors miss when they visit the area?
7.	Are there tourism elements in the region that do not meet the expectations of visitors?
8.	How do visitors experience the accessibility and information provision in the region?
Visitor demographics and behaviour	
9.	What type of visitors mainly use the IVN activities in the region?
10.	What do you think are the most important reasons why people participate in IVN activities?
11.	Have you noticed any changes in visitor demographics or interest over the past few years?
12.	What feedback does IVN receive from visitors about their experience with tourism and nature in this region?
13.	Are there target groups you think IVN or the region should pay more attention to their needs?
Desired state	
14.	What is the desired state of tourism and nature in the region in broad terms according to IVN?
15.	What role does IVN see for itself in the future in promoting nature tourism?
16.	What improvements or changes would you like to see in the future in the tourism offerings that focuses on experiencing nature?
Challenges and external factors	
17.	What are the biggest challenges and external factors influencing tourism in this region?
18.	How can these challenges and external factors be addressed in the future?
Stakeholder collaboration	
19.	How does the IVN currently collaborate with other organisations or stakeholders to promote tourism and nature in the region?
20.	Which stakeholders play a crucial role in realising the future of tourism in the region?

Appendix 1E: Councillor and Policy Officer

The interviewee
1. Can you introduce yourself and your role within the municipality?
2. How long have you been in these roles?
Current tourism offerings
3. How would you describe the current tourism offerings in the Lauwersmeer area?
4. Do the current tourism offerings match the tourism objectives of the municipality?
5. In your opinion, are the current tourism offerings well-suited for the type of visitors the region currently attracts?
Desired state
6. What is the desired state or long-term vision of the municipality for tourism in the Lauwersmeer area?
7. To what extent is the municipality prepared to invest in tourism offerings in the region?
8. What would you like to see developed to improve tourism in the Lauwersmeer area and distinguish it from other destinations?
9. How do you intend to maintain the balance between tranquillity and the natural character of the area in the event of an increase in tourists?
10. How important is it for the municipality that tourism makes a valuable contribution to the region not only in the summer months but also in the low season? And how do you want to achieve this?
11. What is the role of the municipality in strengthening marketing and promotion for the Lauwersmeer area?
12. How do you think marketing and promotion can be used to promote tourism in the region?
Challenges and external factors
13. What are the current challenges in the region?
14. What are external factors that hinder tourism in the region?
15. What are specific challenges and external factors that hinder progress towards the desired tourism state?
Sustainability
16. How important is sustainable tourism development in the municipality's vision and how is this included in policy decisions?
17. How will the municipality ensure that environmental protection and cultural heritage preservation remain as tourism develops?
Stakeholder collaboration
18. How does the municipality currently work together with local entrepreneurs, nature organisations and residents to shape the tourism offerings?
19. Which stakeholders do you think are most crucial to achieving the desired state of tourism?
20. In what ways can the municipality strengthen coordination and cooperation between these stakeholders to create a better tourism offerings?
Other
21. Is there anything else you would like to share with me for my research?

Appendix 1F: Tourists (long version)

The interviewee
1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. Where are you from?
4. What is your marital status and do you have children? If so what are their ages?
5. Are you visiting alone, with family or with friends?
6. How many times have you visited the Lauwersmeer area?
Current tourism offerings
7. How would you describe tourism offerings in the area?
8. Which activities or experiences have you enjoyed the most here? What made them stand out?
9. Are there any activities, attractions or services you would have liked to see in the area but were missing?
10. How would you rate the quality of the existing attractions and services in the area?
11. Do you feel there are enough options for dining, accommodation or leisure activities?
12. How accessible do you find the area's main attractions, both in terms of physical access and the ease of finding information about them?
13. If you've visited similar destinations, how does the Lauwersmeer area compare in terms of offerings?
Visitor demographics and behaviour
14. What kind of travel experiences do you usually seek (e.g., nature, cultural immersion, relaxation, adventure) and does the area meet these expectations?
15. How important are amenities like comfortable accommodations, convenient transport, or diverse dining options for you?
16. When traveling with children, are there particular facilities or activities you look for that influence your choice of destination?
17. What has your experience with local hospitality been like here?
18. Would you recommend this destination to friends or family?
Desired state
19. What improvements or changes would you like to see in the area to make it a better tourist destination?
20. Are there specific activities or attractions you think would enhance the experience of tourists if introduced here?
21. If you could change one thing about the area to better meet your travel needs, what would it be?
Challenges and external factors
22. Have you encountered any specific challenges during your visit, such as difficulties with transport, available services or access to information?
23. How could these challenges be addressed in your opinion?
Sustainability
24. How important is sustainable tourism for you when choosing a travel destination?
25. Have you noticed any sustainable practices in the area?
26. Do you feel that environmental protection is adequately prioritised in this area?

Appendix 1G: Tourists (short version)

Short version
1. What brought you to the Lauwersmeer area?
2. How helpful did you find the online information about the Lauwersmeer area when planning your visit?
3. What were your expectations of the area and are these expectations met?
4. What current tourism offerings did you experience positively and why?
5. Do you feel there are enough options for dining, accommodation or activities?
6. Are there any tourism offerings you feel are missing or could be improved?

Appendix 1H: Interview matrix

Research question	Concept	Definition	Information needed	Interview question
1. Who is the target market of the region?	Target market and visitor demographics	Groups or segments of tourists based on age, interests, motivations and household composition (Zhang & Marcussen, 2007).	Typical age ranges, nationalities, and group composition Motivations for visiting Emerging target segments	Local businesses What type of tourists usually visit the region? Are there particular visitor segments that you think the region is not effectively catering to?
				Local residents What type of tourists usually visit the region? Are there particular visitor segments that you think the region is not effectively addressing?
				The client What kind of visitors does the region want to attract more in the future and why?
				IVN What type of visitors mainly use the IVN activities in this region?
				Councillor & policy officer In your opinion, are the current tourism offerings well suited for the type of visitors the region currently attracts?
				Tourists (long) What is your age? Where are you from?

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				What kind of travel experiences do you usually seek?
2. What are the current tourism offerings and how are they experienced?	Existing attractions, amenities, activities and accommodations	The set of facilities, experiences and services currently available in the region, including how visitors perceive their quality and usefulness (Al-Ababneh, 2013).	Types of attractions and experiences Visitor impressions of quality and variety Feedback on accessibility and enjoyment	Local businesses / residents How would you describe the current tourism offerings in the region? Which current offerings are most successful and why? The client How would you describe the current tourism offerings in the region? Which of the current offerings do you think is the most successful in achieving the region's goals? IVN How would you describe the current opportunities for tourism and nature experience in the region? Which natural areas or activities attract the most visitors and why do you think that is? Councillor & policy officer How would you describe the current tourism offerings in the Lauwersmeer area? Tourists (long) How would you describe tourism offerings in the area? Which activities or experiences have you enjoyed the most here? What made them stand out? Tourists (short) How would you describe the current tourism offerings you experienced positively and why?

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3. What is the target market missing when visiting the area?	Gaps or unmet needs in the region's tourism offerings	Services, attractions or facilities that visitors expect but cannot find, or that are insufficient in availability, quality or seasonality (He & Huang, 2023).	Common visitor complaints or shortfalls Seasonal closures or lack of indoor options	Local businesses / residents What are visitors missing when they visit the area? Are there offerings in the region that underdeliver to visitor expectations? The client What do tourists miss when they visit the region? IVN What do visitors miss when they visit the area? Councillor & policy officer In your opinion, are the current tourism offerings well suited for the type of visitors the region currently attracts? Tourists (long) Are there any activities, attractions or services you would have liked to see in the area but were missing? What improvements or changes would you like to see in the area to make it a better tourist destination? Tourists (short) Are there any tourism offerings you feel are missing or could be improved?
4. What (external) factors are contributing to the inadequacy of the current tourism offerings in the region?	External influences (political, economic, environmental, cross border)	Conditions outside local control that hinder tourism development (McDonald, 2024).	Regulatory frameworks and cross border issues Budget or policy conflicts Limited public transport or infrastructure	Local businesses / residents What are the main challenges while working in this sector? What are the external factors that influence tourism in the region?

				How can these challenges / external factors be addressed in the future? The client What are the main challenges in the sector? How do external factors, such as regulations, economic conditions or environmental factors influence the region in achieving its tourism objectives? IVN What are the biggest challenges and external factors influencing tourism in this region? Councillor & policy officer What are the current challenges in the region? What are external factors that hinder tourism in the region? What are specific challenges and external factors that hinder progress? Tourists (long) Have you encountered any specific challenges during your visit? How could these challenges be addressed in your opinion?
5. What sustainable development goals have to be addressed?	Sustainability targets	Goals that ensure growth which does not harm the region's natural or cultural assets (United Nations, 2015).	Current ecofriendly practices Municipal / organisational sustainability guidelines Attitudes toward more sustainable tourism	Local businesses / residents How important is sustainable tourism development in your opinion for the region? What new or innovative practices would you like to introduce to improve sustainability in tourism offerings? Are there any sustainable practices that you believe should be prioritised? The client What role does sustainability play in the future of tourism in the region? What are the sustainable development goals of the region?

				Which sustainable initiatives should be prioritised to achieve the desired state of tourism? IVN How important is sustainable tourism development in your vision for the region? What new or innovative practices would you like to introduce to improve sustainability? Councillor & policy officer How important is sustainable tourism development in the municipality's vision? How will the municipality ensure that environmental protection and cultural heritage preservation remain? Tourists (long) How important is sustainable tourism for you? Have you noticed any sustainable practices in the area? Do you feel environmental protection is adequately prioritised?
6. Which stakeholders have to be involved in the process?	Key organisations and groups for tourism development	Stakeholders whose collaboration is essential for implementing improvements and achieving tourism goals (UNWTO, 2005).	Identification of main stakeholders Possible new partnerships Coordination across borders	Local businesses / residents How do you currently collaborate with stakeholders to improve tourism in the region? Which stakeholders do you believe are most critical in shaping the future of tourism in the region? The client How does the Vrijetijdsregio currently work together with other stakeholders to shape tourism? Which stakeholders play a crucial role in realising the future of tourism in the region? IVN How does the IVN currently collaborate with other organisations or stakeholders?

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				Which stakeholders play a crucial role in realising the future?
				Councillor & policy officer How does the municipality currently work together with local entrepreneurs, nature organisations and residents? Which stakeholders do you think are most crucial to achieving the desired state?

Appendix 2: Coding matrices

Appendix 2A: Local businesses

Interview question	Interview ee	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
1. Can you introduce yourself, your organisation and describe your role in your organisation?	Mila	Head chef & assistant manager of a restaurant Also involved in holiday home rentals Engaged in tourism in multiple ways		
	Harry	Started spontaneously with old terp Built two studios, now rent them out (no breakfast) Focused on communication, concept development Target couples with higher income escaping city life Offers luxurious, spacious studios with wellness facilities		
	Sil	Owner of a boat rental company Manages mostly remotely Mainly invests, oversees by phone Has staff to run operations		

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	Pepijn	Manages group accommodation, camping, and special lodgings (Lanterfanter) Located near Lauwersmeer NP Target groups: schools for camps, music associations, families Runs outdoor sports company as well		
2. How long have you been involved in the tourism sector in this region?	Mila	Involved for four years in the region's tourism sector		
	Harry	About 4.5 years since arrival and starting the business		
	Sil	4 years since the company started		
	Pepijn	15 years living there and doing it for 15 years		
3. How would you describe the current tourist offer in the region?	Mila	Holiday home supply large but still insufficient Small entrepreneurs hard to find, big players dominate online Many hospitality businesses sold recently Only one restaurant (Raadsel van de Wadden) open besides Lauwersmeer	Gap between supply/demand in accommodations Marketing challenges for small businesses Economic factors causing closures	Insufficient and decreasing tourism offerings due to economic & marketing challenges Need for strategic positioning & branding to differentiate region Untapped tourism potential through improved promotion Uncoordinated marketing despite good natural & activity resources

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	Significant reduction in nonholiday home offerings	
Harry	Super boring No clear positioning, lacks good marketing Lauwersmeer beautiful but no distinct identity Friesland unknown beyond sailing & Wadden Offer is bare, no strong brand from province	Unclear branding and lack of unique selling points Poor marketing & positioning
Sil	Sufficient supply exists Awareness can improve More potential to attract people than currently tapped	Underutilized potential Low awareness Could attract more visitors with better promotion
Pepijn	Relatively quiet, undiscovered area Interest growing, provinces & municipalities trying to improve Enough accommodations & activities Not well known to everyone	Underrecognized region Fragmented promotion Good supply but lack of coordinated marketing

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		Efforts are fragmented per region/place		
4. Which elements of this offering are most successful and why?	Mila	Holiday homes fairly large supply, though not enough Good branding, visitors know they come for peace & quiet (no amenities)	Success of holiday homes due to clear branding Alignment with visitor expectation of tranquillity	Successful appeal of holiday homes to tranquillity seeking visitors Preserving natural appeal amidst multiple pressures
	Harry	Nature is the main successful element Under pressure from multiple interests (tourism, agriculture, environment)	Nature as core attraction Conflicting interests putting environment under strain	Leveraging niche activities to attract certain segments Nature as a tourism driver
	Sil	Water sports are big for those interested Different visitors prefer different things, can't generalize	Water sports as a key niche activity Individual preferences shape success	
	Pepijn	Nature, national park, islands attract most people	Nature as central draw National park & islands stand out	
5. Do you find the current offering inadequate or outdated?	Mila	Too few restaurants Lack of communication among entrepreneurs leads to overlapping offerings	Inadequate dining options Poor collaboration	Insufficient restaurants & lack of business collaboration hinders tourism offerings Developing unique, upscale experiences to differentiate the region

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		Competition tough due to same clientele	Market saturation without differentiation	Enhanced promotion to broaden market reach
	Harry	Too little special to do Missing unique adventures, beyond basic cycling/walking Not enough upscale experiences for those who pay more	Deficit in unique activities Lacks upscale amenities Needs to cater to experienced travellers	Infrastructure improvements needed
	Sil	Offer is sufficient Easy to find on Google Maps More promotion needed outside region (south, Germany)	Adequate supply but insufficient external outreach Promotion deficit	
	Pepijn	Public transport problematic No bus near the door, only hourly service	Accessibility issues (public transport) Infrastructure gap	
6. What do visitors miss when they visit the area?	Mila	Visitors miss a connected experience Offerings disconnected, entrepreneurs isolated Need a regional approach vs. individual	Lack of integrated tourist experience Fragmentation of offerings Need for collaboration	Absence of cohesive experience due to lack of stakeholder collaboration Enhancing dining options to meet visitor expectations Centralised information platform needed
	Harry	Visitors miss good dining options	Culinary deficit	

Consultancy Report

		Some go as far as Amsterdam for quality restaurants Outside high season even worse	Limited dining outside high season	
	Sil	Most find things well organized They don't really miss much here	Visitors generally satisfied No major shortcomings reported	
	Pepijn	Good information provision lacking Need a single website/clear source Info now scattered among entrepreneurs	Inadequate unified information channels Fragmented info sources	
7. Are there elements in the region that do not meet visitors' expectations?	Mila	Overall experience underdelivers, not specific parts	Overall shortfall Complete package lacking	Region underdelivers as a whole Expand activity portfolio to satisfy visitor expectations
	Harry	Visitors expect something to do, find none	Activity gap vs. expectations	Contentment with current offerings
	Sil	Nothing for Sil's visitors All satisfied, good reviews	Meeting current expectations for this business	
	Pepijn	Doesn't know of any unmet expectations	Generally meets expectations	
8. How is accessibility experienced by visitors?	Mila	Region not very accessible Lags 10-15 years behind Randstad	Physical & service accessibility challenges Outdated infrastructure	Accessibility shortcomings hinder visitor experience Improve public transport for better access

Consultancy Report

		Limited wheelchair accessibility	Limited dietary accommodation	
		Public transport & taxis scarce		
		Not catering to allergies/vegan		
	Harry	Generally okay with Google Maps	Basic accessibility okay	
		Unsure about disabled access	Inclusive accessibility uncertain	
	Sil	Everything easily accessible, no complaints	Adequate accessibility in Sil's context	
	Pepijn	Not good without own transport	Heavy car dependence	
		Car needed	Public transport insufficient	
9. From your perspective, what type of tourists typically visit the region?	Mila	Many Germans, year round	Core demographic German tourists	Shifts in demographics impact local economy
		Germans wealthy, easy to please, big spenders	Pricing & occupancy changes alter visitor mix	Catering to peace seeking people
		Esonstad changes brought new crowd (self catering, less for restaurants)		Wide variety of tourists with diverse motivations
	Harry	Couples from Randstad seeking peace and quiet	Urban escapees seeking relaxation	Seasonal demographic shifts
	Sil	Very diverse: from plumbers to professors	Broad visitor range	
		People wanting adventure, peace	Seeking adventure & peace	
	Pepijn	Mainly seniors year round	Seasonal shifts in demographics	

Consultancy Report

		Families in summer	Seniors & families	
10. What are the reasons for tourists to visit this area?	Mila	Nature and quietness Spending time with family	Motivations: nature, tranquillity, family bonding	Natural environment & peaceful family experiences Balancing tranquillity and adventure
	Harry	Nature, relaxation	Emphasis on relaxation in natural setting	Nature as foundational tourism asset
	Sil	Nature	Simple core draw: nature	
	Pepijn	People seeking peace or adventure	Dual appeal: tranquillity & activities	
11. Have you noticed any changes in tourist demographics and preferences over the past few years?	Mila	Visitors younger, more families More international (Italians, Americans, Australians)	Younger, more diverse demographics International expansion	Evolving demographics: younger & more global Post pandemic continuity of urban escape trend
	Harry	Corona caused need to escape city Same profile still comes Visitors go outside more now	Persistent urban escape motif Post pandemic continuity	Consistent visitor base
	Sil	No changes, always diverse	Stable visitor mix	
	Pepijn	Since corona, more families Before: large groups, now smaller families and boat renters Schools before, now shift to families	Shift from large groups to families Influence of corona on demographics	

Consultancy Report

12. What feedback do tourists give about their experience of the region?	Mila	Not enough to do, not well known Area beautiful but just peaceful People don't stay long	Lack of activities & awareness Scenic but underutilized	Need for more activities & marketing to extend stays Improve digital presence & offer more activities Positive reinforcement of nature's value
	Harry	Boring but also beautiful nature Hard to find info online Also positive about peace	Contradiction: scenic yet underserved Info deficit	
	Sil	They find it beautiful, quiet, enjoyable	Positive feedback on environment & experience	
	Pepijn	Relaxed, enthusiastic, impressed by nature	High satisfaction with nature	
13. Are there certain visitor segments that you think the region is not effectively addressing the needs of the region?	Mila	Not effectively catering Randstad yuppies Remote workers need peace, working holidays Untapped market of urban professionals	Untapped segment: remote working professionals Potential for working holidays	Opportunity to attract remote working urban people Potential upscale target segment Expanding region's water sports reputation
	Harry	Target is average consumer now Missing wealthier tourists seeking relaxation & luxury	Missing upscale market Wealthier tourists desire relaxation & good dining	Adjust operational strategies to consistently cater to visitors

Consultancy Report

		Could attract high spenders to boost local economy		
	Sil	Water sports underdeveloped compared to Sneek Region not fully leveraging water sports potential	Underdeveloped water sports niche Competition from known water sports hubs	
	Pepijn	Everything closed Mondays/Tuesdays, even in summer Tourists complain about lack of open establishments	Operational gaps reduce visitor satisfaction Missed opportunity in basic services	
14. What is, in broad terms, the desired state of tourism in the region?	Mila	Year round tourism, break seasonal cycles Offseason downturn discourages return visits	Extend tourism season year round Overcome seasonality's vicious cycle	Sustainable, year round tourism to break seasonality cycle Leveraging capacity for broader tourism growth
	Harry	n/a		Preserving low density authenticity
	Sil	More tourism, 23 times current volume Underused capacity	Growth potential Desire for increased visitor numbers	
	Pepijn	Happy with it as is, likes that it's not too busy Prefers quiet side of Lauwersmeer	Preference for low density tourism Maintaining authenticity and quietude	
15. What improvements or changes would you personally like to see in the region's tourism offerings in the future?	Mila	Year round tourism	Enhanced activities for all seasons	Expanding offerings to promote year round visitation

Consultancy Report

		More activities & diverse offerings	Support year round visitation	Market repositioning for upscale, experiential tourism
	Harry	More activities	Strategic curation of activities	Differentiation via thematic specialization (water sports)
		Better positioning	Target upscale market	Enhancing basic tourism infrastructure & services
		Focus on higher target group & offseason	Nonseasonal approach	
	Sil	More water sports tourism	Strengthen water sports appeal	
		Better promotion of region	Improve marketing	
	Pepijn	Better public transport	Infrastructure & service improvements	
		More/better restaurants open even Mondays/Tuesdays	Dining enhancement	
16. What kind of visitors would you like to attract in the future and how do you plan to adapt the offerings to cater to them?	Mila	Randstad visitors wanting convenience & care	Targeting urban remote workers	Tailored offerings for urban remote workers seeking convenience & leisure
		Provide work friendly accommodations, internet, ergonomic chairs	Offering convenience & full service packages	Incremental growth in same visitor profile
		Offer activities & full packages	Integrating local entrepreneurs	Intimate, family oriented tourism with genuine nature appreciation
	Harry	Same type as now (wealthy couples seeking peace)	Maintain current niche	

Consultancy Report

		Business going well, no need to change	Continue satisfying existing successful segment	
	Sil	More of the same: nature & peace lovers Hopefully more water sports fans	Reinforce current market Incremental growth in same profile	
	Pepijn	Shift to families with children, smaller groups More personal contact, community feel Move away from large groups to intimate family friendly setup	Focus on family oriented environment More authentic nature experience Smaller groups for intimacy	
17. What are the main challenges while working in this sector?	Mila	Border region complexity Multiple organizations & provinces No unified regional plan	Administrative fragmentation Need for cross regional collaboration	Lack of unified regional planning due to fragmentation Importance of strategic clarity & marketing choices Marketing and differentiation challenges
	Harry	Not complicated: make a clear plan, use right media Once offer is clear, customers come	Importance of clear strategy & marketing Straightforward approach	
	Sil	Promotion difficult, people tend to go to Sneek for water sports Getting people from Sneek to here is hard	Marketing & branding challenge Competing with known destinations	
	Pepijn	Rising prices, must pass on costs	Economic pressures (price hikes)	

Consultancy Report

		Fear of fewer bookings if too expensive Balancing work private life as he lives onsite	Work life balance in tourism	
18. How can these challenges be addressed in the future?	Mila	More cohesion needed Set up a steering group Joint plan and image bank for unified marketing	Collaborative regional approach Unified marketing strategies	Cohesive regional collaboration & unified marketing Resource supported marketing improvements Strategic adaptation to attract more profitable visitor segments
	Harry	n/a		
	Sil	More marketing/promotion Municipality could provide budget	Public private cooperation for promotion Resource allocation from authorities	
	Pepijn	Renovate and focus on smaller families Potentially more revenue	Adapting offering to new segment Strategic renovation for profitability	
19. What are the external factors that most influence tourism in the region?	Mila	Regulations (UNESCO, protected nature) limit development Horizon pollution concerns High costs, 21% VAT	Regulatory constraints Economic cost factors	Environmental regulations & economic factors shaping tourism Natural conditions influence tourism Seasonal weather challenges in planning
	Harry	Weather is key external factor	Climate/weather unpredictability	

Consultancy Report

	Sil	Weather/climate uncontrollable	Environmental uncertainty	
	Pepijn	Weather greatly affects visitation Hard to plan staffing & operations	Weather dependency Unpredictable visitation flow	
20. How can these external factors be addressed in the future?	Mila	Hard to influence regulations & financial aspects	Limited control over external constraints	Recognition of external limits
	Harry	More indoor activities could mitigate bad weather impact	Diversify to all weather options	Resilience through indoor options
	Sil	n/a		Emphasis on sustainability as critical
	Pepijn	n/a		
21. How important is sustainable tourism development in your vision for the region?	Mila	Essential, must protect World Heritage & nature Without sustainability, nothing left in 10 years	Sustainability imperative Environmental necessity	Mixed perception of the importance of sustainability
	Harry	Very important, nature under pressure Must be careful with climate wise decisions	Sustainability to protect environment Sensible investments	
	Sil	Not important personally No strong emphasis on sustainability	Low personal priority for sustainability	
	Pepijn	Not really important personally Does minimal efforts (solar panels, electric car) mainly for costs	Limited personal commitment Some minimal actions	

Consultancy Report

22. What new or innovative practices would you like to introduce to improve sustainability in tourism offerings?	Mila	Start with basic steps: solar panels, heat pumps Existing facilities lack these basics	Fundamental sustainability improvements Begin with simple ecofriendly measures	Incremental sustainability enhancements Adopting greener infrastructure
	Harry	More climate neutral accommodations	Ecofriendly infrastructure focus	
	Sil	Not for Sil personally Other companies use electric boats	Some sector peers move to electric Sil not adapting currently	
	Pepijn	Doesn't know	Uncertain about sustainability innovations	
23. Are there any sustainable practices that you believe should be prioritised in the region's future offerings?	Mila	Restaurants should source locally Use local farmers & sea resources Shift from imported mass production	Local sourcing for sustainability Support local economy & reduce footprint	Promoting local sourcing to enhance sustainability Long term sustainable planning
	Harry	Long term vision from province & municipalities needed	Strategic long term sustainable planning Policy level sustainability focus	
	Sil	n/a		
	Pepijn	n/a		

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24. How do you currently collaborate with stakeholders to improve tourism in the region?	Mila	Working with RMT & Henk	Incentive based stakeholder collaboration	Innovative collaboration model for stakeholder synergy (Arrange)
		Set up Arrange to incentivize collaboration	Move from subsidy to mutual financial benefits	Good collaboration among local businesses & authorities
		Others isolated, subsidydriven		
		Arrange aims to financially motivate cooperation		
	Harry	Not really now	Minimal current collaboration	
		Initially joined local platforms	Independent approach	
		Now operates independently		
	Sil	All rental businesses (B&Bs, water sports) are stakeholders	Broad potential stakeholder network	
		Also municipalities	Possible synergy through cooperation	
	Pepijn	Works closely with Staatsbosbeheer	Selective, pragmatic cooperation	
		Some local entrepreneurs for catering	Emphasis on direct relationships	
		Prefers direct guest sales		
		Not much with municipalities or leisure orgs		

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25. Which stakeholders do you believe are most critical in shaping the future of tourism in the region?	Mila	More than just municipalities Local entrepreneurs, homeowners crucial Groningen side cooperation needed Infrastructure planning for new attractions	Multilevel stakeholder involvement Cross provincial collaboration Infrastructure essential	Stakeholder collaboration essential for sustainable tourism future Governance needed to direct tourism strategy Entrepreneurs central to tourism's future viability
	Harry	Provinces & municipalities must decide Not happening now	Government decision gap Need authorities to shape policy	
	Sil	Municipalities & province crucial More tourism = more money Promotion improvement needed	Authorities key in shaping tourism Promotion responsibilities	
	Pepijn	Entrepreneurs are key Hard winters, low offseason tourism On islands it's busier, here quiet Entrepreneurs struggle outside high season	Entrepreneurial resilience Seasonal challenges Private sector central	

Appendix 2B: Local resident

Interview question	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
1. Can you introduce yourself and describe how long you have lived in the Lauwersmeer area?	Adriana from Anjum Lived there her whole life (20 years)		
2. How does tourism impact your community and your daily life?	Tourism has a significant impact Grateful for tourism Sometimes annoyed by tourists when they cause crowds (annoyed by tourists) Notices more tourists now who stay longer than before (more tourists, longer stays)	Positive and negative impacts of tourism Personal feelings about increasing tourism Increase in tourist numbers and stay duration	Mixed feelings about increasing tourism impact
3. Are you involved in activities or organizations related to tourism in the region?	Internship at RMT of Northeast Friesland Involvement in tourism related activities (internship related to tourism)	Direct involvement in regional tourism development	Active participation in regional tourism efforts
4. How would you describe the current tourist offer in the Lauwersmeer area?	Some tourist offerings exist Restaurants can't be open every day in winter More B&Bs and small scale accommodations Large holiday park doesn't fit regional style Peace and quiet are essential to Friesland	Limitations in facilities and services Concerns about maintaining regional character Importance of tranquillity	Balancing tourism development with preserving regional identity
5. Are there any particular offerings that are popular or useful to the community?	Plus Supermarket benefits from tourism Infrastructure like cycle paths and walking routes helps tourism and residents	Community benefits from tourism supported amenities Infrastructure improvements aid both tourists and locals	Tourism supports community facilities and infrastructure
6. Are there aspects of tourism that feel outdated or could be improved?	Poor communication and cooperation (e.g., signage placed without informing business owner) Need for better coordination between authorities and businesses	Issues with stakeholder communication Need for improved collaboration	Improving stakeholder communication and collaboration

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7. What do you think visitors miss or would like to have when they come to this area?	Restaurants not always being open, especially in low season Less supply and hustle, which may not meet all visitor expectations	Limited services in the low season Potential gaps in meeting visitor needs	Enhancing year round service availability for visitors
8. Are there any tourist offers that you think do not meet visitors' expectations?	Visitors may expect businesses to always be open, which isn't the case Websites not always up to date	Mismatch between visitor expectations and service availability Need for accurate online information	Improving information accuracy and managing visitor expectations
9. What do you think the accessibility for tourists is like in this area, both in terms of physical access and information?	RMT website exists but may not be easily found Reduced online visibility after moving to Merk Fryslan platform Public transport is poor; area is difficult to reach without a car	Challenges in online findability and accessibility of information Physical accessibility issues due to inadequate public transport	Enhancing online and physical accessibility for tourists
10. What type of tourists do you typically see in this area?	Majority are older people (50-60 years old) Families with young children also visit Visitors vary but skew towards older demographics	Visitor demographics include older adults and families	Understanding visitor demographics to tailor offerings
11. Why do you think tourists come to the Lauwersmeer area?	Tourists come for peace and quiet Beautiful open spaces Activities like walking	Attractions: tranquillity and natural beauty	Core appeal is peace, space, and nature
12. Have you noticed any changes in the type of visitors over the years?	Area has become busier recently Increase in visitor numbers over the years Unsure about changes in visitor types	Increase in tourism volume Notable growth in tourism activity	Notable growth in tourism activity
13. What feedback have you received from visitors about their experiences here?	Visitors appreciate local hospitality Informal, friendly atmosphere contributes to positive experiences Locals are open to helping tourists	Positive visitor feedback on hospitality Cultural aspects enhance visitor experience	Hospitality and friendly culture enhance visitor experience
14. Do you feel that the area is not well prepared for the needs	Tourists seek insight and experience	Alignment between tourist needs and available offerings	Current offerings meet the needs of target visitor segments

Consultancy Report

of certain types of tourists?	Facilities like museums and walking routes cater to their needs Believes expectations are met		
15. What is your ideal vision of tourism in the Lauwersmeer area?	Initially indifferent to tourism but now sees its benefits Supports moderate increase in tourism, but not too busy Suggests better distribution across seasons Aims for balanced, sustainable tourism growth	Evolving perspective on tourism's value Desire for sustainable, balanced tourism growth	Supporting sustainable tourism growth with balanced seasonal distribution
16. What changes or improvements would you like to see in the tourist offer?	Restaurants open all week, even in winter Need more tourists in low season to justify businesses staying open Improvement of public transport would help both residents and tourists	Enhancing service availability year round Improving infrastructure (public transport)	Improving facilities and infrastructure to support tourism growth
17. What type of visitors would you like to see more often in the area?	More "insight seekers" who appreciate the region Attract young people interested in cultural and natural experiences Concern about young people who may misbehave	Targeting visitors who respect and value the area Desire to avoid disruptive visitors	Attracting respectful visitors aligned with regional values
18. What challenges do you think the region faces in terms of tourism?	Facilities like restaurants not always open Working on infrastructure improvement projects Tourism should benefit residents economically Importance of proper execution of projects	Operational challenges in service availability Need for successful implementation of development projects	Addressing service gaps and ensuring effective project implementation
19. What external factors do you think have the greatest influence on tourism in the area?	Weather is a significant factor Bad weather reduces tourist numbers Cannot control weather	Impact of uncontrollable external factors (weather)	Recognising and mitigating impacts of external factors
20. How do you think these challenges and	Ongoing efforts are already addressing challenges	Proactive steps being taken to overcome challenges	Ongoing initiatives to overcome challenges

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factors can be addressed?	Projects are in place to tackle issues		
21. How important do you think sustainable tourism is for the region?	Region is a Natura 2000 area; preservation is important Can't hold large festivals; need to protect natural environment Sustainability is crucial for the area	Importance of environmental conservation Limitations on certain activities to protect nature	Emphasising sustainability and environmental protection in tourism
22. What sustainable practices would you like to see more of in the region?	Support for building houses with sustainable materials (e.g., hemp) Positive towards sustainable initiatives Open to sustainable development practices	Encouraging sustainable development practices	Supporting sustainable initiatives to enhance regional sustainability
25. How do local residents, businesses and other tourism stakeholders in the region work together to improve tourism?	RMT organizes activities like learning networks to connect entrepreneurs RMT plays a major role in facilitating cooperation Some local companies collaborate with RMT Limited structural cooperation between residents and tourism stakeholders Occasional informal interactions between residents and tourists	Efforts to enhance stakeholder collaboration through RMT Limited resident involvement in tourism development	Strengthening collaboration among stakeholders, especially involving residents
26. Which stakeholders do you think are most essential in shaping the future of tourism in this area?	The regional brand is increasingly important Organizations like Tourism Alliance Friesland play a major role Support for projects and networks Such organizations are essential for the future of tourism They contribute to the leisure sector	Key stakeholders include regional branding organizations and tourism alliances Importance of administrative and organisational support	Essential role of organisational stakeholders in shaping tourism's future

Appendix 2C: The client

Interview question	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
1. Can you introduce yourself, the leisure organisation and your role within it?	Liesbeth is project leader of the leisure region Leisure region aims for integrated supply Ensuring entrepreneurs know each other's activities Facilitating connections among entrepreneurs, government, education, and individuals Providing access to knowledge and appropriate channels for questions		
2. How long have you been involved in shaping tourism for this region?	Involved since July 2018		
3. How would you describe the current tourist offer in the region?	Many small scale activities Not fully professionalized Active guests must find offerings themselves Beautiful nature is the main experience Varied cultural landscapes not equally accessible Museums (18 small ones) not all contemporary or futureproof Visitor experiences are mostly passive (exhibiting and showing) Modern visitors seek interactive, engaging experiences ("doing and feeling")	Underdeveloped and fragmented offerings Challenges in accessibility and modernization Gap between offerings and visitor expectations	Need for professionalisation and modernisation to meet visitor expectations
4. What do tourists miss when they visit the region?	Lack of specific data; research needed Feedback from entrepreneurs indicates need for more open catering options Lack of activities suitable for bad weather	Identifying gaps through visitor feedback Need for better facilities and all weather activities	Identifying and addressing gaps in facilities and activities
5. What are the objectives of the Leisure Region regarding tourism in the region?	Tourism as a driver for regional prosperity ("flywheel") Maintain liveability and attractiveness Implement tourism vision plans	Enhancing regional prosperity through tourism Leadership in implementing vision and reducing fragmentation	Driving regional prosperity through coordinated tourism development

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	Take control to reduce fragmentation Cannot do everything but can coordinate efforts		
6. Which of the current offerings do you think is most successful in achieving the region's goals?	Initiatives to reduce fragmentation (e.g., Arrange, Riddle of the Wadden) Host courses by IVN Popular activities: eating fish in the harbour, walking paths, lookout tower, cycling, bird watching Dark Sky Park has potential but underutilized Freely accessible attractions make measurement difficult	Collaboration among entrepreneurs Popular attractions aligning with objectives Challenges in measuring success Potential in unique offerings needing better promotion	Leveraging popular and unique attractions while enhancing visitor engagement
7. Are there areas where the current tourist offer no longer fits in with the longterm vision for the region?	Offerings not sufficiently experiential Catering is present but one sided Missing experiential activities like equipment rentals (surfboards, boats, bikes, mountain bikes)	Insufficient experiential and interactive offerings Need to diversify catering options Enhance active tourism experiences	Enhancing experiential and active offerings to align with long term vision
8. What are the main changes needed to achieve the desired state of tourism?	Improve infrastructure for better accessibility All parties need to collaborate Consider legal, investment, and implementation aspects Promotion is crucial and must be collaborative Engage with regional entities (RT, Waddenland, Groningers, Visit Wadden)	Infrastructure development Collaborative efforts among stakeholders Importance of coordinated promotion Navigating practical challenges	Achieving tourism goals through infrastructure, collaboration and promotion
9. What kind of visitors does the region want to attract more of in the future and why?	Targeting "insight seekers" Provincially, focus is on "adventure seekers", but "insight seekers" fit better Insight seekers seek deeper cultural and natural experiences	Focusing on specific visitor segments Aligning offerings with interests in culture and nature	Attracting visitors seeking deep cultural and natural experiences

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10. How can economic growth through tourism be balanced with preserving the character and environment of the region?	Municipalities play a key role by supporting small scale tourism Importance of preserving local character and values Careful distribution and promotion to attract fitting entrepreneurs Avoid attracting unsuitable businesses (e.g., those focusing on noise, animation, all inclusive packages) Risk of takeovers by international parties lacking local roots Leisure region facilitates communication among stakeholders	Preserving local character through small scale, thoughtful development Managing promotion to maintain regional identity Importance of local stakeholder engagement to prevent adverse impacts	Balancing growth with preservation through local engagement and careful promotion
11. What role does sustainability play in the future of tourism in the region?	Visit Wadden has a pioneering role in sustainability Aligns with UNESCO World Heritage status Encouragement of regenerative tourism Fits with targeting insight seekers	Emphasis on sustainable and regenerative tourism Alignment with regional values and target audience	Promoting sustainable and regenerative tourism aligned with visitor values
12. Are there specific goals that the Leisure Region has set to achieve the desired state of tourism?	Goals are within the scope of current projects Projects are financially driven Focus on entrepreneur involvement and participation Implementing the tourism vision	Setting achievable, project based goals Engaging entrepreneurs in realising the vision	Achieving objectives through focused projects and stakeholder involvement
13. What are the biggest challenges of working in the region?	"Madness of the day"; people are busy Large, diverse area with multiple brands and attractions Can't apply one approach to all Need for diverse strategies while maintaining unity Budget constraints Avoiding duplication of efforts	Complexity due to diversity Balancing tailored approaches with unified vision Resource and budget limitations	Managing complexity and diversity through coordinated and efficient strategies

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14. How can these challenges be addressed?	Avoid duplicating efforts; assess existing activities Spend budget wisely Use storytelling to unify promotion while allowing individual variations Focus on enhancing existing offerings instead of creating new ones Value what already exists	Strategic planning and resource optimisation Unified storytelling with personalised approaches Enhancing and promoting existing assets	Optimising resources and unified promotion to address challenges
15. How do external factors, such as regulations, economic conditions or environmental considerations, influence the region in achieving its tourism objectives?	Regulations have both positive and negative impacts Need cooperation with local, national, and European authorities Climate and weather significantly influence tourism Variable climate poses challenges Bad weather affects visitor numbers Need to promote all season tourism Opportunity to market experiences regardless of weather	Impact of regulations and climate Importance of strategic cooperation Mitigating climate impacts through all season tourism promotion	Adapting to external influences through cooperation and year round tourism strategies
16. What are the region's sustainable development goals?	Goals are encompassed within Visit Wadden initiatives Focus on "people, planet, profit" Leisure region supports but doesn't lead sustainability efforts Not their role to be frontrunners	Alignment with broader sustainability initiatives Supportive role in sustainability efforts	Supporting sustainable development aligned with regional initiatives
17. What innovative or sustainable tourism practices would be a good fit to promote tourism in the region?	Innovation in shifting focus away from reliance on good weather Making the outdoors liveable in all conditions Improving curation of experiences Not always relying on digital tours	Innovative approaches to enhance experiences Promoting tourism in all weather conditions Creative, nondigital solutions	Promoting tourism through innovative, experience focused practices
18. Which sustainable initiatives should be prioritized to achieve	Leveraging unique assets: UNESCO World Heritage, national park, Dark Sky Park	Prioritising unique sustainable assets	Prioritising sustainable initiatives leveraging

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the desired state of tourism?	Low light pollution is an advantage Continue attracting tourism that values these features Focus on "insight seekers" Support and promote private initiatives Positive examples strengthen image and attract more visitors	Targeting appropriate visitor segments Supporting private initiatives to enhance sustainability and image	unique regional assets and audiences
19. How does the Vrijetijsregio currently work together with other stakeholders to shape tourism?	Collaboration through meetings, discussions, sharing information and knowledge Addressing sustainability challenges (e.g., opposition to drilling activities) Recognising conflicts between economic activities and sustainability goals	Stakeholder collaboration and communication Addressing activities conflicting with sustainable tourism objectives	Shaping tourism through collaborative efforts and addressing sustainability challenges
20. Which stakeholders play a crucial role in realizing the future vision of tourism for the region?	Municipalities, regional brands (national park organizations, Dark Sky organization, Staatsbosbeheer, IVN), entrepreneurs, governments, provincial marketing organisations, residents All stakeholders need to act with a unified vision and story	Broad stakeholder involvement Importance of unified vision and collective action	Realising the tourism vision through unified efforts of diverse stakeholders
21. What additional stakeholder collaboration is needed to achieve the region's tourism objectives?	Involving additional stakeholders through existing networks Leveraging stakeholders' regional knowledge Improving communication channels ("on a kind of chat list of everyone") Desire for quick information sharing for faster access Need for more cooperation among all regions in Northeast Friesland	Enhancing communication and information sharing Leveraging stakeholder expertise Increasing regional cooperation	Strengthening stakeholder collaboration through improved communication and regional cooperation

Appendix 2D: IVN Lauwersmeer

Interview question	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
1. Can you introduce yourself, your organization and your	IVN's mission: reconnecting people with nature		

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role within the organization?	Focus on communication and education Large network of professionals and volunteers Jorgen's role as coordinator in Lauwersmeer National Park Collaboration with stakeholders Organizing educational and enjoyable programs Work is diverse and dynamic		
2. How long have you been involved with IVN and the region?	Over 30 years with IVN Background as biologist Lifelong passion for nature Enjoys sharing nature with others		
3. How would you describe the current opportunities for tourism and nature experience in the region?	Unique natural setting Not overcrowded Potential for development with caution Strengths: quietness, open spaces Concerns about future visitor influx Need for careful management	Current state of tourism and potential Natural strengths of the area Concerns and need for careful planning	Balancing development with preserving natural qualities
4. Which natural areas or activities attract the most visitors, and why do you think that is?	Wadden region popular Lauwersmeer less known, unique appeal Small scale attractions need better connection and marketing Nature is paramount; activities shouldn't harm nature	Attraction of nearby regions vs. Lauwersmeer Challenges in marketing and connecting attractions Importance of conserving nature	Enhancing visitor awareness while preserving nature
5 & 6. Are there aspects of tourism and nature experience that you think could be improved to better meet visitor demand? What do visitors miss when they visit the area now?	Lack of major attractions Limited activities in bad weather Families find limited options	Gaps in tourist offerings Need for more substantial attractions	Enhancing tourist facilities and attractions

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	Need for bigger attractions within the area		
7. Are there any tourist elements in the region that do not meet the expectations of visitors?	Infrastructure improvements made Positive feedback Need for more visitor input	Ongoing improvements Importance of visitor feedback	Continuously improving based on visitor input
8. How do visitors experience the accessibility of nature reserves, such as accessibility, walking paths and information provision?	Accessibility is improving Businesses becoming more tourist friendly Economic viability linked to tourism levels	Improvements in accessibility and services Relationship between tourism and local businesses	Enhancing visitor experience through better services
9. What type of visitors mainly use the IVN activities in this region?	Visitors are nature enthusiasts Appeal to quality visitors seeking meaningful experiences Avoid mass tourism	Targeting nature focused, quality tourism Shared vision among stakeholders	Promoting sustainable, meaningful tourism
10. What do you think are the most important reasons why people participate in IVN activities?	Interest in nature and sustainability Desire for education and meaningful experiences	Motivation: learning and connecting with nature	Engaging visitors through education and nature experiences
11. Have you noticed any changes in visitor demographics or interests over the past few years?	Stable visitor demographics Consistent interests	Consistency in visitor profiles	Maintaining core audience
12. What feedback does IVN receive from visitors about their experience with tourism and nature in this region?	Positive feedback on natural beauty Appreciation of peace and space Interest in unique features (Dark Sky Park)	Visitor satisfaction with natural aspects Unique attractions appreciated	Strengthening natural attractions to enhance visitor satisfaction
13. Are there target groups that you think IVN or the region should pay more	Concern about developments affecting area's character	Preserving area's character	Fostering quality experiences through preservation and hospitality

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attention to their needs?	Emphasis on hospitality and visitor experience Need for entrepreneurs to focus on quality and welcoming atmosphere	Enhancing hospitality and service quality	
14. What is the desired state of tourism and nature in the region in broad terms according to IVN?	Need to strengthen and improve nature Aim for balance between tourism and nature Explore regenerative tourism Preserve landscape's peace and space	Sustainable tourism practices Preservation and enhancement of nature Innovative approaches (regenerative tourism)	Integrating tourism with nature conservation and enhancement
15. What role does IVN see for itself in the future in promoting nature tourism?	IVN's role: education and sustainable experiences Not actively promoting tourism (organizational stance)	Focus on education over promotion Sustainable nature experiences	Educating for sustainable nature engagement
16. What improvements or changes would you like to see in the future in the tourist offering that focuses on experiencing nature?	Need for better cooperation among stakeholders Overcome silo thinking Involving residents Focus on connecting people (through nature)	Collaboration and coordination Community involvement Connecting through nature	Enhancing tourism through collaborative efforts and community engagement
17. What are the biggest challenges and external factors influencing tourism in this region?	Need for strategic planning with stakeholders Balancing development and nature preservation Prevent cumulative negative impacts Encourage longer visitor stays Address nature deterioration	Strategic planning and management Balancing tourism and conservation Enhancing economic benefits while preserving nature	Addressing challenges through strategic, sustainable planning
18. How can these challenges and external factors be addressed in the future?	By meeting with stakeholders Developing a shared vision Planning for the long term	Stakeholder collaboration Long term strategic planning	Overcoming challenges through collective action and planning

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	Focusing on sustainable practices		
19. How does IVN currently collaborate with other organizations or stakeholders to promote tourism and nature in the region?	Collaboration with entrepreneurs Education and communication efforts Training hosts and hostesses Practical coordination going well	Partnerships with local businesses Education as a tool for collaboration Effective communication strategies	Strengthening tourism through education focused partnerships
20. Which stakeholders do you think are most crucial in shaping tourism and development in the region?	Key stakeholders: government, provinces, municipalities, residents, entrepreneurs, farmers Need leadership and initiative Importance of involving many stakeholders Structures exist but need effective implementation	Key stakeholder identification Need for leadership Importance of stakeholder involvement	Collaborative governance involving all stakeholders

Appendix 2E: Councillor and Policy Officer

Interview question	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
1. Can you introduce yourself and your role within the municipality?	Councillor overseeing recreation and tourism Policy officer involved in tourism in the region		
2. How long have you been in these roles?	Long term government service in tourism role		
3. How would you describe the current tourism offerings in the Lauwersmeer area?	Focus on nature and tranquillity Popular activities: walking and cycling Investing in tourism facilities for visitor experience	Emphasis on nature based tourism offerings Popular visitor activities (walking, cycling) Addressing infrastructural needs for better visitor experience	Developing sustainable, nature centric tourism Addressing infrastructure gaps and diversifying product offerings

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4. Do the current tourism offerings match the tourism objectives of the municipality?	Recognition of a large and diverse tourism region Catering to multiple audience segments	Recognising diverse visitor segments and regional diversity Multiple demographic/psychographic segments	Balancing economic growth with environmental integrity and local authenticity
5. In your opinion, are the current tourism offerings well suited for the type of visitors the region currently attracts?	Gap in basic facilities (no toilets) Lack of visitor amenities (toilets, catering)	Identifying gaps in basic facilities Infrastructure and amenity shortfalls	Addressing facility gaps Diversifying product offerings
6. What is the desired state or long term vision of the municipality for tourism in the Lauwersmeer area?	Aim for increased tourism volume and spending Pursuing small scale, sustainable growth	Economic growth objectives Sustainable, controlled tourism development	Developing sustainable, nature centric tourism
7. To what extent is the municipality prepared to invest in tourism offerings in the region?	Infrastructure investments to support tourism	Committing resources to infrastructure	Committing to invest
8. What would you like to see developed to improve tourism in the Lauwersmeer area and distinguish it from other destinations?	Promoting active tourism (cycling, walking) Developing a unique regional identity ("roof of the sky") Capitalising on natural serenity and biodiversity	Enhancing behavioural engagement through active pursuits Creating a unique identity/brand Leveraging natural and sustainable assets	Promote current strengths more Develop unique identity
9. How do you intend to maintain the balance between tranquillity and the natural character of the	Using zoning to maintain natural balance	Spatial management for sustainability	More zoning of amenities and activities

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area in the event of an increase in tourists?	External threats (defence plans) impacting environment	External threats affecting environment/economy	Defence plans have serious potential consequences
10. How important is it for the municipality that tourism makes a valuable contribution year round? How to achieve this?	Addressing low season tourism gaps Encouraging entrepreneurs to diversify offerings	Addressing seasonality gaps Stakeholder led product adaptation	Address seasonality gaps Encourage entrepreneurs
11. What is the role of the municipality in strengthening marketing and promotion?	Leveraging regional marketing organisations Collaborating with regional tourism boards for promotion	Delegating promotional tasks to regional organizations Interorganisational cooperation in marketing	Strengthening stakeholder networks and collaboration
12. How do you think marketing and promotion can be used to promote tourism in the region?	Emphasising marketing in tourism development Encouraging entrepreneur led marketing initiatives	Importance of coordinated marketing Entrepreneurial involvement in promotion	Improve marketing and promotion
13. What are the current challenges in the region?	Challenges posed by defence expansions Prioritising sustainability in tourism planning	External development pressures Need for sustainable approach	Defence plans have serious potential consequences Sustainability important
14. What are external factors that hinder tourism in the region?	Military related external factors Socioeconomic factors affecting tourism growth	External military related factor Socioeconomic and demographic constraints	Defence plans Demographic constraints
15. What are specific challenges and external factors that hinder progress towards the desired tourism state?	Dependency on local industry (fishing) for tourism appeal Reoccurring external threats (defence plans)	Dependency on local industries Ongoing external development threats	Defence plans Local dependency

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16. How important is sustainable tourism development in the municipality's vision and how is it included in policy?	Maintaining a sustainable visitor capacity	Controlled growth for sustainability	Maintaining sustainable tourist numbers
17. How will the municipality ensure environmental and cultural preservation as tourism develops?	Entrepreneur engagement in preservation efforts Maintaining the region's unique cultural/natural identity	Entrepreneur led preservation initiatives Maintaining authentic cultural/natural identity	Entrepreneurial engagement
18. How does the municipality currently work with entrepreneurs, nature orgs, residents to shape tourism?	Strong emphasis on multistakeholder collaboration Implementing eco-friendly infrastructure projects	Intense stakeholder collaboration Integrated eco projects supporting tourism	Facilitate stakeholder collaboration
19. Which stakeholders are most crucial to achieving desired tourism state?	Involving local communities and entrepreneurs as key stakeholders	Key stakeholders in tourism success	Entrepreneurs and locals
20. In what ways can the municipality strengthen coordination and cooperation?	Strengthening stakeholder networks for better coordination	Importance of strong stakeholder networks	Strengthening stakeholder networks and collaboration
21. Anything else to share for my research?	Aligning product development with marketing efforts Strategies to extend tourism beyond peak season Opportunities from shifting travel patterns (climate change) Targeting specific traveller segments (campers)	Need for product market alignment Seasonality solutions through product adaptation External environmental factor as an opportunity Targeting specific demographic segments	Address and diversify product offerings

Appendix 2F: Tourists (long version)

Interview question	Interviewee	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
1. What is your name?	Johan	Johan van der Meer		

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	Geert	Geert van den Broek		
2. What is your age?	Johan	62 years old		
	Geert	49 years old		
3. Where are you from?	Johan	From Bathmen, near Deventer		
	Geert	From Ommen		
4. What is your marital status and do you have children? If so, what are their ages?	Johan	Married, two sons aged 30 and 28		
	Geert	Married, daughter 14, son 16		
5. Have you visited alone, with family or with friends?	Johan	Visited with wife in 2019		
	Geert	Visited with wife and two children		
6. How many times have you visited the Lauwersmeer area?	Johan	Visited once; had seen everything		
	Geert	Visited once; stayed at Landal Esonstad		
7. How would you describe tourism offerings in the area?	Johan	Quiet and cozy; good for walking and cycling	Nature focused offerings	Area excels in nature but lacks diverse attractions
		Not a whole lot to do beyond nature activities	Limited activities	Area lacks attractions for families with teenagers
	Geert	Great for nature and outdoor activities Not much for teenagers; kids got bored Region is large but empty	Good for nature Lacks activities for teens	
8. Which activities or experiences have you enjoyed the most here? What made them stand out?	Johan	Enjoyed walking and cycling Relaxing atmosphere and nature stood out Did not visit specific attractions	Valued natural environment and tranquillity	Appreciation of nature and relaxation Unique experiences give tourism appeal
	Geert	Dark Sky Park visit was great	Unique natural attraction enhanced visit	

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		Unique experience seeing the night sky clearly		
9. Are there any activities, attractions or services you would have liked to see in the area but were missing?	Johan	More restaurants needed Difficult to find information Lack of fixed cycling routes	Insufficient amenities and information	Need for better services and information Need for attractions catering to families
	Geert	More activities for teenagers Interactive visitor centre suggested	Lack of family friendly activities	
10. How would you rate the quality of the existing attractions and services in the area?	Johan	Rated 6 out of 10 Natural landscape beautiful Services and information lacking	High natural quality Low service quality	Good natural landscape Services need enhancement
	Geert	Attractions minimal but nature is lovely Services outdated; information lacking	Unique nature Services need improvement	
11. Do you feel there are enough options for dining, accommodation or leisure activities?	Johan	Limited restaurant options Accommodation is fine Leisure activities minimal	Adequate accommodation Lacking dining and leisure options	Enhancement needed in dining and leisure options Increase in amenities needed for family appeal
	Geert	Could use more of everything Few dining choices; cooked own food Activities lacking for kids	Insufficient dining and activities for families	
12. How accessible do you find the area's main attractions, both in terms of	Johan	Physically accessible by car	Good physical access	Need for better information dissemination

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physical access and the ease of finding information about them?		Information not centralised, needs improvement	Poor information access	Dependence on informal info indicates need for better outreach
	Geert	Physical access fine by car Relied on friend and official website for info	Information obtained through personal networks	
13. If you've visited similar destinations, how does the Lauwersmeer area compare in terms of offerings?	Johan	Compared to Veluwe Lauwersmeer has less to do Less proximity to other attractions	Offers less than similar destinations	Lauwersmeer less developed for tourism
	Geert	Compared to Ameland Lauwersmeer less fun Ameland more tourist oriented	Lauwersmeer less geared toward tourism	
14. What kind of travel experiences do you usually seek, and does the area meet these expectations?	Johan	Seeks nature and relaxation Area meets expectations	Preferences align with offerings	Satisfactory for nature and relaxation seekers Area partially fulfils family travel needs
	Geert	Seeks activities for kids, relaxation Partially met, lacks kids' activities	Family needs not fully met	
15. How important are amenities like comfortable accommodations, convenient transport, or diverse dining options for you?	Johan	Very important, comfortable bed and dining options needed Transport by car, public transport unknown	High importance on amenities Area lacks dining options	Amenities crucial Area needs to improve offerings
	Geert	Very important, accommodation was nice Transport by car, dining options acceptable	Values comfort Moderate dining needs	

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		Usually cook themselves		
16. When traveling with children, are there particular facilities or activities you look for that influence your choice of destination?	Johan	Not applicable (no kids)		Area lacks suitable activities for children
	Geert	Yes, activities for kids important Kids were bored, offerings didn't meet needs	Children's activities influence choice Current offerings insufficient	
17. What has your experience with local hospitality been like here?	Johan	Limited interaction Service was basic and expected	Neutral hospitality experience	Hospitality meets basic expectations
	Geert	People were friendly Positive interactions with staff Limited overall interactions	Positive but limited hospitality	
18. Would you recommend this destination to friends or family?	Johan	Yes, for similar preferences Not for those seeking more activities	Conditional recommendation	Suitable for specific visitor profiles
	Geert	Yes, but not with teenagers	Recommendation with reservations	
19. What improvements or changes would you like to see in the area to make it a better tourist destination?	Johan	Better marketing and information Improve services like restaurants Preserve uniqueness	Enhance awareness and services without overdevelopment	Balance improvement with preserving character Enhance family appeal through activities
	Geert	More activities for children Attract more families	Increase family friendly offerings	

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20. Are there specific activities or attractions you think would enhance the experience of tourists if introduced here?	Johan	Opening of WEC would enhance experience	Anticipation of new attractions	New developments can boost tourism
	Geert	More nature based activities Can't specify examples	Expand on existing strengths	Build on natural assets to enhance offerings
21. If you could change one thing about the area to better meet your travel needs, what would it be?	Johan	More and better restaurants Willing to spend more	Desire for upscale dining options	Improve dining experiences Build on natural assets to enhance offerings
	Geert	No additional suggestions beyond prior comments		
22. Have you encountered any specific challenges during your visit, such as difficulties with transport, available services or access to information?	Johan	Difficulty finding online information Services mostly fine	Information access challenging	Need for improved online information
	Geert	No significant challenges Information from park reception and friend	Challenges minimal due to support	
23. How could these challenges be addressed in your opinion?	Johan	Centralised information hub Increased marketing efforts	Improve information accessibility and awareness	Centralised info and marketing needed
	Geert	n/a		
24. How important is sustainable tourism for you when choosing a travel destination?	Johan	Not very important Likes nature but sustainability not a priority	Sustainability not a key factor	Sustainability is secondary concern

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	Geert	Important but not top priority Appreciates environmental care	Values sustainability but it's not decisive	
25. Have you noticed any sustainable practices in the area?	Johan	Region seems focused on sustainability Did not notice specific practices	Perceived sustainability but lacks visible efforts	Sustainability not prominently observed
	Geert	Not specifically Assumes area is sustainable due to nature focus	Sustainability inferred from natural environment	
26. Do you feel that environmental protection is adequately prioritized in this area?	Johan	Unsure, thinks so but lacks knowledge of regulations	Uncertainty about environmental efforts	Environmental priorities not clearly perceived
	Geert	It seems so but uncertain	Perception of adequacy without certainty	

Appendix 2G: Tourists (short version)

Interview question	Interviewee	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
1. What brought you to the Lauwersmeer area?	1	Relaxing atmosphere and quietness	Seeking tranquillity in nature	Seeking nature and tranquillity
	2	Cycling and hiking through the area	Interest in cycling/hiking	Outdoor recreation (cycling, hiking)
	3	Enjoy nature in this quiet region	Enjoying quiet natural environment	Family-oriented visits
	4	Cycling and hiking through the area	Interest in cycling/hiking	
	5	Nice area for a family getaway	Family-oriented visit	
	6	Cycling and hiking through the area	Interest in cycling/hiking	
	7	Cycling and hiking through the area	Interest in cycling/hiking	
	8	Family weekend	Family-oriented visit	
	9	Quiet retreat after a busy work period	Seeking relaxation and quiet	

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	10	Visit this nature park that we've not seen before	Exploring new natural area	
	11	Weekend with my partner	Quiet weekend getaway	
	12	Combining this visit with a trip to Dokkum	Nature plus nearby destination (Dokkum)	
	13	For the wildlife and nature	Wildlife/nature interest	
	14	To take pictures of nature and animals as a photographer	Photography/nature focus	
	15	Family weekend	Family-oriented visit	
	16	Close to the Wadden Sea	Proximity to Wadden Sea	
	17	Family weekend	Family-oriented visit	
	18	For the wildlife and nature	Wildlife/nature interest	
	19	Cycling and hiking through the area	Interest in cycling/hiking	
	20	Relaxing atmosphere and quietness	Seeking tranquillity in nature	
	21	Enjoy nature in this quiet region	Enjoying quiet natural environment	
2. How helpful did you find the online information about the Lauwersmeer area when planning your visit?	1	Minimal information	Limited, minimal info	Limited or minimal online information
	2	Found cycling maps after extra searching	Info available but hard to find	Difficulty finding official information
	3	Good enough	Basic but sufficient	Basic but not comprehensive online presence
	4	Could be improved	Insufficient info, needs improvement	
	5	Did not use any websites	No online info usage	
	6	Hard to find accommodations	Difficulty locating lodging info	
	7	Not clear what is the official site	Unclear official source	
	8	Social media was basic	Basic social media info	
	9	Official website was fine	Official website okay	
	10	Basic information present	Basic info available	

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	11	No clear overview of dining options	Missing dining info	
	12	Not up to date	Outdated information	
	13	Google maps was our main source	Relied on Google Maps	
	14	Did not use any websites	No online info usage	
	15	Minimal information	Minimal info available	
	16	Clear what is present	Clear but limited info	
	17	Very helpful	Very helpful info	
	18	Not up to date	Outdated information	
	19	Could be improved	Needs improvement	
	20	Did not use any websites	No online info usage	
	21	Good enough	Basic but sufficient	
3. What were your expectations of the area and are these expectations met?	1	Beautiful nature area, expectations met	Nature expectation met	Nature-related expectations largely met Desire for more family activities, dining or attractions Overall tranquillity and quietness as positive
	2	Hoped for more family activities	Wanted more family-oriented offerings	
	3	Hoped to enjoy nature, expectations met	Nature expectation met	
	4	Wanted more attractions	More attractions desired	
	5	Enough family activities	Family expectations met	
	6	Pleasantly surprised	Exceeded expectations	
	7	Hiking trails better than expected	Trails surpassed expectations	
	8	Needed more signage in the region	Lacked adequate signage	
	9	Met expectations for a peaceful retreat	Peaceful retreat expectation met	
	10	More dining options wished	More dining desired	
	11	Met expectations of nature retreat	Nature expectation met	
	12	Quiet getaway met expectations	Quiet getaway expectation met	

Consultancy Report

	13	Hoped to enjoy nature, expectations met	Nature expectation met	
	14	Hoped to take nice photo's, expectations met	Photography goals met	
	15	Expected more nearby activities	More activities desired	
	16	Beautiful nature area, expectations met	Nature expectation met	
	17	Hoped for more family activities	More family activities desired	
	18	Great for birdwatching	Birdwatching expectation met	
	19	Felt very remote and quiet	Remote and quiet as expected	
	20	Met expectations of great nature area	Nature expectation met	
	21	Expected more activities	More activities desired	
4. What current tourism offerings did you experience positively and why?	1	Walking and cycling paths, pleasant to use and maintained well	Well-maintained walking/cycling paths	Positive experience with walking/cycling paths
	2	Smooth, well-marked cycling paths	Quality cycling infrastructure	Natural beauty and tranquillity appreciated
	3	The peaceful environment for its relaxing atmosphere	Peaceful environment	Proximity to Wadden Sea
	4	Lauwersoog and walking next to the Wadden Sea	Proximity to Wadden Sea area	Eco-friendly environment
	5	The Landal park, good activities and good restaurant	Quality of Landal park and dining	
	6	Walking and cycling paths, go through beautiful nature	Scenic walking/cycling paths	
	7	Great atmosphere in general of the whole area	Positive general atmosphere	
	8	Natural beauty of the landscape	Natural landscape beauty	
	9	The Wadden Sea, next to the region and easy to visit	Easy access to Wadden Sea	
	10	Eco-friendly region, great natural beauty	Eco-friendly/nature emphasis	
	11	Quietness of the whole region, to relax	Overall quiet and relaxing	
	12	The Wadden Sea nearby, for its beauty	Wadden Sea beauty	

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	13	Walking and cycling options	Good walking/cycling activities	
	14	The quietness and present animals	Quietness and wildlife presence	
	15	Authentic and untouched feel of everything	Authentic, untouched environment	
	16	Cycling around the whole lake, beautiful trip	Cycling around lake	
	17	The Landal park, activities for the kids	Child-friendly activities at Landal park	
	18	Eco-friendly region, great natural beauty	Eco-friendly/nature emphasis	
	19	Well-marked cycling paths through the region	Well-marked cycling paths	
	20	Cozy local restaurants, though limited opening hours	Cozy restaurants	
	21	Bird species diversity	Bird diversity	
5. Do you feel there are enough options for dining, accommodation or activities?	1	Limited options but enough for short stay	Limited but sufficient for short visit	Generally limited dining and activity options
	2	More dining options, not much open now	Need more dining options	Accommodations lacking variety
	3	Few choices for families	Limited family offerings	More family-oriented or year-round options desired
	4	Decent accommodation options, more activities is preferable	Good accommodation, need more activities	
	5	More activities and dining options needed	More activities/dining needed	
	6	Few choices in general	Limited overall options	
	7	There are enough options	Satisfied with options	
	8	More kids attractions needed, better restaurants	Need more family activities and improved dining	
	9	Dining options are fine, 2 Landal parks is enough	Dining okay, accommodations okay	
	10	Not during the low season as of now	Seasonal limitations	
	11	Good accommodation options, but the rest lacking	Good lodging, lacking other offerings	
	12	Enough for quiet getaway, not more than that	Adequate for a quiet stay only	

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	13	More organised tours and restaurants	More organized tours/dining needed	
	14	Suitable for nature-focused visits but not more	Suitable for nature only	
	15	Could be more of everything, bit boring now	More variety needed	
	16	Enough as of now	Currently sufficient	
	17	Could be more, but acceptable now	Acceptable but could improve	
	18	Enough accommodations, limited kids activities and dining options	Adequate lodging, limited family dining	
	19	Fine if you seek nature	Fine for nature lovers only	
	20	Dining and activities are fine, nothing unique	Adequate but not unique	
	21	Some good spots, boring for long stays	Good spots, but boring long-term	
6. Are there any tourism offerings you feel are missing or could be improved?	1	Restaurants opening hours are limited now	Improved dining hours needed	Improved signage and information services
	2	Missing a central information centre	Need an info centre	More dining options
	3	Not really	Nothing missing	Increase eco-tourism and sustainability efforts
	4	Better public transport	Improved public transport	More activities or tours, including off-season
	5	Everything feels outdated	Modernization needed	
	6	More supermarkets	More supermarket options needed	
	7	Increase eco-tourism	More eco-tourism	
	8	An app for the region	Digital info tool needed	
	9	Better signage, not everywhere as clear	Improve signage	
	10	Longer restaurant hours	Extended dining hours needed	
	11	More signage for hidden spots	Additional signage for hidden attractions	
	12	Nature-themed playgrounds for kids	More family-friendly nature facilities	
	13	Not really	Nothing missing	
	14	More tours, also in winter	Seasonal tours desired	

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15	Wider variety of accommodations	More accommodation variety
16	Not really	Nothing missing
17	Even more focus on sustainability	Greater sustainability focus
18	Landal parks could be even bigger	Expanded accommodation options
19	Not really	Nothing missing
20	More restaurants	More dining options
21	More activities in general	More activity variety

Appendix 3: Interview transcripts

Demographic and psychographic segmentation

Behavioural segmentation

Environmental and economic segmentation

Sustainability segmentation

Stakeholder segmentation

Gap analysis segmentation

Appendix 3A: Local businesses

Mila of restaurant Raadsel van de Wadden

Date: 16-10-24

1. Can you introduce yourself, your organisation and describe your role in your organisation?

Yes, I'm Mila, I'm the head chef and assistant manager of this restaurant. Besides the restaurant, we also have a business that mediates in the rental of holiday homes. So, we are involved in the tourism process in several ways, to put it like that.

2. How long have you been involved in the tourism sector in this region?

Four years.

3. How would you describe the current tourism offerings in the region?

Yes, the tourism offer in terms of holiday homes is fairly large, but research has shown that it's still insufficient for the demand for overnight stays in Northeast Friesland. And what we see is that many small entrepreneurs are not found, while larger companies with bigger marketing budgets ensure they appear at the top of Google, so they are found. As a result, especially in the past year, many hospitality businesses around the Wadden area and Lauwersmeer are being sold. So, practically speaking, this means that "Het Raadsel van de Wadden" is currently the only restaurant open here, apart from what's at Lauwersmeer. The rest are all closed, and the same thing is happening in Lauwersoog. So, there is quite a significant reduction in offers other than holiday homes.

4. Which current offerings are most successful and why?

Well, there are quite a few parties offering holiday homes, so the supply is fairly large. Although it's not enough, it's still quite decent. And I think the branding is good, in the sense that people who come here know they're not coming for amenities. They come here to do nothing, for peace and quiet.

5. Are there areas where you feel the current offerings are inadequate or outdated?

Yes, 100%, there are simply too few restaurants, and we previously competed with "De Gouden Stek". It was recently taken over, and when a new owner arrived two years ago, what happened was they started catering to our clientele. There are enough people here to cater to different crowds, but the lack of communication between entrepreneurs means everyone ends up doing the same thing. This means we're all fishing in the same pond, which makes competition tough.

6. What are visitors missing when they visit the area?

In our opinion, they miss an experience. Many things are disconnected from each other. I always describe it as little islands. Entrepreneurs here tend to operate on their own island, thinking the summer months are great for making money. But outside those months, they just accept that business is bad. But we don't believe in that, and we want to change it. However, since everyone is on their own island, it's hard to achieve something together. You need a regional approach, not just an individual business one.

7. Are there offerings in the region that underdeliver to visitor expectations?

Not separate parts, but the complete experience underdelivers.

8. How is accessibility experienced by visitors?

No, this region isn't very accessible. We're quite behind in many aspects, especially compared to the Randstad. We're easily 10 to 15 years behind here. You can see this in many areas. For example, in our restaurant, people can get in with a wheelchair, but we don't have accessible toilets. And it's expensive to arrange those. Public transport is also limited. We have a dial-a-ride service, but taxis are scarce as well. And silly things, like dealing with allergies. Very few restaurants here cater to people with allergies. And the same goes for vegan diets. We're quite behind in that respect.

9. What type of tourists usually visit the region?

Yes, Germans, lots of Germans. We always say Germans are always on holiday, and you can really tell. They come here all year round. They're an interesting target group – they have plenty of money, they're easy to please, and they spend generously. We've also seen a different type of visitor coming in now, partly due to what Esonstad has done over the past year. Their occupancy rate was low, and their return rate was poor. A new interim manager lowered their prices, which has brought in a different crowd – people who stay in self-catering cottages, which doesn't benefit the restaurants much. No, we're not thrilled about the direction Esonstad has taken, but I understand they need to fill their places. But it's not ideal for us.

10. What are the reasons for tourists to visit this area?

They usually visit for the nature and quietness and just spend time with their families.

11. Have you noticed changes over the past few years in terms of tourist demographics and preferences?

Yes, definitely. The visitors are getting younger. It used to be mostly an older crowd, but now we see more families. For the first time this year, we've had many more nationalities – not just Germans. We've had Italians, Americans, Australians – they're coming from all over. More people are finding their way here.

12. What feedback do tourists give about their experience of the region?

It's mostly that there is not enough to do in the area but also that the area is not well-known to people in the Netherlands. The area is beautiful and quiet and peaceful, but that is about it. People also usually do not stay for longer than a few hours.

13. Are there particular visitor segments that you think the region is not effectively catering to?

Yes, definitely people from the Randstad, particularly the yuppie generation. There's a growing trend of working holidays, and working remotely is completely normal now. These people get tired of city life, the noise, and the hustle. This is a great place for a working holiday – peace and quiet, and a good environment for inspiration. So, that's a market we want to tap into with our rental business. We haven't seen much of them here yet, but it's definitely a promising segment.

14. What is, broadly speaking, the desired state of tourism in the region?

In an ideal world, we'd have year-round tourism. Currently, the four summer months are booming, but the rest of the year, you could fire a cannon and no one would hear it. It's a shame because businesses close down when it gets quieter, which creates a vicious cycle. The fewer

tourists there are, the more businesses close. Tourists who do come find there's nothing to do, so they don't return. And the cycle continues. We need to break that pattern. Year-round tourism is essential.

15. What improvements or changes would you personally like to see in the region's tourism offerings in the future?

Year-round tourism would be the best, I think. So more activities and other types of offerings to be able to achieve this.

16. What kind of visitors would you like to attract in the future and how do you plan to adapt the offerings to cater to them?

I think these Randstad people are inherently quite lazy. They want to be taken care of because they have other things to focus on. So, you need to make things convenient for them – provide them with a house, a good internet connection, an extra monitor, an ergonomic chair, and let them get on with it. Then, offer a random activity in the region to help them relax. You'd be helping local entrepreneurs grow as well. You could arrange for them to go sailing with a local business or go mudflat hiking. Just offer them the full package.

17. What are the main challenges while working in this sector?

Being a border region is difficult. The Lauwersmeer area spans both Friesland and Groningen, so there are many organisations, municipalities, and provinces involved. Everyone is working on something, but we're not creating a unified plan for the whole region. We're creating separate plans for each side of Lauwersmeer, which is not how it should be.

18. How can these challenges be addressed in the future?

There needs to be more cohesion. Maybe set up a steering group and approach the area as a whole, which would also influence marketing. For example, "Merk Friesland" and "Merk Groningen" each have their own image banks, but there's nothing in the Friesland image bank for the Lauwersmeer area. Groningen has some images, but it's a fragmented approach. We need to create a shared plan and a joint image bank for the area. The marketing team in Groningen is doing well, and you can see how Lauwersoog is booming. Oostmahorn isn't. So, there's work to be done, but we're not there yet.

19. What are the external factors that influence tourism in the region the most?

Regulations definitely play a role, especially with the Wadden Sea being a UNESCO World Heritage site and the area being a protected nature reserve. There are strict limits on what can be done in terms of recreation. And things like horizon pollution – someone might want to build apartments on a beautiful piece of land, but you won't get a permit because it would spoil the view. It's also a financial issue. Tourists, especially Germans, know that coming to the Netherlands is expensive. And with the 21% VAT on overnight stays, that will have an impact too.

20. How can these external factors be addressed in the future?

That is hard to tell, as there is not a lot of saying about regulations and financial things.

21. How important is sustainable tourism development in your vision for the region?

I think it's essential nowadays. We have no choice but to move in that direction, especially with the region's focus on protecting its World Heritage site and nature reserves. If we don't make things sustainable, we won't have anything left in ten years.

22. What new or innovative practices would you like to introduce to improve sustainability in tourism offerings?

That's a great question. I think we need to start with the basics. Just look around at the holiday homes here. How many solar panels do you see? None. In other regions, things like solar panels and heat pumps are standard, but not here. We need to start with those simple steps before we look at more innovative ideas. So we should start with the basics – solar panels, and making existing facilities more sustainable.

23. Are there any sustainable practices that you believe should be prioritised in the region's future offerings?

Restaurants should also focus on sourcing locally. There are plenty of farmers here, and we're by the sea. Yet many restaurants are still focused on mass production, and much of the fish is flown in from Taiwan. We should focus on using local products again.

24. How do you currently collaborate with stakeholders to improve tourism in the region?

We're working with RMT and Henk, but we've also set up our own rental business, "Arrangie", because we noticed that people tend to work in isolation here. There was already someone mediating holiday homes here, but they didn't want to work with us, so we decided to do it ourselves. Our aim is to bring entrepreneurs together so that people can book a house and immediately see what activities are available. We think that existing collaborations are often too

limited because they're driven by subsidies rather than a genuine financial incentive to work together. Entrepreneurs respond better to financial incentives than to the idea of working together for the sake of it. That's why we set up "Arrangie" as a business model, not dependent on subsidies. The idea is that as it grows, everyone benefits. More houses are rented, more activities are booked, and local businesses can thrive.

25. Which stakeholders do you believe are most critical in shaping the future of tourism in the region?

It's more than just municipalities. You need to get the local entrepreneurs on board. Private homeowners also need to understand the direction we're heading in, not just focus on their own interests. And we need to collaborate with stakeholders on the Groningen side. For example, the new seal centre being built there will give the region a huge boost, but we need to ensure there's enough capacity and infrastructure to handle it. The centre is beautifully set up, but there's no parking. It's already a mess. The people visiting the seal centre will need somewhere to stay, so there are many pieces to this puzzle.

Owner of B&B Happy in Ljussens

Date: 18-10-24

1. Can you introduce yourself, your organisation and your role within your organisation?

I find it interesting that we, as a company, actually started quite spontaneously. We did a bit of everything in terms of communication and positioning. When we arrived here in Friesland about 4.5 years ago, we started with an old terp and wondered what we could do to generate some revenue. Eventually we built two studios and we now rent them out. It is emphatically not a B&B, because we do not offer breakfast. People often book for several weeks and then come here to cycle and relax. My role is to come up with and work out the communication around it. I have been involved in tourism in this region from the beginning. When we came here, we first oriented ourselves on what was missing here. We wanted to offer something that was not there yet, but just a little bit better. We spoke to Rabobank, gathered information and investigated what kind of target group we wanted to attract. We focused on couples with a higher income, who want to escape the city and enjoy some quality time together. Our studios are spacious at 110 m², larger than most homes in the city and have a luxurious, loft-like feel with lots of space, tranquillity and natural surroundings. In addition, we offer wellness facilities such as saunas, which enhances

the luxury experience. It may be a bit more expensive, but guests find it worth it. The concept works well, and we attract guests from all over the world, from the Netherlands to Germany, Norway, Sweden, France, Spain, the United States, England, and increasingly more Belgians. And people always leave here relaxed and satisfied.

2. How long have you been involved in the tourism sector in this region?

(4.5 years, since beginning)

3. How would you describe the current tourist offer in the region?

Super boring, indeed. We present it as a quality, that there is simply nothing here, absolutely nothing. But it does not distinguish itself from other places. The Lauwersmeer is a beautiful nature reserve, but do you want my honest opinion? No clear choices are made. They are actually just shooting with a shotgun. If you ask people what Friesland has to offer, almost no one can really name it. They often mention things like sailing, the Wadden, and that's it. For the rest, almost no one really knows Friesland. So the offer is simply boring and bare, and lacks good marketing and positioning from the province.

4. Which elements of this offering are most successful and why?

Nature and tranquillity here are under enormous pressure. Just look at the Wadden Sea, there are so many parties that use this piece of nature reserve. You can also see that at the Lauwersmeer, where tourism is increasing, because everyone wants to sail and enjoy the surroundings. In addition, you have traditionally had agriculture and livestock farming here. At some point, all these interests will collide. And then you get problems such as nitrogen emissions, which of course also come with it. Nature is by far the most successful part of the offer, but it is under pressure and should not get worse.

5. Do you find the current offering inadequate or outdated?

There is too little on offer here, and there is a lack of things to do. You might as well go to a place like Odense; the landscape is similar, and people in Denmark also find these kinds of things. What is missing here is something special to do, something other than cycling, walking, a visit to the fishing village of Moddergat, or a local museum. There is simply too little adventure. That is my conclusion. Mudflat hiking is the most spectacular thing to do here, but there is no really interesting offer. Certainly if you want to attract a certain category of guests, who are prepared to spend a bit more, want to eat well, and have already seen something of the world. These people find this area beautiful, but also want to experience something.

6. What do visitors miss when they visit the area?

We have German guests here who go to Amsterdam to eat, simply because there is nothing good to be found in the area. That happens quite often. For people from Germany, and people who are used to long distances, 180 kilometres is really nothing. They drive that without any problems. There is simply nothing good in terms of food and restaurants. Outside the high season it is a complete disaster, then even less is open. Our visitors miss that enormously.

7. Are there elements in the region that do not meet visitors' expectations?

Again, they expect there to be something to do and there just isn't anything to do.

8. How is accessibility experienced by visitors?

Generally quite okay, that of course has everything to do with the fact that everyone has google maps these days. As for accessibility for disabled people I don't know, I don't hear anything about that.

9. From your perspective, what type of tourists typically visit the region?

For us, these are mainly couples seeking peace and quiet from the Randstad. They come to us to relax.

10. What are the reasons for tourists to visit this area?

(answered above)

11. Have you noticed any changes in tourist demographics and preferences over the past few years?

We just started during the corona period, and then people really felt the need to escape the city. That was actually a new theme, because before it was mainly about a week away or a short holiday. That need to escape the city, however, remained. Now the same kind of people still come to us, so for us nothing has changed. Maybe only that the visitors go outside more than sitting inside in their studio.

12. What feedback do tourists give about their experience of the region?

Mainly just that it is boring and therefore nothing to do. And that it is difficult to find online. But not only that negative, also positive sound comes from them. Then they talk about how beautiful the nature is here and that the peace is considered very nice.

13. Are there certain visitor segments that you think the region is not effectively addressing the needs of the region? And who is?

The target group that is currently being focused on is actually an average tourist. They are aiming at the average consumer, but in my opinion they are missing the right visitors. I think that more attention should be paid to tourists who are looking for peace and quiet. For example, it would be good to attract more wealthy tourists, for example from the Randstad, who want to enjoy the surroundings and local restaurants here. This group is often looking for relaxation and luxury, something they do not always have at home, and thus contributes to the regional economy instead of organizing everything themselves, such as preparing food in a camper.

14. What is, in broad terms, the desired state of tourism in the region?

-

15. What improvements or changes would you personally like to see in the region's tourist offering in the future?

Then I would say more activities in the region. I also like to start at the beginning and That is the positioning so making choices from the stakeholders who are responsible for that. And so focusing more on that higher target group. But what also needs to happen is that there is more to do and eat outside the high season.

16. What kind of visitors would you like to attract in the future and how do you plan to adapt the offering to suit them?

We will just continue with what we are doing now, which is attracting the same type of tourists as we do now. Our business is going well and visitors are happy so we see no reason to approach other types of people.

17. What are the main challenges of working in this sector?

Well, I don't think about it that complicated. It's about making a clear plan, just executing it, and reaching the right people. Choose the right media types and use them efficiently. Our brand gives advice, and once you have a clear and unambiguous offer, the customers will come. Fortunately, that works well for us and they come.

18. How can these challenges be addressed in the future?

-

19. What are the external factors that most influence tourism in the region?

The weather of course. If the weather is not good there is even less reason to come here.

20. How can these external factors be addressed in the future?

More activities or other things that can also be done indoors, for example.

21. How important is sustainable tourism development in your vision for the region?

Very important, with a growth of tourism, the nature in the region is of course under pressure. Climate-wise, it must be looked at carefully by the province and municipalities. Look carefully at what needs to be done, what to invest in and what not?

22. What new or innovative practices would you like to introduce to improve the sustainability of the tourism offer?

Now I think that there should and could be more climate neutral accommodations. Everything is already focused here on a natural area but the facilities in this area are not sustainable at all actually.

23. Are there any sustainable practices that you think should be prioritised in the region's future offering?

What I would perhaps like to see even more is a long-term vision from the province and municipalities. Everything is short now. That is not future-proof. Really look at what matters in the region.

24. How are you currently working with stakeholders to improve tourism in the region?

Not really. In the beginning yes, then we joined local platforms and such, but now we use Arrangie everything for our B&B ourselves, also in terms of promotion and renting.

25. Which stakeholders do you think are most crucial in shaping the future of tourism in the region?

As previously stated, these are the provinces and the municipalities. They must ultimately decide and make decisions when it comes to tourism, which is not happening now. It is already something that students are being put on it, like you, fortunately!

Sil (owner) of Varen met Sil

Date: 21-10-24

1. Can you introduce yourself, your organisation and your role within your organisation?

The company yeah, well, I'm the entrepreneur, so to speak, so I'm the owner of the boat rental company. And my role is actually remotely, I mean mainly managed, so I myself have not been present much. Mainly busy making money investing and remotely by phone. Mainly managed the boys a bit.

2. How long have you been involved in the tourism sector in this region?

4 years, since the company started.

3. How would you describe the current tourist offer in the region?

Well, I think we are satisfied that we currently have sufficient supply, but that in terms of awareness that more can happen there so there is a lot of supply already, but I think that we can attract more people to this area than we do now. So to say that we still have much more possible.

4. Which elements of this offering are most successful and why?

Yes, I think that is, I think it is a very difficult question, Because it is different for everyone, I think. One likes to be in a B and B and the other likes to be on the water. I can't say anything about this myself, I think water sports are a big element.

5. Do you find the current offering inadequate or outdated?

No, I think it is sufficient. I think that the offer is quite large. I think that it is also. Easy to find on Google or Google Maps for example. I only think that more can be promoted in the south of the country or maybe in Germany. In a nice way better in a nice way can show in other parts of the country, so that people actually look for a bio and bie or a boat rental company in this part of Friesland.

6. What do visitors miss when they visit the area?

Yes actually, actually most people who come to me have actually recovered from the fact that things are well organised here, so that we actually become yes, they miss not miss, well.

7. Are there elements in the region that do not meet visitors' expectations?

With us actually nothing, all visitors are satisfied and we have good reviews on Google.

8. How is accessibility experienced by visitors?

Well actually yes, everything is easily accessible and so on.

9. From your perspective, what type of tourists typically visit the region?

We really get all kinds of people, from plumbers to professors, just people who want adventure on a boat but also want some peace and quiet.

10. What are the reasons for tourists to visit this area?

Nature, yes... actually that, yes.

11. Have you noticed any changes in tourist demographics and preferences over the past few years?

No, no, it has been very diverse from the beginning.

12. What feedback do tourists give about their experience of the region?

They find it beautiful and great to sail with the boats. The environment and nature is beautiful and quiet and they can enjoy everything here.

13. Are there certain visitor segments that you think the region is not effectively addressing the needs of the region?

Water sports can definitely be done more. Everything in terms of water sports now goes to Sneek unfortunately because that is really a water sports place.

14. What is, in broad terms, the desired state of tourism in the region?

More tourism as far as I'm concerned. I think the capacity is there to have 2 or 3 times as many tourists. This seems to me to be what we need to think about here, the area is beautiful and could be better known to get more tourists here. There is so much more to be gained.

15. What improvements or changes would you personally like to see in the region's tourist offering in the future?

More water sports tourism as I said. And better promotion of the region.

16. What kind of visitors would you like to attract in the future and how do you plan to adapt the offering to suit them?

More people like now, people who want to enjoy nature and peace. And hopefully more water sports in the future.

17. What are the main challenges of working in this sector?

Promotion is very difficult because I do everything myself now, because I have to do it myself. And use this marketing on people to get them here. Furthermore, people go to Sneek mainly for water sports because that is what Sneek is very well known for. People also go to Sneek for boat rental itself. So getting people from Sneek here is a very big challenge because they tend to go there first.

18. How can these challenges be addressed in the future?

Marketing and promotion again. Maybe the municipality can free up a budget for this? Yes, that would be very good for us.

19. What are the external factors that most influence tourism in the region?

Yes, we have no control over the weather and climate.

20. How can these external factors be addressed in the future?

-

21. How important is sustainable tourism development in your vision for the region?

Not so important to me I guess. No, not really.

22. What new or innovative practices would you like to introduce to improve the sustainability of the tourism offer?

Not really for me but other boat companies that do electric boats, so there is already some work being done with it. We focus more on sailboats than electric.

23. Are there any sustainable practices that you think should be prioritised in the region's future offering?

-

24. How are you currently working with stakeholders to improve tourism in the region?

Yes I think everyone who is in the rental business in the region from B&Bs to water sports that they are all stakeholders that you can get more out of through good cooperation. Also municipalities and such.

25. Which stakeholders do you think are most crucial in shaping the future of tourism in the region?

Municipalities and the province, yes. They have to shape everything here, so to speak, for beautiful tourism in the future, because more tourism in the region means more money and that is good. If the promotion gets better, then everything here will be more in terms of tourism and entrepreneurs such as restaurants and that is positive for everyone here. So it starts with municipalities and the province, yes.

Pepijn of Natuurlijk Kollummeroord

Date: 5-11-24

1. Can you introduce yourself, your organisation and your role within your organisation?

My name is Pepijn, and I manage a group accommodation here in Kollummeroord, as well as a camping site and several special places to stay, collectively known as Lanterfanter. We're located near the Lauwersmeer National Park, close to a bridge that leads you directly into the park. Our main target groups are schools that come for school camps, as well as music associations and families who visit on weekends. During the summer months, we operate a camping site. In addition, we also run an outdoor sports company, offering various activities for our guests.

2. How long have you been involved in the tourism sector in this region?

I've lived here for 15 years and have been doing this for 15 years.

3. How would you describe the current tourist offer in the region?

I'm completely in love with this area. On one hand, it's still relatively quiet compared to national parks in the south of the country, and I actually like that. Otherwise, it would be incredibly crowded and busy. Here, it still feels like an undiscovered corner of the Netherlands. In recent years interest in this region has been growing. Various provinces and municipalities are doing their part to make it more attractive and better known. In terms of accommodations I believe

there's a sufficient supply, everything from local lodging options to the nearby islands. Activities are also plentiful, but the area just isn't as well known to everyone yet. Many of the neighbouring places and regions focus primarily on their own development and promotion, so there isn't always a lot of coordinated effort. But overall, there's a lot here to explore and enjoy.

4. Which elements of this offering are most successful and why?

That's the nature, the national park and the islands for most people who come here.

5. Do you find the current offering inadequate or outdated?

Public transport is a problem in particular. Coming to the outpost by train is fine but after that it becomes difficult. There is no bus that stops in front of the door no and the one that still comes close only goes once an hour.

6. What do visitors miss when they visit the area?

Good information provision especially, so a website for example. A place where it is clear what there is to do. You do have the VVV's and Dokkum but it is now spread per entrepreneur where you can find something, all those entrepreneurs do it themselves. Online it is also spread and not clear no.

7. Are there elements in the region that do not meet visitors' expectations?

I don't really know, from what I hear from tourists everything is beautiful here actually.

8. How is accessibility experienced by visitors?

Not good, especially with public transport. Own transport is needed to get here properly.

9. From your perspective, what type of tourists typically visit the region?

Mainly many seniors, who also come throughout the year. In the summer months also families.

10. What are the reasons for tourists to visit this area?

Visitors are always people who seek peace or adventure with activities. That's why they come here. But you notice that it is getting less, that's not going well no.

11. Have you noticed any changes in tourist demographics and preferences over the past few years?

Since corona we mainly get a lot of families. Before that it was always the same and not much changes. Since corona also more boat people came, so they rent a boat to go out themselves. Before corona a lot of schools. But now also more with the rental of houses you notice it, more families and families, small families.

12. What feedback do tourists give about their experience of the region?

No, they are all relaxed, all enthusiastic. Yes, no, That's the only thing If you, once they are here, then it's the nature, the place that concerns and they are all impressed.

13. Are there certain visitor segments that you think the region is not effectively addressing the needs of the region?

The thing that is missing now is that everything is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays, even in the summer. They say staff shortages but this was also the case before corona. We also notice this because many people come to us for a drink or something like that when they cycle past us because the rest is closed. Then it is very busy here. We hear this more often from tourists.

14. What is, in broad terms, the desired state of tourism in the region?

People sometimes ask if it's all right like this, and I really think it is. It's lovely that it's not too busy here. If you head over to Lauwersoog, for instance, I already find it a bit too crowded. Fortunately, we're on the quieter side of the Lauwersmeer. Everyone else just drives through, and that's perfectly fine with me. Some people also take their boats toward the Sneekerveer, but then you're basically sailing in a traffic jam. That's just too busy. Here, it's quiet and open. Overall, I think it's perfect the way it is.

15. What improvements or changes would you personally like to see in the region's tourist offering in the future?

Better public transport then, if something can be done about that. I also miss good restaurants, and those that are also open on Mondays and Tuesdays. More of those in the area. You simply don't have any good places to eat around here. You can always eat fish, but you don't really have a really good restaurant here.

16. What kind of visitors would you like to attract in the future and how do you plan to adapt the offering to suit them?

I'm looking to shift more toward hosting families with children, smaller groups rather than the large groups we've traditionally focused on. Since the pandemic, we've also started offering

camping and that's created a completely different atmosphere. With the camping guests, we have much more personal contact and a stronger sense of community. If I have a group of a hundred people, they usually take care of themselves. We might arrange food and activities, but there's not much genuine interaction beyond that. They don't really experience nature the way it's meant to be appreciated. With large school groups, for example, there's a certain mass-tourism feel. We live here, so we understand the value of this natural environment, but it's not always appreciated in the way we'd like. We're trying to figure out how to make this shift. The large buildings were designed for big groups, and they need renovating to better suit smaller groups and families. Right now, in the summer months, we might host just one large group a week, and then the rest of our guests are small groups and individual campers. Our dream is to really make that transition to focus on a more intimate family-friendly environment where nature is truly experienced and appreciated.

17. What are the main challenges of working in this sector?

What particularly noticing now is that prices are rising. How do we handle that with our guests? Everything is getting more expensive, and we have to pass those costs on somehow. We've tried increasing our prices a little bit each year, and while we were worried about receiving complaints, so far we've mostly just seen fewer bookings from people who think it's becoming too expensive. But if you compare our prices to those in the south, we're still very affordable. That's one of the biggest challenges right now figuring out how to manage these price increases. Another challenge is balancing work and private life. Since I live here myself, it's difficult to separate the two.

18. How can these challenges be addressed in the future?

So renovate everything here and focus more on smaller families. In the end that will also bring in more money I think.

19. What are the external factors that most influence tourism in the region?

The weather also plays a huge role here. Because we're on the quieter side, our traffic is very dependent on the weather. Take our summer terrace and the restaurant, for example. If the weather is bad, no one comes. That makes it incredibly challenging to plan our staffing and to keep the restaurant running smoothly. We can't just open it fully and hope for the best, because a single bad day can throw everything off. The unpredictability of the weather really influences our operations.

20. How can these external factors be addressed in the future?

-

21. How important is sustainable tourism development in your vision for the region?

Not really important to me, although I do my bit, given the high energy costs I have installed many solar panels myself for example. I also drive electric. So I do something.

22. What new or innovative practices would you like to introduce to improve the sustainability of the tourism offer?

I don't know about that.

23. Are there any sustainable practices that you think should be prioritised in the region's future offering?

-

24. How are you currently working with stakeholders to improve tourism in the region?

Well, I work closely with Staatsbosbeheer, since we're basically in their backyard. Being located in a national park, we naturally have a lot to do with them, and we try to collaborate on various projects. Besides that, I do some business with local entrepreneurs, primarily for catering and similar services. Otherwise, I generally prefer that guests buy directly from me. I don't have much involvement with municipalities or the regional leisure organisations, though. I'm not really a fan of that kind of arrangement, so I tend to handle things on my own.

25. Which stakeholders do you think are most crucial in shaping the future of tourism in the region?

Entrepreneurs, that's how it is I think. It's a challenging time for many entrepreneurs, especially in this region. Winters make it very hard to keep businesses afloat because tourism is minimal during that period. On the islands, it remains relatively busy year-round, but here it's much quieter. From what I understand, it's manageable during the high summer season, but outside of that it's very slow. Entrepreneurs are key to shaping the future.

Appendix 3B: Local resident

Adriana from Anjum

Date: 7-11-24

1. Can you introduce yourself and describe how long you have lived in the Lauwersmeer area?

My name is Adriana Visser. I come from Anjum. That is also in the region Northeast, municipality Northeast Friesland and I have lived there my whole life, so that is 20 years.

2. How does tourism impact your community and your daily life?

Well, a lot, of course we have that partly thanks to tourism here. In Oostmahorn you also notice it a lot, and I am very grateful for that. Yes, sometimes I also get annoyed by those tourists who are there, because then I want to do something for myself and they are fanatical about it, with all those people. That's how I see it. I live next to the church and I notice that I see tourists more and more often now, and that they also stay longer than before; a while ago it was still a bit less.

3. Are you involved in activities or organisations related to tourism in the region?

Yes, I am doing an internship at regional marketing tourism of Northeast Friesland. That is about tourism in the region where I live.

4. How would you describe the current tourist offer in the Lauwersmeer area?

Well, I think we do have some supply here. But for example, the restaurants can't be open every day in the winter, they just can't do that. Furthermore, I think we have more B&Bs and small-scale accommodations here. We also have a large holiday park, but that doesn't really fit the style that Friesland should radiate. And yes, it shouldn't be too crowded either; that peace and quiet is part of Friesland.

5. Are there any particular offerings that are popular or useful to the community?

For example the Plus Supermarket, That is not necessarily for the tourists, But that is of course something that can continue to exist in such a small village as Anjum by tourists. I don't think we would have had such a large supermarket otherwise? So yes and I think that the infrastructure there certainly helps tourism there. Cycle paths and such things, walking routes.

6. Are there aspects of tourism that feel outdated or could be improved?

What I get with RMT and the Vrijetijdsregio is that for example a sign was placed right in front of a company, a B&B. The owner did not even know that the sign was going to be placed by the

municipality. The communication and cooperation is therefore poor. Maybe that can be improved, but really old-fashioned I do not really know anything to say.

7. What do you think visitors miss or would like to have when they come to this area?

I don't really know. Here it's all about the peace and quiet, so there's a bit less supply and also less hustle and bustle, so to speak. So yes, whether the target group of RMT and the Vrijetijdsregio really miss something here, I don't know. Maybe, like restaurants not always being open. You notice things like that especially outside the high season, then there's just less. I think that's something that stands out, especially in the low season.

8. Are there any tourist offers that you think do not meet visitors' expectations?

Maybe they expect us to always be open here, but that is not the case and perhaps with websites that are not always up to date.

9. What do you think the accessibility for tourists is like in this area, both in terms of physical access and information?

Well, in terms of information, I am of course with RMT, and we simply have a good website. But I do not know how easy it is to find. I do know that we are now using the Merk Fryslan platform, and since we have been on it, we have had far fewer visitors to our website. So that findability is somewhat less, we also score less well in the algorithm. Furthermore, public transport here is not great. It is quite difficult to get here, and I notice that myself when I travel by public transport from the east.

10. What type of tourists do you typically see in this area?

You see that often older people come here, not necessarily very old, but around 50 to 60 years old. But there are also families with younger children. Especially at the holiday parks, where I live close to, you see a lot of families anyway. So it varies from babies to grandparents, so to speak. But in general I think that the majority of the visitors are somewhat older people.

11. Why do you think tourists come to the Lauwersmeer area?

They come for the peace, the space is of course also very beautiful. And you can do all sorts of things, you can walk and such but mainly the peace I think.

12. Have you noticed any changes in the type of visitors over the years?

I think it has become busier recently. My father used to come to the Lauwersmeer all the time, about 20 years ago, and then there was hardly anyone. But when you go there now, there are really a lot of people. Last week it was still very busy there. I myself have not really experienced whether there is a different kind of visitors than before.

13. What feedback have you received from visitors about their experiences here?

Well, if I think about it, I have helped tourists here, for example, and they really appreciate our hospitality. We are always open to help them if they have questions and such. I don't know exactly what they say about it, but among ourselves we never say 'u' to each other, not even to the tourists. I think that also contributes to the hospitable atmosphere.

14. Do you feel that the area is not well prepared for the needs of certain types of tourists?

Well, I think tourists here are mainly looking for insight and experience. I see that in the area, for example. We do have some facilities here, such as museums, walking routes and that kind of activities. So yes, I think we meet their expectations with that.

15. What is your ideal vision of tourism in the Lauwersmeer area?

At first I always thought: it's fine with those tourists, I didn't really need it. But now that I'm doing an internship at RMT, I'm getting more and more insight into what tourism does for the region and what benefits it offers for the infrastructure and the economy. So I think it can get a bit busier, but not too busy. It shouldn't be too full, so to speak. Maybe with a bit more spreading, because it is busier in the high season. But it would be good if more people came in the low season, to spread the seasons better. Then it can get a bit busier, but in a balanced way.

16. What changes or improvements would you like to see in the tourist offer?

It would be nice if the restaurants here could just be open all week, even in the winter. But then there have to be tourists who go there, otherwise they are open for nothing, because the residents can't always go there. Furthermore, an improvement of public transport would also help, although that is partly out of self-interest. But I think it would also attract tourists.

17. What type of visitors would you like to see more often in the area?

I think those insight seekers also fit in well with the region, and maybe that appeals to young people too. I think that would be nice, because it's not like we have a boring province or region; there's quite a lot to do here. But you also have young people who destroy things and misbehave, and that doesn't fit in with the atmosphere of the region at all.

18. What challenges do you think the region faces in terms of tourism?

It comes back to the fact that facilities, such as restaurants, are not always open. For example, we are working on projects, including with the Vrijetijdsregio, to improve the infrastructure. The idea is that tourism can really mean something to the residents, for example in the economic field. Projects have already been set up for this. I think it is important that these projects are carried out well, although that of course also brings challenges.

19. What external factors do you think have the greatest influence on tourism in the area?

You can't do anything about the weather and if the weather is bad, tourists won't come either.

20. How do you think these challenges and factors can be addressed?

(They are already working on that)

21. How important do you think sustainable tourism is for the region?

Well, we are of course in the middle of a Natura 2000 area, and I think that preserving that is very important. It is not like you can just organize a festival here, like Burgum does. Sustainability is really an important factor for the area here.

22. What sustainable practices would you like to see more of in the region?

What I also heard is that in the future they want to build houses from sustainable materials, like hemp. Those kinds of projects seem good to me. I don't necessarily have a strong opinion that they should do it, but if there are such sustainable initiatives, I can agree with that.

25. How do local residents, businesses and other tourism stakeholders in the region work together to improve tourism?

At RMT, for example, there are activities such as the learning network, with which they set up connecting networks with entrepreneurs here. I think RMT plays a major role in that. In addition, some local companies also work together with RMT, but in terms of cooperation with local residents, I don't know if that happens a lot. I do have an example: we live next to the church, and sometimes tourists come by who want to see the church. Once I had my father come along, an old man from Anjum who has the key to the church, and then we could see the church together with those tourists. Such small coincidental moments do happen, but apart from that, I don't think there is much structural cooperation between residents and tourism. Companies do work

together, but really locally with residents, apart from such small examples, it is not something that always and everywhere happens.

26. Which stakeholders do you think are most essential in shaping the future of tourism in this area?

The regional brand is becoming increasingly important, and it is good to pay attention to it. Administrations such as the Tourism Alliance Friesland play a major role in this. For example, they support projects such as the networks I mentioned earlier. These types of organisations are very important for the future of tourism. And yes, they also contribute strongly to the leisure sector.

Appendix 3C: The client

Liesbeth Schievink of RMT NOF/Vrijetijdsregio Noordoost Friesland

Date: 31-10-24

1. Can you introduce yourself, the leisure organisation and your role within it?

Liesbeth Schievink, in the leisure region I am project leader of the leisure region. The leisure region has a number of assignments to ensure that the supply is more integrated, that the entrepreneurs know what each other is doing. That everyone in the ecosystem, so to speak, entrepreneurs, government, education and sometimes also private individuals, knows how to find each other, but also knows how to find knowledge and knows which counter to go to for which question.

2. How long have you been involved in shaping tourism for this region?

Since July 2018.

3. How would you describe the current tourist offer in the region?

Lots of small happiness. Lots of small air outside builds the activities. Not yet completely professional. It is really a small offer. What for the active guest, find out for yourself what is there. So the experience is the beautiful nature. Very different. We have all the cultural landscapes, but it is not equally experienceable everywhere. Yes, and that also applies to the culture. Also the

museums. We have something like 18 small and less small museums, but they are not all very contemporary or future-proof according to the current standard. The offer so how does the visitor experience its purpose, so it is still a lot of exhibiting and showing. But well, the current visitor you have that circle that wants to get into it, so to speak and more into doing and feeling. This suggests the current visitor (insight seeker) wants more interaction and participation, a more immersive experience.

4. What do tourists miss when they visit the region?

I don't know. I can only have an opinion about that. Research needs to be done on that. Fortunately, you are working on that. That is very good, namely that we ask them ourselves. Look, we sometimes hear things from entrepreneurs about their guests, then it is mainly about openly available catering. Bad weather activities.

5. What are the objectives of the Leisure Region regarding tourism in the region?

Recreation and tourism should be the flywheel for the broad prosperity in the region. Objectives that the region has must remain liveable, attractive etc. and to achieve that. We must ensure that the plans that are included in the tourism vision are realized, we cannot do it all ourselves but at least take control of that and ensure that fragmentation is counteracted.

6. Which of the current offerings do you think is most successful in achieving the region's goals?

In the Lauwersmeer area, we also have regular RT of course and I am also active there if I take that together, because if I really have to take it here, then I can say, if it is about fragmentation, then there are initiatives for that, also among entrepreneurs themselves, for example with Arrange or like the riddle of the Wadden tries to work together. There have also been host courses in the Lauwersmeer area of IVN. But if you put it generally, what makes what, what makes the Lauwersmeer attractive then? Is that not always easy to substantiate, because they are freely accessible things, so yes, the moment you have to buy a ticket for something, then you can really measure it, we don't know that, but I think if I have to do it myself, the most attractive and the most fitting for the objective are, yes, I think eating fish in the harbor is almost at one as the most performed activity. In addition, I think that the walking path and the lookout tower attract more people. Cycling in general, things like a round of Lauwersmeer and bird watching. I think the Dark Sky Park still has a lot of potential there. It's super unique that you are allowed to enter a national park at night. But I think that for people that is sometimes still, well, exciting or I wonder if people experience that very well yet. Apart from the sky platforms and benches.

7. Are there areas where the current tourist offer no longer fits in with the long-term vision for the region?

Well, I dare not say that. I think it is not yet experienceable enough and you also see that on the one hand there is a lot of catering, to name but one thing, but that it is still somewhat one-sided. I also think that you are still missing, well, just experienceability. Where can I get a surfboard, boats and bicycles, mountain bikes etc.

8. What are the main changes needed to achieve the desired state of tourism?

Yes, that is always a bit of a combination of things. That is making sure that the infrastructure is in order, so that you can indeed get somewhere more easily. I think that that is that all parties play a role in that. Is it allowed in terms of legislation, what kind of investment does it require and how do you implement it? And then I think, the promotion is certainly very important and that is something you have to do together. But we should also still have to and can play in that from the RT and Waddenland to the Groningers. Visit Wadden.

9. What kind of visitors does the region want to attract more of in the future and why?

Well, according to the lifestyle finder, we are mainly on the insight seeker. Provincially, there is a bit more focus on the adventure seeker, but we think that the insight seeker fits better with us. No, the insight seeker just goes a bit deeper into both culture and nature, so that is for us the focus, so to speak.

10. How can economic growth through tourism be balanced with preserving the character and environment of the region?

I think that municipalities play a role in this and I think they play a good role in this by embracing and enabling that small scale [END BLUE] and by monitoring that there. For the entrepreneurs and certainly the local entrepreneurs, I really think, be careful in the people who live here. They have had that for a long time, because that is why they are happy here. So they will want to keep that, because that is the gold on which they also earn their money, so that is also in it. So I think that we always have to look carefully at distribution. We have to look carefully at the right promotion. And together we also create that profile and tell it that it is also less attractive for other entrepreneurs. I would almost say, those who are just, well, who are very much into more noise, animation, all inclusive, that does not fit in here in the area and that could lead to problems and I do see a risk in that. Well, for example, in the takeovers that are currently taking place in the camping area. Nationally, that is, well, that we are very interesting for international parties and

they are generally not very locally rooted. So I think that local roots are very important to keep talking to each other and I also think that the leisure region makes an important contribution to this by bringing people into conversation with each other.

11. What role does sustainability play in the future of tourism in the region?

Well, Visit Wadden in particular has a pioneering role in this. That also fits in with the Unesco world heritage. Regenerative tourism is also strongly encouraged. And it also fits in with that insight seeker, so in that sense they are correct.

12. Are there specific goals that the Leisure Region has set to achieve the desired state of tourism?

We have of course those subjects that I have named here in particular, we can do that within this project. The project has a certain size and that is of course. Also always financially driven. So you could, you could get that well over project plan and that is about involvement of the entrepreneurs the extent of participation and ticking off the tourism vision.

13. What are the biggest challenges of working in the region?

What are the biggest challenges? I think the madness of the day. People are already busy with a lot so limitation. We have a large and very diverse area. In our region we have 5 regional brands and two national parks, a national landscape Unesco world heritage and the fortified city. That is fantastic, because with that you actually have an entire country in a region. But that requires, you can't do it all with 1 approach. So that is the challenge that you have to facilitate that you have to do that in a diverse way and still want unity in that. I think that is the biggest challenge. Yes and also the budget and not doing things twice.

14. How can these challenges be addressed?

Not to do things twice, always look very carefully at the entire playing field. Do you do that already? Then I'm going to do something else, so make sure you spend your budget well and that leisure region gives us the time that project to, well, pay extra attention to the story share supplement so that every entrepreneur with his own variant but on the same story. You can arrange your promotion and marketing well and it gives us the opportunity. For example, to draw attention to disappearing supply, see if there can be an extra instead of developing something completely new again, so that you also value more of what is already there instead of always putting something completely new back. This also implies using existing resources more sustainably rather than always creating new ones.

15. How do external factors, such as regulations, economic conditions or environmental considerations, influence the region in achieving its tourism objectives?

Well, regulations can have an influence for good and bad. We always want rules for things that we find annoying, but we find it very annoying when there are rules for things that we find important. In regulations, you are of course in both national European and local regulations. Yes, that requires good ongoing cooperation with at least the local authorities [END BLUE] who are then of course discussion partners in Europe and in the Netherlands. Yes, and then it depends on what it is about. What is the influence? And then you counted the other question. It was influence on regulations and influence on. Climate absolutely has a lot of influence. And the more variable the climate becomes, the more difficult it is. Last spring, well it was not a good spring, then we immediately notice that in the bookings for visitors. So that is apart from change, but just climate. If you talk about climate change, well, then of course there are scientists who say it will be 5 degrees warmer. There are scientists who say 5 degrees colder because the ice caps are melting. We will have to talk about that with each other, but in general and also when you look at seasonal battles, what we also really need to a certain extent is a quiet season and in between. But when we talk about that, then the external factors of that are of course also great. People like a bit of nice weather, but is the challenge for us to have all season? The boat trip that was really wild and wild or that walk on the beach where the rain streamed in your face, but afterwards you had that nice cup of chocolate milk and you felt incredibly alive. Well, I think that if we use that proposition more and ensure that people can be outside in this outdoor region in every season, Then we could perhaps level out that external factor a bit.

16. What are the region's sustainable development goals?

They are locked up in Visit Wadden [END BLUE] of course so no visibility on that. And I think it is very much in a general sense that we do look at people, planet, profit, but we follow in that. We are not a front runner ourselves as an organization. That is simply not our role.

17. What innovative or sustainable tourism practices would be a good fit to promote tourism in the region?

This depends on what you consider innovation, for me taking the focus off of nice weather would be an innovation and therefore making the outdoors even more liveable. And maybe an innovative curation is also improving. Not always reaching for digital tours.

18. Which sustainable initiatives should be prioritized to achieve the desired state of tourism?

If on the one hand we have a **Unesco world heritage and a national park and a Dark sky park**. We know that Friesland scores very favourably on light pollution and that corner in particular, so very low light pollution to name one of the sustainable things. Then I think that we should continue in that line and that this form of tourism should continue to attract. You do that, among other things, by that **insight seeker**. I think, that focus on that. The lines should also remain short in the region. So I think that you should **especially support private initiatives very much. Promote them very much. Because you attract more and more people from positive examples and at the same time strengthen your image.**

19. How does the Leisure Region currently work together with other stakeholders to shape tourism?

By meeting each other by discussing things with each other by sharing information and knowledge. Yes, still about that sustainability, right? What I still remember is. Discussions such as belgas, drilling, under Schiermonnikoog and at Ternaard. Of course that does not contribute that much to the proposition of. A sustainable region. **So environmental and economic considerations like drilling can conflict with the sustainable tourism proposition.**

20. Which stakeholders play a crucial role in realising the future vision of tourism for the region?

These are the **municipalities, these are in the regional brands such as a national park organization Dark Sky Organization or the Staatsbosbeheer that works on this with IVN. These are the entrepreneurs. I have already mentioned the governments. These are the provincial marketing organizations. I think that is us too. So actually that whole set and the residents also play a role in this.** And I think that all those stakeholders together, if we all take a step, and we do that, a bit with the same view and the same story that you will come a long way.

21. What additional stakeholder collaboration is needed to achieve the region's tourism objectives?

Through our stakeholders, other stakeholders are involved. And I think that it is mainly more about our added value in that. They have a lot of knowledge of the regions branched out in the regions, so that can be taken into account even more. So that we are actually on a kind of chat list of everyone. If someone is going to do that, then I should hear about it, because then I have the fastest access. Furthermore, **more cooperation between all regions in Northeast Friesland is always necessary.**

Appendix 3D: IVN Lauwersmeer

Jorgen from IVN Lauwersmeer

Date: 22-10-24

1. Can you introduce yourself, your organisation and your role within the organisation?

IVN is an association committed to bringing nature back into people's hearts. We aim to draw more attention to nature and bring a sustainable society closer. We do this mainly through communication and education projects, engaging people of all ages, from childcare centres to nursing homes. Through these projects, we hope people will reconnect with nature and treat it with more care and respect in the future. It's also worth noting that IVN has a professional organisation of around 180 professionals spread throughout the Netherlands, with a head office in Amsterdam. Additionally, as an association, we have approximately 18,000 volunteers who are mostly in local and reasonably autonomous clubs across the country. These volunteers engage in various activities, including excursions, events, and courses on related themes. We have a broad network in that respect and are well-established. That's about IVN, and specifically about my role in relation to Lauwersmeer National Park. In almost all national parks, there is a coordinator for communication and education employed by IVN. When the parks were established by the government, there was a need for an extra boost in information and education so that people could become aware of and enjoy the beautiful nature. That role is with IVN, so I have colleagues in nearly all the other 21 or 22 national parks. I work for Lauwersmeer, and that is where I am the coordinator for communication and education. This doesn't mean I do everything myself; I collaborate with many partners, entrepreneurs, residents, and the land management authorities. I strive to organize enjoyable programs so that visitors to the park have a pleasant experience and also learn something about it. That's essentially my role in Lauwersmeer National Park. Yes, because it is very diverse. Such a park is actually a microcosm of the world, with many interests and developments. I've been doing this for quite a long time, and sometimes people ask me, Doesn't that get boring, Jorgen? Shouldn't you do something different? But I say, a park like this is never boring. There are always new developments, new visions, new ideas. In my experience, it's always in full swing.

2. How long have you been involved with IVN and the region?

I've been with IVN for over 30 years. I originally started as a biologist. What I think is a shame is that people, when they're young, tend to rush and not fully appreciate nature. My amazement for nature actually started when I was a little boy, at the age of 4 or 5, when you start discovering your world and become curious. That feeling never went away for me, so I studied biology. I think it's great when I can take other people into nature with me so that they, too, are amazed.

3. How would you describe the current opportunities for tourism and nature experience in the region?

I always say we have a unique position in the Lauwersmeer. You might not think it, but if I stand in the harbor of Lauwersoog, I don't immediately feel like I'm in the middle of nature. However, if I look forward, I see the Wadden Sea World Heritage site. A little further on, I see Schiermonnikoog National Park, and if I turn around, I see Lauwersmeer National Park. Many people do not know the area yet, and I certainly do not think it is too busy at the moment. When I hear colleagues in other parks talk about the future, that's a concern of mine, but perhaps we can discuss that later. Right now, it's not too crowded. I have colleagues in the Biesbosch and Kennemerland, in the Randstad area they are already quite overrun. So, I think Lauwersmeer certainly still has potential and undeveloped possibilities, but we all have to think about it very carefully. When I'm in the area, I usually chat with people, and I often hear the same terms. There's a dedicated group of birdwatchers, Lauwersmeer is very well known for birdwatching, it's quite a group, but that's naturally a select audience. When I speak to the average tourist, they mention the quietness and open space. Silence and wide horizons, that's what I really hear as the strengths of the area. Yes, there's peace and space, and we have to handle that carefully. Does everyone still want to be able to experience that, and how far can we go in that regard? Yes, that's our shared challenge, I think. Look at what's going on. It's not an amusement park, but we do have developments like the Wadden Sea World Heritage site nearby. In the port of Lauwersoog, there's quite an ambitious plan. Well, yes, I think it's fair to say I sometimes have a bit of concern. On one hand, they have the ambition to attract between 100,000 and 150,000 visitors per year. Well, how do you do that? How do you manage that properly? What are those people going to do when they come? That's already very exciting. Suppose that happens, how will that work? How will those visitor flows move through the area? What else are those people going to do? That's a development that is... well, ongoing. Tomorrow we happen to have a meeting, I'm also part of a core team focused on the economy and sustainable recreational tourism for the park, there's another plan to create a beautiful medieval open-air museum at the corner of the Bantpolder. Well, yes, those are developments currently taking place, and you can see those

things happening here too. And yes, there are very divided opinions among people about what is wise in this and where it ultimately leads. At the moment, I still see quite a bit of development. We do see that it has become busier in recent years you can see that. But compared to other areas, I think if we tackle this in a smart way, there's certainly still potential in the Lauwersmeer area and its surroundings.

4. Which natural areas or activities attract the most visitors, and why do you think that is?

Well, I think that in the Wadden region, which is, I believe, the most popular destination, right? Yes, if you conduct a study in the Netherlands and ask people to name the most beautiful areas, we have also been named the most beautiful nature reserve in the Netherlands a few years ago by the Dutch. Then comes the Wadden with the islands; they come up first, so you have activity there. Is that at Lauwersoog a bit less? Because we have activity, of course, along the coast, but still, yes? There are all kinds of initiatives; you know, something is certainly happening there, but not yet on a super large scale. Well, and Schiermonnikoog is also quite limited in itself, with, what is it, between 250,000 and 300,000 visitors per year? But that is a well-known place and an attraction. No, yes, besides that, I always say, well, Lauwersmeer, you have to like it. Of course, it is a certain area, right? It is quite open, somewhat rough, I find; it appeals to me, but now that is also changing for the public. And I think that a lot of people do not know what beautiful gems we have all around there, right? What I do see in the Lauwersmeer is that we have quite a lot of small-scale enterprises, small-scale attractions too. But there is an awful lot. But yes, how do you connect that? How do you then also partly market that? I think that is still a challenge in the area, right? Because all those churches around those wierden and terps now, that is really, if you have nice stories about that, super special; that is real gold that you have there, right? And well, yes, there is still profit to be made there. But yes, now that is a bit of a strange thing, because I do see it with that always in mind. I'll say a few words: nature is paramount, right? So nature is paramount; there's everything allowed and everything is possible, but it shouldn't be at the expense of nature. I'm putting it briefly now, right? But that's how it is.

5. Are there aspects of tourism and nature experience that you think could be improved to better meet visitor demand?

(Answered below, there are no bigger attractions in the area to entertain for multiple hours.)

6. What do visitors miss when they visit the area now?

Well, what is lacking now, and until recently, is a major attraction, because the area is always freely accessible. Yes, Lauwersmeer is really a beautiful place, but when there's bad weather,

the options are very limited in the area. In bad weather, finding fun activities is really challenging in such a rural area. As a biologist, I personally think that is very nice for the area, but that is something that guests miss. Indeed, if you are with a family, I understand that when you are in the countryside with your family and children, you might find there is not much to do. Well, fortunately, the weather is nice now, but the autumn and winter holidays are coming again. Then I can imagine people saying, "Oh, there is not much else to do and experience here." Well, hopefully that works, but okay. People also go from Lauwersmeer for a day to the city of Groningen and that kind of thing, so I hear. I always see the region up to that distance a bit like Leeuwarden, where Groningen belongs, if you are there as a tourist or as residential tourists at least. But otherwise, really within the area, yes, there are some small-scale things, but not really anything big where you can entertain yourself for hours. We don't actually have that at the moment, no.

7. Are there any tourist elements in the region that do not meet the expectations of visitors?

Oh, I find that very difficult. From the national park's perspective, we just completed a big project a few years ago called the Lauwersmeer Round, in which we significantly improved the infrastructure around the entire area, including walking routes, cycle paths, and facilities. We are now receiving very positive reactions to that. Beyond that, I don't really know; I can't answer that question for you very clearly. Actually, you should ask the visitors themselves.

8. How do visitors experience the accessibility of nature reserves, such as accessibility, walking paths and information provision?

Things are slowly getting better, and that was a chicken and egg story for years. For example, many places, such as those in the catering industry, are now also open on Mondays. Previously, quite a lot of establishments in Lauwersmeer were closed, and you had to make an effort to find a place where you could get a cup of coffee and pay by card. That is improving, as I hear in recent years. But yes, those kinds of things, of course, also have to do with it. On the one hand, you need a kind of critical mass of tourism because, of course, it has to make sense for the entrepreneur to be open, since he has to earn money.

9. What type of visitors mainly use the IVN activities in this region?

Yes, well, we are of course very focused on nature and sustainability, so those are often people who already have something to do with green. I also think that the Lauwersmeer area is very interesting for that kind of audience, right? We have talked about it with the entrepreneurs: what do we actually want with each other? Then everyone immediately shouts, "No mass tourism," but

okay, right? That is still a vague concept. What is that? But hey, we all have an image of it. We also have a lot of small facilities and yet quality. I think the quiet space appeals to the quality visitor who now also wants a bit of meaning in their experiences, right? Around those themes, we could, of course, as a national park with entrepreneurs, find each other very well in that. It's like a concept you want to promote. I also see in recent years movement there, also with the marketing organisations, that we are going in that direction. We also had a few years ago in the park, because what was it like at a certain point? Yes, but that was always the topic: more and more, right? I did occasionally attend a meeting where it was about more tourism, and then I was the one listening who occasionally said, "Gosh guys, we've been in a meeting for an hour now, but I haven't heard the word 'nature' once." Huh? I thought so. I was worried then, but I do see a change coming. I also think, partly because we have real developments in the Netherlands, in some parks where you really see that this is threatening to get out of hand. A number of Wadden Islands also clearly indicate, "We don't need more visitors." Well, you can see it in other places in Europe too. I happened to see the Canary Islands on the NOS this morning; the people also revolt, saying it's all getting too crazy. Big cities, right? So you and I would really like to have, well, maybe you can contribute something to that with your research. I would really like us to start thinking about that now before it gets that far, you know? I think it is always much smarter to have a vision and a plan for that than to have to roll back things or start banning things afterward, because you will never make friends with that, right? Very concretely, just closing a footpath or a waterway at a certain moment within a few days. I also worked for the Order for a long time in Friesland, do you think? Well, then we had everyone on the map. Then we got everyone against us, right? Also residents saying, "We were always allowed to pass by, and how do you want to close this?" Well, that is not possible. Okay, you can do better upfront, and you can, of course, quite positively restructure and guide tourism if you think about it well together. But that's a very practical thing. Yes, I would too. Nice. No, in the past I have been there quite long there was a VVV Lauwersland. That also had its limitations, Oscar. I don't want to say that it was sacred, but for me that was very easy. I went to Dokkum once a quarter, and then I talked to the director about what we were going to do and what they did and how we could use each other, and then I went home refreshed. Yes, that has grown very differently now, right? But that is more of a practical thing.

10. What do you think are the most important reasons why people participate in IVN activities?

(Answered above, people seeking sustainable/nature activities and education.)

11. Have you noticed any changes in visitor demographics or interests over the past few years?

No, not really, it has been the same type of visitors usually over the years.

12. What feedback does IVN receive from visitors about their experience with tourism and nature in this region?

The people who visit almost all think it is a very beautiful area, mainly because of the peace, right? People from urban areas are amazed; while we might think it is busy, for them it's like, "Wow, what space, what nature, what greenery!" So I always receive very positive feedback from most people. Also, regarding activities, Lauwersmeer is nice, and there is a lot of interest in it. It is a Dark Sky Park with darkness, right? That is all very positive.

13. Are there target groups that you think IVN or the region should pay more attention to their needs?

Oh, as I speak more personally now about what is occupying me at the moment. Well, there are developments that I would find very nice, but that is perhaps very idealistic because it is a national park with specific core qualities. Perhaps it has a specific appearance, and I would like that appearance to remain in the area, partly to see again what we have. But this is a personal annoyance. You have to put it into words nicely in your article, so bear with me for a moment because I'm going to say something. I do think that sometimes there is a bit of clutter on the edges. For example, when houses are densely packed and those prefab chalets are put down that makes me very sad. I understand that entrepreneurs do that because they are probably much cheaper, of course. But I also think, yes, tourists come for an area, not solely for that national park; they come for the region as well. Well, I think there is still some profit to be made by thinking about it properly. And now it's been a while, and I do see an improvement, and sometimes also in what I say in my work. It starts with hospitality. I find hospitality in my work super important; that's the first thing, right? You will feel that too when you come somewhere. That doesn't mean someone takes half an hour for you, but that you feel welcome, that you are listened to for a while, that attention is paid to you. Well, that applies to entrepreneurs, but it also applies to us in educational work. I see that here and there are things where I think we can still be more aware of that and grow a bit in it.

14. What is the desired state of tourism and nature in the region in broad terms according to IVN?

Yeah, well, as I was saying, in such national parks it is quite clear, and I think so actually. In the law, there are regulations in the Netherlands as well. Nature is under quite some pressure, so at some point we need to strengthen and improve it here and there. But it would be nice if we could bring recreational tourism into minimal balance with nature. And, I'm not so good at that, but

there is also a movement slowly starting up of regenerative tourism that can really contribute to nature, right? Now, often I go to nature reserves, I experience them, so I actually consume that, and hopefully with respect: I do not throw away my waste, I behave properly, stay on the paths, and I do not let my dog run loose. Well, there is also still a challenge among people, but that is the way it is. In the future, it would be nice to do that again. I see some currents already in the beginning stages to investigate that further: how can recreation and tourism actually contribute to an improvement of the quality of nature? I would find that a very nice challenge and quest for the future or the coming years. Together we can do something with that, right? What is it called regenerative tourism or something, right? That is such a term. Of course, that is still a bit in its infancy. I'm not very familiar with that either, but I do think that is a very nice idea. Yes, indeed, well, as I just said, we will see together. There is still room for improvement, but we will still see that we have that quality of the landscape in its peace and space and that open horizon. Yes, so many people in darkness together we will cherish that and be aware that we want to guard and strengthen it, right? For example, last year I participated in that event; it was super fun, and we had a course in nature-inclusive entrepreneurship, and that was mainly about how you can make your business premises greener. Do that, right? So it was about the interior and exterior design, which can of course also be inside. And how do you communicate about that with your customers and visitors, and do you really give them something to take home about nature? Well, those are developments that IVN also likes and that we would like to contribute to.

15. What role does IVN see for itself in the future in promoting nature tourism?

The main role of IVN is to educate and let people experience nature in a sustainable way. Promoting is not something that IVN itself does actively.

16. What improvements or changes would you like to see in the future in the tourist offering that focuses on experiencing nature?

Well, it's more about some overarching things. I think even better cooperation, better coordination, seeking each other out more, you know. But I do see that in recent years really, really positive things have happened, you know, because yes, you have to do it together, right? As I already said, also in such an area there are all kinds of interests. Yes, then you can really rise above silo thinking. I am involved in recreation and tourism I have to do more; and I am focused on nature, and it has to be less, and that nature has to be protected. Yes, that's not how it works, of course not; you have to do it together. And I also think that we have that responsibility together

in that region and area. So yes, I think that it is up to a province, perhaps with the two municipalities around the Lauwersmeer, to take control, and we also have a structure for that because we have the Lauwersmeer steering group, right? That also includes the two provinces, the two municipalities, Rijkswaterstaat, Staatsbosbeheer, and the water boards. Well, then you already have a nice first club that represents a lot of interests. That's fine; that's nice on paper, but then you still have to weave it together and make it come true in practice, and that remains a challenge, of course, because yes, there are so many parties, so many interests, right? But we also get business say, but also reproach of "Gosh, why didn't I know that?" Right? Yes, sometimes you also forget people because there are so many to involve. But I also think, let's all be proactive there; I've always been happy to ring the bell. I say, "I'm happy that you're ringing the bell along," yes, those things just happen, but let's also keep each other sharp together, right? Then we have a task together. Yes, I'm quite idealistic about it, I realize that too, but I think such a region, especially if you want to create a tourist product, that's what you really have to do together. Actually, you're not going to make it unless every resident participates in that, you know? I walk through Zoutkamp, and I just have a question as a tourist: "Gosh, where can I get a fish here?" Now that's immediately a grumpy man or woman opposite you, but yes, that should start with, "Well, if you walk here, there, and there," right? But okay, we'll never achieve that 100%, of course, and that's not necessary. But I do think that residents should be involved too. So we also have residents now and then; we also do courses, where we tell about nature, and then we hope that they are also enthusiastic and that they also convey that. So that's what IVN does; we are very keen on connecting, right? Connecting people with nature, but the nice thing about nature is that it can connect people with each other. If you do it well, people can also polarize very much, but if you do it well, it can also connect people very well with each other.

17. What are the biggest challenges and external factors influencing tourism in this region?

Regarding the biggest challenges, indeed, as we just mentioned, streamlining a bit more, I think. Yes, and I would really like to as I just told you that is for me the challenge: that we would prefer to meet up with the relevant stakeholders as soon as possible. How do we see this area, not only in 15 years but also in 50 years, and what do we want and can we do there together? I do realize that that is a very big question, but I would really like to get started with that. Well, from the national park, I have already tried to narrow it down a bit so that we first come up with a vision of how we see the use of the National Park, right? You have a number of core areas where nature is really the priority, and we need to name that very clearly. Where do we still see development possibilities? Look at what I have noticed now with the forest ranger; I can also talk about it. Then

there is another development, for example, a mountain bike route that's what the terrain is about with you so it is said that is possible. And then I speak to the forest ranger and say, "Jurgen, but yes, that is only a very small piece." Yes, I said, but I am so afraid that if we put all those small pieces next to each other again in 20 years, we will then say, "Damn it, there we have it." Actually, we fell for it because even all those small pieces eventually became a very big thing. And I would so much like to prevent that together. So for me, from the park and I think also for the region the big challenge is perhaps we should very well, together, ask that question: What kind of tourist visitor do we want here? Indeed, and now, if we had something about that, what should we also offer to make that visitor stay? And that is preferably to stay a bit longer and also come back. Because for an entrepreneur, it is interesting, right? As soon as an overnight stay is added. I realize that from the park too. We have a lot of individual excursions, but actually the region has no use for that, huh? If I go birdwatching for a day in the Lauwersmeer, I just go birdwatching. Well, I might eat a fish somewhere, but in principle, I can bring everything myself. I come with my own car. I don't even fill up in the region. The region has no interest in that at all, so you have to look at that aspect, right? I realize that too. Also from the park, I would like to have, sometimes, actually a kind of multi-day arrangements so that visitors also stay in the area a bit longer, because then it also becomes interesting for that livability and that entrepreneur. Because that has to be balanced in a certain way so that an entrepreneur can earn a good living there, and hopefully a next generation can work and live well again, but that we also work on those qualities of the area, that we preserve them at least. Yes, and in the area of nature, we even have to improve a bit here and there still, right? That's not the fault of recreation, but yes, nature is deteriorating worldwide and in the Netherlands even doubly so. So yes, we do have a challenge there with each other, all of us.

18. How can these challenges and external factors be addressed in the future?

(Mentioned above.)

19. How does IVN currently collaborate with other organisations or stakeholders to promote tourism and nature in the region?

Well, we promote the park and our activities ourselves. While we are not a marketing organisation, as I already said, we focus on communication and education, so we do communicate, and that boundary is sometimes a bit vague. We also do some promotions like "Come to the open day," "Come do this," "Come do that," but these are really focused on activities. We work closely with entrepreneurs; for example, I have a network of hosts and

hostesses. Entrepreneurs here also take a one-time course about the park so they know what's going on and where the fun tours and recreational opportunities are. As we always say, tourists and recreational visitors don't come to my office or to me; their first contact is often through entrepreneurs. You end up in catering establishments or in a cottage park, so if those people know well what the essence is that there are certain rules (which are not there for nothing), but also that there are many beautiful places where you can experience things we can collaborate effectively. In such an area, we work very concretely together. We try to do this once a year or so with a group of 35 to 40 companies, where we get together to catch up. Furthermore, I sometimes provide training at one of those marketing organisations; if they have something, we go there with our informational materials. So, in itself, I have the idea that practical coordination is going pretty well.

20. Which stakeholders do you think are most crucial in shaping tourism and development in the region?

Well, I think we need to take a broad view towards the national park and world heritage sites. The government certainly has something to say about the parks, and furthermore, I think that provinces have the overview. Those provinces actually implement the park policy and, of course, the visions on the rural area and such; they belong there, so that is a very crucial stakeholder, right? But you have to do it indeed in collaboration with others. So I think it is important that someone will have to take the lead or take the initiative, but you have to see that you, well, polder in the Netherlands, right? I used to be a bit of an impatient little man; I have gotten a bit older, right? I sometimes thought, "Oh guys, how long is it all taking? Let's do something too." But I am now convinced that the most important thing is we have to keep looking for each other, we have to keep talking and finding solutions together. One thing that we haven't mentioned yet is that there is also a bit of natural agriculture and nature, right? Especially along the south side of the Lauwersmeer, there is a road between, and that road is now 10 meters wide. There is the national park, and on the other side, it is all intensive, very fertile, also very rich productive agricultural land. Yes, that is sometimes a thing where you get some small conflicts from how do you deal with each other, right? So you have to do it together. Yes, and furthermore, I am in favor of involving as many stakeholders as possible, and we do that from the national park. We also have a sounding board group; we don't do that that often, I think twice a year he comes to a meeting. Then there is a very diverse group; people can also just register themselves, preferably from their interest or party, but there are recreational entrepreneurs, residents, farmers, people from the

water board. Occasionally, defense also joins in, so those interests all come together. But yes, I do think that it is up to a province, perhaps with the two municipalities around the Lauwersmeer, to take control, and we also have a structure for that because we have the Lauwersmeer steering group, right? That also includes the two provinces, the two municipalities, Rijkswaterstaat, Staatsbosbeheer, and the water boards. Well, then you already have a nice first club that represents a lot of interests. That's fine; that's nice on paper, but then you still have to weave it together and make it come true in practice, and that remains a challenge, of course, because yes, there are so many parties, so many interests, right? So we also get business say, but also reproach of "Gosh, why didn't I know that?" Right? Yes, sometimes you also forget people because there are so many to involve. But I also think, let's all be proactive there; I've always been happy to ring the bell. I say, "I'm happy that you're ringing the bell along," yes, those things just happen, but let's also keep each other sharp together, right? Then we have a task together. Yes, I'm quite idealistic about it, I realize that too, but I think such a region, especially if you want to create a tourist product, that's what you really have to do together. Actually, you're not going to make it unless every resident participates in that, you know? I walk through Zoutkamp, and I just have a question as a tourist: "Gosh, where can I get a fish here?" Now that's immediately a grumpy man or woman opposite you, but yes, that should start with, "Well, if you walk here, there, and there," right? But okay, we'll never achieve that 100%, of course, and that's not necessary. But I do think that residents should be involved too. So we also have residents now and then; we also do courses, where we tell about nature, and then we hope that they are also enthusiastic and that they also convey that. So that's what IVN does; we are very keen on connecting, right? Connecting people with nature, but the nice thing about nature is that it can connect people with each other. If you do it well, people can also polarize very much, but if you do it well, it can also connect people very well with each other.

Appendix 3E: Councillor and Policy Officer

Councillor Maaïke Prins and Policy Officer Frederik Kamstra

Date: 12-12-2024

1. Can you introduce yourself and your role within the municipality?

M: My name is Maaïke Prins, I am an alderman and I have a portfolio including recreation and tourism.

F: I am Frederik Kamstra, a policy officer for recreation and tourism. Within the field of recreation and tourism, we have a division of responsibilities. My role focuses on issues that have been ongoing in the area for years. I've participated in consultations with the Core Teams and the Steering Group, providing support in various capacities. Previously, I worked on projects in areas such as Landsmeer. Currently, I am also involved in initiatives at a higher level, including projects in Dokkum. My work often intersects with organisations like Stichting Regiomarketing and Tourism, particularly regarding subsidies and related matters. Overall, my role covers a broad range of tourism-related subjects.

2. How long have you been in these roles?

M: Not that long, only since October 24th. That's a short time, that's why Frederik is here.

F: I realised that I've been in government service for 25 years, although not all of that time has been with this municipality. Since 2006, I've been working with the municipalities of Kollumerland. Later, I transitioned into my current role. It's been quite some time now, and I've gained a lot of experience over the years.

3. How would you describe the current tourism offerings in the Lauwersmeer area?

M: Yeah, that is. I think you could say it's mainly focused on nature and tranquillity. And walking and cycling and things like that.

F: Yes, the Lauwersmeer area is quite an important region for tourism. In our municipality, our largest recreation area is around IJsselmeer, which includes locations on both sides of the Lauwersmeer. On our side, there's a Landal park, the Lauwersoog Siblu campsite, and other large parks. When it comes to overnight stays, most visitors to our municipality stay in these areas, making them very important for our tourist and recreational offerings. Recently, we completed a project called Rondje Lauwersmeer, where we invested in improving facilities around the Lauwersmeer. For instance, we've developed horse trails, new cycling paths, and built a beautiful lookout tower in Kollumeroord. There are also boat docks and additional infrastructure to enhance accessibility, so a lot has been accomplished. That said, I think there's room for improvement. For example, we could make the area more attractive during the low season. The current offerings are fine, but there's still work to be done to broaden our appeal. Yesterday, we had a meeting about visitor data around the Lauwersmeer. In recent years, we've

focused a lot on the Lauwersmeer itself, but we see potential to develop the surrounding areas further what we call the “shell.” This includes places like Anjum, Wierum, or Dokkumer Nieuwe Zijlen. The idea is to not only attract visitors to the central parks but also encourage exploration of the wider region. Investments in infrastructure and facilities in these surrounding areas could enhance the overall visitor experience.

4. Do the current tourism offerings match the tourism objectives of the municipality?

M: I think the municipality is a bit too unsuitable to make a general statement about that.

F: Look, Dokkum is quite different from the Lauwersmeer area, right? But we are looking at the broader region, which naturally includes more tranquil areas, open spaces, and that kind of thing. For instance, if you compare it to the Achterhoek or further west towards the terp villages, those are very different landscapes and experiences. What stands out about the Lauwersmeer area is the sense of peace and space the nature, the birds, and the overall experience of being surrounded by natural beauty. That’s a key part of what makes this area attractive. However, visitors often combine these experiences with something completely different, like a visit to Dokkum, which offers more of a city vibe. The coastal areas are now better connected, but even so, I think we attract a similar type of visitor. That said, there are differences in accommodation types and facilities across the area, which can influence who visits and where they stay. This is a very large and diverse region, and it’s not as if we can just label it as something like Giethoorn, where everything revolves around water-based tourism. Instead, we have a mix of water-based activities, villages, and cities, offering a very broad product. This diversity can sometimes make it challenging to decide where to focus. For example, in discussions, the question often comes up: “What is the Eiffel Tower of this area?” what’s the iconic feature we want to highlight? It’s a tricky balance. On the one hand, you want to create a clear identity for the region, but on the other hand, you have to accommodate the diverse needs of many stakeholders, including municipalities and businesses. Our region is so broad and diverse that it allows visitors to experience something different every day. That’s a strength, but it also makes focusing efforts more difficult. When you ask, “What should the focus be?” the answer depends on the type of business. Each company already caters to different target groups. For example, a fine-dining restaurant targets a different audience than a snack bar or a wok restaurant. It’s not about judgment; it’s about meeting the needs of all these varied audiences. That diversity is part of what makes our region so unique.

5. In your opinion, are the current tourism offerings well-suited for the type of visitors the region currently attracts?

M: Well, look, you can always notice little things that could be better. There are no toilets on the way next to the whole lake when cycling around, that kind of thing for example.

F: First of all, I think there's a clear lack of certain facilities in the Lauwersmeer area. For example, there's a need for more amenities like toilets, coffee, tea, and catering options. These are important for visitors, especially cyclists who are out exploring the area. However, cycling is only enjoyable when the weather is good. If it's raining, what would a restaurant in the area do? Most facilities are concentrated in certain locations, such as around Burum or Lauwersoog. There are some amenities, but they aren't always open, and the existing catering options are limited. That's a gap that needs to be addressed. I've heard similar feedback before, that improvements are possible and necessary to make the area more welcoming for visitors.

6. What is the desired state or long-term vision of the municipality for tourism in the Lauwersmeer area?

F: A few years ago, we developed a tourist vision in collaboration with a stichting and all the municipalities. The goal was ambitious—50% more visitors, overnight stays, and spending. This aligns with the fact that our area is relatively young in terms of tourism. Unlike regions like the Veluwe, Drenthe, or Zeeland, we don't have a long tradition of tourism. It's only been in the past 10 years or so that tourism, including overnight stays, has started to play a significant role here. This growth brings benefits, but we're still at the beginning. There are already areas in the Netherlands, such as Giethoorn and Amsterdam, that experience significant overcrowding and nuisance. Residents in these places sometimes feel that their own lives and space are being disrupted. Fortunately, that's not an issue for us yet, and we'd like to continue growing responsibly without creating such problems. Our area is large enough to handle growth without causing major disruptions. However, there are examples where things could get challenging, such as in smaller villages like Moddergat, where limited parking and facilities can become a problem. This is why we need to be mindful about the type of tourists we attract and the facilities we develop. We don't want to attract a target group that doesn't align with our vision for the region. Growth needs to happen on a scale that fits our region and municipalities. We don't need large amusement parks or other developments that would feel out of place here. Instead, we're focusing on small-scale growth, such as expanding bed-and-breakfasts and other locally appropriate accommodations. These kinds of initiatives can contribute to the economy without

overwhelming the area. At the same time, we need to remain attentive to residents' concerns. For example, residents value peace and quiet, and they may notice an increase in visitor numbers, particularly in terms of parking and activity levels. To avoid conflicts, we aim to concentrate tourism activities in specific areas rather than spreading them throughout the entire region. This approach allows us to preserve the tranquillity and natural beauty of the Lauwersmeer area while still achieving sustainable growth.

7. To what extent is the municipality prepared to invest in tourism offerings in the region?

M: I think we're already doing quite a bit of that. The money is rolling in pretty well at the moment.

F: It depends on how you define tourism, right? For example, investments in cycle paths and footpaths might not always be explicitly labelled as "tourist-focused," but they are intended to enhance the visitor experience. Similarly, projects like the renovation of Dokkum, where the streets were upgraded with cobblestones, aren't just for residents; they also benefit tourists. So, what are we really aiming for? A significant amount of money does go into tourism-related initiatives, even if it's not always obvious. At times, we ask ourselves, "What exactly are we doing for tourism?" But when you start to think about it, you realise there's actually quite a lot happening. For instance, in areas like Moddergat, we've been working on projects like aligning new cycle paths with the dike reinforcement. Similarly, in Lauwersmeer, a watchtower was built in collaboration with various partners. We take ownership and management of these facilities, which means we carry the responsibility for their upkeep. Additionally, investments have been made in visitor centres and the restoration of historic buildings. Often, these initiatives are the result of collaborations. For example, a local organisation or stakeholder might approach us with a proposal, and we'll support their idea, think along with them, and provide assistance. In many cases, we also take the lead in deciding how to move forward.

8. What would you like to see developed to improve tourism in the Lauwersmeer area and distinguish it from other destinations?

F: I think if you look at areas like Sneek, they focus heavily on sailing and activities on the water. Here, in contrast, it's much more about cycling, walking, and some boating, but cycling and walking are really the main activities. That's a defining characteristic of this area. When I reflect on it, I think the "roof of the sky" is a unique label for this region. It really distinguishes Lauwersmeer and what it offers. From what I've heard, this concept genuinely attracts visitors—they come here specifically for that experience. Just yesterday, I heard anecdotes about people travelling all the way from Breda, spending a day in Lauwersmeer, and then driving back. Many

even choose to stay overnight, which shows how appealing the area is. The "roof of the sky" concept, combined with the birdlife and natural environment, is a big draw. Personally, I'm not a bird enthusiast, but many people are. The birdwatching experience here attracts a significant group of visitors. On top of that, places like the seal centre add to the area's appeal. And, of course, who doesn't enjoy having fish at Lauwersoog? It's a staple experience for visitors and residents alike. The diversity of attractions is striking. You have areas where the focus is on peace, nature, and minimal disturbance—perfect for birdwatching or enjoying a quiet walk. Then there are areas with busier activities, such as sailing or visiting local restaurants. This aligns with the policy for the region, which seeks to balance quiet, undisturbed natural areas with zones that can accommodate more activity and visitor interaction. The Lauwersmeer area caters to a wide variety of groups, offering something for everyone. That variety is one of its strengths. Even though we sometimes wonder about adding a unique element to make the region stand out even more, I think the current strengths—peace, nature, and the birdlife experience—are so compelling that they simply need to be expanded and enhanced.

9. How do you intend to maintain the balance between tranquillity and the natural character of the area in the event of an increase in tourists?

F: I think zoning is important—it helps balance the busier, more concentrated areas with those where nature takes priority. Some parts of the region are best suited for quiet and undisturbed nature experiences, while others can handle more visitor activity. However, there are always boundaries to consider. Entrepreneurs and others often push for more development, but we need to ensure that the areas dedicated to peace and space remain intact. The region itself is large enough to accommodate a significant number of tourists. Activities like cycling and walking can be well-supported without overcrowding. That said, it's not about trying to handle 100,000 visitors at once—it's about sustainable growth. Some parts of the water and surrounding areas aren't even accessible, and that's okay. Not every corner of the region needs to be open for visitors. There are concerns about defence plans, though I'm not entirely sure where our municipality stands on this. It's something we're discussing, as it might bring changes that aren't necessarily welcome. For instance, if these plans are implemented close to the region, they could impact the area's tranquillity and appeal. That's a topic we're keeping an eye on because it's both a potential threat and an opportunity depending on how it's handled. On a more positive note, there are developments aimed at enhancing visitor experiences, such as improved walking paths and better access for horseback riding. These projects can strike a balance between

preserving the natural environment and allowing people to enjoy it. It's about guiding visitors in a way that lets them experience the beauty of the area while respecting its delicate balance.

10. How important is it for the municipality that tourism makes a valuable contribution to the region not only in the summer months but also in the low season? And how do you want to achieve this?

M: In the Lauwersmeer area, you see the holiday parks and the visitors' centre as key locations for tourism. These are the places where people come to stay and gather. Over the years, we've been working to expand and improve these facilities to accommodate visitors better. One of the things we've been advocating for is an increase in visitor numbers, which is good for the region. However, this doesn't just mean building new accommodations. It's not only about expansion—it's also about how we manage this growth sustainably. That said, there's always the question of how far we can go. After all, tourism here is largely tied to the holiday periods in the Netherlands, which limits how much we can spread out the demand. The challenge lies in finding a balance that works within these constraints.

F: Yes, especially in the winter period, it's a challenge. I was there yesterday, and it's quite clear that the off-season can feel a bit dull—it's a quieter time. So, how do you address that? You need to offer something to attract visitors even in the winter months. Walking and cycling are, of course, always possible, but beyond that, it's important to think about what else could be added. That said, we shouldn't go to extremes—there's no need for an amusement park or anything like that, as it wouldn't fit the character of the area. I think this is a key question, but maybe it's not just for us to answer—it's something entrepreneurs in the area should also consider. They could think about how to adapt or expand their offerings to make the off-season more appealing. That said, there's also something to be said for the peace and tranquillity of the region during the winter. Not every place needs to have constant activity—it's about finding the right balance. For some, the quiet off-season can be just as attractive as the busier summer months.

11. What is the role of the municipality in strengthening marketing and promotion for the Lauwersmeer area?

M: Yes, you should actually ask RMT NOF right away how they do that, because they do that on our behalf.

F: You shouldn't have two or three organisations working separately in the same space—that never works well. Currently, we have the management team of the region handling certain responsibilities, particularly beyond the subsidies. They work with Visit Friesland and Visit Wadden. While there is collaboration, it could perhaps be more robust. In the Lauwersmeer area, there are contacts and coordination efforts between organisations, but I'm not directly involved in those discussions, so I don't have full visibility into everything. I hope they're taking these collaborations into account properly and ensuring that things align well. In the past, we've had similar efforts, like in the Moddergat area. There, on a smaller scale, we organised promotions and marketing actions. Staatsbosbeheer also carries out activities through the National Park framework. So, there is quite a bit happening—it's not just a passive effort. Groningen also does a lot of work in this regard, but I'm not sure how well the coordination is managed between all parties. That might be an area where improvements could be made. Perhaps a better structure or process for organising and aligning efforts is needed. For marketing specifically, our municipality handles it through the regional MT, which is part of our broader efforts to promote and develop tourism in a cohesive way.

12. How do you think marketing and promotion can be used to promote tourism in the region?

M: Well, you need to make sure people know what there is to experience in an area—that remains important. Marketing plays a key role in this. You might hear people say that marketing doesn't work, but I believe it does. People often discover a destination through a story they hear, whether through word of mouth or another channel. That first impression matters, and getting it right is crucial. However, marketing shouldn't just be the responsibility of the government. It's something that also involves other stakeholders, such as businesses and organisations in the region.

F: Entrepreneurs especially need to take the lead, because otherwise, we risk missing the boat. They need to recognise the importance of their role—not everyone sees it that way yet, but it's crucial. We're working for the entire region, for everyone, and it can't just be the responsibility of governments. Entrepreneurs have to be involved because they're the ones with businesses directly impacted by tourism. Their active participation is essential to ensure success for the whole region.

13. What are the current challenges in the region?

M: The expansion plans of the defence in the area present a significant challenge. Organising around that and managing the associated issues is a critical part of the discussion. The question

is, how do you keep the area in order now, and how do you ensure it remains so in the future? Sustainability is key. With all the new constructions, renovations, and developments that have been implemented, the challenge is maintaining them in a way that keeps the area attractive. While this might not be an immediate concern, it will undoubtedly become important in the slightly longer term.

F: Yes, we've made progress, but it's not always clear in my mind how everything fits together. We've created a future agenda with specific tasks, and while it's a good framework, the real challenge lies in working together effectively. For example, when you look at water quality, there are already pressing issues like salinization and the discharge of polluted water into the sea. These are significant environmental concerns, and they're closely tied to recreation and tourism. These challenges require long-term solutions, and they're not something we can ignore. Maintaining existing infrastructure is also critical, especially in areas where recreational activities are key. While there's still some work to be done in certain places, I don't see any major new investments happening at the moment. The focus seems to be more on sustaining and improving what we already have.

14. What are external factors that hinder tourism in the region?

M: Defense, then. Other than that there aren't that many external things.

F: It's not really an external factor, but the liveability of the entire area, including the surrounding villages, is a significant issue. While it might not be classified as an external factor, it's closely linked to demographic developments in the region. There's also the connection to local facilities—small businesses and services, which are struggling. These facilities are vital for the community, and they contribute to the overall appeal of the region for both residents and visitors. It's a multi-faceted challenge, with different perspectives to consider. Additionally, the infrastructure around the Lauwersmeer, including the villages, could use attention. For instance, Lauwersoog is a very attractive area, but it also represents a significant uncertainty due to various factors influencing its development and future.

15. What are specific challenges and external factors that hinder progress towards the desired tourism state?

M: That comes back to fishing, right? If that stops then Laurensoog loses its appeal, I think.

F: And the upcoming defence plans in the area.

16. How important is sustainable tourism development in the municipality's vision and how is this included in policy decisions?

M: Sustainability is always important, both in terms of facilities and the area itself. It's about maintaining the infrastructure and environment in good condition—that's one aspect of sustainability. But sustainability also means avoiding extreme forms of tourism. For example, we don't want to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors in a way that overwhelms the region. It's about finding the right balance and ensuring that tourism remains manageable and aligned with the area's character. This makes it crucial to always consider where the boundaries lie and how they influence the area.

F: Sustainability is always an important topic, and yesterday we discussed how organisations are addressing related issues, such as light pollution. That's already on the agenda, and while progress has been made, there's still more to do. A new project is in the pipeline to tackle this further, which I think is a great initiative. Sustainability is something that should always be integrated into the way we work—it's just part of doing business today. It's about constantly examining the boundaries of what's possible, what's necessary, and what's acceptable. There are still open questions, though, about how some projects impact the region. For example, I'm not sure about the latest developments regarding solar parks, like the one at Hogeland—whether that's progressing or not. Windmills are another topic. Would we even want windmills here? What impact would they have on the experience of the area? These discussions lean more toward the sustainability of the surrounding areas rather than the Lauwersmeer area itself. But both perspectives are essential when considering the region's future and ensuring it remains attractive, functional, and sustainable for everyone involved.

17. How will the municipality ensure that environmental protection and cultural heritage preservation remain as tourism develops?

F: I don't think it's solely our task—it's much broader than that. A lot is at stake, especially for entrepreneurs. They're the ones hosting the tourists and visitors, and they have the most influence and the most to gain or lose from how the area develops. Entrepreneurs play a crucial role in ensuring the area remains attractive to visitors. If we don't work together to maintain and enhance what makes this region unique, those tourists could simply go elsewhere. It's essential to preserve and promote the distinctive qualities of the Lauwersmeer area—things that set it apart from other regions, like the Veluwe. This uniqueness is what keeps people coming back.

18. How does the municipality currently work together with local entrepreneurs, nature organisations and residents to shape the tourism offerings?

M: We do nothing else! Collaboration is what we do as a municipality.

F: Yes, I often think about this in my work as well. The municipality is primarily responsible for providing basic infrastructure, such as cycle paths, walking trails, and network junctions. These are essential foundations. Beyond that, we often collaborate on special projects, like the development around new sluices or incorporating cultural heritage into regional plans. These types of projects are typically long-term, taking several years to complete, and the municipality actively participates in them. For example, there is pressure to temporarily address certain issues, such as increased checks or noise reduction. While we don't currently have a dedicated municipal subsidy scheme, we do collaborate through joint entities that have funding mechanisms. These partnerships allow us to implement systems or initiatives that might not be possible for the municipality alone. One of the largest ongoing projects in our municipality is related to the Lauwersmeer area, particularly the development of a fish migration river. This is not just about sailing or recreational use but also involves fish migration, ecological restoration, and even cycling infrastructure. It's a massive endeavour that represents significant municipal investment in the area. However, many of these initiatives don't carry the tourism label. Yet, in reality, they greatly benefit the tourism sector. Basic infrastructure like cycle paths and walking trails enhances the visitor experience and makes the area more attractive, even if they're not explicitly branded as "tourism projects." These investments demonstrate the municipality's commitment to supporting both the region and its visitors.

19. Which stakeholders do you think are most crucial to achieving the desired state of tourism?

M: Actually already said, entrepreneurs.

F: And the villages around it.

20. In what ways can the municipality strengthen coordination and cooperation between these stakeholders to create a better tourism offerings?

F: I firmly believe in networking—it's crucial. This means connecting people, aligning with the vision, and understanding what everyone contributes. Bringing the parties in the area together is essential. When people know and understand each other's roles, a lot of good things can emerge from that collaboration. It's about ensuring that the initiative comes from the stakeholders themselves. We're not going to impose things top-down or in a rigid manner. It has to come from

them—that's the most important part. When they take the lead, it adds real value and ensures that the results are meaningful and sustainable. Our role is to facilitate this process, to help provide the conditions for collaboration and success. But the beauty lies in the fact that the initiative and ownership rest with them.

21. Is there anything else you would like to share with me for my research?

M: Good to keep in mind that when you talk about marketing, it's not just about the sales side but also the product side. So if you write something like that, then just a marketing plan is not enough. You still need a product.

F: I think the people of the Leisure Region are already aware of what is missing and what needs to be done: the high season needs to be extended. That is the main issue. Furthermore, I think there is enormous potential for this area in the future. Many people now go south for a holiday, but with global warming this will become less and less. Then people will want to go north. So we can seize an opportunity here. So we can offer much more here, and much more. More places for campers, for example? That is the type of people we are looking for in the Lauwersmeer area.

Appendix 3F: Tourists (long)

Johan van der Meer (tourist)

Date: 18-11-2024

1. What is your name?

Johan van der Meer.

2. What is your age?

I am 62 years old.

3. Where are you from?

Bathmen in the Netherlands. Close to Deventer.

4. What is your marital status and do you have children? If so, what are their ages?

I'm married to your aunt and have two children, aged 30 and 28. Both are boys.

5. Have you visited alone, with family or with friends?

I visited with my wife a few years ago, 2019 if I recall correctly. Both my children are way too old to still go with us on vacation, haha.

6. How many times have you visited the Lauwersmeer area?

Only once, that one time a few years ago. We had seen everything by then.

7. How would you describe tourism offerings in the area?

We stayed in a chalet for 1 night, which was next to the lake which we had booked online. We are always looking for relaxing experiences with a lot of nature. The region ticked these boxes as it was very quiet and cosy. I would say there is not a whole lot to do but we enjoyed walking and cycling. For these two things I would say the tourism things there are good as there is a lot of space, but that was about it.

8. Which activities or experiences have you enjoyed the most here? What made them stand out?

For us it was mostly just walking and cycling around the area, we did not go to certain activities or attractions. We heard of the dark night park? Or dark sky park. But we did not go there. We just liked the environment for its relaxing atmosphere. The nature was what made the region stand out, and just its calmness in general.

9. Are there any activities, attractions or services you would have liked to see in the area but were missing?

I would have liked to see more restaurants. There was not a lot of choice now, in the end we went to Lauwersoog to get something to eat. Also information was hard to find about the area, I guess it's because there is not a whole lot there anyway? Finding things online was not straightforward but we just used google maps in the end. I don't know if there are any fixed cycling routes for example, we just did one circle around the whole lake. That is something that could be improved.

10. How would you rate the quality of the existing attractions and services in the area?

I'd give it a 6 out of 10 I think. The natural landscape is beautiful, it's not busy at all which is good and you can relax there. But the services and just information in general is not really present in a good way, so I would not give it a pass.

11. Do you feel there are enough options for dining, accommodation or leisure activities?

Restaurant options are quite limited, there is not that much. Accommodation is fine I think? I believe there was a big Landal park as well, we stayed in a chalet. Leisure activities are not really present right? Just nature based activities but nothing special.

12. How accessible do you find the area's main attractions, both in terms of physical access and the ease of finding information about them?

What are the main attractions again? I guess that the region in general is fine to access, we went there by car. Getting around then on foot or on bike was fine as well. And as mentioned before, information was not abundant, there was not 1 clear place to find information. That could be improved, definitely.

13. If you've visited similar destinations, how does the Lauwersmeer area compare in terms of offerings?

I don't know if you can call it similar, we just went once to the Veluwe? It's a nature park as well but I don't think it is similar. But there was more to do there, but that region is also just closer to other places in general. There is nothing close to the Lauwersmeer region. Maybe Dokkum? We once went there, but looking at what is close to the region that is about it.

14. What kind of travel experiences do you usually seek (e.g., nature, cultural immersion, relaxation, adventure), and does the area meet these expectations?

We usually seek a mix of nature and relaxation-friendly activities. The Lauwersmeer meets these expectations!

15. How important are amenities like comfortable accommodations, convenient transport, or diverse dining options for you?

Very important, we're also a bit older already now so a comfortable bed is very important haha! Convenient transport as well but we just go by car. I don't know if the region is accessible by public transport? Dining as well, but as mentioned before there was not much choice in the area when we went there.

16. When traveling with children, are there particular facilities or activities you look for that influence your choice of destination?

No kids.

17. What has your experience with local hospitality been like here?

Apart from the host of our chalet we did not make contact with the locals really. Nothing special to mention at least, the minimum what you expect was there of course. So the service at a restaurant is what I mean.

18. Would you recommend this destination to friends or family?

Yes if they would be looking for the same thing as we did, but I think that most people stay for longer periods and would want something to do, at least more than is present at the Lauwersmeer area. So I don't think I would recommend it in that case. But for older couples without kids and with their own car I think it would be nice to go here.

19. What improvements or changes would you like to see in the area to make it a better tourist destination?

I think the main thing that should be addressed is probably the marketing and information right? While I think there could be more to do here, its emptiness and nature experience is also what makes it unique. I think you can say that Holland is pretty full right now, and here you can really escape that. So marketing I would say, as people don't know about this area at all. So that is what I would say. It's fine like this, maybe do improve services such as restaurants as well, but maybe that will come as more tourists arrive.

20. Are there specific activities or attractions you think would enhance the experience of tourists if introduced here?

If the WEC opens next year, that will definitely enhance the experience of tourists.

21. If you could change one thing about the area to better meet your travel needs, what would it be?

For me more and better restaurants, but I also have a bit more money to spend than the average tourist I think.

Challenges and External Factors

22. Have you encountered any specific challenges during your visit, such as difficulties with transport, available services or access to information?

Yes, finding information online was a bit tricky as I mentioned before. Public transport I don't know as I did not use that, available services were mostly fine too.

23. How could these challenges be addressed in your opinion?

A single place with all the information of the region and information about hotels, B&B's and etc. could be very good for the region I think. Maybe some marketing using commercials as well, so people can find the region in the first place.

Sustainability

24. How important is sustainable tourism for you when choosing a travel destination?

We like nature based tourism locations for our trips, but honestly if it's sustainable or not is not that important to us. Sounds a bit contradicting I know, but we also eat a lot of meat for example so we can't really say sustainable options are important for us.

25. Have you noticed any sustainable practices in the area?

I would say the whole region is focused on sustainability right? But it's not like I have seen solar panels on every roof for example. So no I have to not noticed any special or unique sustainable practices.

26. Do you feel that environmental protection is adequately prioritised in this area?

I don't know, I think so when I looked around me in the region. I don't know if the region is subject to special laws of preservation rules.

Geert van den Broek (tourist)

Date: 20-11-2024

1. What is your name?

My name is Geert van den Broek.

2. What is your age?

49 years old.

3. Where are you from?

Ommen.

4. What is your marital status and do you have children? If so, what are their ages?

I'm married to my wife Helena and we have a daughter who is 14 and a son who is 16.

5. Have you visited alone, with family or with friends?

We visited together with the whole family 2 years ago in the spring.

6. How many times have you visited the Lauwersmeer area?

Just that one time. We stayed in a house of Landal Esonstad.

7. How would you describe tourism offerings in the area?

It's a great place for nature and outdoor activities but there wasn't much else to do, especially for teenagers. We liked the peaceful atmosphere but the kids got bored after a while. So the region is quite large but very empty in our opinion. The kids who were younger then, liked staying in the Landal park the most actually. We went out with a bike usually.

8. Which activities or experiences have you enjoyed the most here? What made them stand out?

We went to the dark sky park one night and we thought it was great! It was really beautiful at night to see the sky so clearly. Lauwersmeer is probably the only place in the country where you can experience this, so this definitely made it stand out.

9. Are there any activities, attractions or services you would have liked to see in the area but were missing?

We definitely missed having more things to do for kids their age. A visitor centre with some interactive exhibits maybe could be interesting for them. Just overall in general more activities would be good for the region I think, to attract more visitors.

10. How would you rate the quality of the existing attractions and services in the area?

The attractions were not really present, but I guess that is the reason the area stands out. The natural environment is lovely though. So if you would ask me to give a grade I think that would be hard to say. The calmness of the region is what makes it unique. But the available services could use a boost for sure, they were a bit outdated and things such as information provision was not really present.

11. Do you feel there are enough options for dining, accommodation or leisure activities?

I think there could be more of everything. For dining we mostly just made our own food in our house, and the final night we went out for dinner in Lauwersoog. But I remember that there was not much choice nearby when reserving a table beforehand. Accommodations are enough right now I think, there is another Landal park in the region at least. Activities could be more, especially if you are with kids. Our kids were a bit bored.

12. How accessible do you find the area's main attractions, both in terms of physical access and the ease of finding information about them?

Physical access was fine, we came by car. For information we relied mostly on Johan haha, he told us about the region in the first place. For other information or activities we looked on the official website.

13. If you've visited similar destinations, how does the Lauwersmeer area compare in terms of offerings?

We've been to Ameland in the past, at least that it is being treated more with respect to nature than Lauwersmeer. If it could be called similar then I would say Ameland is more fun and there is more to do. It's just more geared towards tourism in general.

14. What kind of travel experiences do you usually seek (e.g., nature, cultural immersion, relaxation, adventure), and does the area meet these expectations?

We look for activities to keep the kids busy of course, they need some fun as well. We're usually fine with more relaxing activities such as walking. But we would also like to see some interesting sites. So that is where the dark sky park for example was really interesting.

15. How important are amenities like comfortable accommodations, convenient transport, or diverse dining options for you?

Very important. Who does not like that right? Our house was nice, we booked that ourselves. We go everywhere by car or plane usually, so not public transport if that is what you mean. Few good restaurants in the region should be fine for us too, as we usually cook ourselves except for the final night.

16. When traveling with children, are there particular facilities or activities you look for that influence your choice of destination?

Yes definitely, but when we went there we thought the kids would appreciate the nature a bit more but that wasn't really the case. But they can be very stubborn of course because of their

age. We also thought that they would enjoy the Landal park a bit more. They used the swimming pool only once and they felt a bit too old for the climbing park. But oh well, they had their phones which they liked very much.

17. What has your experience with local hospitality been like here?

The people were very friendly. Friendly staff members of the Landal park, they were all teenagers I think by the way! The people who guided us to the dark sky park were friendly too. Furthermore we did not have that many interactions with the locals.

18. Would you recommend this destination to friends or family?

Yes for sure, but not with teenagers I think.

19. What improvements or changes would you like to see in the area to make it a better tourist destination?

More activities for children in general would be good if you want to attract more families. Apart from that I don't really know.

20. Are there specific activities or attractions you think would enhance the experience of tourists if introduced here?

Maybe more nature-based activities? The region is already geared towards that but even more would be good I think. I can't give you an example what though.

21. If you could change one thing about the area to better meet your travel needs, what would it be?

I don't know apart from what I just said.

22. Have you encountered any specific challenges during your visit, such as difficulties with transport, available services or access to information?

No not really actually, we came by car so not with the bus or something. Information was fine, the reception of the park had some booklets but other than that Johan gave us tips and we searched online ourselves.

23. How could these challenges be addressed in your opinion?

(No response)

24. How important is sustainable tourism for you when choosing a travel destination?

It's important to us but not the top priority. We do appreciate holidays that care about the environment.

25. Have you noticed any sustainable practices in the area?

Not really, did not see particular sustainable things but the whole area is nature-based so I think it is very sustainable.

26. Do you feel that environmental protection is adequately prioritised in this area?

It seems so but I don't know.

Appendix 3G: Tourists (short)

1. What brought you to the Lauwersmeer area?

1. Relaxing atmosphere and quietness
2. Cycling and hiking through the area
3. Enjoy nature in this quiet region
4. Cycling and hiking through the area
5. Nice area for a family getaway
6. Cycling and hiking through the area
7. Cycling and hiking through the area
8. Family weekend
9. Quiet retreat after a busy work period
10. Visit this nature park that we've not seen before
11. Weekend with my partner
12. Combining this visit with a trip to Dokkum

13. For the wildlife and nature
14. To take pictures of nature and animals as a photographer
15. Family weekend
16. Close to the Wadden Sea
17. Family weekend
18. For the wildlife and nature
19. Cycling and hiking through the area
20. Relaxing atmosphere and quietness
21. Enjoy nature in this quiet region

2. How helpful did you find the online information about the Lauwersmeer area when planning your visit?

1. Minimal information
2. Found cycling maps after extra searching
3. Good enough
4. Could be improved
5. Did not use any websites
6. Hard to find accommodations
7. Not clear what is the official site
8. Social media was basic
9. Official website was fine
10. Basic information present
11. No clear overview of dining options
12. Not up to date
13. Google maps was our main source

14. Did not use any websites
15. Minimal information
16. Clear what is present
17. Very helpful
18. Not up to date
19. Could be improved
20. Did not use any websites
21. Good enough

3. What were your expectations of the area and are these expectations met?

1. Beautiful nature area, expectations met
2. Hoped for more family activities
3. Hoped to enjoy nature, expectations met
4. Wanted more attractions
5. Enough family activities
6. Pleasantly surprised
7. Hiking trails better than expected
8. Needed more signage in the region
9. Met expectations for a peaceful retreat
10. More dining options wished
11. Met expectations of nature retreat
12. Quiet getaway met expectations
13. Hoped to enjoy nature, expectations met
14. Hoped to take nice photo's, expectations met

15. Expected more nearby activities
16. Beautiful nature area, expectations met
17. Hoped for more family activities
18. Great for birdwatching
19. Felt very remote and quiet
20. Met expectations of great nature area
21. Expected more activities

4. What current tourism offerings did you experience positively and why?

1. Walking and cycling paths, pleasant to use and maintained well
2. Smooth, well-marked cycling paths
3. The peaceful environment for its relaxing atmosphere
4. Lauwersoog and walking next to the Wadden Sea
5. The Landal park, good activities and good restaurant
6. Walking and cycling paths, go through beautiful nature
7. Great atmosphere in general of the whole area
8. Natural beauty of the landscape
9. The Wadden Sea, next to the region and easy to visit
10. Eco-friendly region, great natural beauty
11. Quietness of the whole region, to relax
12. The Wadden Sea nearby, for its beauty
13. Walking and cycling options
14. The quietness and present animals
15. Authentic and untouched feel of everything

16. Cycling around the whole lake, beautiful trip
17. The Landal park, activities for the kids
18. Eco-friendly region, great natural beauty
19. Well-marked cycling paths through the region
20. Cozy local restaurants, though limited opening hours
21. Bird species diversity

5. Do you feel there are enough options for dining, accommodation or activities?

1. Limited options but enough for short stay
2. More dining options, not much open now
3. Few choices for families
4. Decent accommodation options, more activities is preferable
5. More activities and dining options needed
6. Few choices in general
7. There are enough options
8. More kids attractions needed, better restaurants
9. Dining options are fine, 2 Landal parks is enough
10. Not during the low season as of now
11. Good accommodation options, but the rest lacking
12. Enough for quiet getaway, not more than that
13. More organised tours and restaurants
14. Suitable for nature-focused visits but not more
15. Could be more of everything, bit boring now
16. Enough as of now

17. Could be more, but acceptable now
18. Enough accommodations, limited kids activities and dining options
19. Fine if you seek nature
20. Dining and activities are fine, nothing unique
21. Some good spots, boring for long stays

6. Are there any tourism offerings you feel are missing or could be improved?

1. Restaurants opening hours are limited now
2. Missing a central information centre
3. Not really
4. Better public transport
5. Everything feels outdated
6. More supermarkets
7. Increase eco-tourism
8. An app for the region
9. Better signage, not everywhere as clear
10. Longer restaurant hours
11. More signage for hidden spots
12. Nature-themed playgrounds for kids
13. Not really
14. More tours, also in winter
15. Wider variety of accommodations
16. Not really
17. Even more focus on sustainability

18. Landal parks could be even bigger
19. Not really
20. More restaurants
21. More activities in general

Appendix 4: Implementation plan prototypes

Extending the high season and diversifying activities (addressing gap 1)
Actions to be taken: • Create low-season events and activities • Implement Arrange to bundle packages • Support local businesses to adopt a year-round tourism mindset
Involved: • Local businesses in the whole region • Municipality (relevant policy officers) • RMT NOF / Vrijetijdsregio (marketing, joint campaigns, facilitating cooperation) • Arrange and its owners (implementing package deals and bookings)
Necessary changes: • Shared off-season tourism calendars • Targeted marketing • Collaboration on package deals to ensure fair and better profits • Shift in local mindset to view low season months as opportunities
Budget indication: • ?
Timeline: • Short-term (0–6 months): meetings with local business and other relevant stakeholders to set up plans • Medium-term (6–12 months): work out new tourism plans and packages • Long-term (after 12 months): implement and execute new plans
Improving collaboration with Groningen (addressing gap 2)
Actions to be taken: • Form a tourism task force with Noardeast-Fryslân and Het Hogeland • Create a shared roadmap for tourism, marketing, events and infrastructure • Align branding so visitors see the Lauwersmeer region as one
Involved: • Municipalities of Noardeast-Fryslân and Het Hogeland • RMT NOF / Vrijetijdsregio • Visit Groningen • Local stakeholders, nature groups, marketing experts
Necessary changes: • Shared plans outlining common tourism goals • Unified signage, brochures, website and region identity • Joint event planning and data-sharing
Budget indication: • ?
Timeline: • Short-term (0–6 months): meetings to form task force, agree on shared goals/brand • Medium-term (6–12 months): coordinate tourism and events, align budgets • Long-term (after 12 months): implement fully integrated shared services for the region

Creating a strong regional brand and improve cooperation (addressing gap 3)
Actions to be taken: • Create a unified online website listing all tourism activities, events, amenities and facilities • Design new and unique brand with a shared logo, colours and style • Expand RMT NOF/Vrijetijdsregio efforts by offering local incentives for tourism projects
Involved: • RMT NOF / Vrijetijdsregio (brand coordination, marketing activities) • Groningen and its relevant stakeholders • Local businesses (restaurants, B&Bs, boat tours etc.) • Municipalities (signage guidelines, funding support)
Necessary changes: • Centralised brand style for all marketing • Single website showcasing the entire Lauwersmeer region and what there is to do • Coordination between businesses to insert the website with information
Budget indication: • ?
Timeline: • Short-term (0–6 months): finalise brand identity, begin website creation • Medium-term (6–12 months): launch online portal, install consistent signage • Long-term (after 12 months): collect visitor feedback and refine brand materials

Defining more target market strategies (addressing gap 4)
Actions to be taken: • Conduct market segmentation and adapt offerings (insight seekers, remote workers, families) • Enhance existing nature education to include family-friendly programmes • Design flexible workstation packages with reliable Wi-Fi and easy booking options
Involved: • Municipalities Noardeast-Fryslân and Het Hogeland • Local businesses • RMT NOF / Vrijetijdsregio (marketing, promotions) • Groningen and its relevant stakeholders
Necessary changes: • Market research to clarify visitor motivations and segment demands • Adjusted facilities (desks, kid-friendly things) and content (workstation packages, family tours) • Targeted promotional campaigns for each segment
Budget indication: • ?
Timeline: • Short-term (0–6 months): conduct market analysis, prioritise key segments • Medium-term (6–12 months): roll out small pilot packages, collect visitor feedback • Long-term (after 12 months): refine offerings, expand campaigns

Improving tourism infrastructure and accessibility (addressing gap 5)	
Actions to be taken:	• Add or upgrade tourism facilities, sheltered rest areas and clear route signage with QR codes • Launch (or improve) a local shuttle or bus service linking the region and its key attractions • Maintain consistent route marking and safety checks for popular hiking and cycling paths
Involved:	• Municipalities Noardeast-Fryslân and Het Hogeland • Transport providers Qbuzz and/or (potential) local shuttle operators
Necessary changes:	• Facility upgrades at popular tourist spots • Potential feasibility study on weekend or seasonal shuttle service • Integration of route signage with online info systems
Budget indication:	• ?
Timeline:	• Short-term (0–6 months): identify priority sites for tourism facility and signage improvements, plan shuttle routes • Medium-term (6–12 months): improve identified tourism facilities, open pilot shuttle, assess user satisfaction • Long-term (after 12 months): evaluate results, expand or refine services
Embracing local sustainability (addressing gap 6)	
Actions to be taken:	• Encourage restaurants to source fresh products from nearby farmers/fishermen/others, supported by small municipal grants • Offer eco badges on Arrangie or new websites to highlight green efforts • Expand existing nature education to promote topics like sustainable farming and hospitality
Involved:	• Local businesses (restaurants, shops, accommodations) • Municipalities (providing grants and guiding sustainability standards) • IVN (nature education programmes) • RMT NOF / Vrijetijdsregio (marketing incentives and help, eco labelling)
Necessary changes:	• Stronger ties with local suppliers and producers • Less plastic, more recycling and better energy efficiency • Public acknowledgement or awards for businesses reaching green milestones
Budget indication:	• ?
Timeline:	• Short-term (0–6 months): set up initial plans for green initiatives, define eco-badge criteria, meetings with IVN • Medium-term (6–12 months): begin awarding grants, highlight sustainability badges, expand IVN's environmental education • Long-term (after 12 months): track progress, share success stories, improve or increase green targets

