Making a tourist destination: The case of Giethoorn

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Abstract
Tourism is a place-based phenomenon. Touristic places are often referred to as tourist destinations. This research looks at the strategies used to make a place a tourist destination, using a social constructivist approach. With this approach, social processes are of importance in the place-making process. Furthermore, places are seen as more than a location. A specific place was chosen as a case study. This case study is Giethoorn as this is a place often visited by tourists. By interviewing tourism stakeholders, doing observations in Giethoorn and by analysing promotional materials in a content analysis, data was gathered to see what strategies were used to portray Giethoorn as a tourist destination. The data shows that the place-makers in Giethoorn are the tourism stakeholders but also the tourists and inhabitants. They shape Giethoorn into a tourist destination through image creation, promotion, conservation of the landscape and by making adaptions to the landscape. Examples of these place-making strategies are promoting a specific image of Giethoorn and conserving the image through a protected townscape policy. According to the results, goals and strategies differ between stakeholders. However, in the end, their strategies all contribute to making and keeping the place Giethoorn a tourist destination.

Keywords: Tourist destination, place-making, Giethoorn, social constructivism, tourism strategies.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

In the tourism industry places can thrive because of the popularity to visit them just as much as places can be left unvisited by tourists. Being a "tourist destination" is a meaning that is attached to a place (Young, 1999). When humans travel, they often have the intention to visit specific places, which then become known as tourist destinations (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003). However, what are the underlying factors that make a place to what it is? And why are specific places experienced as tourism destinations? Who are the stakeholders involved in creating the characteristics of a place? As these questions arise when thinking about the concept tourist destination, the topic of this thesis is to see what strategies are used to make a place a tourist destination. Tourist destinations are an important part of the tourism industry. Tourists often choose a specific place to go to, based on the appeal or meaning this place has to them (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003). How a destination is put forward can have an influence on the choice to visit a place or not and also on how tourists expect the place to be and on how tourists will behave in the place (Jenkins, 1999).

In this study, Giethoorn will be the case study. In Giethoorn tourism is already a long-running driver of the village. The main features of tourist destinations are that the place is an amalgam and a cultural appraisal, that production and consumption are inseparable and that the place is being used for multiple purposes (Cooper, 2012). In Giethoorn many facilities can be found in the village, differing from accommodations and restaurants to ancillary services. This makes the place an amalgam. The centre that is popular with tourists is only about 1 kilometre long. In this part of the village, the density of activities and facilities offered significantly increases. Besides that, the landscape in Giethoorn originated from the culture of harvesting peat. As the landscape is one of the reasons Giethoorn is a popular tourist destination, according to the image portrayed online, Giethoorn can be seen as a cultural appraisal. Besides that, to consume the activities in Giethoorn tourists need to be present at the place where the service is offered. So, consumption and production both take place in the village and are inseparable. Although Giethoorn is a tourist destination, it also is a village where people live. In that way, Giethoorn is also used for multiple purposes. With that, the village has all the features that a tourist destination has according to Cooper (2012).

The identity of a tourist destination is, for tourists, often a reason to visit the place. This identity is most of the time connected to the culture and history of the place (Massey, 1995). In the case of Giethoorn social processes in history have also shaped the identity of the village as well as the landscape. The social processes that have happened throughout history have made Giethoorn a popular place to visit for tourists. This already started around the year 1880 when the first painters

made Giethoorn famous. By painting the village and its landscape and by distributing this image over the country, the first tourists were attracted to Giethoorn. In 1958, Bert Haanstra shoots the movie "fanfare" in Giethoorn. As this became a very popular film in the Netherlands, currently still the second most visited Dutch movie in Dutch cinemas, more people wanted to see the images of the village in real life. So, more tourist started to visit the village around that time. Later, in 2015, Giethoorn was featured on the world edition of the board game Monopoly. Around the same time, one of the business owners started to promote Giethoorn in China. These events caused an extra influx of tourists that is currently still going. With the internet and social media becoming more used, images of the village are shared more, faster and over a greater distance. Because of that and the fact that more countries and their inhabitants become more wealthy, tourism became more international. So, these processes, of which some are strategies aimed at attracting more tourists, have been making the place Giethoorn into a tourist destination. Throughout the history of Giethoorn as a tourist destination, putting the image of the village into the attention was successful to attract tourists. However, not only internal characteristics and social processes have an effect on a tourist destination, but also influences from outside the place have effects. These external influences can affect the strategies used by the tourism stakeholders that are responsible for making the place into a tourist destination. As tourism in the Netherlands is still growing and will continue growing the coming years, these influences will be likely to affect strategies used by stakeholders (NBTC, 2018). The influx of more tourists can hinder the experience or liveability in a tourist destination, this is when we speak of over-tourism (Goodwin, 2017). Another thing that can be affected by the growing number of tourists is the image of a place and the tourist experience in a place, things that are often used in the promotion of a destination. This can, for example, be influenced when tourists experience the destination as too busy or when problems are caused because of tourism, like pollution. Both of these things are currently influencing Giethoorn (Boonstra, 2018; Bosch, 2019). That way a change in the number of tourists can impact the strategies of tourism stakeholders. So, in this research, there will be looked at the underlying strategies used to maintain Giethoorn as a tourist destination in times where tourism is a very relevant but changing industry.

1.2 Research objective and research questions

In this study, the focus is on how a place is created to be a tourist destination. The place that will be looked at in this thesis is Giethoorn. This is a well-known tourist destination in the Netherlands. It is famous for having canals instead of roads and is known as "Het Venetië van het Noorden" (Venice of the north). The fact that Giethoorn has become such a well-known tourist destination also creates problems like overcrowding and pollution according to the news (Boonstra, 2018; Bosch, 2019). So,

tourism is a social phenomenon that can affect a place in many ways, positive as well as negative. In this case study, the goal is to investigate what makes a village like Giethoorn a tourist destination. Thus we will look at the strategies that are being used to shape Giethoorn as a tourist destination. So, to discover how a geographic place is constructed to be a tourist destination. The research question for this case study is:

Which strategies do the stakeholders use to shape Giethoorn as a tourist destination?

In order to answer this question, other questions need to be asked. These secondary research question will help to fulfil the aim of this research and will help to answer the main research question.

Which characteristics of Giethoorn, as a particular place, have been put forward by tourism stakeholders in order to make it an attractive tourist destination?

In what ways has Giethoorn been branded as a particular tourist destination?

So overall, with this research, the goal is to find out what is behind the creation of a tourist destination, how a place is turned into a tourist destination, who the stakeholders are that are involved in such a process and what strategies are implemented to keep the place a tourist destination. To narrow this down this research will look at one specific place, Giethoorn, as introduced earlier.

2. Literature review

2.1 Conceptual framework

In order to know how to go about researching the underlying factors of what makes a place a tourist destination, it is important to look into the concept of place. This concept is often connected to the concept identity. As this thesis focuses on places that are tourist destinations, that is another important concept to consider. In the following part literature on these concepts will be discussed.

Place is a concept that is often discussed in geography studies. It is a complicated concept as there is not one singular way of looking and understanding the concept of place. Besides geography, there are important influences on the understanding of place coming from other disciplines, like philosophy and history (Cresswell, 2015). Place is also of importance for tourism as tourism is a place-based phenomenon as it often takes place in a specific place (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003). Besides that, tourists often have ideas about specific places that they want to visit. The way a place is presented in, for example, the communication between stakeholders and tourists can affect the image tourists

have of a place (Jeong & Holland, 2011; Reynolds, 1965). So, tourism can change the way people look at a place.

The concept of place has a history that involves multiple disciplines and approaches, whom all define the concept in different ways (Cresswell, 2015). According to Cresswell (2015), there are three main approaches to place. The first one is the descriptive approach. Here, place is seen as a geographic entity somewhere in the world. The second approach is the social constructivist approach. Here, research is looking at the underlying social processes of a place, which form and shape the place. The third approach is the phenomenological approach. Rather than focusing on a specific place or the social processes in a place, this approach looks at the relevance of place to humanity. In this thesis, the social constructivist approach is used to look at the concepts place, tourist destination and identity. The choice for this approach and the approach itself will be discussed in the theoretical framework later in the literature review.

Besides these three approaches, there are more aspects to place that can differ the way in which it is understood. Place can be seen as a location, but it can also be seen as not bound to temporal or spatial components. Besides that, place can be seen as a space that has a meaning connected to it. The meaning attached to a place can be different for each individual. In such a way place can be seen as socially constructed (Cresswell, 2015). A place can also be seen as a location where people can meet and is therefore sometimes seen as the basis for human interaction (Cresswell, 2015; Massey, 1994). Besides place being a sight where humans can interact, it is also a place for other aspects to gather. For example, where histories and experiences from inside the place and outside the place get in touch with each other (Cresswell, 2015). They cause places not only to be constructed out of internal aspects but also to be linked and constructed by outside factors, through social relations between an aspect within the place and an aspect from outside the place (Massey, 1995).

A concept connected to place is identity. Identity can be split up into the self-identity and shared community identity. Identity, as well as place, can be constructed and can be changing (Massey, 1995). Where identity was first seen as being connected to place, in modern society identity becomes less place-bound, for example, due to the arrival of the internet (Tilley, 2006). However, in tourism, the reason tourists travel to a different place, away from their home, is to sense a place with a different identity. Identity is something that is not only ascribed to humans but it is something that places have as well (Massey, 1995). The identity of a place can often be connected to the history and culture of the place and how these are told (Massey, 1995). In the case study of Minca (2007) on the Jamaa el Fna in Morocco, its identity and landscape are being portrayed as authentic. This “authenticity” attracts tourists to the place. So, places can use their identity to attract visitors.

However, this identity is not always a real representation of the current identity of the place, it can be staged (Cassel & Pettersson, 2015; MacCannell, 1973). Besides that, the identity of a place is often not a single one as different people sense and connect to the place differently (Massey, 1994). So, overall, identity is temporally and spatially variable and it can have different meanings to the people that connect with this identity (Martin, 2005). However, the identity of the place is what is actually in the place, people can perceive this in different ways for example because of their experiences, memories and emotions, but as soon as this vision of a place is only constructed in an individuals' mind, based on information received via, for example, media or promotion, this vision is called the image of the place (Reynolds, 1965).

Besides place and identity, tourist destination itself is also one of the concepts used in this thesis. Tourist destination can be defined as a physical place where visitors go, that has tourism services and attractions. Often it is seen as something with both physical and administrative boundaries. (UNWTO, 2016). So, the tourist destination itself is seen as a physical location. However, the tourist destination image, the vision that tourists have about a destination, is often seen as socially constructed. This image is one of the things that is often used in branding the destination (Souiden, Ladhari & Chiadmi, 2017). So, the difference between the identity of a place and the image of a place is that the image is something created in the minds of people often created because of the information that they have received about the place, and the identity is what the place actually is (Reynolds, 1965). Although a tourist destination can be seen as something with boundaries, the social processes are not limited to the physical boundaries and often reach far beyond these. Therefore, when looking at tourist destination from a social constructivist perspective, the actual boundaries of a tourist destination are not very clear and not bound to a physical location (Cresswell, 2015). A destination can also be defined by four common features most destinations have. These are, destinations are amalgams, they are cultural appraisals, they are inseparable in a way that tourism is consumed in the same place as where it is produced, they have multiple purposes and users (Cooper, 2012; Snepenger, Snepenger, Dalbey, & Wessol, 2007). Destinations being amalgams means that they offer attractions and amenities, like restaurants, accommodations and stores. And that they also are accessible and that ancillary services are offered as well. Besides that, the destination has to be seen as worth visiting, tourists need to be present in the place in order to be able to consume the place as a tourist, and besides tourists, the place is also used by other people for other reasons, like working and living. The management of a destination is often led by a destination management organisation (Cooper, 2012). However, for smaller destinations, such an organisation is not always available. In that case, it is often a task of the local governmental body. The management of a

destination has a great influence on the place making of the destination. This can happen via development plans, promotion and policies (Cooper, 2012).

Connected to tourist destination is the destination image. This is the image that is broad into the world about the place for, for example, promotional usage. Via the promotion, the tourism stakeholders can communicate the image to the tourists, and in this way information about the place can be shared and emphasized (Jeong & Holland, 2011). The information that the tourists receive eventually forms an idea about the place in their minds, this is the actual destination image (Reynolds, 1965). The tourism stakeholders help to create this image and can steer it via communication with the tourists. According to Gartner (1994), tourism stakeholders should participate in the creation of the image of their tourist destination in order to keep their share in the tourism market. In multiple ways, the tourism stakeholders help to formulate the image of the destination. The tourism stakeholders of a place can use different channels, like promotion, to influence and form the destination image that potential tourists have. The image can exist of emotions, impressions, beliefs and prejudices people have when thinking about a certain place (Kim & Chen, 2016). The way in which the tourism stakeholders affect the eventual image can be via, for example, attracting the attention to a certain product the destination has to offer or, for example, by selecting what to show to the tourists in advertisements and brochures about the destination (Gartner, 1994).

2.2 Theoretical framework

In this thesis, a social constructivist view will be used. This means that place will be seen as something socially constructed rather than seeing it as a mere location. It also means that we will be looking at the social processes that make and shape a place and its identity and how these processes create a tourist destination (Cresswell, 2015). Tourism is a phenomenon that brings social processes to a place and also has the ability to affect the existing social processes in a place (Cohen, 1979). As the research questions are trying to find the answers about how a place is constructed to be a tourism destination, the questions ask for a social constructivist approach. This because with the social constructivist approach there can be looked at more than just the location and boundaries of a place. The social processes and the effects these have on a place becoming a tourism destination, like promoting an image to attract potential tourists or implementing policies to steer tourism, can be studied with this approach. Since these are the kind of processes the research questions and problem statement try to look at, the social constructivist approach is the most suitable for this research.

Therefore, this research will draw on the theory of seeing place as a social construct, as well as seeing a tourist destination as something socially constructed as these are constructed in places.

The reason a social constructivist approach is used rather than a descriptive or phenomenological approach is because of the following reasons. A descriptive approach focusses on describing all the layers of a place separately, describing them from the soil, the first layer, to culture, the last layer (Cresswell, 2015). This approach often tries to describe a place in such a way that its differences with other places are visible. So, it is creating boundaries to the place by describing it. According to the descriptive approach, the environment of a place determines the society and culture that the place will have rather than those having an influence on the environment of the place (Cresswell, 2015). In tourism influences from outside a place can have impacts on a place and its environment. Also, social processes occurring in a place because of tourism can change the place and its identity. For example, a place can build more facilities for tourists which will shape and transform the place. By using the descriptive approach the focus would be on what elements are available in the place and what are the elements that make it different from others, leaving out the social influences that affect a place. With the social constructivist approach, the elements that create a place are still of importance, however, the social processes affecting and creating these elements are also looked at.

When using the phenomenological approach the way of looking at place would shift away from looking at a specific place and the elements that create a place. Also looking at the social phenomena that construct a place are less important when using this approach. This approach rather looks at place as it being the basis for all other (Cresswell, 2015). So, social processes would not be possible without place. According to this approach, without place, there would not be any existence. So, social interactions could not construct a place as the humans performing these social interactions need to be in a place before being able to have social interactions (Cresswell, 2015). With this approach, it is difficult to look at a specific place as the approach looks at the concept of place as a general term for all places. This approach, therefore, does not explain how a place was constructed to what it is nowadays. As the goal of this study is to look at the way in which a specific place turned into a tourism destination, this way of looking at place is not the most suitable.

Social constructivism is also used when it comes to tourist destinations. Pearce (2014) discusses this approach in connection to destinations in his research. Under the influence of social processes, the identity of a destination is ever-changing, so it is a social construct. As all experiences and social processes involved in differ per person, each individual can see the social construct which is a tourist destination in a different way. Because of that, it is difficult to give boundaries to the destination. According to Pearce (2014), some studies see the concept destination as something only used for

marketing purposes to make clear a place is visited by tourists. However, looking at destination as a social construct from a geography perspective, which is used in this study, it is defined as a spatial object which is changed because of tourism (Pearce, 2014). In the research by Young (1999) the social construction of a tourist destination exists of two parts. These are the place promotion and production, where the tourism industry gives meaning to the place, and the place consumption, where the tourists consume the meaning of a place (Young, 1999). By looking at it that way the importance is to maximise the overlap between these two parts.

2.3 Relevance to tourism and tourism literature

In essence, tourism is a place-based phenomenon as tourism often takes place in a specific place (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003). Because of that tourism is a phenomenon that brings social processes to a place, which can change the current social processes in the place (Cohen, 1979). The place is important in tourism as tourists are people who travel to different places and who want to experience different places. Creating a tourism destination gives meaning to a place. The spatial features of such a place that is a tourism destination can be small in scale, a single building, or bigger like a whole island (Dregde & Jenkins, 2003). Also, the temporal aspects of a place can be important to give it meaning to tourists. For example, the history behind a place, a certain architectural style or a museum, can make a place attractive to tourists (Massey, 1995). So, in order for the tourism industry to be able to create tourism destinations that attract tourists, it is important to understand the concept of place as it is the basis of place-making.

For a place to implement tourism, it is important to use some planning. Via tourism planning policies like conserving heritage and promoting and marketing, tourism can be implemented in the place (Williams & Lew, 1998). Often a place that is aiming to attract tourists, markets themselves around a unique place identity (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003). So, the identity of a place is used to distinguish a place from other places. Tourists like to travel to places that they think are more authentic than their own. Also, tourists like to see the "real and authentic" places and identity of a country. However, the authenticity of a tourist destination can be staged, in that case, the tourist is only led to believe to experience the authentic (MacCannell, 1973).

Current research on the creation of tourism destinations is often focused on other elements than how a place is constructed into a particular tourist destination. The research by Govers, Go & Kumar (2007) is looking at the effect of promoting tourism on the creation of tourist destinations images. The results were that the promotion does affect the image people have about the destination. However, this research does not look at the effect of this promotional strategy on the place itself.

Overall, the research is often aimed at the construction of the image of a tourist destination rather than the construction of a place into a tourist destination itself (e.g. Gartner, 1994; Govers et al., 2007; Fesenmaier & MacKay, 1996; Espelt & Benito, 2005; Hunter, 2016; Kim & Chen, 2016; Marine-Roig, 2015).

So, the aim of this research is to get an insight into what strategies create tourist destinations currently and how the concepts of place and identity are being used in setting up the destination. This will contribute to the tourism literature as little tourist destinations have been used as case studies in combination with the concept of place. The benefits of knowing more about place and identity are that this could improve the current way of constructing tourist destinations. Right now research is done on how the reputation and image of tourist destinations are socially constructed and also on how tourist destinations are socially constructed online, but research on how tourist destinations themselves are socially constructed, in the form of a case study, are rare. Besides that, literature is provided on strategies to brand and manage tourist destinations but rarely on how these strategies create the image of a place being a tourist destination. Overall, this thesis will contribute to the literature trying to answer the question "What makes a place a tourist destination?".

3. Methods

In order to answer the research questions, qualitative methods are used. The methods that are used are doing interviews, observations and a content analysis. These three methods will be discussed in more detail below.

3.1 Interviews

Before doing the interviews it is important to find out who the most important stakeholders in the creation of Giethoorn as a tourist destination are. The question "who are the stakeholders involved in creating the tourist destination Giethoorn?" needs to be answered, this to see who would be useful to interview. To answer this question the sources of promoting materials of Giethoorn were looked at to see who is involved in the tourism sector and the promotion of Giethoorn. Besides that, the municipality of Steenwijkerland, of which Giethoorn is part, is one of the stakeholders. Snowball sampling was used to see who else are important stakeholders (Adler & Clark, 2011). Expert sampling was also used in order to be able to interview stakeholders that have influential strategies for the creation of Giethoorn as a tourist destination but that were not recommended through snowball sampling.

Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders that are active in implementing strategies to make Giethoorn a tourist destination, were done as a way of getting more insights. Semi-structured

interviews are one of the key methods used in geography (Longhurst, 2010). With this style of interviews, detailed information can be gathered from talking to the interviewee (Adler & Clark, 2011), which is useful to answer the research question of this thesis. The semi-structure gives a basic structure to the interview in order to gain data that is useful for this thesis. Also with the interviews being semi-structured rather than structured a certain degree of freedom can be held and questions can be modified for each interview (Adler & Clark, 2011).

In order to find the most influential and important stakeholders googling Giethoorn was the starting point. The first sites coming up are Giethoorn.com, Holland.com and visitweerribbenwieden.com. Next to online materials, other promotional materials like flyers were also used to see who is involved in the tourism sector in the village. As policies are often made by the local government, the municipality of Steenwijkerland is also included as a stakeholder. The municipality makes use of a marketing company to do the promotion of the area. This company is Marketing Oost, who is also in charge of the websites visitweerribbenwieden.com and ervaarhetwaterreijk.nl. As Giethoorn gained a lot of fame through the movie “Fanfare”, the café and restaurant de Fanfare was the first business to be interviewed. Famous attractions in Giethoorn like Gloria Maris and de Oude Aarde were also interviewed. Besides that, businesses that were often named by others and businesses that stood out because of their product or promotion were contacted. The tourist information, being a place where tourists find information and where businesses promote their product, was also included.

The interviews that were done can be categorised in long interviews and shorter interviews. The long interviews were recorded when consent was given. The shorter ones were recorded via note taking. One of the reasons for this was that these interviews often took place in shops making the surroundings too loud for voice recordings. The notes were written out in more detail shortly after taking the interviews. This to make sure most of the details were still remembered and the transcripts would be the most complete. The long interviews were held with Marketing Oost, the Municipality and one of the owners of an accommodation. These interviews where 50 minutes or longer. The shorter interviews were mostly between 20 and 30 minutes long and held with shop owners, restaurant owners and museum owners. An overview of the interviews and interview questions can be found in the appendix.

After all the interviews were held and transcribed a method of coding and theming was used. Inductive coding was used, which means that the codes were made up after the data was gathered instead of making a list of codes beforehand. This method was chosen to limit bias influencing the interviews and interview questions. The coding process was started with line-by-line coding, after reading through the data. Here all parts of the transcript that were related to the research topic were

given a code. After this, the codes were categorized and grouped in order to get a more organized overview of the topics. Also were the codes counted to see what codes came up more often than others. Codes were grouped when they roughly had the same meaning. These groups are the themes coming out of the interviews. These themes have been grouped into bigger themes and are besides that, all linked to each other. The bigger themes would be about strategies for tourism and the effects of tourism.

All the stakeholders that have been interviewed have the ability to promote Giethoorn and/or their business in Giethoorn. In the appendix, a table can be found for more details on the stakeholders. Overall, the business owners interviewed are mostly involved in promoting their own business rather than the village in total. The Province and municipality have appointed Marketing Oost to do the marketing and promotions of the whole province. Giethoorn is part of the Weerribben-Wieden area which is branded under the name “visit Weerribben-Wieden”. Besides that, the website Giethoorn.com is set up by entrepreneurs to promote the village online and to make an online platform where tourists can find all participating businesses in one place. So, by doing interviews with stakeholders from all these different levels a more complete data set can be gathered.

3.2 Participant observations

As the observations took place while visiting Giethoorn as an outsider, the observations are participant observations. Since we see place as something socially constructed, going there as an outsider can affect the place (Cresswell, 2015). In order to see the place from a tourist perspective and from the outsider perspective that can change the place, participant observation is useful. This way the view of the participant can be taken to look at the phenomenon (Adler & Clarck, 2011). Also, (marketing) strategies implemented in the field, that help make Giethoorn a tourist destination, can be observed. The goal was to continue the observations until saturation is reached. Which means that doing more observations would not add any extra insights.

The observations were mostly recorded by taking pictures of what could be seen, where appropriate. Also, notes were taken on the spot and were written into a story later on. Things that were observed during the observations were the image of the streets and the village, the stores and what was going on in them, tourists behaviour and ways in which promotion of facilities was visible in the streets of Giethoorn.

To analyse the observations the notes were transcribed into more detailed texts. Similar to the interviews these texts were coded and themed using induction. The codes were being highlighted in the texts and then grouped into categories where they were mostly similar, these are the themes of

the observations. The pictures are used to give visual support to the texts in order to endorse the information.

3.3 Content analysis

Content analysis is a method that can be used to study advertisements, brochures and other forms of communications, like video materials and newspaper articles. So, with this method, the forms of communication with which Giethoorn aims to attract and communicate with tourists can be analysed. As communication with tourists is often going via written texts in brochures and on websites, content analysis is a useful method as with this method text data can be analysed (Cavanagh, 1997). The main questions in a content analysis are to see what is communicated to whom and by who, how and why this is happening and what the effects of this are? (Adler & Clark, 2011). So, by using content analysis we can see how the strategies used by Giethoorn to make it a tourist destination are used in the way they communicate with the tourists if strategies are being used.

In the content analysis, promotional materials about Giethoorn were analysed as well as news articles. Flyers and folders gathered at the tourist information and other points that offer information, like museum t olde maat uus, were analysed by writing down what colours were used, what pictures were used and what text was used. Besides hard copies of information, websites offering information about Giethoorn were also analysed looking at the same points. These points were structured in a table to see what is most often used and to see the differences between them. The analysis looked at the image that was communicated to the tourists via the choices in pictures, texts and colour use.

The combination of these three methods will allow to analyse written data as well as getting more insights from the stakeholder via interviews. With the observations included, Giethoorn and the strategies used can also be analysed from a visual, outsider perspective.

4. Results analysis

4.2 The use of image and identity in strategies to construct Giethoorn as a tourist destination

According to the interviewees, tourists often visit the place because of the unique elements of the village, for example, the water and the traditional houses (interview 1,7, 9, 10, 11). Because of those unique elements, the place is considered to be attractive. The observations support the presumption that tourists find Giethoorn a place worth investing time and money in, this, as plenty of tourists can be seen in the place. This image is not only used to attract tourists, but stakeholders also try to shape the image tourists have of Giethoorn, as will be discussed below.

The image and identity of Giethoorn as a tourist destination

When comparing Giethoorn to other Dutch villages it is quite different. The history and culture of the village have given it a unique identity which comes with a special appearance. The first thing that stands out when observing the village are the houses. Almost all of them have thatched roofs, big gardens which look very neat and a colour scheme which is basically the same for all of them. The second element that is very prominent when doing observations of the village is the water. When leaving the road connecting Giethoorn to other places, the roads will become pedestrian and cyclists only and will become small paths. Along the paths, the canals and the boats can be observed. Having an infrastructure and village build around boats and pedestrian traffic is uncommon in the Netherlands according to some interviewed stakeholders (interview 8, 9, 11) and when comparing the observations to other villages in the Netherlands. So, Giethoorn has something unique to offer (interview 8, 9, 11) These elements that make Giethoorn unique are created because of the history and culture around the peat extraction in the area (interview 2, 10, 11). Marketing Oost stated that "There are always multiple reasons why people are attracted to a place, however, the relation with the water and the way this creates a picturesque landscape is very important." (interview 10, translated by author). So, the elements of the landscape are currently one of the things that attract people to the village. Because of that, it is important to conserve the landscape and appearance of the village as this attracts tourists to Giethoorn (interview 7, 9, 10, 11). So, the identity of Giethoorn, which is connected to the culture and history of the village, is a reason for tourists to come and visit the place. Also when analysing websites and hardcopy materials about Giethoorn, which are used as a mode of communication between the tourism stakeholders and the tourists, it is apparent that an image is set up of the location and used in the promotional materials in order to make the place an attractive tourist destination. This image that can be found in the analysed promotional materials is often based on specific elements of the landscape or the identity of the place that can be observed when visiting Giethoorn. It is the idea that tourists create about the place, based on the information they receive, that is often the reason to visit Giethoorn (interview 1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). According to one of the interviewees, tourists often visit "to see what they expected to see" (interview 7, tourist information, translated by the author).

In the case of Giethoorn, the image that people have of the village is connected to multiple elements as stated by multiple stakeholders (1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). These are the architectural style of the houses but also the way the village is designed, which is directly linked to the landscape, as sketched in the text above. So, it is the total of the traditional houses, the way the village is build up around the water and the water that forms the landscape in and around the village. This image is very important for tourism in Giethoorn, as it is the reason tourists come to visit the village according to the

interviewees (interview 1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). Therefore it is also widely used by tourism stakeholders, for example in the promotional materials that were analysed.

The importance of the destination image for tourism in Giethoorn

Overall, most tourism stakeholders see Giethoorn as unique and authentic (interview 1, 9, 11, 10). Seeing Giethoorn as authentic meant to these interviewees that Giethoorn still is as it used to be, a place where people live and where the landscape is maintained, besides the amount and scale of facilities which has been influenced by tourists coming in. Besides that, most of the stakeholders name the landscape of the village as authentic and unique as well (interview 7, 9, 11). This landscape is part of the identity of Giethoorn as it is a cultural-historical landscape (content analysis & interview 2, 10, 11). Often the landscape that is featured in peoples' image of Giethoorn is a landscape based on the fact that the village is built around canals in combination with the traditional houses and bridges (interview 1,7, 9, 10, 11). In order to stay attractive to tourists, strategies are used to keep the identity and the associated image of Giethoorn in existence. The tourist information stated that they thought tourism in Giethoorn would decrease if the landscape would change:

"If the new landscape would be disappointing to a lot of tourists because it is not as they thought it would be, tourism would most definitely decrease, especially when this negative experience is shared and spread." (interview 7, translated by the author).

One of the strategies to make sure that the reality matches the image of Giethoorn is executed by the municipality. The municipality told in their interview that some of the aspects of the village are made in a certain way to fit into the image that tourists have of Giethoorn (interview 10). An example given was that if new facilities are being built, they should fit the image that Giethoorn has. So, if there is more demand for accommodations these accommodations will be built in a style that fits Giethoorn. The hotel would rather be in the form of a thatched roof farm than a more modern styled hotel. Also, the small scale identity of Giethoorn is trying to be kept (interview 7, 10, 11). Building big hotels would not fit in the small scale identity of the village. Therefore, permits that allow building bigger accommodations will not be given according to the municipality (interview 10). These are rules and regulations that are not yet written down, however, the municipality is writing a new vision on tourism in Giethoorn and these are things that they want to add to the tourism policies soon. So, the municipality is using strategies to keep the image that the identity of the village has, with as aim to keep tourism going and to keep the place attractive. In order to keep the place attractive, it is important that the image that tourists have of Giethoorn, of it being a place with traditional houses and a specific way of living on and around the water, match with the reality they see when visiting

(interview 7, 10). If the image does deviate from reality too much, tourists can be dissatisfied with their experiences, which can lead to negative promotion. An unwritten rule that is helping to keep the image of Giethoorn to be identical with reality, is that inhabitants are keeping up with their gardens. When observing the village, this one of the elements that stand out and that make the village look very neat and peaceful. According to the interviewees of interview 5, 9 and 10 the Inhabitants are not forced to take care of their garden. Nevertheless, they do, which adds to the conservation of the image of the village. The strategies that are used do not only conserve the image and identity of Giethoorn, they also reproduce the image of the village, for example, if photos of the village are placed online these photos of how the place really looks will add to the information input which creates the image in the tourists' mind. This could be seen as a way in which the place is shaped as a tourism destination since meaning and an image are given to the place. This meaning and image distinguish it from other places. Also, the fact that the image is being preserved via strategies can be seen as putting forward characteristics. So, a well-known characteristic of Giethoorn that is attracting tourists is the traditional architecture of the houses, this is also put forward when building new accommodations, for example. Putting forward characteristics and conserving characteristics is one of the strategies of the municipality to construct Giethoorn as a tourist destination.

Tourism works both ways in Giethoorn. It is not the only village in the area with a specific image, however, it is the most touristic one in the area. A strategy used to make the place more welcoming to tourists is by developing and keeping products in the village (interview 11). This way there is a reason for tourists to spent time in the place. The image and identity of the village can also be seen as a product. Therefore it is important to keep this in existence (interview 7, 10, 11). One of the policies enforced by the municipality in order to keep this image is the fact that the centre of the village is a protected townscape. With this rule, everything that influences the way the village looks like buildings, bridges and streets, cannot easily be changed. An example of this is that a house with a thatched roof cannot be changed to a roof with pans without a permit. According to the municipality, they do not accept requests like this often, as "we want to keep it attractive for the tourists" (interview 10, translated by author). So, it is a strategy with the aim of keeping the attractiveness, that the streets of Giethoorn have to tourists, in order to protect the tourism industry. This via keeping and protecting the way the village looks.

With these strategies to keep the image of Giethoorn alive, the most famous attraction of the village is preserved. This can be stated as, according to the interviewed stakeholders, one of the most popular reasons to visit Giethoorn is because of its characteristics and unique elements. According to

tourism stakeholders, tourists like to visit Giethoorn because of the image they have of Giethoorn, which is something they want to see for themselves (interview 1,7, 9, 10, 11).

This image that tourists visiting the place have, is created by the information that they take in. Often the image is based on images they have seen of Giethoorn or by the stories they have read or heard about the village. So, this image is being communicated to tourists. That way tourists form an image of the place in their heads which can be linked to emotions and can create expectations and prejudices of the village. The tourists visiting then want to experience and see with their own eyes what matches the image in their heads (interview 1, 7, 9, 10, 11). A way in which this image is communicated to the tourists is via promotion, which will be discussed later.

The image that is important to attract tourists according to tourism stakeholders is clearly visible when visiting and observing Giethoorn. When the stakeholders were asked to describe the image that is connected to Giethoorn, the following elements of the village where named: the water, the fact that you can sail your own boat, the farmhouses with the thatched roofs, the absence of roads with cars, the nature, the climate, the fact that it is of small-scale (interview 1, 7, 9, 10, 11). Picture 1. is an example of how the village looks. Similar images of Giethoorn are often used in the analysed promotional materials, as will be discussed in the next part.

Picture 1. A street view of Giethoorn, Binnenpad (photo by author, 2019)

4.3 Promotion of tourist destination Giethoorn

As discussed above, the identity and image of Giethoorn are important reasons for tourists to visit Giethoorn. Although these images and stories that attract tourists to the Giethoorn can vary, overall most of them are linked to the cultural and historical landscape, including the water and traditional buildings. Besides an image of how the place will look like, tourists also often have an idea of what activities they think can be done in a place. As these ideas in the tourists' mind do not appear out of nowhere, there has to be some form of communication between the stakeholders in the village and the tourists before they come to visit the place. One of the most common forms of communication, when it comes to communication between a tourist destination and potential tourists, is via promotional materials. As different images are appealing to different target groups it is often the case that the destination is promoted in multiple ways. This brings up the fact that Giethoorn is also promoted in various ways. With the promotion, these images and stories are communicated to potential tourists as can be seen when analysing promotional materials of the village. In the promotion characteristics of Giethoorn, as a particular tourist destination, are emphasized and put forward. This is visible since these characteristics are featured very often in the analysed materials. Promotion can be seen as a strategy to keep Giethoorn a tourist destination. Besides that, it can also be a strategy via which the identity of the village can be reinforced and through which the image of the village can be influenced by choosing what pictures and texts to show.

<u>Stakeholders involved in the promotion of Giethoorn</u>

Multiple stakeholders are involved in doing promotion in and of Giethoorn. These stakeholders can be found at the local level but also at the provincial and national level. They all shape the place with the intent to make it a tourist destination but do not all of them have the same end goals and reasons for their strategy used in their promotion. Promotion in this thesis will be seen as all the forms of communication between stakeholders of all levels and potential tourists that have positive effects on the tourism industry. This positive effect is linked to the goal of the stakeholder and can be different and lead to different strategies for the promotion. On the local level, it is mostly the facilities offered that are promoting themselves (interview 10). Some of these entrepreneurs do also promote Giethoorn as a destination on, for example, their website, next to promoting their own business (content analysis & interview 4, 6, 9). The stakeholders on the local level are, therefore, mostly owners of shops, restaurants, accommodations and activities. Overall, the strategy behind their promotion is to become or stay known among tourists. In order to do so, some also promote the village as more tourists can mean more customers for them. On the provincial level, the organisation Marketing Oost is responsible for the promotion of Giethoorn and the surrounding area.

This marketing organisation is also working together with the municipality of Steenwijkerland, of which Giethoorn is part. The promotion led by the municipality focusses more on branding the whole area rather than just Giethoorn. Besides that, both the municipality and the province work together with an organisation responsible for the national promotion of the Netherlands as a tourism destination, the NBTC (Nederlands bureau toerimse en congressen – Dutch bureau for tourism and congresses). The NBTC uses icons in the Dutch landscape in order to show tourists all sides of the country. Giethoorn is branded as one of these icons and is featured as a water-based destination (interview 10, 11; "Nederland Waterland", 2019). A goal shared on the municipal, provincial and national level is to spread tourists over different places rather than attracting them all to Giethoorn.

Although most of these levels have specific strategies set up for the promotion of the area, there is also promotion happening outside the reach of the stakeholders. An example of promotion happening outside of the reach of stakeholders is when tourists post reviews or stories about Giethoorn online. Besides that, the promotion is sometimes affecting more than what the stakeholders aim to reach according to their strategies. One of the interviewees stated in the interview that “Giethoorn is such a unique village, you cannot find another village similar to this one somewhere else in the Netherlands, so I do not need to do a lot of promotion.” (Interview 11, translated by author). However, it could be the case that the stakeholders are not always aware that they are promoting Giethoorn. Also, the creation of a specific image of Giethoorn is not always explicitly part of the promotional strategies of the stakeholders, however, still a specific image is communicated to the tourists through the flyers and websites of the stakeholders. An example of promotion affecting more than what is aimed for by the stakeholder is when stakeholders say not to try and show a certain image of the village but still only use a specific element of the landscape of the village, for example the water, in their flyers which affects the image of Giethoorn. In the end, the tourists have an idea about the village before visiting, this idea has to have been communicated to them in some sort of way, most likely via direct or indirect promotion.

Ways of promoting Giethoorn as a tourist destination

During the interviews, it became clear that there are multiple ways in which Giethoorn is still promoted even though stakeholders argued that promotion is not needed as Giethoorn already built up its brand awareness (interview 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9). Overall, the strategies used for promoting the destination and the businesses in the destination have shifted to the internet since the emergence of the internet (interview 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11). So, the promotion has shifted from being on paper and face to face to being a more internet-based phenomenon. As the internet grew popular stakeholders

said that they have been going less to holiday fairs and that they decreased the number of advertisements in papers (interview 8, 9). Instead of that, the stakeholders now have their own website or communicate with their tourists via websites like TripAdvisor as was found out through the content analysis. Online reviews are also of importance in communication with new tourists (interview 1, 9). Also for the whole village as a tourist destination using the internet as a platform for communication and promotion is more important nowadays. This happens via websites like Visitweerribbenwieden.com and Giethoorn.com (interview 9, 10, 11, 12). The destination profits from social media as pictures of the place get spread over the whole world via platforms like Facebook and Instagram. When looking at social media platforms, things posted under the name Giethoorn mostly show pictures of the water, boats, bridges and houses. Overall in the promotional strategies, the stakeholders promoting have to keep up with the modernization of the world in order to be able to stay in touch with their potential customers. This is something they try to do by shifting to the internet.

As the internet became popular, tourists started to become involved in promotion as well. This is a form of promotion that is not directly influenced by tourism stakeholders. However, according to the interviewees, this is very influential, if not the most influential and successful promotion of Giethoorn (interview 1, 7, 9, 10). According to an interviewee, the start of tourists from Asia coming to Giethoorn started with a Taiwanese man, a tourist himself, promoting the place (interview 9). He bought a house in Giethoorn to spent his holidays and every time he would return to Giethoorn he would take guests with him to show them the beauty of the village. After that, he wrote stories in Chinese about Giethoorn and spread them via the internet (interview 9). Something that attracts a lot of tourists to the place nowadays is when an influencer or a celebrity from a country visits and spreads images of the place on social media or the internet (interview 7, 9). But also when other people post pictures or stories about Giethoorn this affects brand awareness and the number of tourists. So, via online posts about Giethoorn tourists and stakeholders send a certain image of the village into the world as particular pictures are taken and put online. These pictures and stories can reach people in other places that are then attracted by the image of Giethoorn and come to visit the place. Overall, the images that are created can vary widely as the information can be interpreted differently per individual, because of this it speaks to a lot of different tourists that are attracted to come to Giethoorn. A strategy of the stakeholders that can be seen as connected to this form of promotion is the strategy to keep the appearance of the village attractive as this will be featured on the pictures and in the stories of the tourists. Besides that, giving tourists the best experience does also affect the way tourists will portray and review Giethoorn on the internet. Also, via signs and flags that end up on pictures, the businesses can have some extra promotion. Besides that, they also

use these social media handles. So, they can, for example, interact with the tourists by commenting on the pictures posted. Furthermore, the stakeholders often have a page about their business. Here they post their own pictures and stories and share the ones of tourists as can be concluded for the content analysis.

However, it is not the case that everything goes via the internet. One of the stakeholders that was often held responsible for a big part of the promotion of Giethoorn, and especially for the international promotion, is one of the Hotel owners in Giethoorn (interview 4, 6, 9, 10). In Dafeng, China, the Holland flower park is built. This park also offers a part that is Giethoorn. Here this entrepreneur has a restaurant. The strategy behind this is that by keeping good connections with her business partners abroad the international tourists keep visiting the hotel in Giethoorn and the village itself (Lanting, 2016). Also, by giving the visitors of the Holland flower park a good experience in "Giethoorn" and giving them a sneak peek into what it really is, their interest can be triggered to come and visit Giethoorn in the Netherlands. Besides this extreme form of offline promotion, most of this comes in the form of flyers and folders. Many flyers can still be found at places like the tourist information, the bus and museums. This way of promotion is still successful to inform tourists about the place when they are already visiting.

Spreading your information over multiple sources, like having a website but also flyers, is a way in which more people are reached than when a stakeholder limits its sources. The promotional strategies can also be adapted to the tourists. According to Marketing Oost, you should "look through the eyes of the tourists" to see whether or not the information is accessible and appealing (interview 11, translated by author). As countries and nationalities differ in their habits, so should your promotion according to Marketing Oost. An example given in the interview is that when they try to attract more Germans they focus more on promotional materials on paper as this nationality tends to use less online resources (interview 11). In that case, it is more useful to go to holiday fairs and to have advertisements in papers rather than having a German website. So, by analysing the behaviour of nationalities, when it comes to booking holidays, the promotional strategy can be tailored to that behaviour in order to be more efficient. Other stakeholders also try to tailor their information to the nationalities, most often by offering their information in multiple languages which can be observed when walking through Giethoorn and when reading their websites and flyers. With these strategies, the information becomes more accessible and more tourists can be reached.

Besides promotion via the internet and hard copy promotional materials, promotion of local businesses is also very much visible in the streets. The way the village and the facilities in the village are set up makes it clear that you have arrived in a tourism destination when observing Giethoorn.

This is because of the facilities and promotion that are visible. It already starts at the train station in Steenwijk. Here signs are placed to tell people how to get to Giethoorn. Also, the bus going to Giethoorn is called “Giethoorn express” whereas Giethoorn is not the only village this bus goes to. This way the tourists are offered easier access to the village. Also, tourists that were not planning on visiting Giethoorn might change their mind as the word “Giethoorn” is very visible in the area, likely to make people curious about it. On the Giethoorn express bus, flyers are available with information about Giethoorn and its businesses. This bus line is mostly used by tourists who want to visit the village travelling via public transport. It is because of tourism that this line is still here, according to the municipality and Marketing Oost (interview 7, 10, 11). To go to the centre of the village from the bus stop, only one road can be taken. First, you will pass the tourist information. After that, the street most tourists enter through offers a lot of stands with boat tours and boat rental places. Besides that, there are some souvenir shops and restaurants. Since the village is built as one long strip along the water, tourists can turn right or left when reaching this main path. On both sides shops, museum, accommodations and restaurants are visibly located. Also, most of these offer the option to rent a boat. So lots of boats can be seen (picture 2). The promotion materials on the street are mainly to promote the local businesses. Most of them use signs. Flags are also often used. To make sure they can be read by the tourists these signs often include more than one language. (picture 3 & 4). So, the strategy is to make it very easy to get to Giethoorn and steer them into the village, walking by all facilities. You could say that the tourists are guided towards the village and through the street with the businesses. By naming the bus stop Giethoorn Centrum and advising tourists who want to visit the village to get off the bus at that stop the tourists are immediately led through the streets with the touristic businesses. The strategy to be visible in the streets of Giethoorn is used by businesses to be visible to tourists. Also by decorating their parts of the streets they try to be more appealing tourists and show everything they have to offer in order to be more attractive than their competitors.

Picture 2. Rental boats (photo by author, 2019)

Picture 3 & 4. Signs in multiple languages on the side of the road. (photo by author, 2019)

The promotional strategies continue inside of the shops in Giethoorn. Products in the stores are often branded by the stakeholders as local products or typically Dutch products (interview 6, 13). A reason why this is done was given by one of the interviewees:

"We promote products as local products. This works very well. All tourists feel attracted to Dutch products, this is even stronger when it is also local. They like to take something home from the area that they have visited." (interview 6, translated by author)

So, this strategy makes the products more interesting for the tourists. Branding products as local could be seen as a marketing technique to encourage tourists to buy products. So, when observing the products in a store in Giethoorn you can often find Cheese, wine, nuts and more, all described as local products. Besides that, souvenir shops sell a lot of Holland merchandise. These are products that a typically Dutch according to the view that international tourists often have of the Netherlands. These products are, for example, I love Holland bags, small windmills, wooden shoes and so on. Another product that is often sold in stores is Old Dutch candies. This cannot only be found in produce stores but also at the museum and in art stores. Of course, the target aim of these shops is tourists, as local people will most likely not have an interest in buying these products (interview 2, 6, 13). So, offering products that are specifically demanded by tourists or that fit the interest of tourists is another strategy used by store owners.

Governmental strategies to brand Giethoorn as a tourist destination

Next to stakeholders that are directly in touch with the tourists, like shops, restaurants and accommodations, the municipality of Steenwijkerland, of which Giethoorn is a part, also has a department focussing on tourism and recreation in the area. One of the things they did, together with the province of Overijssel, is appointing an organisation to do the marketing for the province and the areas in the province (interview 10; provincie Overijssel, 2019). To promote the different areas in the province, the promotion and marketing are split up into 5 branded areas according to the provincial website (2019). Giethoorn, as it is part of the Weerribben-Wieden area, is represented by WaterReijk for its marketing. Besides that Marketing Oost is responsible for the promotion of tourism in the area. They aim for collaboration between the promoted areas in Overijssel, for collaboration with the national organisation Nederlands Bureau voor Toerisme en Congressen, for collaboration with Holland marketing and for having a separate campaign to attract domestic tourists (interview 11; Weerribben-Wieden Marketing, n.d.). Besides that, their goals are to make the brand and the area more well-known and ameliorate the image of the areas. By making the brand more well-known they want to attract a specific target group of tourists, namely tourists that stay longer and spent more (interview 11). Their main focus is on tourism and recreation. However, domains connected to the well-being of the tourism sector and image, like education, living and working, and traffic, are also considered as these are important elements of the attractiveness of an area. The idea behind this is that a well-developed area in which the liveability is good is more attractive to tourists and leads to less conflict between inhabitants and tourists (interview 11).

Marketing Oost has a brand dedicated to the area around the national park Weerribben-Wieden which is called Visit Weerribben-Wieden. Giethoorn is situated within this park. This brand aims to inspire people to visit the area and to gain recognition for the area. They work together with the province, the municipality, entrepreneurs and organisations, event planners and nature organisations. To promote the brand they focus on three characteristics. These are man-made, small-scale and authenticity (interview 11). With these three characteristics, they try to tell the story of the landscape. Man-made, as, according to the interviewee, the landscape would not be this way without humans as it is a cultivated landscape. The small scale is used, according to the interviewee, as the canals and lakes are small, and so are the villages. And authentic as the village is still the way is it used to be, a place where people live (interview 11). By emphasizing these three elements an image is created of the place Giethoorn. With that, they try to attract a specific target group. Their focus is specifically on the Dutch, Belgian and German market (interview 7, 11). This mainly because these are tourists that stay longer in the area, spend more and are more likely to return to the area if satisfied. Also, they have often more mobility as they travel individually by their own vehicle, this

makes it easier to spread them over the area (interview 7). Spreading tourists is one of the goals of the promotion at the municipal and provincial level, this to maintain the liveability in the village (interview 6, 7, 9, 10, 11). This is done by putting more efforts in promoting other places than Giethoorn. This way they try to ease the pressure on Giethoorn without cutting in the number of tourists. Besides that, they try to give more attention to the national park. One of the ways used for this is to make Giethoorn its local entrepreneurs hosts of the national park. That means that those entrepreneurs have knowledge about the park (interview 7). These are visible by the sign as seen in picture 5.

Picture 5. host of the national park sign (photo by author, 2019)

The tourist information provides information and promotion material of the local businesses in Giethoorn and the surroundings, based on observing the available content and the interview. However, since they are part of the municipality their strategies are based on the goals of the municipality and Marketing Oost. So, since their goal is to spread tourists information about the rest of the area is now available at the tourist information (interview 7, 10).

<u>Characteristics of Giethoorn put forward in the promotion of the tourist destination</u>

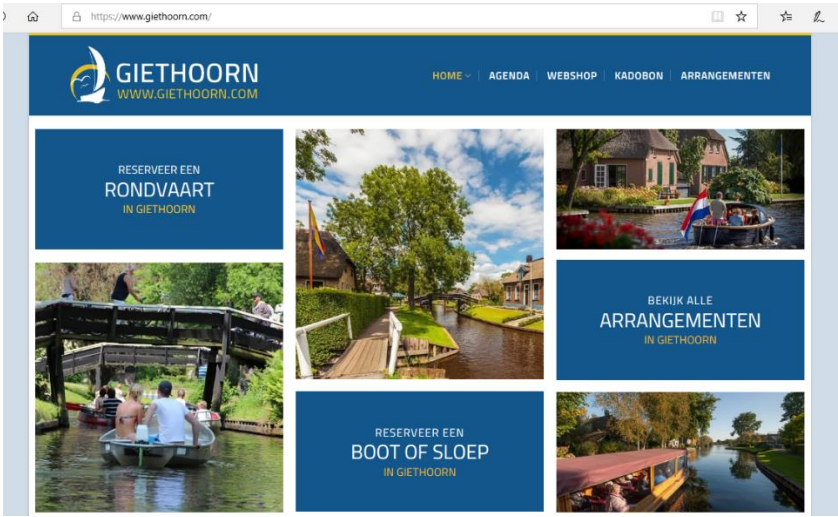
In the promotion of Giethoorn as a tourist destination, characteristics of the place are being emphasized for example in flyers and websites. This is happening on the multiple levels of the promotion of the village. Each of the stakeholders has his own strategy and vision on what is the best way of promoting Giethoorn and which elements are the most useful to fulfil their goals.

On the national level, NBTC is the most important organisation to promote tourism in the Netherlands (interview 10, 11). Giethoorn is part of one of their storylines that tries to attract tourists to different parts of the country. These storylines can be seen as subway lines through the

Netherlands and they all revolve around a specific theme (interview 10, 11; "Nederland Waterland", 2019). The storyline including Giethoorn is called “The Netherlands, Land of Water”. The destinations on this line all have to do with water and how the Netherlands lives together with all the water. Although the NBTC does not have a promotion campaign specifically aimed at Giethoorn, it does have promotional materials for the water line. It goes without saying that the most prominent element promoted in those materials are linked to water and the history around the water. Overall, water is one of the key elements that attracts tourists to Giethoorn (interview 1, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11). It is not only used in promotional materials of the national level but also for promotion on the other levels as water is being portrayed as something unique for Giethoorn. At the level of the NBTC adding Giethoorn to one of these subway lines caused the destinations to become more visible in the national promotion of the Netherlands. It has become known as one of the icons of the country (interview 11). As tourists often prefer to visit special locations, Giethoorn being seen as an icon adds to the meaning of the place being a tourist destination. By being an icon it is agreed upon that it is a must-visit place that is worth your time.

When looking at the flyers and websites of stakeholders some things do stand out. However, it is not always part of the stakeholder's promotional strategy to create a specific image of Giethoorn (interview 1, 8, 11, 12). Still, in the content analysis, it became obvious that some elements are more often used in the promotional materials about Giethoorn. Overall the main colour that is used in the promotion materials is blue. Blue could be connected to the fact that Giethoorn and the area are branded as a water-rich destination, for example through the strategies of Marketing Oost, Giethoorn.com and the NBTC (an example can be seen in picture 6). Also, the pictures used are often featuring water and boats. For example, in the promotion video used on the website Giethoorn.com 31 out of the 43 shots used are featuring water. In the interview with Giethoorn.com, however, they told that they do not use elements to create a specific image of Giethoorn (interview 12). Notwithstanding that, as a tourist, you would immediately see the water and probably create an image of Giethoorn as being a very water based destination. Also, their logo features water and a sailing boat (picture 6). On other websites promoting Giethoorn or a business in Giethoorn water is prominent as well and the logos are also often connected to elements that Giethoorn is famous for. So even though it is told that the promotion of Giethoorn is not themed around something to create an image of the village, still an image is portrayed to the outside world as websites that feature Giethoorn on their page, like TripAdvisor or booking.com, or that are aimed to promote Giethoorn, like Giethoorn.com or visitweerribben-wieden.com, all feature the water, boats, bridges and houses that the village is famous for. Besides that, activities and facilities like renting boats, restaurants and accommodations are visible on the websites, this adds to the image of it being a tourist destination.

Both of these things can create an expectation about the village in the tourists' mind. This image creation and emphasis of certain elements is not only happening on the internet. Flyers often feature the colour blue, many pictures of water and boats, and texts like “discover green Venice”, fall in love with the water village”, must-visit destination, “characteristic image created by the many canals, typical high bridges and thatched roof farms”, good atmosphere, beautiful and unique Giethoorn, Giethoorn is water and nature, a village with a WOW factor. In picture 7 some of the flyers can be seen. So, these ways of promotion do focus on creating an image of Giethoorn that is romantic and authentic in order to attract tourists to the place. Even though the strategy behind the promotional material might not be to create a certain image of Giethoorn, still the choice to feature certain aspects of the village in the promotion more than other elements will affect the image tourists form of what the destination Giethoorn is.



Picture 6. Website Giethoorn.com (retrieved from Giethoorn.com, 2019)

Picture 7. A set of flyers about Giethoorn (picture taken by author, 2019)

As discussed earlier, the brand Visit Weerribben-Wieden which is part of the promotional strategy of Marketing Oost to promote the area around the national park uses three characteristics of Giethoorn in their promotion, man-made, small scale and authenticity (interview 11). These characteristics are also important according to other stakeholders like the municipality, accommodations, the tourists' information and restaurants. The landscape surrounding Giethoorn needs to be taken care of because if this is not done the landscape will disappear, which is the reason that man-made is one of the characteristics of Giethoorn. Keeping this landscape in existence is important according to Marketing Oost because it is one of the things that attract tourists to the area. This is the same for the other two characteristics. So, they want to keep it small scale and authentic, which in this case means not to stage it for tourists, to make sure the image of Giethoorn is not damaged. The promotional strategy for Giethoorn created by the municipality, which is executed by the tourist information and Marketing Oost, tries to form Giethoorn in a way that it stays liveable and where the traditional look of the village is still intact. So that the village will stay enjoyable for the people that visit but also for the people that live there. One of the ways they try to ensure this is by spreading the tourists over the area. With this, the goal is to make the destination sustainable, which in this case means that it will stay similar to how it currently is and that it will stay enjoyable for both tourists and inhabitants (interview 7, 10, 11). Also, they try to make the area more well-known and add elements to the image so it becomes more diverse and speaks to a bigger range of people (interview 11).

Along with the tourism stakeholders, the media also influences the image people have of Giethoorn. Some stakeholders also see this way of communication with potential tourists as tourists, even though the media does not always portray a positive image of the village (interview 8, 11). One of the things concerning Giethoorn is that it is often portrayed as being too busy with too many tourists (interview 1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11). Also, inhabitants are said to experience the negative effects of tourism nowadays according to news articles and according to the municipality. Because of that, the municipality and Marketing Oost are focussing on leading tourists to the areas around Giethoorn rather than to the village itself (interview 7, 9, 10, 11). To make sure that there is less pressure on the village they try to attract people to other parts of the area. One way in which they try to do is, for example, by offering products in villages near Giethoorn (interview 11). Besides the image that is created in the media of Giethoorn being too busy, it is sometimes also portrayed as a very sustainable destination due to the fact that no cars are used in the centre of the village (interview 7, 9). Both of these images mostly reach domestic tourists as these articles are mostly featured in national newspapers. Overall, most stakeholders disagree with the image sketched in the media of Giethoorn being too crowded and too busy, as can be seen in, for example, in quotes like “Often it is

overestimated how busy it is here." (interview 1, translated by author) and "Currently there is the image that it would always be very busy here with tourists, however, this is only the case on certain days. (…) These days are explicitly shown in the media, which is negative mood making." (interview 8, translated by author). Some stakeholders think it will affect tourism negatively if Giethoorn is in the news in a negative way, specifically for the domestic tourism market (interview 1, 8, 9, 10, 11). On the other hand it can be something used as a strategy, as long as Giethoorn will get media attention, positive as well as negative, this will increase tourism in the place as the image of Giethoorn stays fresh in the tourists' mind and as it triggers peoples curiosity and makes sure that they keep thinking about Giethoorn (interview 8).

4.4 Strategies and visions for future construction of tourist destination Giethoorn

At the moment the municipality of Steenwijkerland is creating a new vision on Giethoorn together with the inhabitants of the municipality and the businesses in the municipality. As tourists tend to stay for a short amount of time in the municipality and is mainly only going to Giethoorn, the goal of the new policies is to make sure that tourists are spread over the area (interview 6, 7, 9, 10, 11). Besides that, the most important policies are about keeping the characteristic elements that Giethoorn has intact. These policies are the rules and regulations on the topic of tourism that are officially written down by the municipality of Steenwijkerland.

<u>The protected townscape policy</u>

As the tourism stakeholders are mostly living off tourism, they want to keep Giethoorn attractive so it will still be visited. In order to do so, they want to keep what is unique in Giethoorn (interview 7, 10, 11). Therefore, policies, a set of official rules and regulations, are created by the municipality to keep Giethoorn how it is. One of the tourism policies that is set up by the municipality is that the village of Giethoorn has a protected townscape (interview 2, 5, 7, 8, 10). This means that the image of the village is protected as changes cannot just be made. For example, if your house has a thatched roof you cannot decide to replace it with pans, you have to ask permission to do so (interview 5, 10). This permission is most of the time not given as the municipality said their goal is to keep the village how it is. This is the main reason why the centre of Giethoorn looks different from city centres of other villages. The reason for implementing this policy was to keep tourism going according to the municipality (interview 10). In order to make sure that the image is not damaged the municipality sends someone to Giethoorn to check on the looks of the village (interview 5). It is quite visible that the centre of Giethoorn has a protected townscape. Especially when Giethoorn centre is compared to Giethoorn Noord. Giethoorn Noord is the part of Giethoorn that is predominantly consisting out of residential areas. It also offers other types of facilities like the dentist. The other part of Giethoorn is

the part that tourists like to visit and is the part where the protected townscape is. In pictures 8 and 9, the townscape of Giethoorn can be seen. Which features the water, the high bridges and especially the houses.

Picture 8. Street view of Giethoorn, "the image" (photo by author, 2019)

Picture 9. Houses and water in Giethoorn (photo by author, 2019)

In picture 9 a house in the traditional style in the protected townscape is visible. This type of images is often also featured in the promotional materials as it contains the elements that are part of the image tourists have and find attractive about the village. Here the water is prominent as well as the way in which the houses are traditionally built around the water. As a comparison, a picture of a house in Giethoorn Noord can be seen in picture 10. In that part of town, the protected townscape rules are not applied.

Picture 10. House in Giethoorn Noord (photo by author, 2019)

Policies to keep Giethoorn a tourist destination in the future

A tourism policy that needs to be taken into the new vision, besides the protected townscape, is the fact that the municipality wants to keep destination Giethoorn a small scale destination. Right now investors that want to build, for example, a big hotel in or at the border of Giethoorn are declined each time without there being an argument for this that can be found in the rules and regulations of the municipality. By writing down these rules and regulations the municipality tries to keep the image and the scale of Giethoorn and, with that, they aim to keep tourism in Giethoorn the same, which would be not busier than it currently is. Also, Giethoorn being a small-scale destination is one of the pillars of the municipality's promotional strategy. As they want to keep using their current promotional strategy it is needed to keep the characteristics used in this strategy true to the reality of the village (interview 7, 10, 11).

Besides that, the main aim of the new vision is to make sure that the village stays liveable, as the number of complaints is growing (interview 10, 11). The way in which they want to do this is by spreading tourists over the area rather than having them in Giethoorn all at the same time (interview 6, 7, 9, 10, 11). This will also help with the parking problems and the traffic jams with boats in the canals (interview 1, 5, 8, 10, 13). To achieve this, Marketing Oost is trying to create attractive products in other places together with businesses there (interview 11). However, difficulties are experienced with this. This mostly because tourists come from far away because they want to see Giethoorn. So, telling them that other places close to Giethoorn are also beautiful does not work as they travelled all the way here to see Giethoorn. This was explained by the interviewee of the municipality in the following way: "A lot of people just want to have visited Giethoorn once. If we go

to the USA than we want to see perhaps the Rocky Mountains, even if there is something else that is just as beautiful we want to be able to say that we have been to the Rocky Mountains. I think it is the same for tourists here. They want to see Giethoorn, not Dwarsgracht even though that might be more beautiful and authentic." (interview 10, translated by author). The interviewee at the tourist information had a similar perspective saying that "Most people come with visiting Giethoorn as the goal and therefore they also want to see what they have travelled for. It is difficult to convince them to go visit another beautiful place. You can tell them, but nevertheless, they also want to discover Giethoorn. Just as when we want to visit the Notre Dame, it is difficult to convince us to go and visit another church instead.". Therefore, the spreading of tourists is easier if the tourists stay longer in the area surrounding Giethoorn. In that case, they do have the opportunity to visit the surroundings but also to visit Giethoorn. That is one of the reasons why the promotion set up by the municipality aims to attract tourists from countries like Germany and Belgium, as these tourists often stay for longer and travel individually which gives them more mobility to visit the surroundings (interview 7, 10, 11). A way in which they try to attract tourists from these markets is by selling the culture and history of Giethoorn and promoting the nature in the surrounding areas, rather than promoting the landscape and activities of Giethoorn only. When it comes to the municipal policies to spread tourists over the area rather than sending them all to Giethoorn, these strategies are not very visible in Giethoorn. One place it can be seen is at the tourist information as they also offer information about the surroundings. In other facilities, the flyers offered are mostly of other businesses in the village itself. When visiting the surroundings, observations can conclude that not that many tourism facilities can be found. However, most of the villages do have at least one restaurant and often a place to sail a boat, especially around the lake more water activities are offered. Accommodations in the surroundings mostly are campsites. In order to make it easier to spread tourists, they want to attract a different group of tourists that has wishes that fit better with the surroundings which is another reason why Marketing Oost has a promotional campaign in Germany and Belgium rather than in Asia or the middle east (interview 11). The overall idea behind attracting this group rather than intercontinental tourists is that they aim to attract tourists that are staying longer in the area and that are spending more money in the area. Also, these tourists are more likely to return to the area as it is closer to their homes (interview 7, 11). Furthermore, the tourist information added that the way in which tourists travel to Giethoorn makes it harder or easier to spread them. If they are travelling individually and are travelling to Giethoorn with their own mode of transport, this will make it more easy for them to visit other places. For example, because they are not restricted to a travel schedule and also they are not depending on public transport. This is often the case for the group of tourists that Marketing Oost tries to attract. So, by making the area more attractive and by

aiming at a specific group of tourists they try to keep the experience and liveability in Giethoorn of high quality.

To reach the goals stakeholders have to work together. It is important that all the strategies are going in the same direction, otherwise it will be even harder to reach and execute them (interview 10). For example, the fact that the businesses and the NBTC promote Giethoorn rather than the area can limit the effect of spreading policies implemented by the municipality. By working together with them, this effect can be reduced. The municipality also works together with the province to increase the budget available. They also try to get the national government to participate, to increase the budget even more (interview 10). With this budget, it would be easier to fulfil the goals they have.

4.5 Tourists and inhabitants as place makers

It is not only the touristic policies set up by the municipality and promotion performed by different stakeholders with different goals, at different levels that shape a place, the social processes happening between tourists and inhabitants can also shape the place. In this case, the inhabitants and tourists become place makers. This is what is currently happening in Giethoorn.

One of the things that happen because of the way the village looks, is that some tourists see the place as an open-air museum (interview 1, 7, 10, 11). This has an undesirable effect on their behaviour, which affects the place. As they think it is a museum, they think they are allowed to go wherever they want, so also into private properties like houses and gardens of inhabitants. This causes a nuisance for the inhabitants (interview 1, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11). Since inhabitants are also place-makers of the place they live in, they have responded to this behaviour of tourists by fencing off paths to private properties and giving the fences signs that tell you that you are not allowed to enter as a tourist. Most of the time these signs are in multiple different languages to make sure most people will understand (see picture 11, 12, 13). This is one of the adaptions the village has made because of tourism, as tourists would enter private properties without the signs or fences, that can be observed. In this case, the image that tourists have of Giethoorn affects the village and the behaviour of the place-makers, the inhabitants. As alterations are made to the village by the inhabitants the image of the village will also change. An example of this could be that tourists are seeing Giethoorn less like an open-air museum, or that tourists are disappointed as the adaptions made can be seen as not fitting the authentic image.

Picture 11, 12 & 13. Signs in Giethoorn (photo by author, 2019)

Another way in which the inhabitants shape the village is by taking care of the exterior of their houses and their gardens. Although there is no policy or rule that makes it mandatory to keep the gardens neat it still happens and can be observed when visiting the village. So, It is not only the businesses that try to keep the village to look good but also the other inhabitants are involved in keeping the image and keeping Giethoorn to look nice. Social control is one of the drivers behind this according to the interviewees that live in Giethoorn. One of the inhabitants said that you would probably get talked to if you would not keep up with your garden work (interview 5). Also, the municipality often sends someone to Giethoorn to make sure the image is not negatively affected and to make sure the rules concerning the protected townscape are followed (interview 5).

As the creation of a place is affected by social processes, tourism also has effects on the village of Giethoorn. Tourism is a phenomenon that has been in Giethoorn since world war two (interview 10). So, it is not a new phenomenon in the village (interview 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10). The unique image of the village is created in earlier times when peat was extracted from the ground for economic reasons (interview 10, 11). The canals were dug to facilitate the transportation of the peat. Flooding caused the iconic lakes to be created. Painters came to the area as they were attracted by the unique look of the village (interview 2, 8, 9). This caused other people to become curious about the village and attracted them to Giethoorn as well. With the film Fanfare being made in 1958 more tourists wanted to come and see Giethoorn for themselves (interview 1, 7, 10). So, the main reason why tourists were and are coming to Giethoorn is based on the things done by the inhabitants. The inhabitants have created the unique image that Giethoorn is famous for nowadays over the course of the village its history. As more and more tourists came to Giethoorn the products offered started to change, for example, restaurants increased their capacity and accommodation adapted to the demand of the new customers coming (interview 9). The fact that the tourists had different demands changed the

facilities available and eventually created the Giethoorn that is famous nowadays, a place full of tourism orientated businesses. Overall we can say that social processes and interactions have changed the village over the years, creating the village that is now, known as tourism destination Giethoorn.

Nowadays there are both positive and negative effects of tourism in Giethoorn. One of the positive outcomes of tourism is that facilities are kept in existence in Giethoorn. Facilities that would have gone bankrupt if they only relied on the usage of the inhabitants (interview 7, 9, 10, 11). Besides that, more facilities and activities are offered because of the popularity of the place. Also outside of Giethoorn. For example in the national park Weerribben-Wieden Marketing Oost tries to improve recreation facilities, not only for the tourists but mainly for the inhabitants of the area as they are the ones using the area the most (interview 11). So, tourism has triggered a process that made the village into what it is now. However, before that, tourism was triggered by the choices made by the municipality and its inhabitants.

Over time the inhabitants that live in Giethoorn have adapted to the touristic character of the village and the number of tourists visiting. For example, they know it is easier to sail in the morning or late afternoon rather than in the middle of the day (interview 1, 5). However, new inhabitants that have moved into the village are often looking for peace and quiet in this rural part of the country. The houses in Giethoorn are highly priced, people living in the “Randstad” of the Netherlands rather buy a house for the same price in Giethoorn than in the “Randstad” according to tourism stakeholders in Giethoorn (interview 8, 9, 10). So, socio-economic processes in other places cause people to move to Giethoorn. According to the interviewees, these new inhabitants are often the ones complaining about the number of tourists in the village (interview 1,8, 9, 10). As media is in close reach nowadays more of the complains are reaching outside the boundaries of Giethoorn. The complains that reach the media tend to create a negative connotation with the name Giethoorn. So, the new inhabitants also become place makers as they actively try to limit the number of tourists coming to Giethoorn by changing the existing image of the village by spreading their negative view on tourism in Giethoorn.

As tourism changed over the years, so did the effect that tourism has on Giethoorn. Without always knowing the tourists visiting Giethoorn are place makers of the village as well. Over the last years, the composition of the tourists that come to visit Giethoorn has changed. More intercontinental tourists are visiting Giethoorn nowadays instead of European and domestic tourists. The amount of Asian, Arab and Eastern European tourists have increased in the streets of Giethoorn (interview 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11). Because of this, the image on the street has changed. According to multiple stakeholders the fact that the tourists that are currently visiting Giethoorn look different from Dutch

people and the tourists that used to visit Giethoorn, who looked a lot like the Dutch people, makes the place feel busier than it used to be (interview 9, 10, 11). So, it feels busier whereas the total number of tourists visiting did not increase that much (interview 11). So, probably without realising, the tourists visiting the village have changed the image of the village according to the stakeholders. This is the same for, for example, Chinese investors. If they buy a house in Giethoorn and Chinese names appear on the houses, inhabitants get the feeling that the whole village is taken over by outsiders whereas this is not the case when a Dutch investors buy multiple real estate (interview 10). According to some of the inhabitants, the new tourists and investors change the identity of Giethoorn, away from the traditional identity. Also, the way in which the tourists behave in Giethoorn changes the village. The way tourists behave is sometimes based on different values than the ones the inhabitants are used to. This behaviour can be experienced as rude, for example when tourists enter private property (interview 1, 7, 9). Also, habits like using the toilet can be different from Dutch habits. This leads to the creation of signs or adapting cleaning habits (interview 1).

To go back to the stakeholders as place makers, not all of them have started their business especially to offer to tourists. The interviewees of Gloria Maris, Museum de Oude Aarde and 'T olde maat uus stated that their businesses started because of personal interest in the topic of their business (interview 2, 3, 8). All the stakeholders have a different vision on tourism and a different relation to tourism. A couple of shops are set up because of tourism, with the aim to attract tourists, with tourists as their first purpose and target group. Other activities have emerged out of personal interest, sometimes with the idea of it also being profitable because of tourism or to show their interests to tourists. So, the products offered in the village were not necessarily built there to create the place into a tourist destination. Overall, most of the stakeholders have the opinion that tourism is not at its limits yet, so they suggest that there is still room for growth of tourism (interview 1, 2, 4, 8, 9). The ideal image that stakeholders have of tourism in Giethoorn often suggests that it would be good if it would stay like this or grow a little bit but not too much.

5. Discussion

5.1 Reflections on the results of the study

With the results that were found through the observations, interviews and content analysis, the research questions can be answered. The research questions of this study are "Which strategies do the stakeholders use to shape Giethoorn as a tourist destination?", "Which characteristics of Giethoorn, as a particular place, have been put forward by tourism stakeholders in order to make it an attractive tourist destination?", and "In what ways has Giethoorn been branded as a particular tourist destination?". Below, these questions will be answered using the results of the analysis

above. This, in order to give an overview of the answers. To answer the main research question, "Which strategies do the stakeholders use to shape Giethoorn as a tourist destination?", it is good to look at the answers on the secondary research questions first.

Question 1: Which characteristics of Giethoorn, as a particular place, have been put forward by tourism stakeholders in order to make it an attractive tourist destination?

The characteristics of the village that are featured the most in promotional materials that were analysed in the content analysis are the following: Water, traditional bridges, authentic houses, nature and boats. According to the interviewees, these are the elements of the village that attract most of the tourists to Giethoorn (interview 1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). These elements together are promoted as the authentic image of Giethoorn (interview 8, 9, 11; promotional materials content analysis). In order to keep this image visible in the village policies, a set of rules and regulations officially written down by the municipality, are being implemented. They are implemented mostly with the goal to keep the village attractive for the tourists (interview 10). An example of this is the protected townscape policy (interview 1, 5, 7, 8, 10). However, it is not always the case that the image is intentionality put forward by the stakeholders, as they often said in the interviews that they did not try to create a certain image of the village via their promotional materials (interview 9, 11). Nevertheless, when looking into their materials, through the content analysis, it is still the case that the identity the village has, which is shown in these materials, is based on the elements water, traditional houses, bridges and boats, which will likely affect the tourists' image of the place. Besides the protected townscape policy the destination is preserved by taking care of the water, houses and gardens, of which the results can be observed (interview 5, 10, 11). Next to the stakeholders, the land- and townscape of Giethoorn are also often the décor for tv shows, tourists their social media pictures and news articles. That way the unique aesthetics of Giethoorn are spread around the world. In de media the picture put forward is not always positive, as it is often about the fact that the village is very overcrowded with tourists, however, this still provides attention to the place which can trigger potential tourists' interest (interview 8).

Next to the visual image, the history behind the village and its famous landscape are also put forward. Sharing the story of how Giethoorn and the area surrounding the village came to be how it is nowadays is often done to inform tourists (interview 7, 10, 11). By putting the culture and history of the landscape forward the goal is also to attract a different group of tourists to the area: rather than the fast tourists that only take pictures, attracting tourists that stay longer, spend more and have in interest in the story of Giethoorn (interview 7, 10, 11). The water in Giethoorn is also being connected to a story in the national promotion of Giethoorn as the village is part of the water subway line of the NBTC ("Nederland Waterland", 2019).

Another part of Giethoorn that it makes it attractive to tourists is the fact that the village offers many activities and facilities. Observing the supply it became clear that these vary from souvenir shops to museums and from campsites to luxury B&Bs, making it enjoyable for a bigger audience. These facilities are often made visible with signs that are often in multiple to be accessible to more tourists. Other signs that stand out when observing Giethoorn are signs that try to adapt the behaviour of tourists, like private property signs or signs with instructions on how to use something. The presence of tourism in the village led to these rules being visibly emphasized throughout Giethoorn (interview 1, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11).

Question 2: In what ways has Giethoorn been branded as a particular tourist destination?

Strategies are used to make Giethoorn seem unique from other places, often through emphasising the elements discussed in the previous answer. The fact that it is a small scale destination, a man-made destination and an authentic village is brought to the attention via the promotion executed by Marketing Oost (interview 11; Weerribben-Wieden marketing, nd). Besides that, the stakeholders brand Giethoorn as a village where you can enjoy sailing a boat and the romantic scenic views through the texts and pictures in their promotional content. On the national level, the destination is branded as being a water destination (interview 10). So, a destination where activities can be done on and around water. Giethoorn is seen as one of the icons of the east of the Netherlands and because of that, the village is also getting attention from the national and provincial marketing companies (interview 10, 11; “Nederland Waterland”, 2019).

Besides national and provincial promotion Giethoorn is also branded as a particular tourist destination by local entrepreneurs. Here it is often branded as a unique and authentic place, creating the idea that it is a destination you should visit once in your life. On top of that, some of the local entrepreneurs make sure they have ads in foreign newspapers, have connections with tour operators abroad and go to holiday fairs (interview 1, 4, 6, 8). All of that to make tourists aware that they can visit Giethoorn and explain why they should. Also, there is a “Giethoorn” built in China to show the image of Giethoorn there (interview 4, 6, 9).

Furthermore, Giethoorn is branded as a tourist destination on the internet. Here the destination is easy to find and information is offered in different forms and languages, as was found out through the content analysis. The same goes for the activities offered in the village, they can also easily be found. For example via websites like booking.com and tripadvisor.com but also via local websites like Giethoorn.com and visitweerribbenwieden.nl. Next to that, the image of the village is widely spread over the internet, often in the form of pictures. On social media, tourists brand Giethoorn to other tourists as they share images and stories of Giethoorn being very cute and small scale or sometimes

even describe it as being paradise-like (interview 9). Via the internet and social media, the destination can be promoted on a larger scale than before the emergence of the internet.

Next to the marketing, in Giethoorn itself it is also very easy to observe that it is a tourist destination. This because of the number of people in the streets but also because of the number of accommodations and activities offered. These products are made visible with signs next to the streets. In the stores itself it is often clear that the products are tailored to tourists as, for example, products like "I love Giethoorn" bags are sold there.

Main research question: Which strategies do the stakeholders use to shape Giethoorn as a tourist destination?

With the answers to the previous questions, it is already clear that promotion at all levels and rules and regulations implemented by the municipality are used to shape Giethoorn as a tourist destination. With the municipal branding strategy and the promotional materials of the other stakeholders, a certain image is created of the village. Also, through promotional materials, the entrepreneurs communicate with tourists and reach potential tourists. Via this form of communication, the stakeholders can affect the image that tourists have of Giethoorn. With the regulations set up by the municipality, it is made sure that the village aligns with the image created and stays similar to how it originally was (interview 10). Besides that, the municipal goals aim to spread the tourists over the area more than they spread by themselves (interview 7, 10, 11). This to make sure that Giethoorn stays enjoyable for the tourists but also for its inhabitants. With the use of promotion this is tried, just as attracting a different group of tourists to the place, tourists that stay longer, spend more and discover more of the area than just Giethoorn.

Overall in the promotional materials of the stakeholders and the municipal tourism policies for Giethoorn, it is the aim to show how the real identity of Giethoorn is. By this is meant that the stakeholders do not want to show Giethoorn as a museum but as a real village where people are living (interview 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). Also, they do not want to support the negative images that are often sketched in the media. These news articles often show Giethoorn as overcrowded which is, according to multiple stakeholders, an exaggeration of the reality (interview 1, 8, 9).

In order for Giethoorn and the surrounding places to be attractive, you need more than just a nice landscape or image. It is important to keep offering products to tourists and to keep developing these products (interview 11). This has been done in Giethoorn and continues to be done. So, building new facilities and products and maintaining the once that are already available. This way the tourists have a reason to visit and are also entertained while visiting. To make the destination and its products even more accessible to tourists of all kind of nationalities the information is nowadays

often available in multiple languages, which can be observed in their flyer, websites and street signs. In order to spread the tourists and make the villages surrounding Giethoorn tourist destinations as well, it is the idea to develop more products there (interview 11).

To make sure tourists visit the village and the facilities the internet is often used to make sure tourists find their way to Giethoorn. The emergence of the internet makes it possible to get in touch with tourists further away from the Netherlands in an easy way. This way Giethoorn has become well known on certain international markets as a tourist destination. It is important to make sure that tourists can find information about the destination and facilities. Therefore websites like booking.com, Airbnb and TripAdvisor are often used by the businesses in Giethoorn. Besides the internet other strategies are still used to keep in touch with potential tourists, for example, using folders, news articles, deals with tour operators or promoting at holiday fairs (interview 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9; content analysis). In the village itself, the most used technique to attract tourists is by making the business visible. After the observations, we can conclude that this is most often done via signs on the streets and flyers at the tourist office and other information points.

When comparing the strategies used by the stakeholders to shape Giethoorn as a tourist destination, differences can be seen. Generally speaking, businesses want to attract tourists to Giethoorn. For the municipality and their partners, it is important to focus on the wellbeing and welfare of the inhabitants as well (interview 10, 11). Rather than attracting new visitors to Giethoorn, they want to manage the visitor flows in order to keep the liveability, making sure everyone benefits from tourism and making the destination sustainable so tourism can keep existing in the future (interview 10, 11). Since Marketing Oost and the tourist information are employed by the municipality and the province, they also focus on spreading tourism and keeping the destination in its best shape for the future (interview 7, 11). Still, overall the destination is created around the looks of the village and nature as could be seen using the content analysis. The combination of the different ways of promotion at different levels, policies that protect the aesthetics of the image and product creation are the most important strategies that shape Giethoorn to be a particular tourist destination. This together with the social processes between inhabitants and tourists, making them place-makers as well. With this, the stakeholders involved in tourism in the place are creating a specific image of the village. This image reaches over the world via promotion, mainly via the internet (interview 1, 4, 6, 8, 9). Since policies are implemented to maintain the characteristics of Giethoorn that are the basis of the image connected to the place, the stakeholders try to meet the expectations tourists have of the village (interview 2, 5, 7, 8, 10). By matching the place to the image that appeals to tourists, tourists are not disappointed when visiting and will continue to spread their experiences and pictures with more potential tourists (interview 9). As long as this is continued, in combination with promotion by

stakeholders, and as long as products are being renewed and offered in the place, it is likely that Giethoorn will stay and continue to be perceived as a tourist destination.

5.2 Reflections on the theory

As seen in the research by Dredge & Jenkins (2003), tourism often takes place in a specific place. Tourists often have a specific reason to go to a certain place rather than just randomly going to somewhere. In the case of Giethoorn tourists come to visit the place mostly because of its characteristics that are portrayed as being unique. As tourists specifically come to visit Giethoorn, difficulties are experienced when trying to spread the tourists over the areas surrounding Giethoorn Although the goal of the municipality is to spread tourists, they still specifically come to visit Giethoorn. So, tourism is also connected to a specific place in this case. The strategy to spread tourists, however, is a tool to prevent over-tourism. When a place experiences over-tourism, the liveability and the tourism experience in the place can be hindered (Goodwin, 2017). The goal of the municipality and Marketing Oost is to maintain the liveability in Giethoorn by spreading tourists over the surrounding area. So, to prevent the village from the negative effects of having too many tourists in order to keep it enjoyable for both tourists and inhabitants.

According to MacCannell (1973) and Cassel & Pettersson (2015) authenticity can be staged in tourist destinations, as could be seen at the Jamaa el Fna according to the study by Minca (2007). In Giethoorn the tourists also come to visit for the aesthetics and atmosphere just as in Minca his study. Drawing on the interviews the activities visible in Giethoorn are not set up for tourists and are just activities villagers chose to do. So, if you see someone mowing the lawn this is daily life and not something staged for tourists to watch. Nevertheless, the municipality did tell that new buildings that will be built for tourism purposes do have to fit into the style of the village. If the buildings are then looking like traditional buildings even though they are new buildings, this could be seen as a form of staging (Cassel & Pettersson, 2015). The staging that is incorporated into the strategies of the municipality has as a goal to keep the destination attractive.

As discussed earlier this research used the social constructivist approach as the theoretical framework. This means that a place is seen as a social construct rather than a geographical location with boundaries (Cresswell, 2015). Social processes can shape the social construct, place, and its identity. In this case, the place is shaped to be a tourist destination. According to Cohen (1979) and Pearce (2014), tourism can change a place and the social processes in a place. In the case of Giethoorn, the place is seen as a tourist destination rather than just a mere location. Processes like communication between stakeholders in the village and potential tourists have helped to create the

image of Giethoorn being a tourist destination. Furthermore, the image spread of the village is attractive to tourists, according to the interviewed stakeholders. Also, changes in the village, like the arrival of hotels in the traditional architectural style, are attempts to maintain the identity of Giethoorn that is advertised to tourists.

Overall, the people that use the place give it a meaning. These meanings are multiple, as for some people it is a village to live while for others it is a village in which to spend their holidays. The processes that emerge because of people using the place affects how the place is looking and how the place is perceived. As each person interprets a place and its identity in a different way, these ways of looking at Giethoorn are shared for example in promotional materials but also by tourists on social media (Cresswell, 2015; Reynolds, 1965). This will add to how the place is seen and how it is perceived as a tourist destination rather than just a location.

In the case of Giethoorn, it also became clear that they make use of the image tourists have about the place in the promotions, although not always intentionally. So, the statement made in the article by Souiden et al. (2017) that image is used to brand a tourist destination, is true in the case of Giethoorn. This can be seen in the folders and flyers and on the websites online. So, the spatial features that a place has, can be one of the characteristics of the place that appeals to tourists (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003). In the case of Giethoorn, the water-rich and nature-based location is attractive to tourists and therefore also used in the image creation of the place.

Since not many studies have looked at the concept place in combination with the making of a tourist destination this thesis will add to research answering the question “What makes a place a tourist destination?”. However, the results of this study cannot be generalised to be true for other destinations as strategies can vary between destinations.

5.3 Limitations

Although throughout the study it was tried to work carefully, the study does have limitations. Due to the limited time period available for this research, the observations were only executed over the course of a week. The data gathered would be more reliable and detailed if the participant observations would have taken place over a longer period of time. Doing the observations on more than just one day could have given a more accurate image of Giethoorn, as uncommon events could be filtered out of the observations. Also, not all of the tourism stakeholders were (willing to be) interviewed. Because of this, it is likely that certain opinions and destination making strategies have been left out of this research. Besides that, not all of the interviews were recorded. Notes were written down and processed quickly afterwards, still it can be that details were left out because of

human error. This could have led to a wrong interpretation of the data. Looking into all content produced about Giethoorn as a tourist destination in the content analysis was also not an option. This because of the limited time but also because of language issues. Some information is written in languages not spoken by the author which made it difficult if not impossible to include this information. Besides that, it is likely that not all information about Giethoorn can be accessed from the authors' location, for example, certain websites.

Another limitation is concerning the sampling method. Snowball sampling was used after choosing the first tourism stakeholder randomly as the group of stakeholders is relatively small. However, one of the limitations is that the recommendations of the stakeholders can be biased. Limitations of this method were experienced in the field as certain stakeholders were very often recommended and some of the interviewees did not have explicit recommendations. Also, the fact that certain stakeholders that were often recommended did not have the time to participate in an interview led to a dead end. In the end, expert sampling was used to fill the gaps left by snowball sampling. With this, stakeholders that have important strategies creating Giethoorn into a tourist destination were also interviewed, like the municipality.

5.4 Recommendations for future studies

The results of this study are specific to Giethoorn, and cannot be generalised for all other tourist destinations. Although this research does add to answer on the question "what makes a place a tourist destination?", this research is not enough to answer the question as the strategies are specific to the making of Giethoorn into a tourist destination. As the question "what makes a place a tourist destination?" is not yet clearly answered, it would be good if future studies look more into this question. By doing more case studies, it might be possible in the future to see a general pattern in the strategies used to turn a place into a tourist destination. In these future studies, it would be recommended to increase the time available for doing the research. With more time, the methods can be used in more depth. So, more interviews can be done, for example also over time to see changes in the place and its strategies. Also, more content can be analysed if the research time is extended. Besides that, it could be better to record all interviews, when consent is given, to limit the human error of forgetting the details. Overall, doing extra research on this topic would help to find a more general answer to the underlying decisions and processes that make a place a tourist destination. Furthermore, as most of the studies concerning the construction of a tourist destination look at the construction of the destination image it would be good to add more studies on the topic of the social construction of the place into a destination itself.

6. Conclusion

The main question behind this research is “what makes a place a tourist destination?”. In this research, a specific case was chosen to look at. This is the village of Giethoorn. Giethoorn is a popular tourist destination in the Netherlands that is currently often in the news because of the negative effects of tourism. For this case study, the research question is “Which strategies do the stakeholders use to shape Giethoorn as a tourist destination?**”.** By looking at the concept of place from a social constructivist perspective and by using interviews, observations and a content analysis as methods, the following main results were found. Overall, Giethoorn became a tourism destination because of social processes. These processes started with images that reached the greater public like paintings and the film de “fanfare”. These images caused tourists to be attracted to the place. Currently, social processes continue to shape the place as a tourist destination. By using promotion the stakeholders involved in tourism in the place are creating a specific image of the village and communicate this to the tourists through their promotional materials. This image is spread over the world by both the stakeholders as well as the tourists themselves, especially since the emergence of the internet. Nowadays, the image that is connected to the village, of it being authentic and unique because of the houses, boats and canals, stays alive in reality because of policies implemented by the municipality. The landscape on which this image of Giethoorn is based is also created because of social processes since peat extraction created the canals Giethoorn is currently famous for. The unique elements of the village, which are incorporated in the image tourism stakeholders promote and the image tourists have of Giethoorn, are conserved through a set of rules and regulation like the protected townscape policy. Despite the efforts to keep the image the same, social processes, like a tourist with different values visiting Giethoorn or changes in preferred media for promotion, will still affect place makers and their strategies. Their strategies can cause changes in the village, for example in the landscape, causing the image of Giethoorn to be forever changing. With the expectations that tourism will continue growing in the Netherlands, it is likely that tourism will continue to grow in Giethoorn, despite the efforts to spread the tourists across the area. Giethoorn has a unique image and as long as that will keep existing tourists will be coming to the village to experience it for themselves.

So to summarise, the strategies of tourism stakeholders to create a specific image of Giethoorn that is also shared by tourists themselves through social media posts and which is conserved in the village through municipal tourism strategies which contain policies like the protected townscape continues to attract tourist to the village. The reinforcement and the conservation of this image together with the other processes in the village, like the development of new facilities and interactions between inhabitants and tourists, make the place Giethoorn being perceived as a tourist destination.

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8. Appendices

Table of interviewees

Number	Name of business	Type of business	Gender	Interview
1	Café de Fanfare	Restaurant	M	Short, notes taken
2	Museum T olde maat uus	Museum	M & F	Short, notes taken
3	Gloria maris	Shop/gallery	F	Short, notes taken
4	Hollands venetië	Boat tours	M	Short, notes taken
5	-	Inhabitant	M	Short, notes taken
6	Cheese store Giethoorn	Shop	M & F	Short, notes taken
7	Tourist information	Information	F	Short, notes taken
8	De Oude Aarde	Museum & shop	M	Short, notes taken
9	De Galeriet	B&B, activity	F	Long, notes taken
10	Municipality Steendwijkerland	Governmental organisation	M	Long, recorded
11	Marketing Oost	Marketing, working for the government	M	Long, recorded, via phone call
12	Giethoorn.com	Marketing	-	Questions sent via email
13	Lekkers & zo	Shop	F	A talk, notes taken (observation)

List of the interview questions

Questions outside the interview:

Do you allow me/ do you give consent to recording of this interview?

Do you know any other actors that are involved in making Giethoorn a tourist destination? Or that promote Giethoorn to tourists as a place worth visiting?

Interview questions

Introductory questions and questions about the specifics of the job and company.

What has your job within the company to do with tourism in Giethoorn? What is the relation that you and the company have with the tourism industry in Giethoorn?	Wat heeft uw functie binnen het bedrijf te doen met toerisme in Giethoorn? Wat is de relatie van uw en het bedrijf met de toeristische sector in Giethoorn?	
What are the reasons that Giethoorn became a tourist destination?	Wat is de reden dat Giethoorn een toeristische bestemming is geworden?	
What is your image of Giethoorn as a tourist destination?	Wat is uw beeld van Giethoorn als een toeristische bestemming?	
What is your vision on (tourism in) Giethoorn?	Wat is uw visie op Giethoorn en toerisme in Giethoorn?	

Strategies used for place making

What are the strategies you/your company uses to create an image of Giethoorn	Wat zijn de strategieën die u/uw bedrijf gebruikt om een beeld van Giethoorn te schetsen?	
What specific branding style/ marketing technique is used to promote Giethoorn?	Is er een specifieke marketing stijl die gebruikt wordt om Giethoorn te promoten? Zo ja, welke is dat?	
How/with what strategies did Giethoorn become a tourist destination?	Hoe/ met welke strategieën is Giethoorn een toeristische bestemming geworden?	
How do you think Giethoorn would have looked if no strategies around tourism	Hoe denkt u dat Giethoorn er uit had gezien/ zou zijn als er geen strategieën	

would have been implemented?	waren gebruikt rondom toerisme?	
What are the reasons behind the image you create of Giethoorn?	Wat zijn de redenen dat u Giethoorn op deze manier neer zet/naar buiten brengt?	
Does your company actively create a certain image of Giethoorn to outsiders? If so, what does this image entail and with what strategies is this image created? How does your company try to portray Giethoorn to tourists?	Creëert u/uw bedrijf bewust een bepaald beeld van Giethoorn naar de buitenwereld toe? Zo ja, wat is dit beeld en hoe wordt dit opgezet? Op wat voor manier toont u Giethoorn aan toeristen?	
What are the strategies you/your company uses to create an image of Giethoorn?	Wat zijn de strategieën die u/uw bedrijf gebruikt om een beeld van Giethoorn te schetsen?	

Outcomes & images created by these strategies

What is the current identity of Giethoorn? Does this resemble the authentic identity of Giethoorn? If so/ if not so, what is the authentic identity according to you? Does the image of Giethoorn communicated to tourists resemble the authentic identity of Giethoorn? If not, why was it chosen to deviate from this? If so, what is the reason behind staying true to the authentic identity?	Wat is de identiteit van de plaats Giethoorn? Komt dit overeen met de originele identiteit? Wat is deze authentieke identiteit volgens u? Komt de uitstraling/ het beeld naar toeristen toe overeen met de echte identiteit van Giethoorn? Zo niet, waarom is er gekozen hiervan af te wijken? Zo ja, wat is de reden om dichtbij de oorspronkelijke identiteit te blijven?	
Via your company's website, is there a specific image that you want to carry out? If so, what is this image? What are the strategies used to create this image?	Via uw website, is er een specifiek beeld/image dat uw wilt uitstralen? Zo ja, wat wilt u uitstralen? Wat zijn de technieken die gebruikt zijn om deze uitstraling te creëren?	

Has the image that is created of Giethoorn changed since the start of tourism in the place? Why and how?	Is het beeld dat Giethoorn naar buiten uit wil stralen veranderd sinds het begin van toerisme in de plaats? Zo ja, hoe is dit veranderd en waarom?	

Ideal image of Giethoorn

What strategies would you use to set up Giethoorn as a tourist destination if it would not yet be a tourist destination?	Welke strategieën zou u gebruiken als u Giethoorn zou opbouwen tot een toeristische bestemming als dat het nog niet was geweest?	
Would you prefer to change the image Giethoorn has and distributes to the outside world as a tourist destination? If so, in what way?	Zou u het beeld van Giethoorn als toeristische bestemming en het beeld dat hiermee naar buiten uitgestraald wordt willen aanpassen? Zo ja, op wat voor manier?	
What does your ideal Giethoorn look like as a tourist destination?	Wat is uw ideaal beeld van Giethoorn als toeristische bestemming?	
Would you prefer to see Giethoorn change, for example no longer being a tourist destination or the image that Giethoorn is portraying to the outside right now? If so, in what way?	Zou u willen dat Giethoorn zou veranderen, bijvoorbeeld zodat het niet langer een toeristische bestemming is of dat het een ander beeld uitstraalt naar buiten? Zo ja, op wat voor manier?	

Things affecting the strategies and images of Giethoorn

What effects do tourists visiting Giethoorn and the activities they perform have on the place according to you?	Welke effecten heeft de aanwezigheid van toeristen en de activiteiten die zij doen op de plaats Giethoorn volgens u?	
Do you think that social processes and tourists visiting Giethoorn changes the place, the identity of the	Denkt u dat sociale processen in Giethoorn en het feit dat de plaats vaak bezocht wordt door toeristen een veranderend	

place and the image that exists of the place? If so, in what way does it change these aspects of Giethoorn? If not, why are the reasons it does not cause change?	effect hebben op de plaats, de identiteit van de plaats en het beeld dat bestaat over de plaats? Zo ja, op wat voor manier? Zo nee, waarom denkt uw van niet?	

Small interviews:

questions about how the tourism strategies from the top-down stake-holders (e.g. the municipality or the tourism organisations) affect the work of these shop or accommodation owners.

- Zijn er dingen die u doet om een specifiek beeld uit te stralen? En om een specifiek beeld te geven aan Giethoorn?

- Hoe wordt uw werk in uw winkel/accommodatie beïnvloedt door de strategieën en het beleid van boven af?

- Gebruikt u specifieke marketing strategieën in uw bedrijf?

- Heeft u uw bedrijf een specifieke uitstraling gegeven om een bepaalde identiteit uit te stralen?

- Wat is uw beeld van Giethoorn's identiteit? Probeert u deze uit te stralen/ te behouden?

- Bent u het niet eens met bepaald beleid?

- Hoe zou u uw bedrijf en Giethoorn het liefste zien?

- Hoe zou u toerisme in Giethoorn het liefste zien?