

# MASTER THESIS

Networking in regions –  
Potential analysis of the integration of north rhine-westphalian cities  
outside the Rhine-Ruhr-region into the project FLOW.NRW

Netzwerkarbeit in Regionen –  
Potentialanalyse der Integration von nordrhein-westfälischen Städten außerhalb der  
Rhein-Ruhr-Region in das Projekt FLOW.NRW



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## Abstract



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**ABSTRACT**  
**Appendix for M.Sc.-thesis**  
**Maturity test for M.Sc.**

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Abstract: <p>Tourists nowadays search for authentic and interesting experiences and activities in a destination. The project FLOW.NRW wants to present the federal state North Rhine-Westphalia as an attractive urban destination and as a living space with a high quality of life in international competition. It aims to attract people to discover the numerous facets of the various cities with its cultural, creative and digital potential. In contrast to the previous project #urbanana, the project approach in FLOW.NRW is now extended to the regional centres outside the Rhine-Ruhr region. The objective of this study therefore is to investigate the potential of the regional centers included, how an integration into the project can be successful and what potential for the future of the project can result from this.</p> <p>The data is collected via a short preliminary study with the three project partners Köln Tourismus, Düsseldorf Tourismus and Ruhr Tourismus as well with qualitative guideline-interviews with seven experts from the regional centers. After the evaluation with the method GABEK it turns out that the regional centers offer a lot of potential which can be communicated into the project. Especially within the threads Culture and Design exist many linkages, whereby the digital scene is still developable.</p> <p>The study has practical implications since it highlights the potentials of the cities and helps the project management to develop the project further, get better connections to the cities and thus to create a working network which strengthens the whole federal state NRW as a travel destination.</p>			
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### Summary

In 2016 the tourism umbrella organisation for North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), Tourismus NRW e.V. launched, together with the project partners Köln Tourismus, Düsseldorf Tourismus and Ruhr Tourismus, the project #urbanana. The project tried to develop an unifying approach for the urban areas of Düsseldorf, Köln and the Ruhr Region, in which the urban creative scene cooperates with the cultural and creative industries (CCI) and the tourism industry. #urbanana was awarded as European cultural tourism region in the year 2017. Following this success, the follow-up project “FLOW.NRW” started in 2019 with an extended approach: the regional centres in NRW and their creative potential should now be included and communicated into the project and in addition to the creative and cultural potentials, the digital scene is now also taken into consideration. The project aims to attract people to come to NRW and to discover not only the classical places of interest in the cities but invites them also to be curious, open and flexible for new and unexpected experiences. And these experiences happen not only in the metropolitan regions Düsseldorf, Köln (Cologne) or the Ruhr Area but also in the various smaller regional centres in NRW with their individual attractiveness.

Thus, this study puts a focus on the project FLOW.NRW and takes a closer look at these regional centres and their potentials. It aims to present the individual competencies of the cities in the three defined thematic threads “Culture & Music”, “Design & Art” as well as “Digital”, the possibilities to communicate those attractions to the project and the resulting potential for the future of the project.

This study is supported by three theoretical foundations. The first foundation focuses on the concept of the creative city, -milieu and -class. Creativity can be seen as an important force in cities, as people can live out their ideas and put them into practice. Through creativity, innovation is generated which in turn is seen as an important factor for economic development. As cities nowadays no longer compete against each other for physical resources like gold or coal, but for mobile brainpower and creativity, intangible factors like experiences and openness to diversity are essential for cities to stand out from others. In this regard, the American economic geographer Richard Florida and his approach of the Creative Class as well as the British urban researcher Charles Landry and the approach of a creative city play a major role.

The second foundation deals with networks, especially regional networks and innovative milieus. Here a focus is put on the different stakeholders in a network, their relationships and Mark Granovetter's theory of the importance of strong and weak ties. For stakeholders in a

network it is important to trust that they will benefit from the network participation. Further, a distinction between a network, a cooperation and an organisation is made.

The third foundation of this study deals with ecosystems and presents different types, amongst others business ecosystems, innovation ecosystems and platform ecosystems. Ecosystems are useful to describe dynamic interactions in a holistic way, e.g. how people meet, trust, collaborate and grow together.

By connecting the three foundations it is aimed to define the whole federal state of NRW as an ecosystem, in which the project FLOW.NRW acts like a network. In this network, the different regional centres are connected to each other and to the project and try to aim the common goal to attract tourists to NRW.

The empirical part of this study uses a qualitative approach. For this, firstly a short preliminary study with the three project partners Köln Tourismus, Düsseldorf Tourismus and Ruhr Tourismus was done to get insights into the project's perspective. Secondly, seven semi-structured guideline interviews with the managing directors of the tourism marketing organisations in the regional centres were conducted. The interviews were analysed with the software WinRelan and the method GABEK, which allows to systematically evaluate the collected data material and to graphically display the textual references by taking syntax and semantics into account. The generated association and causal network graphs are helpful to answer the research question of this study: How can the regional centres outside of the *#urbanana*-region be included in the project FLOW.NRW and what potential does this offer for the future of the project?

During the evaluation, it turns out that the regional centres show a lot of interest for the project FLOW.NRW and its content, and that they are open for participation. Thus, they offer a lot of potential which can be communicated and linked with the project. In this connection, the city marketing organisations see themselves as networkers, who can mediate between the project and the institutions as they already have good connections and networks in their cities. It is noticeable that, especially within the thematic threads "Culture&Music" and "Design&Art", many institutions and linkages were mentioned, whereby the field "Digital" is still developable. Here it becomes clear, that the project's approach to also take the digital scene in NRW into consideration can be stated as a good decision, as through the project this field receives additional attention and can develop further. Besides many positive connections and

optimism, the project will also face some challenges and problems during the three-year project-period, like the merging of the two different industries tourism and CCI or the topic of distribution of the different partners and areas. Here the project management Tourismus NRW e.V. needs to manage the partners adequate and must guarantee a well-ordered project flow.

The study has practical implications since it highlights the potentials of the cities and helps the project management to develop the project further, get better connections to the cities and thus to create a working network, which strengthens the whole federal state NRW as a travel destination. However, there is potential for future research. As this study only takes the possibilities of the integration of the regional centres into the project FLOW.NRW into consideration, the resulting perception by the population respectively tourists in the cities would be an exciting field of research for the future. The overall package - the integration of cities in a creative project like this, and the resulting perception of the people - could be well adapted for other destinations and NRW could thus be seen as a pioneering region.

**Table of contents**

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>List of figures .....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>List of tables.....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>List of abbreviations.....</b>	<b>IX</b>
<b>1 Introduction: Relevance of the subject.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Procedure and goals of the thesis .....	3
1.1.1 Objectives of thesis.....	3
1.1.2 Structure of thesis.....	4
1.2 Object of Research.....	5
1.2.1 Tourism in North Rhine-Westphalia .....	5
1.2.2 The projects: #urbanana and FLOW.NRW .....	7
1.2.3 The regional centres outside the Rhine-Ruhr-region examined .....	11
1.2.4 Tourism and the creative, cultural and digital scene.....	12
<b>2. Theoretical foundations .....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1. The Concept of the Creative City and Creative Milieus .....	19
2.1.1. Richard Florida and “The Rise of the Creative Class”.....	19
2.1.2. Creative industries as driver for the creative city.....	22
2.1.3. The Creative City – a panacea? .....	23
2.1.4. Charles Landry’s “Cycle of Urban Creativity” .....	26
2.2. Networks, regional networks and innovative milieus.....	29
2.2.1. Stakeholder, relationships and ties in a network .....	30
2.2.2. Networks, Cooperation and Organisation: a distinction.....	33
2.2.3. Competitive advantages of networks and the relational view .....	35
2.2.4. Innovation and innovative milieus in a network .....	36
2.3. The Ecosystem approach .....	38
2.3.1. Business ecosystems.....	39
2.3.2. Innovation ecosystems .....	41
2.3.3. Entrepreneurial ecosystems .....	42
2.3.4. Platform ecosystems .....	44
2.3.5. Service ecosystems.....	45

<b>3. Methodological approach .....</b>	<b>46</b>
3.1. Participation in the project FLOW.NRW .....	46
3.1.1. Applying the theoretical basis on the object of research .....	46
3.1.2. Research question and guiding questions of this study .....	48
3.2. Preparation and implementation of the methodological approach .....	49
3.2.1. Criteria of qualitative empirical social research.....	49
3.2.2. Sampling strategy .....	50
3.2.3. Preliminary study with the project partners.....	53
3.2.4. The semi-structured guideline-interview with experts.....	54
3.2.5. Developing the interview guideline .....	56
3.2.6. Conduction of the interviews .....	57
3.2.7. Coding of data with GABEK/WinRelan.....	58
<b>4. Empirical results.....</b>	<b>60</b>
4.1. Networks and the project FLOW.NRW .....	60
4.1.1. Associations with the term ‘network’.....	60
4.1.2. Potential and Benefits of the project for the regional centres and NRW .....	61
4.2. FLOW.NRW in the context of the specific destination .....	65
4.2.1. Potential linkages from the regional centres to the project FLOW.NRW .....	65
4.2.2. Possible integration of the regional centres.....	71
4.2.3. Integration of the regional centres into the project.....	73
4.2.4. Wishes and improvements for the project FLOW.NRW.....	74
4.3. FLOW.NRW in a superordinate context .....	76
4.3.1. The Emergence of a Network.....	76
4.3.2. Challenges within CCI and the project.....	77
4.4. Interpretation, Discussion and Future of the project .....	79
<b>5. Critical reflection.....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>6. Conclusions and recommendations.....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>7. List of references.....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>8. Appendix .....</b>	<b>98</b>

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>102</b>
<b>Statutory Declaration</b> .....	<b>103</b>

## List of figures

Figure 1: Geographical area of #urbanana in NRW .....	8
Figure 2: Thematic threads of FLOW.NRW .....	10
Figure 3: Regional centres in NRW .....	11
Figure 4: Changes in the drivers of tourism over time .....	15
Figure 5: The Cycle of Urban Creativity .....	27
Figure 6: Networks, Cooperation and Organisation .....	34
Figure 7: Ecosystem streams .....	39
Figure 8: The Ecosystem North Rhine-Westphalia .....	47
Figure 9: Network associations of the preliminary study and the interviewees .....	61
Figure 10: Potential and Benefits of the project for the destinations .....	62
Figure 11: Association graph to "Thematic thread: Culture & Music" .....	65
Figure 12: Connections within 'Fashion & Fashiondesign' .....	69
Figure 13: Possible integration of the regional centres .....	71
Figure 14: Integration of the regional centres from the perspective of the project partners ....	73
Figure 15: Wishes & improvements for FLOW.NRW .....	74
Figure 16: Emergence of a network .....	76

## List of tables

Table 1: Overview of the used codes in GABEK .....	59
Table 2: Potentials of the regional centres .....	68



## List of abbreviations

<b>B2B</b>	Business-to-Business
<b>B2C</b>	Business-to-Customer
<b>CCI</b>	Cultural- and creative Industries
<b>DCMS</b>	Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
<b>DMO</b>	Destination Marketing Organisation
<b>EAAP</b>	Ecosystem-as-Affiliation Perspective
<b>EASP</b>	Ecosystem-as-Structure Perspective
<b>EE</b>	Entrepreneurial Ecosystems
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>IP</b>	Interview Partner
<b>NRW</b>	North Rhine-Westphalia
<b>PS</b>	Pre-Study
<b>SMEs</b>	Small and medium-sized enterprises
<b>UCCN</b>	UNESCO Creative Cities Network

### **Explanatory note:**

In this study, the original German names of the cities are used, e.g. Köln (Cologne)

## 1 Introduction: Relevance of the subject

In an interview with the urban researcher Charles Landry, he was asked what a city should have so that he would feel comfortable. He answered: “*Contradictions, most of all, a balance between chaos and order. It needs neighborhoods vibrating with energy,[...] cozy little corners and parks; well-tended, middle-class sections,[...] an alternative scene; technology centers for innovative youth and social facilities for older people. In other words, it needs creativity to retain the high performers who have lived there for years as well as to attract new, interesting residents.*” (LANDRY 2007). The interview was conducted already in 2007, but the topic of a liveable city is today more actual than ever.

With the project #urbanana and its follow-up project FLOW.NRW, Tourismus NRW e.V. wants to achieve this goal for the whole federal state North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) by examining the (creative) urban spaces for special features and making them accessible for tourists as well as the locals. The project wants to attract people to NRW to discover not only the classical places of interest in the cities but invites them also to be curious, open and flexible for new and unexpected experiences. And these experiences happen not only in the metropolitan regions Düsseldorf, Köln (Cologne) or the Ruhr Area, but also in the various regional centres in NRW with their individual attractiveness. The project FLOW.NRW aims to identify small niches between the creative, the tourism and the digital industry in the cities and to establish a mutual understanding for different industries and thus to create an authentic experience for the visitors (DÖLL-KÖNIG & LAARMANN 2017).

The concept of linking the creative sector to the tourism industry is not a new phenomenon and has been subject in the literature since the end of the last century (see e.g. HORNER 1993; CREIGHTON 1995; DANIEL 1996; JONES & SMITH 2005; GIBSON & CORNELL 2005; HUDSON & RITCHIE 2006; MORGAN, WATSON & HEMMINGTON 2008; BUCHMANN, MOORE & FISCHER 2010; PREBENSEN & FOSS 2011; OTTENBACHER & HARRINGTON 2013; CHATHOTH, UNGSON, HARRINGTON & CHAN 2016; ROSS, SAXENA, CORREIA & DEUTZ 2017). Since 2003 the number of articles which were published on creative tourism has steadily increased and since 2012 also the citations have grown (GALVAGNO & GIACCONE 2019: 7).

Projects which connect the creative, cultural and tourism industry have been existing in Germany similarly before FLOW.NRW started. “Kuckucksnester” (cuckoo's nest), which is a

project of the High Black Forest Tourism Association, rents old holiday flats and apartments, which have been modernised and redesigned to tourists in the region Black Forest and won the 1<sup>st</sup> price at the German Tourism Awards in 2015 (DEUTSCHER TOURISMUSPREIS 2015). Another example is “the Fläming Forge – with crowdfunding to a creative region”, a project of the tourism association Fläming e.V. The crowdfunding competition aimed to promote unusual business ideas and tourism products to strengthen the region Fläming as a travel region and won the 3<sup>rd</sup> price in 2018 (DEUTSCHER TOURISMUSPREIS 2018). In NRW exists amongst others “Kulturnetzwerke Ruhr”, a campaign, where 20 museums, 11 theatres and five festivals in 16 cities offer free admission and discounts and where the tourist can immerse into the cultural landscape of the Metropol region Ruhr (RUHR TOURISMUS GMBH 2019).

However, the project FLOW.NRW can be regarded as a novelty insofar as it, on the one hand, expands its radius from the #urbanana-region, which means the metropolitan areas Düsseldorf, Köln and the Ruhr Area also to the other regional centres in NRW. On the other hand, the project aims to connect not only the creative- and cultural scene, but takes also the digital scene with start-ups and innovation centres into its focus and therefore tries to cover and to strengthen the tourism industry in the whole federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia. Referring to the thematic breadth and the size of the region that the project is working on, it is thus worth looking at the regional centres in NRW, their individual potentials and the possibility to include them into the project FLOW.NRW.

## 1.1 Procedure and goals of the thesis

At the beginning of this study the objectives and the structure of this thesis will be presented.

### 1.1.1 Objectives of thesis

This study aims to research how cities, which are not a member of an already existing project in the tourism industry, may also be included and can participate and thus how their potential can strengthen and support the project. This should be done by using the project FLOW.NRW as a case-study, researching the regional centres outside the Rhein-Ruhr-Region (synonymical: outside the *#urbanana*-region) in the federal state North-Rhine-Westphalia.

During an internship at Tourismus NRW e.V. in Düsseldorf, the researcher was in the lucky position of being able to gain a few insights into the design of the project application for FLOW.NRW. Through this it was decided to take the project as an opportunity to do some research for this thesis. Concerning the general aim, it should be carved out how the regional centres can profit from *#urbanana* although they are not located in the Rhine-Ruhr-Region. By exploring the cities perspective on the project, it is aimed to show their potentials and their possibility of integration and participation and to create more innovative ideas at the interface between the tourism industry and the creative and cultural industries as well as the digital scene (CCI). Besides it will be explored what could be done on the part of the project to involve these cities and their potential in a better way. Based on these insights it is aimed to re-communicate the bigger cities in NRW as destinations, to intensify their external perception and to develop and expand the social network relationships between the actors of the Destination Marketing Organisations (DMO) in NRW. In practical terms, it is aimed to provide important recommendations for the practical partner of this study, Tourismus NRW e.V., and especially the project partners of FLOW.NRW. They will receive useful information on how the cities outside the Rhein-Ruhr-Region could participate and be more integrated into the project, which creative potential they offer and how this could be used in general to strengthen North Rhine-Westphalia as a tourism and travel destination.

By doing research on this topic, this study aims to fill a research gap by exploring important implications to develop and conceptualize future projects in the field of participation and integration for cities into an already existing network. As the project *#urbanana* started as a pilot project in Germany (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2017) and the transfer to the follow-up-project

FLOW.NRW in this extension is also new, the results of this study could be transferred to other destinations, which may also follow the approach and place a stronger focus on integration of cities into similar networks.

### **1.1.2 Structure of thesis**

This study consists of a theoretical part, a methodological part and an empirical part. At the beginning of this work, elementary information about the object of research will be given in chapter 1.2. This includes data and facts about the tourism in North Rhine-Westphalia as well as information on the practical partner of this study, Tourismus NRW e.V. Further, the two projects #urbanana and its follow-up project FLOW.NRW, which form the basis of this thesis, will be presented. This chapter shall therefore not only serve for describing the field of research. Rather the information about the cultural- and creative industries in NRW and both projects play a major role in the further investigation of the perceived empirical research.

Thereafter in chapter 2, the theoretical basis of this study is illustrated. There are three theoretical foundations which are used in this study: the first one deals with creative cities and creative milieus in a destination. The second foundation addresses the (regional) networks which this study wants to explore, and the last foundation gives attention to NRW as a holistic ecosystem and tries to combine the two previously mentioned approaches.

In chapter 3 an overview of the methodological approach of this study is given. In chapter 3.1 the theoretical basis is applied to the object of research and the research question is carved out. Following this, in chapter 3.2 the core criteria of qualitative research, the sampling strategy, information about the preliminary study with the project partners, the interview guideline and its conduction, as well as the coding of the data, is outlined.

Chapter 4 shows the empirical results, and the insights of the investigation will be analysed, evaluated and presented with reference to the theoretical foundations. In chapter 5, a critical reflection of the study is presented and an outline of potentials for future research in this thematic field is given. The work concludes in chapter 6 with a final assessment and derives specific recommendations for the practical partner Tourismus NRW e.V. and its project partners.

## 1.2 Object of Research

In this chapter, the object of research of this study will be presented. This includes an overview of the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the two projects *#urbanana* and FLOW.NRW, a short description of the regional centres which are examined in this study and finally information about the creative industries in NRW and their relation to tourism.

### 1.2.1 Tourism in North Rhine-Westphalia

The federal state of NRW is located in the west of Germany, borders on Lower Saxony, Hessen, Rhineland-Palatinate as well as both countries Belgium and the Netherlands. It has a size of 34.112 square kilometres and 17.932.651 inhabitants (as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018) (FISCHER 2019). The state capital is the city of Düsseldorf. At a political level, NRW is divided into the five administrative districts Arnsberg, Detmold, Düsseldorf, Köln and Münster (Geoportal.NRW 2019). The Rhine-Ruhr metropolitan region in the centre of NRW comprises with around ten million inhabitants one of the largest conurbations in the world and belongs to the ‘Blue Banana’, the most densely populated region in Europe (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019c).

“North Rhine-Westphalia has many and varied things to offer: The Rhine-Ruhr metropolitan region is one of the four largest metropolitan regions in Europe, alongside London, Paris and Moscow. The Rhineland and Westphalia offer concentrated strengths in culture, events and creativity. Event locations are easily accessible and recreation is possible in more rural regions with nature and sports experiences right next door” (translated from TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019b: 3). These introductory words from the Minister for Economic Affairs, Innovation, Digitalization and Energy of the State of NRW, Prof. Dr. Andreas Pinkwart for the new tourism strategy, which was published in June 2019, illustrate the significance of North Rhine-Westphalia as an important business location, an important industrial country and an up-and-coming tourist destination.

From 2009 – 2018 the number of overnight stays in NRW rose by 29,6 % to 51,9 million overnight stays in 2018. This puts NRW in third place behind the two federal states Bavaria (98,7 million) and Baden-Württemberg (54,8 million) (DESTATIS 2019). There were a total of 37,1 million arrivals in NRW in 2018, of which nearly the half (18,4 million) came from Germany. Referring to the European countries the Netherlands (1,1 million), United Kingdom (430.000) and Belgium (373.000) represent the three most important main source markets in

Europe (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019d), which can certainly be argued by the geographical location of NRW.

At the regional level, the urban regions Köln /Rhein-Erft-Kreis (+52,5%), Düsseldorf / Kreis Mettmann (+47,6%) as well as the Ruhr region (+42,8%) have been the growing the most in terms of overnight stays since 2009 (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019e).

In North Rhine-Westphalia, Tourism has developed into an important economic factor. In 2017, tourists and business travellers from Germany and abroad used goods and services totalling more than 45,9 billion euros in NRW (WIRTSCHAFTSFAKTOR NRW 2019). Private day trips accounted for around half of the tourist consumption (52,6%), private overnight stays for 15,9%. Business tourism also occupied an important position: day trips (8,1%) and overnight business trips (7,4%) together accounted for approx. 15,5% of consumer spending on tourism (ibid.).

### **1.2.2 The projects: #urbanana and FLOW.NRW**

Tourismus NRW e.V. is the tourism umbrella organisation for North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) and the tourism competence centre of the state. The aim of the association is to strengthen NRW as a tourism location, to establish an identity for the tourism destination of North Rhine-Westphalia, to strengthen regional tourism profiles and to conduct tourism market research, in particular, to impart and highlight topics and trends in tourism (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019a). Both projects, #urbanana and FLOW.NRW were launched by Tourismus NRW e.V. and are presented in the following, as they form the basis of the research in this thesis.

#### **The project #urbanana**

In August 2016, the three-year funding project *#urbanana* was launched by Tourismus NRW e.V. It was financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) 2014 – 2020 and was developed as a project under “NRW as destination for urban lifestyle and scene”.

The name of the projects *#urbanana* is composed of the two words “urban” and “banana”. “Urban” hereby stands for the aspects of cities in the project and relates to urban tourism, while “banana” points out the densely populated areas of the Ruhr Area and Rhineland which are promoted through the project and remind of a banana on the map (see Figure 1).

The founder and project leader of *#urbanana* is Tourismus NRW e.V., the project partners are Düsseldorf Tourismus und Marketing GmbH, Köln Tourismus GmbH and Ruhr Tourismus GmbH (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2017).

During the three years, *#urbanana* tried to examine creative urban spaces in NRW for their special features, to make them accessible internationally and therefore pursued the goal of creating innovative ideas at the interface between the tourism industry and the creative and cultural industries (CCI) (DÖLL-KÖNIG & LAARMANN 2017: 73f.).



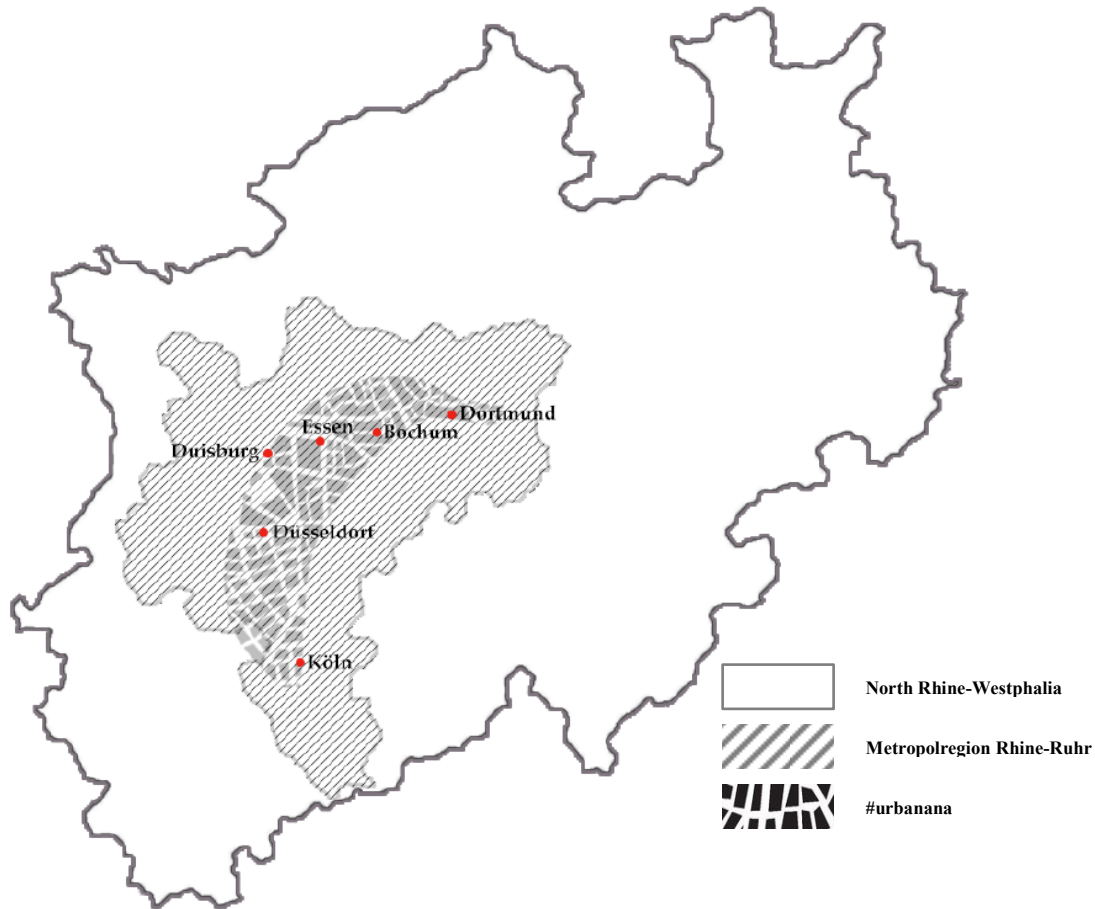


Figure 1: Geographical area of #urbanana in NRW (SCHÖNBERGER 2018: 43)

This was used to communicate the bigger cities in North Rhine-Westphalia anew as destinations and to intensify the external perception of them. Central to this project was the development and expansion of social network relationships between the actors in the Rhineland and Ruhr areas. *#urbanana* was a Germany-wide pilot project, in which the interfaces of the tourism industry and creative and cultural industries merged and were useful used in a destination (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2017). *#urbanana* also was awarded as European cultural tourism region in the year 2017 (WALTER 2019). In 2017 the project itself awarded the *#urbanana*-award for the first time. This award honours creative projects in city tourism in NRW, and the winners prove that cross-sector cooperation between the tourism and the creative industries is yielding fruits. The submitted projects merely need to touch at least one of the subfields (festivals, design, urban art and young art scene, music culture, fashion or the digital scene) and they must focus on individual city tourism. As NRW seems to be full of brilliant ideas, the *#urbanana*-award has been presented for the second time in June 2019 at the Tourismstag

NRW in Mühlheim an der Ruhr and will continue to be awarded every two years in the future (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019c).

### **The project FLOW.NRW**

Building on and following the great success of *#urbanana*, the follow-up project “FLOW.NRW – Integrated Tourism and Location marketing for the Creative and Digital Economy in North Rhine-Westphalia” was planned to start in autumn 2019.

The application for the project was submitted in July 2019 and in August, it became known that the project is starting on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019c).

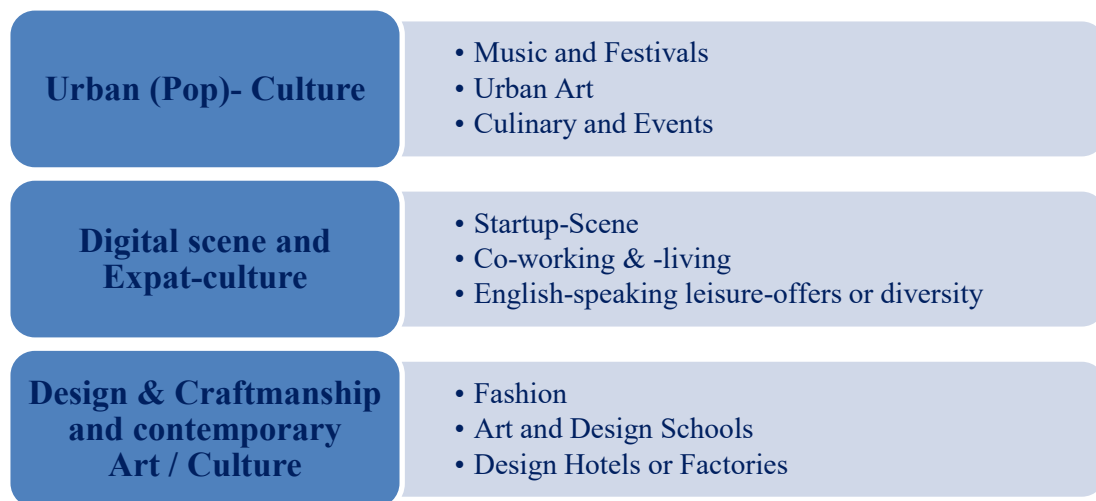
FLOW.NRW is, next to the project “Touristic Data Management NRW: open, networked, digital”, one of the two starter projects, which are anchored in the new tourism strategy for North Rhine-Westphalia and should serve as a central communication and marketing project of Tourismus NRW e.V. and its project partners.

The project addresses the question of how both the travel destination and the location of North Rhine-Westphalia are staged as an attractive city destination and habitat of high quality of life in the international competition. It thus makes a forward-looking contribution to the attractive presentation of the state of NRW and at the same time promotes regional cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the digital-, creative- and tourism industries (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019b). The target group orientation of the project is based on the sinus milieus (a social and target group typology based on social milieus); the group of ‘expeditives’ respectively of the ‘ambitious creative avant-garde’ is to be addressed. This target group is mentally, culturally and geographically mobile, always on the lookout for new boundaries and solutions, and well networked online and offline. Furthermore, they are trend-setters and goal-oriented, but do not pursue career thinking (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019b).

The project will continue with the *#urbanana*-approved cooperation with actors in the creative industries but put a new focus on the digital economy of North Rhine-Westphalia and a much higher degree on the internationalization than *#urbanana* did. It advertises in a globally mobile, expedient milieu for the attractiveness of the polycentric urban landscape of the Rhine-Ruhr-Area and NRW as a whole. In addition, the project approach will be extended to the regional centres outside the Rhine-Ruhr agglomeration of NRW and their specific potentials.

The project FLOW.NRW will be concentrating on three broadly defined thematic threads and corresponding sub-topics (see Figure 2). The three threads will be developed and implemented in numerous cooperations with regional partners from the respective scenes (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019c).

In the project, Tourismus NRW e.V. and its partners act as a kind of resonance amplifier of the urban, creative scenes to the outside as well as an enabler and networker of SMEs within NRW. The aim is to highlight the value creation potential of the cooperation between the digital-, creative- and tourism industries. FLOW.NRW operates with soft location marketing, but all planned measures are to be evaluated as economic development in the field of tourism due to their general character, as the touristic communication is in the foreground (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019c).



**Figure 2: Thematic threads of FLOW.NRW**  
(own illustration, based on Tourismus NRW e.V. 2019c)

As creative urban areas have a great attraction, the locally located creative scenes, in particular, are an important location factor for the settlement of digital companies as well as for the individual decisions of living of highly qualified digital workers. Contacts into the tourism industry can hereby act as useful carriers and promoter. The project aims to dissolve the boundaries between location marketing and destination marketing, which is reflected in overcoming the separation of work, leisure and education. Therefore, FLOW.NRW doesn't want to fit into the categories B2B or B2C and sees itself as a hybrid project (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019c).

### 1.2.3 The regional centres outside the Rhine-Ruhr-region examined

In North Rhine-Westphalia, every municipality has at least the status of a basic centre and guarantees its inhabitants a basic supply of goods for their daily needs. In order to ensure a higher quality of supply, a central and regional centre can be reached from any location by private and public transport (STAATSKANZLEI NRW 2015: 18). The project application of FLOW.NRW envisages extending the project approach also to these regional centres outside the Rhine-Ruhr agglomeration of the federal state of NRW and their specific potentials (TOURISMUS NRW E.V. 2019c).

Therefore in this study, the nine regional centres Aachen (244.951 inhabitants), Bielefeld (333.451), Bonn (322.125), Krefeld (226.812), Mönchengladbach (260.925), Münster (311.846), Paderborn (148.677), Siegen (101.863) and Wuppertal (352.390) are examined (STATISTIKPORTAL 2019) (see Figure 3). Actually, there exist 16 regional centres, but seven cities are either project partners themselves (Düsseldorf and Köln) or are part of the city association of Ruhr-Tourismus (Bochum, Dortmund, Duisburg, Essen and Hagen), which is also a project partner and should therefore not be investigated.



Figure 3: Regional centres in NRW (STEPMAP.DE 2019)

#### **1.2.4 Tourism and the creative, cultural and digital scene**

At the beginning of the 1990s, North Rhine-Westphalia was the first federal state in Germany who asked itself how many people are employed in the cultural- and creative industries and what dimension this industry takes. As a nationwide novelty, a cultural economy report was written and broached the issue of the hard quantifiable economy of this supposedly soft factor, which increasingly contributed to employment and gross domestic product (GDP). By this report, the recognition in politics grew, that culture is not only a social good with positive effects of education, urban life, and discourse but also generates substantial economic effects (MINISTERIUM FÜR WIRTSCHAFT, ENERGIE, INDUSTRIE, MITTELSTAND UND HANDWERK 2012: 5f., DEUTSCHER BUNDESTAG 2016: 4).

Today the cultural- and creative industries (CCI) in North Rhine-Westphalia play a decisive role in the economy. In 2015, the turnover generated by the industries was nearly 36 billion euros, the value-added 19 billion euros (MINISTERIUM FÜR WIRTSCHAFT, ENERGIE, INDUSTRIE, MITTELSTAND UND HANDWERK 2016: 6). This makes a contribution of 3,2% to the total economic output of NRW and a higher result than the federal average (3,0%). The CCI thus achieved a level comparable to that of mechanical engineering (20.1 billion € and 3,5%) or the metal industry (20.3 billion € and 3,6%) (MINISTERIUM FÜR WIRTSCHAFT, ENERGIE, INDUSTRIE, MITTELSTAND UND HANDWERK 2016: 12). In terms of turnover per company, NRW is with around 697.500€ per company well above the federal figure of 603.100€. This shows the good market position and economic performance of this sector in NRW: the CCI have a strong potential for added value and innovation and act as an important catalyst for both innovation and knowledge-based growth in other economic sectors (MINISTERIUM FÜR WIRTSCHAFT, ENERGIE, INDUSTRIE, MITTELSTAND UND HANDWERK 2016: 6f., DEUTSCHER BUNDESTAG 2016: 4). A further good condition for the successful positioning of the sector in NRW lies in the local industries (e.g. health care, education or trade), which are important consumers of creative products and services. Since 2010, the number of employed people in CCI has risen by an average of around 2% per year (at the federal level, the average annual growth rate is around 1%). This indicates a high demand for creative products and services from North Rhine-Westphalia (MINISTERIUM FÜR WIRTSCHAFT, ENERGIE, INDUSTRIE, MITTELSTAND UND HANDWERK 2016: 9f.).

As the CCI are creative and impulse-giving industries with unconventional approaches, they need an appealing working and living environment to be successful. The high number of em-

ployees states that NRW has favourable framework conditions for this sector. Nonetheless, the state is competing with other creative locations throughout Germany and Europe, e.g. cities like Hamburg, Frankfurt, Berlin or Antwerpen. Moreover, the creative sector is currently undergoing a profound change as digital technology is increasing (DEUTSCHER BUNDESTAG 2016: 4). To secure NRW as a creative location in the long-term, the existing creative potential must be made visible and also communicated to the outside world. This will enhance the image of the state as a creative location and thus enhance the attractiveness of the location for qualified workers and companies (MINISTERIUM FÜR WIRTSCHAFT, ENERGIE, INDUSTRIE, MITTELSTAND UND HANDWERK 2016: 38).

Especially the metropolitan Rhine-Ruhr-Region represents the centre of the culture and creative industries in NRW. The region benefits from the typical advantages of an agglomeration area: education, cultural institutions and a large part of the corporate landscape are concentrated here. This critical mass of companies allows the mapping of many value-creation stages and the proximity to a large number of application companies opens up a large regional sales market. This proximity also provides a good foundation for ‘creative spillovers’, e.g. employment and sales impulses which emanate from the CCI to other industries and sectors (MINISTERIUM FÜR WIRTSCHAFT, ENERGIE, INDUSTRIE, MITTELSTAND UND HANDWERK 2012: 70, 2016: 37).

One of these ‘creative spillovers’ in another sector can be seen in the tourism industry. Tourists nowadays search for interesting, unique experiences and activities in a destination. This helps them to broaden their horizons and to get closer to the residents’ way of life and build empathic relationships with them (GALVAGNO & GIACCONE 2019: 3). Some destinations are offering active participation and learning experiences for their visitors to develop their creative potential. This experience can be understood as a kind of ‘mental souvenir’ which can be taken home and be used in everyday life and as a way of building their identity: “creative and participatory experiences represent a way to create value” (GALVAGNO & GIACCONE 2019: 3, RICHARDS & RAYMOND 2000: 18, RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 21). If the tourists are developing their performance skills, thus their creativity, they are able to switch their status and can evolve from a consumer to a prosumer, thus a person who can both produce and consume a certain good (ibid.).

It is therefore not always tangible attractions like museums or historical sites in a destination but also the intangible resources like traditions or customs of the locals which promote the

development and involvement of the tourists' creativity. To involve tourists does not mean to let them move passively through a place; rather they should interact with others and therefore co-create their own experience: the value of the creative product and the quality of the tourist experience can be increased by shifting from the passive consumption of a creative occasion or creative spaces to the active involvement of tourists in the creative process, or creative tourism" (RICHARDS & WILSON 2006: 1217; RICHARDS 2007). By e.g. taking cooking classes and preparing traditional food, participating in perfume manufacturing workshops or designer-studio-tours, creative activities can lead to a more sustainable form of tourism. For the destinations, this increasing role of the intangible resources poses new challenges since "much intangible culture appears to be more footloose than tangible cultural heritage" (RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 19). As there is a growing demand for creative experiences in a destination, creativity can be considered as a key feature in terms of tourist attraction and destination development (GALVAGNO & GIACCONE 2019: 1f., REMOALDO ET AL. 2018).

In recent years, the increasing synergy of tourism, culture, and creativity has been one of the principal themes in tourism development and –marketing (RICHARDS 2001 in RICHARDS & WILSON 2007). Popular destinations like Barcelona, Rome or Venice, whose tourism development was characterized by mass tourism for a long time, are now trying to conquer the congestion and evolve to creative tourism (REMOALDO & CADIMA-RIBEIRO 2019: 86).

In the contemporary global tourism market, it is not the individual businesses, which compete to attract new and more tourists and customers. It is the touristic destinations and regions which have an imperative to innovate and thus to stay competitive: „Regions that succeed in attracting businesses and skilled workers are generally seen as attractive and worth living in" (translated from DAEHRE 2005, BAGGIO & COOPER 2010: 1f.). Regions need to boost and understand innovation and creativity and are therefore an important factor for the development of the economy. They are helpful for entrepreneurship to take place and can become a kind of incubator for new ideas, creative innovations and new knowledge (HUGGINS & THOMPSON 2015: 104f., LEE & LEE 2015: 56).

The changes in the drivers of tourism and the transition from mass tourism to creative tourism can be seen in Figure 4. The drivers vary thereby on an axis from 'Needing' to 'Being'. The driver 'Needing' refers to the fact, that every person has to satisfy basic needs and should have the possibility to go on vacation. As here only the vacation itself is important and no

other factors are involved, there exists no individual travel and it can be stated as a form of ‘Mass tourism’. In recent years this form of tourism became very attractive, as it is comparatively easy to book and cheap, but also reached alarming dimensions. In May 2019 for example, the city of Venice, which fights against the inrush of tourists for years announced that there will be an entrance fee for tourists. The fee should not only be about symbolism (“You can visit our city, but help us to keep it clean”) but also assists to guide the flow of tourists (TAGESSCHAU 2019, DIGNÖS 2019).

The drivers ‘Wanting’ and ‘Having’ allude to the aspect of creating distinction and to stand out of the crowd. In the past, it used to be a privilege for many people to travel and it was only possible for the rich or famous. It was often regarded as a status symbol and was beyond that an intangible extension of possessions such as a car or a TV. When it became customary to go on vacation, the accentuating aspect lay on the activities which were done during the vacation. At this time Urry’s tourist gaze (1990) became known in the tourism literature, as it reflected the production and consumption of tourism in a new way (RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 20). This tourism style of ‘Cultural tourism’ highlights the aspects of the activities in the destination. People are now getting more interested and give attention to the culture and traditions of the destination they are visiting.

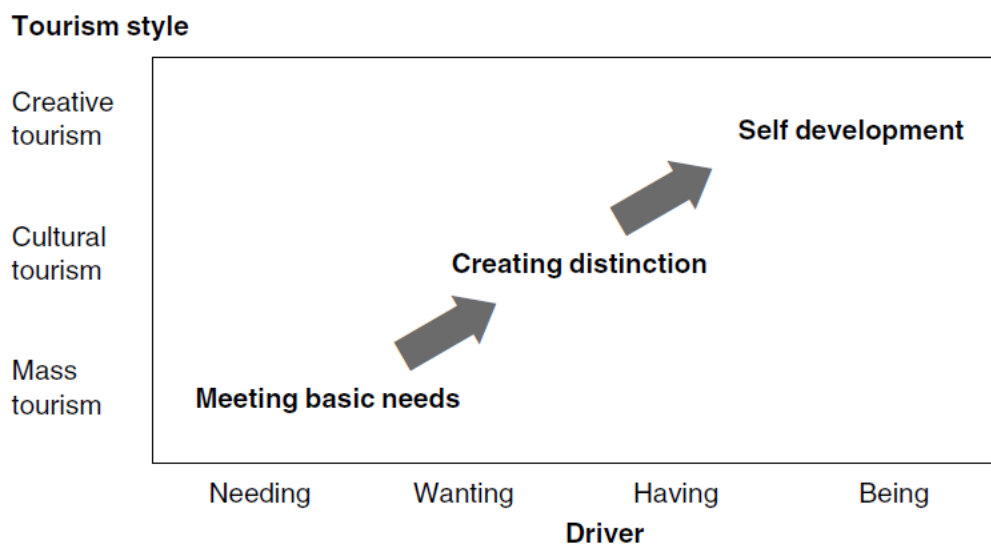


Figure 4: Changes in the drivers of tourism over time (source: RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 20)

The driver ‘Being’ corresponds to the topic that tourists want to develop themselves while they are on holiday. This can be achieved in ‘Creative tourism’, since participation in workshops and making creative experiences with the locals and having, therefore, a deeper look into the culture and traditions moves them away from the urge to consume services and



goods. Instead, they are transformed by the tourism experience itself (RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 20, REMOALDO & CADIMA-RIBEIRO 2019: 86).

Creative tourism is therefore always linked to the culture of the locals, active consumption of the places and active participation, co-creation with the locals and making authentic experiences (REMOALDO & CADIMA-RIBEIRO 2019: 87).

Linking the cultural- and creative industries and the tourism-industry can be a synergy and can be a new source of growth and help to create jobs, especially in areas where the tourism assets are limited (ARDHALA ET AL. 2016: 671f.). Through attracting and supporting the creative industries, creative clusters can be developed, which then can be used to attract tourists to a region: “in this way, both urban and rural areas can leverage creativity to support local development and build creative tourism destinations” (OECD 2014: 25).

For a destination, it is important to build a linkage from the existing creativity to the place itself. This can be done through branding strategies which create visibility for the destination on the one hand but also for the creative industries on the other hand. This branding is beneficial as it not only highlights the relationship between the CCI and tourism in the destination but also attracts tourists as well as creative workers, who are visiting the region. Furthermore, the creativity in a destination should be embedded in a kind of ‘visible network’, e.g. with workshops, events or exchange to ensure year-round and long-term benefits. Particularly events can serve as temporary hubs in international networks and attract and inform foreign network members (OECD 2014: 24f.)

Hard location factors (e.g. the transport connection, taxes, duties, and subsidies or the proximity to suppliers) are generally regarded as decisive factors for the settlement of a company and are quantifiable and objectively measurable. However, the soft location factors (e.g. cultural offers, residential value, the attractiveness of the city centre or the social climate) are becoming increasingly important although they are difficult to quantify. Within the knowledge society, the soft location factors are rather wanted for the development of cooperative networks and innovative milieus, up to a holistic view of the region as a habitat.

The social and societal framework conditions for a high quality of life include the possibilities of interpersonal exchange and contact and the integration of the inhabitants into a location-bound relationship environment. An extensive cultural and leisure offer is attractive not only for the inhabitants but also for the tourists. Consequently, optimal coordination of economy,

ecology, and society can create a balance between living space and habitat, environment and relationship environment (GRABOW 1995, THIEBEN 2005: 18, PECHLANER, INNERHOFER & BACHINGER 2010: 21f.). In his study, TRETTER (2017: 54f.) identified some factors for an attractive business location which can be allocated to the leisure industry (e.g. sports, shopping, good gastronomy, a beautiful inner city or an active cultural scene). This reflects the task of location marketing, in which greater emphasis should be placed on linking quality of life and economic power (PECHLANER ET AL. 2018: 490).

The development of regions and destination is furthermore closely linked to innovation. In the last years, the focus on the topic of innovation grew in the tourism sector and is now a central axis for a competitive strategy for a region (MAZARO 2017: 6).

According to Schumpeter, “innovations are novel combinations of knowledge, resources [...], it is essentially the process through which new ideas are generated and put into commercial practice” (SHAH ET AL. 2015: 3). Innovation implies, therefore, two essential elements: new ideas and creativity through which new combinations can be created. The Australian economist David Throsby, for example, mentions, that creativity leads in the first instance to innovation. This innovation in turn powers the technological change and in turn increases productivity and economic growth (OLIVEIRA 2017: 129). In the same vein, AMABILE ET AL. (1996: 1154) state: “all innovation begins with creative ideas. [...]”. Hence, creativity is the procedure through which new ideas are created, while through innovation these ideas and products are implemented (LANDRY & BIANCHINI 1995: 20).

Innovation itself is often a structured and systematic process which asks for discipline. To be successful with an innovation one needs to be open-minded, proactive and have the ability to search for the necessary resources and then make the best use of them. Often innovation starts with an idea and ends in the market introduction and new business creations, which drive economic growth. Here it doesn't matter if the start-up which had the innovation is a new one or an already existing one and integrated one within a company: “the net effect in the aggregate is a growth of the national and global economy” (SHAH ET AL. 2015: 4). Famous economists like Schumpeter or Solow have proved that it is not only the factors of production (capital, labour, and soil) but also an innovation which promotes the economy (ibid.). So it is not surprising that, in order to compete and thrive as a greener economy with sustainable growth and creation of high-skilled job opportunities, the European Union set research and innovation as central aspects in their development strategies (SOETE 2010: 2).

According to LUNDVALL ET AL. (2002), innovation must thereby be seen as an innately localized and regional phenomenon, as it relies on the resources which are connected to a specific location. This signifies that a reproduction of the innovation somewhere else is either difficult to implement or not realizable at all (LUNDVALL ET AL. 2002: 214). The problem is that many innovations and investments, which originally serve to attract a specific location or tourists, are adopted and used in other places as 'best practice-example'. This does not only harm the competitive character of the original location but also destroys the originality of the location and therefore the experience of the tourists due to lack of exploration of authentic regional competences (MAZARO 2017: 8). Therefore, culture, creativity, and the resulting innovations are an important factor in destinations and remain as one of the main competitive challenges for tourist destinations today and in the future.

## **2. Theoretical foundations**

To derive models and to build theories is an essential endeavour in scientific research. With the help of theoretical frameworks and foundations it is possible to abstract from a single case, to compare similar situations and to transfer effective solutions to other cases (BAGGIO 2011: 51). In this chapter three theoretical foundations are presented which are suitable to be useful in answering the research question.

### **2.1. The Concept of the Creative City and Creative Milieus**

*“Creative cities are spaces you want to be in, places to be seen” (TAY 2005: 220)*

Creativity has always been the animating force in cities and still is. Creativity is needed for cities to work as trading and production centres or markets and is essential for students at universities, for artists, intellectuals or administrators. Cities offer places where new ideas arise, institutions or artefacts are created and people from different cultures and races meet. In cities, people can live out their ideas, get inspiration and motivation for projects and dreams and make memories and experiences. Then again they are also places where problems like overcrowding, social disorder or diseases occur and challenges like housing shortages, environment protection, a lack of infrastructure, economic growth or human rights need to be fixed (LANDRY & BIANCHINI 1995: 11).

In the context of international discourse on the renaissance of the city and the question of the function of inner cities, the discourse on the so-called creative cities emerged. As the city administrations are getting under the increasing pressure to compete with other cities and municipalities, the active change in favour of one's city becomes the motive of city marketing (THIELE 2011: 64f.). To strengthen the city in intercommunal competition and to activate private-sector commitment, the concept of the creative city is increasingly proving to be 'everybody's darling' in the current urban development policy (ibid.) Since at least Richard Florida published his work and theses on the creative class at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the discussion about the upgrading of cities and the question of the creative possibilities of urban policy has been upgraded and reached a new quality (ibid.).

#### **2.1.1. Richard Florida and “The Rise of the Creative Class”**

In his book “The Rise of the Creative Class”, RICHARD FLORIDA (2002) argues that there has been a shift in the cities at reaching economic advantages. Instead of the basic factors of productions, such as cheap labour or raw materials, cities nowadays need human creativity to

stand out from others. Cities benefit when they can attract and retain creative people because these social groups are particularly able to stimulate innovation, which in turn leads to economic growth. This group of creative people he calls ‘The Creative Class’ (FLORIDA 2005, RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 7). For FLORIDA, all human beings, be they financial, legal or business professionals, engineers, writers or computer experts, are creative and hence are all, whether locals or tourists, potentially members of the Creative Class. What unites them is a common creative ethos, i.e. they are valued for creativity, individuality, talent, and diversity; they create economic value through creativity (LEVICKAITÉ 2011: 86). In his book, he sought to answer the question of why these creative people do cluster in certain places and why some cities are chosen over others although the people are living in a highly mobile world (FLORIDA 2005: 35).

According to Florida, for the creative class, a special significance is attached to the quality of the place they are living in or which they are visiting. This combines factors such as environmental quality, atmosphere, openness, diversity or street culture. These relatively intangible factors are getting, like already stated in chapter 1.2.4, more important in the locational decisions than cultural institutions such as theatres, museums or historical sites in the destination: “[...] the physical attractions that most cities focus on building – sports stadiums, freeways [...] are irrelevant, insufficient, or actually unattractive to many Creative Class people. What they look for [...] are abundant high-quality experiences, an openness to diversity [...] and the opportunity to validate their identities as creative people” (FLORIDA 2005: 35f., RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 8; RICHARDS 2007). Being in a destination and searching for experiences and ‘mental souvenirs’ is, therefore, an important factor: “experiences are replacing goods and services because they stimulate our creative faculties and enhance our creative capacities” (FLORIDA 2002: 168).

For the creative class to be attracted to a city, it should meet the three conditions that FLORIDA marks as the three T's: Tolerance, Talent, and Technology. Each factor is a necessary but by itself inadequate condition. In his regard, tolerance and openness form the foundation, which also includes the diversity and acceptance of all races, lifestyles, and ethnicities. Together with talent - what he defines as those people with a bachelor's degree and above - and technology - which is a function of both innovation and high technology concentration in a region - the city can attract creative people. These ones will generate innovation and exchange ideas freely, and thus stimulate economic development (FLORIDA 2005: 37, FLORIDA 2002: 249,

RICHARD & WILSON 2007: 179, 188). Growth in cities and places is only possible where creative minds are located.

FLORIDA further figures out, that musicians, gay people, artists and all the other members of the creative class favour places that are open and diverse because here the entry-barriers are low. Places nowadays grow not just through higher birth rates, but rather their ability to attract and retain people from the outside. For FLORIDA (2002) places need an urban flair and a tolerant, diversified society, which attracts skilled workers and which prevents them from moving to more attractive regions (FLORIDA 2002: 44f.; FLORIDA 2005: 38). Cities can offer this necessary heterogeneity, and diversity, and the critical mass of creatives, which is a basic prerequisite for urban knowledge production. Often the simple clustering of the creative class can lead to innovation and development (THIELE 2011: 66). The Creative Class can be identified as a footloose and independent society that moves to the cities wherever it wants to work and live. There, they start creative companies or other firms and businesses start to follow them, recognizing the useful creative potential of the city for their purpose (RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 178).

In the literature of regional development RICHARD FLORIDA received much attention as he did well research on the evolving creative economy and also participated in public discourse. But he also came in for criticism, for example for the spectrum of people and occupational groups who are, in his opinion, members of the creative class (LEVICKAITÉ 2011: 88). Others argue that his suggestion of increasing creativity stimulates economic growth and development seems to be kind of a ‘chicken and egg-argument’: what comes first – creative people or employment? Mostly cultural and creative facilities exist in affluent places, so here it could be argued that in this case facilities attract creative people and thus creativity follows economic development instead of the other way around (RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 9). PECK (2005) criticizes, that Florida’s concept of the creative class is often treated as a concept of fast policies which are often used by policy-makers to overhaul urban problems in a short time because “they license both a discursively distinctive and an ostensibly deliverable development agenda” (PECK 2005: 740). Moreover, there is a chance of arising conflicts, not so much between the creatives and the tourists, but rather more between the creative class and a poorer local population, which see their areas in the city transformed and feel pressured by it (RICHARD & WILSON 2007: 85).

With his work on the creative class, FLORIDA, therefore, strengthened the link between cities and their creativity. The creative class and creativity, in general, are seen since then as panacea for the economic growth of a city and as a mediator of urban taste (RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 58).

### **2.1.2. Creative industries as driver for the creative city**

The development of the creative industries and creative economy also plays a significant role as they form the basis for a creative city. Over the past years, research in these creative industries has gained dynamism. The UK Government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) defines them as "industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property". These creative industries include 13 areas of activity, among them advertising, designer fashion, film, music or television and radio (DEPARTMENT FOR DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA & SPORT 2001: 5). Of particular importance here is the intellectual property, which underlines the value of an idea created by a person and which can be protected by patent rights or copyright against other use or commercial advantage. Nowadays many countries and cities are using these creative industries as a strategy to create a powerful image which helps to compete against others, as they represent a combination of culture and commerce, e.g. the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Opera House in Sydney (NEWBIGIN 2014; FLORIDA 2002).

While creative industries are intensely addicted to novelty and originality, they have, like many other industries, the challenge to ensure continuous innovation (JONES ET AL. 2016: 752). As described above, often members of the creative class found creative companies. Hence the ambition of innovation is rooted in the creators' own needs for expression and the evolving desire for new experiences, which are also absorbed by locals and tourists which in turn generates more creative output and economic growth (ibid.).

At the same time as the concept of creative industries became known in almost every country and city, questions on the effect and assessment of creativity in companies arose. After discussions of the impact of creativity, much more fundamental thinking was necessary. In a report on the global creative economy, which was written by the United Nations and published in 2008, it was stated that it is useless to zoom in on creative industries economic value, separated from their cultural and social value: "the interface between creativity, culture, economics, and technology [...] has the potential to generate income, jobs and exports while at

the same time promoting social inclusion, cultural diversity and human development. This is what the emerging creative economy has begun to do” (NEWBIGIN 2014). Therefore, the creative economy, rather than the creative industries are defined as “those sectors which specialize in the use of creative talent for commercial purposes” (ibid.). The creative economy is an indicator of a whole new economic order as it transforms the areas where people want to live, learn and work, invent and produce; it is a profit for the sustainability of a place, city or country (NEWBIGIN 2014; OLIVEIRA 2017: 132).

### **2.1.3. The Creative City – a panacea?**

Through the idea of the creative economy, which is today commonly used in urban economics and the point, that creative places attract creative people, finally, the concept of the creative city was established (LEVICKAITÉ 2011: 88, RICHARDS 2014: 120). For a city with a strong and efficient creative economy, a modern infrastructure, which allows the creative people to exchange information is essential and sustains the transformation of a city into a creative city. The beginnings of the creative-class-idea were made in 1985 by the Swedish regional planner Åke Andersson. In his book 'Kreativitet. Storstadens Framtid' (“Creativity. The Future of the Metropolis”) he examines the role science and creativity play in a city by using the example of the city of Stockholm. For him, creativity requires the ability to combine knowledge and competence that something new is created. Therefore creativity is always a dynamic concept, as it implies changes (MÜLLER 2013: 84, Andersson 1985). Especially information technology is, in his perspective, changing the significance of creativity in society, and the importance of (academic) knowledge is increasing due to the growing number of universities. In this context, large cities are important, as they are mostly places of universities and training places. Andersson understands creativity as a human ability to generate innovation and sees the importance of this ability in the same context as the development of a knowledge society (ibid.).

Ten years later, in 1995, the British professor of cultural policy, FRANCO BIANCHINI, and the British urban scientist CHARLES LANDRY published a work about the creative city, which can be marked as one of the first cohesive formulations of this topic. Their work, which was later taken further by Landry, reflects the existence of diverse sources of innovation: it explores what it means to be a creative city, depicts why creativity has become so important for cities and how it can be used helpful to unravel the myriad problems of a city (LANDRY & BIANCHINI 1995: 9). For them, every human being is potentially creative, but habits of mind or work-



ing practices can confine creativity. Creativity is not always about the new, rather it should give the possibilities for a new idea, resources, and influences in the surrounding which can't be controlled totally but could be taken advantage of for a better and more sustainable life (ibid: 21; LANDRY 2008: 12). Transferred to the city, creativity in its broadest sense can be defined as the way how innovation can support the cities to sort out their routine problems (COMUNIAN 2011: 1158).

In his book of the creative city, which was presented as a toolkit for urban innovators, CHARLES LANDRY states that people are the most crucial resource that a city has. With their cleverness, motivation, imagination, and creativity the people are substituting natural resources, location or market access as urban resources (LANDRY 2008: xii). A prerequisite for a creative city are open-minded people who are willed to take risks, who want to work with local distinctiveness and who want to listen and learn. Cities nowadays no longer compete against each other for physical resources like timber, gold or coal, but for mobile brainpower and creativity (LANDRY 2008: 4, 33).

In a creative city, a special emphasis lies on the culture of the city. Cultural heritage connects the people to their histories and memories and helps them to face the future: "cultural heritage is the sum of our past creativities and the results of creativity is what keeps society going and moving forward" (LANDRY 2008: 6). Culture can be considered as a collection of resources which show that a place is exclusive and unique, these resources are the raw material of a city and also its value base. However, creativity is hereby not always only a creation of new things, but rather it can help to exploit these resources and show how to deal with the old.

In Landry's work, creativity is presented like a journey or a process, rather than a status, it is a precondition from which innovation develops (LANDRY 2008: 14f.). He compares the creativity in a city with a creative meeting: it is not possible to have a creative meeting or a creative institution without creative people. Likewise, you can't have a creative milieu in a city without creative institutions as it constitutes the setting where creative people, processes, products, and ideas affect each other. He, therefore, concludes that the establishment of such an innovative and creative milieu is a principal task of a creative city (LANDRY 2008: 15).

But what can be understood by a creative milieu? Creative milieus are both a cause and an essential condition for the development of creativity in cities (HEBLER/ZIMMERMANN 2008, LANDRY 2008, MERKEL 2008). However, in the literature there exist many different dimensions and understandings of this blurred term.

The word ‘milieu’ was originally adopted from the French language and means medium, middle, and environment. Its genuine meaning included a spatial connotation, referring to space, the sky, air, and atmosphere. It was not until the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century that this spatial reference disappeared and instead the context to social groups arose (HEBLER & ZIMMERMANN 2008: 383). Nowadays people are more mobile and therefore have the choice about where they want to be: the physical setting, atmosphere, and ambience have paramountcy. In this container or platform activity takes place, develops and generates a milieu or environment. Hard infrastructure, which are mostly physical and tangible things like roads, buildings, support services such as transport, health, and amenities, and soft infrastructure, which are intangible like the interactions between people or feelings people have about a place are mixed in the milieu (LANDRY 2006: 394, LANDRY 2008: 133). LANDRY defines: “a creative milieu is a place – either a cluster of buildings, a part of a city, a city as a whole or a region – that contains the necessary preconditions in terms of hard and soft infrastructure to generate a flow of ideas and inventions. Such a milieu is a physical setting where a critical mass of entrepreneurs, intellectuals, social activists, artists, administrators, power brokers or students can operate in an open-minded, cosmopolitan context and where face to face interaction creates new ideas, artefacts, products, services, and institutions and as a consequence contributes to economic success” (LANDRY 2008: 133). He further states that a milieu can initially be completely uncreative: “what makes a milieu creative is that it gives the user the sense that they can shape, create and make the place they are in, that they are an active participant rather than a passive consumer, and that they are an agent of change rather than a victim” (LANDRY 2006: 394). In a similar vein, MERKEL (2008) describes it as a social space which is characterized by a high concentration of creative undertakings and their interactions (MERKEL 2008: 69).

Here it becomes clear, that these environments or milieus are open spaces and that new things are tried out and experimented within; the focus hereby always lies on authenticity although this might differ depending on the context (*ibid.*). The creative city as a creative milieu is hereby not just a machine for living, but rather a landscape for experiencing, tasting and enjoying (RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 19).

Landry states, that only because something is creative in one place it doesn’t mean that it is also creative in another place: creativity and (the sometimes resulting) innovation are therefore both context-driven. Moreover, creativity alone doesn’t necessarily lead to success and not every human being in the creative city needs to be creative. Rather a critical mass of open-minded, brave and creative thinkers with a good position of influence can transform a city

into a creative city (LANDRY 2008: 107). And although these creative people seem to be the moving power of the city, it takes people who are perhaps less obviously creative, but who instead serve as ‘test persons’ by implementing and exploiting the ideas and innovations and who ensure that the product passes a reality check. Here, different roles can be a catalyst in different circumstances. In addition, immigrants or outsiders, whether from the same country or abroad, assume a role in creating a creative city. Their different talents, competencies and diverse cultural values and norms, as well as the creative environment that is open to all people and in which they can contribute, lead to new opportunities, ideas, and strategies (ibid: 111).

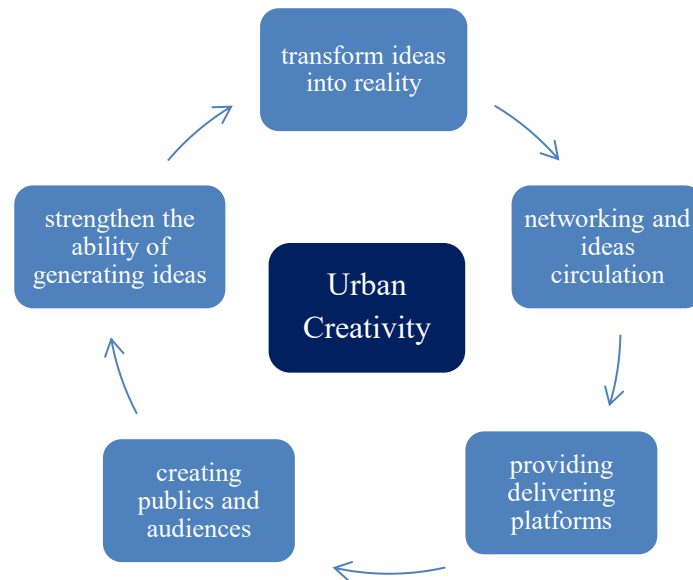
For a destination, it is of course not always easy to develop creative strategies to get economic growth. Creativity is and can’t be omnipresent in the city, which leads to the problem that, as it is an overused concept, it is applied to objects and things which are not creative at all. This, in turn, leads to a devaluation of the whole concept and can, in the worst case, ignore real creativity (LANDRY 2008: 15f.). Other barriers to the creative development of a city could be the shortage of creative skills, lacks of creative investment or creative audiences as well as the cumulative disadvantage of creative locations (RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 29).

#### **2.1.4. Charles Landry’s “Cycle of Urban Creativity”**

Creative cities are kind of paradoxical. On the one hand, they can be potentially self-destructive, e.g. if creativity is no longer available or problems with innovations occur. On the other hand, they are self-renewing and sustainable. As more and more people tend to travel individual and independent, they organize themselves, often without big travel itineraries, plans or dates. This, in turn, leaves space for spontaneous and risky behaviour which can be seen as the first step of creative tourism: “if you plan it, if you destroy all the spaces in between, you also destroy some of the energy that gives the nerve to the city [...] You have to create spaces where things are more anarchistic and unorganized, otherwise it all turns into a mall” (WALBERG 2006 cited in RICHARDS&WILSON 2007: 70f.).

Regarding the point of sustainability and self-renewing, LANDRY developed “The Cycle of Urban Creativity” (see Figure 5). It can be seen as a dynamic concept which tries to generate urban energy through which the city will be powered like a renewable resource. The concept is helpful to assess the strengths and weaknesses of different creative projects in the city, in-

dependent of their development status. With the cycle of urban creativity, the city can evaluate if there are adequate incentives or initiatives to commence new ideas and projects, which could then be implemented and circulated which in turn leads to a new flow of ideas and projects (LANDRY 2008: 224).



**Figure 5: The Cycle of Urban Creativity**  
 (own illustration, based on LANDRY 2008: 225; OLIVEIRA 2017: 130f.)

The cycle consists of five stages. In the first stage, people should create and enhance ideas and generate projects, which are then transposed in stage two. Stage three is about networking and the circulating of marketing ideas and projects. To implement the newly formed projects it takes cheap spaces for rent, incubator units or exhibition opportunities, in short platforms for delivery. The last stage includes the distribution of the results to the city, building markets, and audiences so that new ideas are generated and stage one can start over again: “ it is possible to generate a dynamic that [...] triggers new ideas generators. Therefore, in an endless cycle, creativity creates creativity, leading to new circles, attracting new people and new resources. In this way, creativity is understood as a sustainable and reusable resource” (OLIVEIRA 2017: 132; LANDRY 2008: 224). With this concept, it is considered that creativity is a resource that can be managed and which seeks to promote the city with its development potential and lead to economic growth (OLIVEIRA 2017: 131).

Although Landry advocates thinking urban planning and creativity together and sees urban planning as an integrated concept of political, social, ecological and economic factors which

lead to creative milieus and thus creative places, he is also criticized for his concept of the creative city (THIELE 2011: 67).

One point of criticism is that the concept, just like FLORIDA's concept of the creative class, often fails to include and engage the whole city. Thereby problems between the creatives and the local population arise, which can lead to gentrification, property-oriented development, and social class segregation. Creative city-strategies here are causing problems of social exclusion, rather than solving them. (RICHARDS 2014: 124; RICHARDS & WILSON 2007: 26).

Another point is that the concept of the creative city is often used as a motive to raise hope for the urban population for a regeneration of the inner city and thus increasing prosperity (THIELE 2011: 67).

### **UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)**

In 2004, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was created and today comprises more than 245 cities worldwide. The goal of the network is "to strengthen cooperation with and among cities that have recognized creativity as a strategic factor of sustainable development as regards economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects" (UCCN 2019). The Network is supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and consists of the following seven creative fields: Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music (ibid.). In Germany, the cities of Berlin (Design), Hannover (Music), Mannheim (Music), Heidelberg (Literature), Karlsruhe (Media Arts) and Potsdam (Film) are creative in this network. Within these creative fields, the cities can share experiences, knowledge and best practice which is essential to promote and use creativity for urban development and to tackle upcoming challenges (ibid.).

To conclude it can be stated that the design of the creative industries is an essential and fundamental factor for establishing the creative class and therefore the creative city and -milieu. Without creative people in the city, who generate ideas, innovations and found creative companies and people who adapt and pilot these innovations the concept wouldn't work.

Moreover, without the creative industries concept, the concept of the creative city wouldn't be able to be implemented and put into practice (OLIVEIRA 2017: 128)

## 2.2. Networks, regional networks and innovative milieus

The economic globalisation, which has existed for years, entails striking geographical changes. As economic relations are becoming increasingly intertwined around the globe, old and new local agglomerations are growing. In a search for the organisation of spatially separated economic relations on the one hand and explanations for regional economic specializations on the other hand, the concept of networks has gained momentum and is today more topical than ever (GLÜCKLER 2010: 881). In an increasingly complex environment, networks should represent a tool with which the competitiveness of institutions, e.g. cities, organisations, destinations etc. can be guaranteed (BACHINGER ET AL. 2011: 4). As almost all areas of life are based on networks, be it private friendship networks or virtual service networks, there exist a lot of definitions of this blurred term in literature.

In general, a network can be defined as a set of nodes which are connected by a set of relationships (BENZ ET AL. 2007: 99; PAYER 2008: 5; BAGGIO 2011: 53). More precisely, WASSERMAN & FAUST (2009: 17) define a network as “a specific type of relation linking a defined set of persons, objects or events. In the same manner, PAPPI defines a network as “a set of social units such as persons, positions, organisations linked by relationships of a certain type” (translated from PAPPI 1987: 13). Similar definitions to those mentioned above can also be found in CASTELLS 1996, WEBER & KHADEMIAN 2008 and BORGATTI & HALGIN 2011. In the definitions, no statements on specific objectives, structures or boundaries of the networks are given. Rather the boundaries of a network are open and can be defined individually, depending on research interests and requirements. A definition concerning the activities within a network comes from ZIEGLER (1984: 435 cf. NUISSL ET AL. 2006: 30) when he defines a network as “a social entity in which resources are exchanged, information transferred, influence and authority exercised, support mobilized, coalitions formed, activities coordinated, trust built or feelings and impressions are generated”. A detailed list of possibilities to classify networks, e.g. bureaucratic, strategic, project or voluntary networks, can be found in SYDOW 2010: 380.

BORGATTI & HALGIN (2011: 1169) mention, when using networks to analyse or describe a topic, it is important that the nodes within the network are dependent *from*, and should be determined *by* the research question and the researcher’s theory rather than generally be regarded as an empirical question. As this study deals with the federal state of NRW, the regional centres and the project region of FLOW.NRW and their connection and integration among each other, we can speak of a regional network, as they are located spatially close to each oth-

er. Hereby the regional centres and the project, under which the three project partner cities are subsumed, mark the nodes within the network. This spatial proximity is a characteristic of regional networks as they are mostly of heterarchical nature, which means that the partners are largely equal, and can enable personal interaction and face-to-face contacts (SYDOW 2010: 383; GENOSKO 2000: 3). Through this, a lively exchange of knowledge is to be expected between the actors, which is a good prerequisite for them to develop common values and to share (implicit) knowledge (BACHINGER ET AL. 2011: 6). All the actors in a regional network should furthermore pursue a common goal, which is to realise economies of scale, strengthen the innovative capacity of the region and therefore improve the competitiveness in order to supply jobs and opportunities for generating income (DICKINSON 2003: 277; CUNY & STAUDER 1993: 153; SYDOW 2010: 383). Another advantage of this proximity is, that the actors in this region share a common history as well as similar culture and identity, through which interaction between them has not to be organized from scratch and which eases to recognize and activate endogenous potential (CUNY & STAUDER 1993: 153; KOFLER ET AL. 2018: 1; PECHLANER/FISCHER/BACHINGER 2010: 68). Due to its heterogeneity, modularity, and local embeddings, the tourism sector is well suited for networks to be applied to it and hence can enhance innovation and success (NDOU 2014: 2).

### **2.2.1. Stakeholder, relationships and ties in a network**

To get a better understanding of destinations or regions as networks, the concept of stakeholders needs to be considered. Generally spoken, a stakeholder “is any person, group or institution that has an interest in a development activity, project or program” (BAGGIO & COOPER 2010: 3). Stakeholders are therefore all people who are of relevance for a system. In this study, the marketing organisations, which have a role in the tourism destination NRW, should be regarded as stakeholder whose common aim it is to strengthen the federal state as a tourism destination. FREEMAN (1984) more specific defines “a stakeholder in an organisation is (by definition) any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives” (1984: 46). Here it becomes clear that stakeholders need to have a valid interest in the activities of the system and may even have the ability to influence or participate in the performance of the system. Hence the concept of a stakeholder can be considered in connection with the concept of participative government (BAGGIO & COOPER 2010: 3). When establishing a network, e.g. in the field of tourism and culture or creativity, the involvement of as many stakeholders as possible and the consideration of their interests and

optimal cooperation between them is a fundamental prerequisite for competitive destinations (PECHLANER/FISCHER/BACHINGER 2010: 206ff.). The destination must, therefore, set itself the goal of organizing the individual actors in the network in a manner, where the use of resources and competencies is balanced against the social, ecological and economic interests of the stakeholders (ibid.). Beyond that are networks perceived to be beneficial and profitable for the stakeholders. Hereby it mustn't be only one single stakeholder who contributes to this benefit. Rather all actors need to participate; at the same time, they have to trust that they will benefit from this network participation (NUISSL ET AL. 2006: 30; BRÁS ET AL. 2010: 1623). Here, trust is a relevant factor in a network as it relies on respectful behaviour from the other members as well as having confidence in their expertise and skills (COSTA & LIMA 2018: 53). This deployment of mutual trust, solidarity and the resulting feeling of security contributes significantly to the network effect and the personal contacts and interaction processes within the network. To generate an openness to innovation and learning in the network, the group connection mustn't be too intensive either. Since as soon as obligations and conditions arise between the members, the network impends to become more closed which in turn restricts the openness to innovation (SCHUBERT ET AL. 2001: 18f.).

According to MARK GRANOVETTER and his theory "The strength of weak ties", networks become productive when, on the one hand, they have intense connections to other actors ("strong ties"), but on the other hand also involve actors across distances without involving them in fixed institutional relationships ("weak ties") (GRANOVETTER 1973). Strong ties strengthen the network internally while weak ties bring in new information and enable the network to be cohesive; it is, therefore, the balance between both which is essential. The strong and weak ties also apply to the individual actors in the network. They must maintain weak connections for the exchange of scarce resources as well as strong connections for the emotional anchoring and securing of support and bring them into a sustainable balance: "the more direct and indirect relationships an actor has, the more resources he can mobilize from the network for himself" (JANSEN 2003: 163f.). Thus, the establishment of ties, be they strong or weak and collaboration with other actors in- and outside the network is imperative for the region to innovate and to stay competitive.

JANSEN & WALD (2007: 193f.) summarise the previously mentioned aspects of networks, their emergence and the role of the actors by describing three processes through which networks emerge and alter.



In the first process, actors establish network relationships with other actors, in which both involved actors decide whether or not a connection is established. This decision-making process is particularly important in group-processes, as the acceptance of new network partners also depends on the actors with whom the actor to be co-opted is otherwise still connected. This ‘selection process’ is therefore not only about choosing new relationships, but also about their maintenance as well as termination.

In the second process, the interconnected actors exchange information and thereby change their characteristics, e.g. their level of knowledge or values and norms which can lead to the point, that network members are becoming more similar to one another. The degree and speed of dispersion depend not only on the connection state and structure of the network but also on the type of knowledge or resource; implicit knowledge (= tacit knowledge), for example, spreads more slowly than explicit knowledge and needs furthermore also more intensive relationships for transmission between the actors.

The last process describes the change of the resource situation of the network members. Exploitation and exchange processes take place between the network members and other actors within the network or outside. Within the network, production and distribution processes are taking place between the actors; success and failure of these processes present networks more or less successful and stable. The market or political regulation give feedback and provide incentives for maintaining relationships or the establishment of new ones into the network (ibid.).

In these processes the importance of the relationship quality of the actors within the network becomes visible. The relationships determine the quality of the whole network: “it is the relationships that give a network its strength, its capacity to work collectively” (MANDELL & KEAST 2008: 729). Concerning these relationships, a distinction between cooperative, coordinative and collaborative networks can be made. Cooperative networks only focus on the exchange of information and communication. There are no changes in the structures of the actors and the bonding intensity is low. Coordinative networks, in contrast, require stronger cooperation between the partners. Although they coordinate each other in processes and actions and, if necessary, change their structures, they remain independent in the network. In the last type of networks, in collaborative networks, the goal of joint network services is valid. The structure of the individual partners change, they become interdependent and create a large whole (MANDELL & KEAST 2008: 718).

### **2.2.2. Networks, Cooperation and Organisation: a distinction**

When talking about and describing social phenomena, often the three forms ‘cooperation’, ‘network’ and ‘organisation’ are mentioned and used synonymously. But the special characteristics of a network, as it is used in this study, only becomes visible when comparing it with these other two system types (PAYER 2008: 6).

Initially, networks are formed based on cooperations and thus represent a further development of them. A network therefore always consists of cooperations, conversely, cooperations depict not necessarily a network. Hence, cooperation can also exist without network connections, while cooperation is indispensable for a network (PAYER 2008: 13; NUISSL ET AL. 2006: 27). Both system types seek different aims: cooperations arise usually for a concrete and defined objective and are therefore result-oriented, while in networks the goals are regarded as more flexible, dynamic and open and the emergence of new cooperations is placed in the foreground (ibid.). In cooperations, the members involved are relatively well known and know each other, whereby in networks at this junction an open atmosphere exists since there are no formal memberships and new actors want to be reached. For this reason, networks need a long time for their emergence, but this variety of relationships and connections constitutes its true appeal and attractiveness. Furthermore, instead of being short- or medium-termed like cooperations, networks are designed for a longer and more permanent period (PAYER 2008: 12). As networks are indicated through a more loosely and self-organized linkage and therefore less commitment of the actors, not only cooperations but also competition between them may occur. The most important distinction between cooperation and a network lies within the management. In cooperations, the partners manage their relationship directly by reaching and controlling their agreements. In networks there often exists network management (‘cross-partner management’) which amongst others coordinates the allocation of tasks, manages the linkages between the network participants, and defines a strategic orientation for the development of the network potential; often this is also expressed by an own logo and a public image. The more this management is done in networks, the more those can be defined as strategic networks (NUISSL ET AL. 2006: 27; PAYER 2008: 16).

An interesting comparison is made by PAYER when he considers a network as a big coffee-house: “a continual coming and going, a lot of space for communication, a lot of space for possibilities, great interest, simply being there - but no or only few obligations” (translated from PAYER 2008: 19). This comparison, at first glance, appears confusing and disordered,

but for such a coffee house to exist at all, it needs organisation. Organisation as a noun has two different meanings: it can describe an institution as an organisation as well as the process of organising something (PAYER 2008: 19). To describe and compare the third system type ‘organisation’, it here is necessary to refer to the organisation as an institution.

Organisations have a purpose and want to achieve goals and derived tasks, whereby the goals are not necessarily the same as those of its members. They emerge from the activities of a few people who want to achieve a common goal and who are coordinating their activities and tasks according to rules and structures, the organisational structure (ibid.). Here the activities are linked strongly, there exist binding rules, but the actors are linked rather loosely. This is different in networks: the activities are linked loosely and agreements are non-binding but the actors are linked strongly as relationships have a high significance. These loosely linked activities are especially important in industries that are highly flexible and dynamic, e.g. the cultural- and creative industries. Moreover are these organisations durable and indefinite in time. Similar to a network, the organisation can define their boundaries; in contrast to networks, however, they must have boundaries, as this is the only way they can exist permanently. Networks are therefore not organisations, but they need organisation to coordinate their inner structure (ibid: 20). Figure 6 shows, that there are no exact dividing lines between those three system types and that in practice these types are often hybrid and mixed.

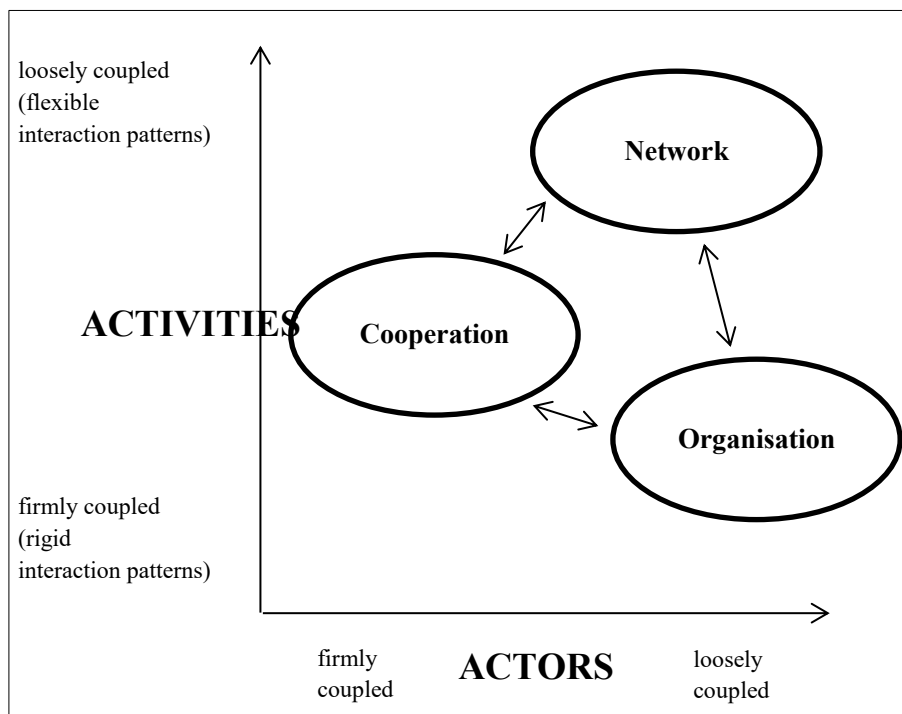


Figure 6: Networks, Cooperation and Organisation (own illustration based on PAYER 2008: 22)

### **2.2.3. Competitive advantages of networks and the relational view**

In a destination, the successful coordination and collaboration of the actors are not only important for the actors themselves, but also for the tourists perspective of the destination they are visiting: “the success of a destination depends on the seamless coordination of the players comprising the tourism value chain to provide wholesome and memorable experiences to tourists” (ZACH & RACHERLA 2011: 98). The tourist considers the destination as a whole, from a holistic perspective, and not as a piecemeal composition of the various actors (ibid.; BOES ET AL. 2016: 109). To achieve this goal, the destination needs special skills and expertise to be competitive against other destinations. PECHLANER, FISCHER & BACHINGER (2010) indicate those as core competencies which “are characterized by the fact that they offer a high level of customer benefit on the market and are applicable to a wide range of markets” (translated, ibid: 71). Furthermore, core competencies are mostly hard to imitate or substitute from the other competitors as they consist of intangible resources or tacit knowledge which is only available in the destination. A distinction is made between cooperative core competencies and regional core competencies. Cooperative core competencies are regarded as learning and synergy processes of the individual network members and their network-specific procedures among each other and are brought into the network by the partners. Regional core competencies, in contrast, are the competencies that are created and produced in the network (PECHLANER, FISCHER & BACHINGER 2010: 72). They can be found in social structures and the basis of their values, which leads to the concept of social capital. PIERRE BOURDIEU, who was one of the most influential sociologists and social philosopher, defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships or mutual acquaintance or recognition (BOURDIEU 1985: 243). Here, a further distinction can be made between individual and collective social capital, which leads in sequel again to MARK GRANOVETTER and his strong and weak ties (see chapter 2.2.1) (PECHLANER, FISCHER & BACHINGER 2010: 76f.). DIEKMANN declares two statements that can be applied to social capital: firstly social capital follows from the affiliation of individuals to networks, be it companies, regions or organisations. Secondly, based on this, these networks are distinguished by shared beliefs and values which are mostly about trust and reciprocity (DIEKMANN 2007: 52). Moreover social capital makes it possible that the actors can resort to resources in the network to achieve their goals.

A region can, through its interacting members, be regarded as a network. The core competencies of the region, be they cooperative or regional, are hereby understood as network-

competencies. This leads to the ‘relational view’, in which the integration of resources, the embedding of these resources in relationships and their cooperative use to be competitive play a crucial role (PECHLANER, FISCHER & BACHINGER 2010: 207; DUSCHEK 2004: 54). DYER & SINGH (1998: 661) state: “firms who combine resources in unique ways may realize an advantage over competing firms who are unable or unwilling to do so”. In contrast to the resource- and the competence-based view, which both assume that advantages can only be achieved with resources from a single institution, the relational-view aims to show that competitive advantages can, of course, be achieved with network resources, but that these are more efficient overall if they are deeply embedded in the network, can be used by all members in the entire network and therefore span boundaries of the institutions (DUSCHEK 2004: 61). It is therefore not about the own advantages of the institutions, but rather about the supplement and combination of resources of the network partners. This is possible through either relation-specific assets (e.g. the productivity increases due to specialization of the partners), knowledge-sharing routines (e.g. mutual exchange of knowledge), complementary resources and capabilities (e.g. exchange of scarce resources) or effective governance (e.g. falling transaction costs) (DYER & SINGH 1998: 663; PECHLANER, FISCHER & BACHINGER 2010: 70). Thus, “idiosyncratic interfirm linkages may be a [...] competitive advantage” (DYER & SINGH 1998: 661) for regions, as they are, like the intangible resources, difficult to imitate and hard to recognize from the outside and often can’t be replicated in the same way by other competitors (PECHLANER, FISCHER & BACHINGER 2010: 71).

#### **2.2.4. Innovation and innovative milieus in a network**

As already stated in previous chapters of this study, innovation is an important factor for the economic growth and development and thus for the success of a destination. The process of innovation implies both informal and formal connections and can be regarded as a result of networking. Corporate networks and intensive regional cooperation between actors form the basis for innovative milieus (PECHLANER & BACHINGER 2010: 1738; WEBER 2010: 675).

The concept of a milieu “is based on the role played by the territorial context and its ability to valorise the players' proximity in a specific way concerning the external environment” (MAILLAT 1995: 159). A milieu hereby has no specific or predetermined borders but a territorial dimension and is characterized by particular behaviour patterns and codified attitudes, which form the basis of regulation of the milieu (ibid.). Furthermore, milieus are not regarded as a static element but rather as a process that is dynamic and flexible. Also, the local labour

market is of particular importance for the milieu, which serves as a facility for the circulating and exchanging know-how (ibid.: 160).

Coming to the concept of the innovative milieu, the focus now lies on the innovation process and not only on the organisation and management of resources: “the innovative milieu is the territorial organisation in which innovation processes originate” (MAILLAT 1995: 161). For an innovative milieu to be successful and also innovative two requirements need to be complied: first, it is necessary not just to integrate elements from the internal dynamics, but rather to open up and to attain the resources or information from the outside world which seem beneficial for the milieu: “innovation does not result solely from endogenous logic in the milieu but also appears as the result of its interactions with the outside world” (MAILLAT 1998: 120). Secondly, the gained resources and information need to be organized, coordinated and linked to create new productive combinations. This organisation, which pictures the origin innovation process within the milieu is expressed by the emergence of innovation networks. From this follows that “the innovative milieu participates in the formation of innovation networks and is involved in their dynamism” (MAILLAT 1995: 162; MAILLAT 1998: 120). Innovative network and innovative milieu, therefore, benefit from each other inasmuch that the network offers positive spin-offs for the milieu which affect the process of formation and structuring; the milieu in return depicts a comparative advantage for the network through its inputs and contributions (ibid.). All innovative milieus have two things in common: their interaction logic and their learning dynamic. The former means the urge to innovate and thus to create innovative networks and collective working areas, while the latter refers to the ability of the actors in the milieu to react and to adapt their behaviour to upcoming changes in the environment (ibid.).

### 2.3. The Ecosystem approach

In the last twenty years, the term “ecosystem” has become a buzzword (AARIKKA-STENROOS & RITALA 2017: 23). It raised enormous awareness and became present in discussions of strategy. Through the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and the Convention on Biological Diversity, the extension to a theoretical approach, the “ecosystem approach” became prominent. In a meeting at this Convention on Biological Diversity in Kenya in 2000, the “ecosystem approach” was defined as “a strategy for the integrated management of land, water, and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way”. This definition highlights the manifoldness of implementation and accentuates the contextual conditions by saying that “humans, with their cultural diversity, are an integral component of many ecosystems” (KERN & SÖDERSTRÖM 2018: 272).

The term ecosystem was already introduced in 1923 by the plant ecologist ARTHUR G. TANSLEY: “all the parts of such an ecosystem – organic and inorganic, biome and habitat – may be regarded as interacting factors which, in a mature ecosystem, are in approximate equilibrium: it is through their interactions that the whole system is maintained” (TANSLEY 1923: 207). As biome, he refers to both organism’s plants and animals which are naturally living together as a unit (ibid: 206). In a similar vein, JAX (2016) describes “ecosystems” from the original conceptual perspective in the sense of ecology as “the organisms in a certain area of space together with their inanimate environment, their habitat [which are] usually understood as a complex network between animated and inanimated elements” (translated from JAX 2016: 40). Both definitions are strongly linked to biology and ecology. But over the past few years, geographers detected that the potentials of this ecosystem concept could also be useful in their research (STODDART 1965: 243).

In his text, ADNER (2017: 40) gives a specific view of the ecosystem construct, which depends on the structure of the interdependent activities that are subject to a value proposition. He defines an ecosystem in general as “the alignment structure of the multilateral set of partners that need to interact for a focal value proposition to materialize”. In his opinion, this definition is helpful as it explains where the ecosystem construct is relevant and where it is not (ADNER 2017: 42). HWANG (2014) states more specific, that “an ecosystem is about the dynamic interactions between things. It’s about how people meet, talk, trust, share, collaborate, team, experiment, and grow together”. In his opinion, it is the openness and dynamic as characteristic of an ecosystem which distinguishes it from other business networks such as clusters or industrial districts. BOLEY AND CHANG (2007) mention four critical elements of an ecosystem: In-

teraction and Engagement, Balance, loosely coupled actors with shared goals and self-organisation. To study ecosystems as a whole instead of focusing on specific actors or elements allows more holistic perspectives, focuses on complex relationships, stresses dynamic changes and confirms the importance of the physical environment and infrastructure which forms the system (BOLEY AND CHANG 2007: 1, GRETZEL ET AL. 2015: 558).

Over the years, different ecosystem-streams evolved. AARIKKA-STENROOS & RITALA (2017) specify five conceptualizations and their characteristics (see Figure 7), which should be described shortly in the following chapters.

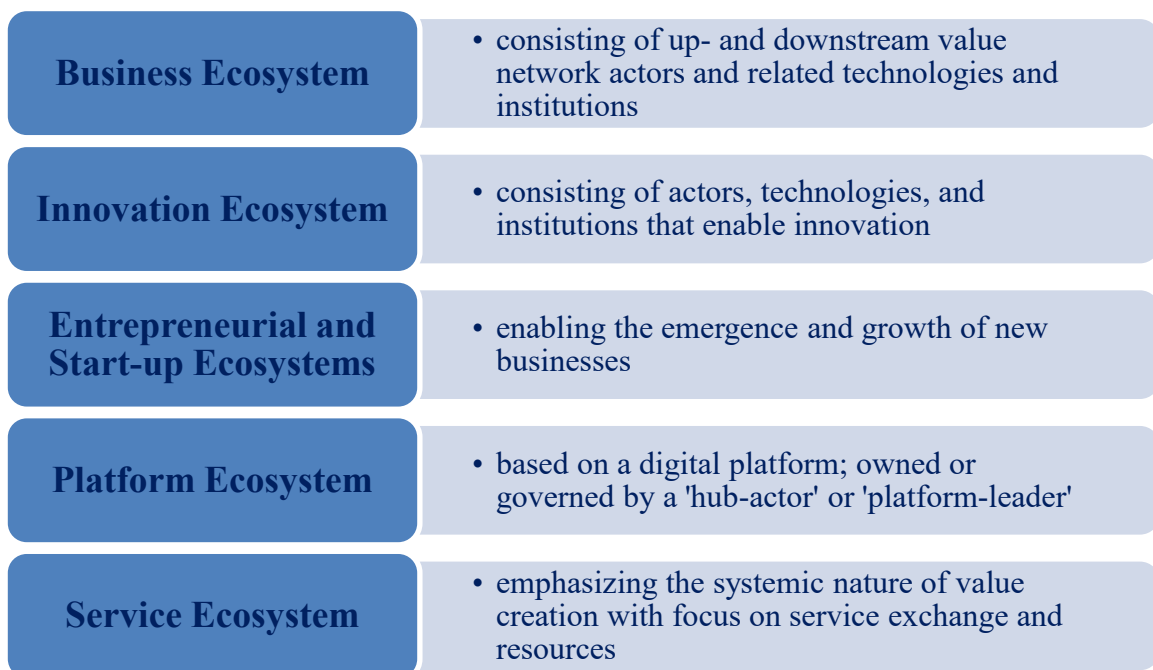


Figure 7: Ecosystem streams (own illustration, based on AARIKKA-STENROOS & RITALA 2017: 25)

### 2.3.1. Business ecosystems

In his work about shared purposes, MOORE (2013: 1) states in very general terms: “business ecosystems are pretty simple: The goal is to get a lot of people to bring their creativity together and accomplish something more important than they can do on their own”. This statement and activity of bringing people together can be applied to nearly all ecosystem-types, and literature shows that the term is a highly blurred expression which has no exact definition.

In a previous work, MOORE (1996: 26) clarified a business ecosystem as “an economic community supported by a foundation of interacting organisations and individuals – the organisms of the business world. This economic community produces goods and services of value to



customers, who are themselves members of the ecosystem [...]”. He furthermore suggests replacing the term ‘industry’ with the term business ecosystem, as nowadays the economic activities can't be divided into specific industries (PELTONIEMI & VUORI 2004: 6). This is also where ADNER (2017: 41) comes in; he calls a business ecosystem ‘ecosystem-as-affiliation’-perspective (EAAP): it “places emphasis on the breakdown of traditional industry boundaries, the rise of interdependence, and the potential for symbiotic relationships in productive ecosystems [...] it focuses on questions of access and openness, highlighting measures such as numbers of partners, network density, and actors’ centrality in larger networks”. The whole system of the Microsoft-network or Silicon Valley would fall into this definition of business ecosystems (ADNER 2017: 41, ACS ET AL. 2017: 2). IANSITI & LEVIEN (2004: 8) state business networks in a similar way as ecosystems which are organized around a keystone species, and are “characterized by a large number of loosely interconnected participants who depend on each other for their mutual effectiveness and survival”. keystones are hereby regarded as those institutions in the ecosystem, which have a great impact on the whole system. They see a business ecosystem as an analogy for biological ecosystems and explain that the participants in a business ecosystem also share their fate: “if the ecosystem is healthy, individual species thrive, if the ecosystem is unhealthy, individual species suffer deeply” (IANSITI & LEVIEN 2004: 8f.).

Next to the ecosystem-as-affiliation perspective (EAAP), which was already named above, ADNER (2017) illustrates the ‘ecosystem-as-structure’-perspective (EASP). Both perspectives pursue oppositional strategic routes: while the EAAP starts with the actors, which are tied to the focal actor, examines the connections between them and finally derives value propositions and improvements which can be created in the ecosystem, the EASP follows the opposite path and starts initially with the value propositions, then takes into account the activities which are necessary for the result and concludes with picking the actors which need to be linked to achieve the goal. Both perspectives are applicable, but which one can be used more meaningfully - EAAP focusing on actors, EASP focusing on activities - depends on the research question (ADNER 2017:43f.).

Summing up, PELTONIEMI & VUORI (2004: 13) define a business ecosystem as “a dynamic structure which consists of an interconnected population of organisations [which] can be small firms, large corporations, universities, research centres, public sector organisations, and other parties which influence the system”.

### **2.3.2. Innovation ecosystems**

Innovative Ecosystems are systems which are characterized by their innovation-driven goals. The system includes the interaction between institutions, enterprises, and actors and should enable “a holistic understanding of needs, solutions, and consequences related to innovation processes and innovation itself” (BULC 2011: 28). The actors should work collectively to create customer value or new value propositions together. An Innovation Ecosystem offers space and an environment “where ideas can be created, tested, brought to the level of a prototype (invention), and then, if accepted by the market, also commercialized or socially integrated (innovation), and last but not least, managed further on through a process of sustainable innovation” (BULC 2011: 28; DATTÉE ET AL. 2018: 468).

Within the concept of an Innovation Ecosystem and concerning tourism systems, the approach of an Innovative Tourism Ecosystem-approach seems to fit in very well.

As tourism can be seen as a multidisciplinary and complex system, which consists always of teamwork of individuals, organisations, businesses, and places to create a travel experience for the tourist, it is, like already stated in previous chapters, nowadays the touristic destinations and regions which need to innovate and thus to stay competitive (BAGGIO & COOPER 2010; NDOU 2014).

Using an innovative ecosystem approach is regarded to be utterly significant for the tourism systems “to manage the diversity and heterogeneity of tourism products, facilities, and services provided by a mix of interdependent actors [...] which are consumed under a unique brand name, that of destination as well as to offer [...] integrated and comprehensive experiential product to the tourists” (NDOU 2014: 7). Through the use of Information- and Communication-Technologies (ICT), the touristic actors can share knowledge and information and thus create innovation- and learning networks. Close cooperation between the organisations and actors and the merging of equal and different resources can thus be helpful to collectively produce and offer products that are demanded on the market (ibid.). Like in the other types of ecosystems, the main critical components are nodes, which are represented by the actors in the system; linkages between those nodes and a hub actor, which is regarded as central management and serves as facilitator and catalyst (ibid.: 9).

Innovative Tourism Ecosystems are based on some principles. Amongst others, the actors of the ecosystem are diverse and heterogeneous, which means that tourism and non-tourism but also private and public organisations are integrated. Moreover, collaboration plays a major

role as it wants to “offer a seamless travel tourist experience by blending together in a ‘one-stop-shop’ marketplace all the necessary elements and issues a customer may require in a certain destination” (NDOU 2014: 11). To ensure collaboration and cooperation of different actors, social capital and trust are important. Furthermore, a multidisciplinary view on the different knowledge and experiences of the other actors is important, as it allows to understand the dynamic of the system and to select the activities with the greatest impact. Besides these principles, a supporting environment, including factors like leadership and political support or hybrid human capacities for the creation of the required skills are crucial to reach the maximum in an Innovative Tourism Ecosystem (NDOU 2014, BULC 2011).

### **2.3.3. Entrepreneurial ecosystems**

Ecosystems and economics are strongly related, as both refer to performance. In this conjunction, entrepreneurship can be regarded as an important output of an economic-system that explains outputs and outcomes (ACS ET AL. 2017: 2).

In literature, a uniform definition of the term is missing and it was used in several ways which makes it a chaotic and fuzzy concept (BROWN & MASON 2017: 14). However, Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (EE) are overall regarded as a type of ecosystem, which enables the emergence and growth of new businesses. In this manner, STAM (2015: 1765) defines entrepreneurial ecosystems as a “set of interdependent actors and factors coordinated in such a way that they enable productive entrepreneurship”. BROWN & MASON (2014: 5) define it more comprehensive as a “set of interconnected entrepreneurial actors, entrepreneurial organisations, institutions, and entrepreneurial processes which formally and informally coalesce to connect, mediate and govern the performance within the local entrepreneurial environment”. Here not only the interdependence of both actors and factors is emphasized, but entrepreneurship is also regarded as the output of an entrepreneurial ecosystem: “the entrepreneurial ecosystem claims a more central role for ‘servant’ leadership by publicly oriented (successful) entrepreneurs with a long-term commitment to the region” (ACS ET AL. 2017: 3).

When creating entrepreneurship in a region, social and cultural factors play a crucial role. BROWN & MASON (2017: 15) state the ‘German Mittelstand’, i.e. small-and-medium-enterprises (SMEs) as a good example for this kind of entrepreneurship, as it is most closely connected to regional research centres, banks, schools and the local government; organisational and social ties here gear into each other (ibid.).

Of relevance in entrepreneurial ecosystems are surprisingly institutions, which are not primarily linked to start-ups and entrepreneurs, like large firms, health care systems, banks or stock markets. Often these large institutions serve as attractors of skilled labour, are often initial customers and are useful concerning knowledge spill-over (BROWN & MASON 2017: 15; ELIASSON 2000: 219).

Literature about entrepreneurship often deals with gender differences and how this is affecting the development of the enterprise (see e.g. ROBICHAUD ET AL. 2007, HENRY ET AL. 2015). Concerning entrepreneurial ecosystems BERGER & KUCKERTZ (2016: 5165) state that it would be fundamental to activate both male and female workforce to maximize the ecosystem's potential, as female founders among other things focus also on social goals, which are profitable for the regional community, and less on economic goals like their male counterparts.

Concluding, BROWN & MASON (2017: 16ff.) feature four main factors of entrepreneurial ecosystems. Firstly, the entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial infrastructure are the centre of the concept, which is mostly a localized phenomenon. This is also an advantage: "one of the benefits of the EE perspective is that it recognizes that the entrepreneurship is fundamentally mediated within a local context" (BROWN & MASON 2014: 14).

Secondly, resource providers play a crucial role in Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. These include among other financial providers like banks, venture capital firms or business angels who support newly founded start-ups and growth-oriented innovative firms with financial resources.

A third important aspect are Entrepreneurial Connectors. As EEs are mostly dynamic, they possess strong informal as well as formal networks that support the ecosystem in various concerns. These networks are e.g. business clubs or start-up networks that foster the level of social capital in the region. Here, the term 'local buzz' can be yielded, which refers to an effect "through which diverse information and inspirations circulate between local actors. This buzz refers to the specific information and communication ecology that arises through regular face-to-face contacts and the co-presence of actors in a particular value chain at a location" (translated from BATHOLT & GLÜCKLER 2012: 270)

The last and maybe most important factor in EEs is Entrepreneurial Culture. Regions who have a positive and open attitude towards entrepreneurship are likely to have more entrepreneurs as they serve as role models and entrepreneurs feel more comfortable in such an atmosphere (BROWN & MASON 2017: 16ff.).

#### 2.3.4. Platform ecosystems

In the sense of AARIKKA-STENROOS & RITALA (2017: 25), platform ecosystems are, like the name already proposes, created around technological platforms respectively based on a digital platform. In times of digitalisation, search engines such as Google or social media networks like Facebook have become an important and nearly ubiquitous factor in our everyday lives to get and exchange information and data or stay in contact with other people. As platforms, in general, are often related with network effects, digital platforms are in this juncture a special feature: the more users the platform can attract and the more people join, the more data and information it can provide, and thus the more valuable it becomes (GAWER & CUSUMANO 2013: 417). In their study, ELORANTA & TURUNEN (2016: 183f.) present three functions of platforms, which they call ‘logics’ of a platform. The first logic deals initially with the *connection* of the different actors who are participating. New collaborations are to be developed and new markets should be created, whereby each actor decides about the own value of the participation and the connectivity: “the essential core is to create connectivity, which in itself creates value in the network” (ELORANTA & TURUNEN 2016: 183). As an example of this logic, they mention the platform ‘LinkedIn’, where different professionals are connected (ibid.). The second logic refers to the *sharing of resources*. Through the mutual provision of resources, the individual actors of the platform benefit amongst others in service innovation. This form of sharing resources should help the participants to gain trust in the other actors, and at the same time to offer them freedom in their own actions. When sharing resources on platforms, an important factor “is addressing the threats of unwanted changes in the actors’ roles” (ELORANTA & TURUNEN 2016: 183), which can be controlled by clear communication. The website ‘AirBnB’ as a marketplace for booking and renting accommodation can be stated as an example for this logic, as it simplifies the use of resources and enables unique travelling experiences (ibid.). Lastly, the third logic deals with *integrating systems*, which can be seen as a mergence of the two previous logics and means the creation of an efficient service delivery system. In contrast to the first *connection-logic*, which merely shows possibilities for new offerings, this logic “stresses operational efficiency via embedding actors in each other’s processes” (ELORANTA & TURUNEN 2016: 183f.). Thus, the actors are merged and integrated, and in contrast to the second logic (*sharing of resources*), this logic aims also to control the value creation. An example for this logic is Salesforce, a Customer-Relationship-Management-platform, where departments like marketing, sales or customer services work on the same platform and there-

fore ensure a perfect customer experience. Through guidelines and rules, the company controls the operating way of the partners (ELORANTA & TURUNEN 2016: 184).

Concluding, digital platforms can be seen as a collection point for various assets and values like processes, knowledge or relationships. On these platforms, the exchange takes place from which the participating actors can benefit.

### **2.3.5. Service ecosystems**

The last ecosystem, which is presented by AARIKKA-STENROOS & RITALA (2017), is a Service Ecosystem. It represents a structure of economic and social actors which are loosely coupled and who try to create value by interacting through language, technology or institutions (ibid: 25). VARGO & LUSCH (2016: 11) define it as “a relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors, connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange”. Service ecosystems highlight the institutional nature of value creation and put a focus on the exchange of services and resources (AARIKKA-STENROOS & RITALA 2017: 25). Through a service-based interaction of the various actors, the ecosystem exchanges resources to survive, thus self-organisation, complexity and emergence are important factors (VARGO & LUSCH 2017: 49).

To explore the relationship and interaction between the various actors, SKLYAR ET AL. (2019) mention *embeddedness* as an essential characteristic of a service ecosystem. In this connection, *embeddedness* can be understood as the conception, that all outcomes and social interaction are affected by the relationship of the actors and by the structure of these relations in the network, and thus influence the whole structure of the ecosystem (SKLYAR ET AL. 2019: 451).

Concluding, actors, who are closely embedded are willed to share more skills, knowledge, information, and resources. But they also need to be aware of the changes in the ecosystem, and should, if necessary, adapt to each other to benefit from the structure (ibid.)

### **3. Methodological approach**

Based on the theoretical embedding on the topic, the methodological approach is explained in this chapter. This study applies a qualitative approach to explore the field of research (see chapter 3.2.1). Therefore, the preparation and implementation of the methodological approach are presented, the criteria of a qualitative research process are explained and the sampling strategy, with which the participants of the interviews were chosen as well as the used guideline interview are described.

#### **3.1. Participation in the project FLOW.NRW**

The purpose of this chapter is to apply the previously presented theoretical approaches to the object of research. Based on these findings the research question and principal guiding questions of this study will be derived.

##### **3.1.1. Applying the theoretical basis on the object of research**

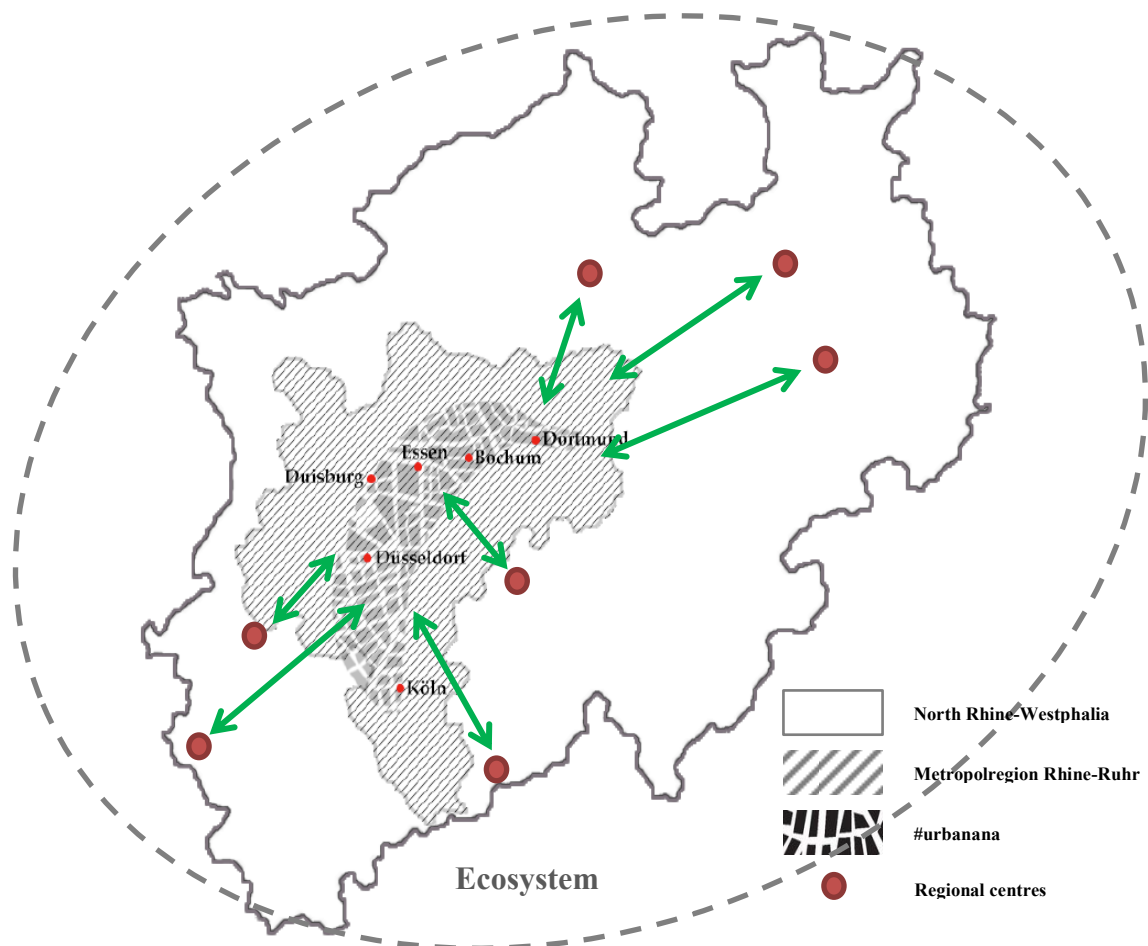
Due to the thematic breadth and the size of the region of FLOW.NRW, there exists no single theory in literature, which could cover the context and structure of the project in its entirety. In this thesis, the three approaches from chapter 2 should therefore be combined and merged to get a comprehensive theoretical background, which is necessary to answer the research question.

The first foundation, the concept of the creative cities and creative milieus (see chapter 2.1), forms the basis. The concept gives an insight of the (sometimes hidden) creative potential in the cities, the various creative stakeholder groups, be they tourists or locals, and their possibilities to change the city they are living in respectively visiting. This concept should be applied to the cities examined in this study to evaluate their creative potential and to find out which specific topic areas, contents, and attractions the destinations would like to communicate to the project FLOW.NRW. Evaluating this potential, the three thematic threads of the project ‘Culture & Music’, ‘Design & Art’ as well as ‘Digital’ play a major role in this study.

The second theoretical foundation, the concept of regional networks (see chapter 2.2) provides an overview of the different network-constructions which can occur, how the network-partners are connected and which synergies this may have. In this study, the concept should be employed to understand the possible connections between the various destinations, if there

already exist common projects and to identify possible links to the destinations of the three project partners. In the same vein, it should be carved out how the regional centres could communicate their potential to the project and which advantage networks have in this context.

The last foundation, the ecosystem-approach (see chapter 2.3) can be seen as a fusion of the first two approaches. Here, the potential of the regional centres and the possible networks are merged and understood as a coherent ecosystem. In this study, the ecosystem-approach should be used to describe the whole federal state North Rhine-Westphalia in its entirety as an ecosystem (see Figure 8), its elements and the interactions between them. Here the important elements are the regional centres with their creative potential and how they interact and can be integrated within the project and therefore strengthen the tourism in North Rhine-Westphalia.



**Figure 8: The Ecosystem North Rhine-Westphalia**  
(own illustration, based on SCHÖNBERGER 2018: 43)



### 3.1.2. Research question and guiding questions of this study

Based on the theoretical insights and information which was gained through the previous chapters, a research question for the present investigation is formulated. The question should be helpful to structure the empirical part (chapter 4) and to limit the scope of the study.

The interest of this study is placed on the regional centres in North Rhine-Westphalia, their creative potentials and possibilities to communicate them to- and to be included in the project FLOW.NRW and thus to strengthen the tourism destination NRW as a whole.

Answering the research question will allow to set up different possibilities of integration and communication in terms of network relationships. Besides, it should provide answers to the possible future potential of the project.

As a result, the following research question is derived for this investigation:

**How can the regional centres outside of the #urbanana-region be included into the project FLOW.NRW and what potential does this offer for the future of the project?**

During the conception of the research question, the following guiding questions came up which should support the research question and provide a better understanding of the relation between the theoretical and the empirical part.

#### **Guiding questions:**

- Which benefit has the project for the regional centres?
- How do the three project partners Köln Tourismus, Düsseldorf Tourismus and Ruhr Tourismus evaluate the integration of the regional centres into the project?
- Are there already any existing cooperations between the regional centres?
- What should be done on part of the project to get the regional centres more involved?
- Which potential do the regional centres have in the three thematic threads that drive the project and North Rhine-Westphalia in location competition?
- How can the regional centres actively contribute to the project?

### **3.2. Preparation and implementation of the methodological approach**

The following chapters focus on the criteria of qualitative empirical research, the sampling strategy, the preliminary study with the project partners, the development of the semi-structured guideline interviews as well as with the conduction and coding of those.

#### **3.2.1. Criteria of qualitative empirical social research**

To begin with, qualitative research deals with the perspectives of the subjects involved, this means the subjective and social constructs (FLICK ET AL. 2015: 17). Qualitative research has its starting point in the interpretative and meaningful approach, which is interactively produced and represents the social quality of the subject interviewed. Moreover, it understands social reality as the joint production and attribution of meaning (ibid.: 22). LAMNEK (2010: 21) states, that from a qualitative point of view, the communication between the researcher and the subject illustrates the own research process. Thus, communication here is not a disruptive or hindering factor, but rather a fundamental component of qualitative research, through which the reconstruction of social reality becomes possible (ibid.).

Besides, a qualitative approach underlines the process character and reflexivity of social reality. This makes clear, that objective living conditions only become significant for the subject's world through subjective meaning (FLICK ET AL. 2015: 22). The process character portrays the changeability of the process in qualitative research (LAMNEK 2010: 22).

The mode of behaviour and statements thus constitute process-specific details of the construction and reproduction of social reality (ibid.). The principle of processuality is therefore purposed to analyse the scientific recording of the context in which social phenomena occur, which would be difficult to record through stringent or statistical procedures (ibid.). At the same time, the reflexivity of the object and analysis specify, that entry and beginning of qualitative research can be chosen individually, depending on the object of research (ibid.).

The goal of qualitative research is to understand the constructions of social reality as a reconstruction of them (FLICK ET AL. 2015: 22). Qualitative research puts the focus on human action in a daily world: qualitative research wants to “strive for a [...] holistic investigation of life-world phenomena and to describe and understand the views and actions of the participants in detail” (translated from DÖRING & BORTZ 2016: 65).

To research with a qualitative approach is useful as it provides a methodological spectrum and is not a standardized method (FLICK ET AL. 2015: 24). For the researcher, this means, that there is a multitude of possibilities to approximate to the research field and to evoke knowledge gain. Besides, a qualitative understanding is based on the object appropriateness of the methods. This means that the openness of research is of central importance here to do justice to the complexity of the object (FLICK 2016: 27). The object to be examined is the reference point for the selection of the methods and not vice versa (ibid.). LAMNEK (2010: 20) points out, that qualitative research has the aim to discover new things and generate new theories, which highlights the exploration function of this research method. Thus, quantitative research is a hypothesis-review research process while qualitative research is a hypothesis-generating research process (ibid.). Conversely, however, this means that the researcher needs to be open as possible in the surveys to gain new knowledge. According to this, the results of qualitative research are often time-, person- or location-bound, which makes it difficult to generalize them (DÖRING & BORTZ 2016: 65).

In this study, the application of qualitative empirical social research appears highly relevant, like the way how the regional centres want to and also can be included into the project FLOW.NRW depends on their own creative- and cultural potential and is therefore context-specific. The response options of the interviewees should not be defined beforehand, as it often appears in quantitative research; the research should rather have an open character to gain new knowledge and give the interviewer also the opportunity to ask an interposed question if the content seems relevant for the analysis. Using a qualitative approach in this context offers the possibility to carve out feasible difficulties or barriers, with which the cities are confronted in their marketing and how these could be solved by the project.

### **3.2.2. Sampling strategy**

In qualitative research, the focus is not put on the large numbers of cases (which is a characteristic feature of quantitative research), but on cases which are typical and particularly relevant for answering the research question. Qualitative research aims to discover and describe structures and relationships, the quantitative nature of these aspects here is not important (LAMNEK 2010: 172). In qualitative research, questions of sampling or concerning certain research methods can't be posed and answered meaningfully and measures such as the representativeness of a sample are hence not serviceable or conducive for the research process. Whether a sampling selection was made appropriate can only be answered in regard to the

research question, the gained results and the methods applied (KELLE & KLUGE 2010: 42; FLICK 2016: 525).

To conduct qualitative research, the researcher is faced with the question of which cases or groups of cases he/she would like to investigate. This selection is made under the keyword 'sampling'. In literature, which deals with qualitative research, often a distinction between different sampling strategies is made, e.g. theoretical sampling, trial-and-error-principle, selective sampling or a heterogeneous selection. The two best-known sampling strategies, which are frequently used in qualitative studies, are theoretical sampling and selective sampling (LAMNEK 2010: 170f.).

In theoretical sampling, it can't be determined at the outset which cases are to be investigated since the case is still vague and there are no empirical hypotheses about the object of research. The construction of the case emerges in the course of the investigation and therefore is shifted into the research process. The case selection (sampling) and the analysis of the data material take place simultaneously and influence each other: "Theoretical sampling means the process of data collection aimed at generating theory, during which the researcher collects, encodes and analyses his data parallel to each other and decides which data is to be collected next and where they can be found" (GLASER & STRAUSS 2010: 61, MERKENS 2015: 296f.). Through the process of coding and analysing the data, it may be necessary to collect new data again, either the researcher still needs confirmation for what has been found so far, or the data already collected needs to be controlled by broadening the database concerning the generality of the result. Therefore it has to be decided after each step of the survey whether a new selection is useful and beneficial for the research (MERKENS 2015: 296f.). The process of theoretical sampling is considered to be completed when theoretical saturation is reached, i.e. when no theoretically relevant similarities and differences can be detected in the data material (LAMNEK 2010: 171; STRÜBING 2008: 33; KELLE & KLUGE 2010: 49; BOHNSACK ET AL. 2018: 228).

When using selective sampling as strategy, the researcher has to make several choices before drawing the sample: "his [the researchers] strategy for the next stage is to move from one selected sub-site to another and sample at each site various "dimensions": time, space, people and events" (SCHATZMAN & STRAUSS 1973: 39). Since the researcher with this strategy follows a defined plan, the term sampling plan is often used in literature (see e.g. LAMNEK 2010, KELLE & KLUGE 2010). These choices include characteristics that are relevant for case selection, characteristic values, and the size of the qualitative sample. The researcher makes a selection of people investigated based on the research question, theoretical considerations and

previous knowledge of the research field (KELLE & KLUGE 2010: 50). An important role in selective sampling are classic socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, occupation or educational attainment, as these are required as indicators of significant structural influences. In the end, the sampling plan should be designed in such a way, that representatives of all relevant combinations of characteristics are represented in the sample (KELLE & KLUGE 2010: 52). The process of selective sampling is considered to be completed when the entire sample has been examined (FLICK 2016: 161).

This study implements a selective sampling. Due to the project application and the demand to extend the project to the regional centres in North Rhine-Westphalia, certain persons were selected in the run-up to the investigation based on characteristics as well as the ability to answer the research question. The most striking feature was the occupation of the persons. They should feel a touristic connection with the respective regional centre and be in a professional position in which they can make decisions and have the tourist image of the city at their disposal. Therefore, the managing directors of the destination and marketing organisations (DMOs) in the nine regional centres Aachen, Bielefeld, Bonn, Krefeld, Mönchengladbach, Münster, Paderborn, Siegen, and Wuppertal were selected and asked for an interview. However, in the correspondence, it was always emphasized that other people, such as project managers or -consultants of the same institution could also be considered for the interview if they were more suitable for the topic from their perspective.

At this point, it has to be mentioned that the interviews took place in cooperation with the practical partner Tourismus NRW e.V. Since the project FLOW.NRW has only been running since September 2019, the project manager needed to present the project with all ideas and goals to the DMOs of the regional centres and to inform them about it. Therefore, for organisational reasons, a combination of information and interview proved to be promising, as the interviewees already knew the contents of the project and were not surprised by the topics in the interview. It must be emphasized here that the project manager explained the project in a neutral and not judgmental way as far as possible. This helped the interviewees a lot to understand the project and its intention. However, the interviewees maybe have been a bit prejudiced in this respect, as they answered the questions possibly in a different way as though they wouldn't have known the project at all.

In the first call, five of the nine DMOs responded and made themselves available for an interview. A week before the first interview was conducted, a second appeal was made to the remaining four DMOs. Finally, interviews were conducted with seven DMOs in the regional centres, as one city reacted neither to the first nor to the second call and another city cancelled the interview shortly before the appointment. Here the project-manager of FLOW.NRW decided not to force the project on the regional centre and to contact the city again at a later date (out of time for this study).

### **3.2.3. Preliminary study with the project partners**

In the run-up to the main investigation, a preliminary study was carried out. Preliminary studies are empirical studies on a small scale that are intended to provide the knowledge which is necessary for the actual investigation. They can have different objectives and can, therefore, be carried out in different phases of a project (GLÄSER & LAUDEL 2009: 107). For instance, they can be used to get information about the object of research and thus extend the level of knowledge of the researcher. Then again, they are also helpful to test and adapt the actual survey and evaluation methods. Carrying out a preliminary study, therefore, promotes the openness of the investigation and qualifies the application of the methods (GLÄSER & LAUDEL 2009: 108).

In this study, a preliminary study was conducted with the three managing directors of the project partners Köln Tourismus, Düsseldorf Tourismus, and Ruhr Tourismus GmbH. It was aimed to gain general knowledge about their perspectives and opinions concerning the project. Within the framework of a questionnaire that the project partners were asked to fill out in advance of an internal project workshop, the researcher could slip into two own questions:

- 1) How do you define networking? What do you associate with the term “network”?
- 2) How do you assess the stronger integration of further regional centres into the communication of FLOW.NRW?

The first question was also conducted to the seven interview partners, while the second question can be regarded as a counter-question of question 2 of the interview guideline (see chapter 3.2.5). These questions should illuminate the perspective of the project partners; both the

similar and the counter-question may later in the analysis reveal connections and interests that can drive the project forward from both sides (project partners and regional centres) equally.

#### **3.2.4. The semi-structured guideline-interview with experts**

In qualitative research, several interview forms exist, e.g. the narrative interview, the problem-oriented interview or group interviews. One of the most basic forms of practice is the guideline interview (KRUSE 2015: 147), which ATTESLANDER (2010) also refers to as a semi-structured interview. As already stated in chapter 3.2.2, a selection of interviewees due to their occupation and professional position occurred. This study hence adopts the idea of combining a semi-structured guideline interview with an expert-interview, although an expert-interview does not represent an own form of an interview, but is an application field-related variant of guideline interviews (KRUSE 2015: 166).

As the name already proposes, the people, in this case experts, are interviewed based on a guideline, which was written in advance and which should support the interview to follow a specific theme path (ATTESLANDER 2010: 141; KRUSE 2015: 209). Semi-structured guideline interviews are hereby particularly suitable if the researcher wants to identify something specific in the research content, when several interviews should be compared or when new topics and information are introduced by the interviewees. Here, the researcher needs to make a structural intervention in the open narrative space (HELFFERICH 2009: 179). Guided interviews are therefore highly applicable for “a mode of asking, not a mode for requesting or even mode of quizzing” (translated from KRUSE 2015: 213). Thus, they offer flexible and dynamic handling.

Guideline interviews can have different levels of structuring, ATTESLANDER (2010: 133) differentiates between little-, semi- and strong structured. What they all have in common is their more or less open structuring of the qualitative interview execution (HELFFERICH 2009: 209). As guideline interviews want to gain new knowledge and be open as possible on the one hand, they want to contain and control the process through the guiding questions on the other hand. To counteract this conflict between openness and the structuring of the guideline, the form and style of the questions need to be taken into account already during the development of the guideline. KRUSE (2015) in this regard formulates some requirements that should be considered: initially, the questions must be structured openly. Here a stringent structural principle, e.g. the distribution of the questions into thematical blocks or different dimensions of the re-

search object can be useful (see chapter 3.2.5). The questions need to focus on the research topic, but must not have a closing effect. Furthermore, the questions should not be ambiguous or misleading and they should not indicate expectations. At the interviewee, no feelings of shame or guilt should be triggered and questions with tough topics need to be handled carefully (KRUSE 2015: 215; HELFFERICH 2009: 181f.). Besides, a simple choice of words should be used, this means no technical terms, colloquial language or foreign words. A reasonable interview guideline contains questions that can be answered by the interviewee (KRUSE 2015: 217; LAMNEK 2010: 321).

To develop an optimal interview guideline, HELFFERICH (2009) mentions the four step-method SPSS (a German acronym for Sammeln (collect), Prüfen (check), Sortieren (sort) and Subsumieren (subsume)). In the first step, the researcher collects as many questions as possible which are linked to the research topic. Here the researcher should always ask himself, which goal should be pursued and what would be interesting to know concerning the research question. Afterwards, the questions are checked, which means, that the collected questions are structured and reduced. At this junction, the researcher should pay attention to possible previous knowledge and thus implicit expectations, but also to questions with potentially surprising answers or the demand that the interviewee has a correct and fitting answer to the research question. This latter point often seems to be underestimated in interviews, as the interviewees “are not located in a scientific discourse, but in their daily routines” (translated from HELFFERICH 2009: 184). In the third step, the remaining questions are sorted according to the chronological sequence, e.g. concerning the past or future, or content aspects which are relevant for the research question. The last step subsumes the questions to thematic blocks with the main question and possible sub-questions as a back-up (HELFFERICH 2009: 182f.)

But what characterizes an interviewee as an expert? In literature, disagreement prevails between the authors how an expert can be defined. DEEKE (1995) defines an expert “as a person who is particularly competent as an expert concerning a matter of interest” (translated from DEEKE 1995: 7f.). As this definition is universal and can refer to any person who has a strong interest for a matter, a more detailed definition comes from BOGNER & MENZ (2005) who state: “the expert has technical, process and interpretative knowledge relating to his specific profession or professional field of activity. In this respect, expert knowledge does not only consist of systematized, reflexively accessible [...] special knowledge, but to a large extent, it also has the character of practical [...] knowledge [...]” (translated from BOGNER & MENZ



2005: 46f.). Expert-interviews, therefore, are qualitative interviews with a special target group. Experts are often seen as representatives of an organisation or institution and are mostly only interesting as actors who are integrated into a specific functional context, and not as persons with their orientation and attitudes in the individual context of life (MEUSER & NAGEL 1991: 444f.). As the status of the experts in certain ways is determined through the researcher in regard to the research question (MEUSER & NAGEL 1991: 443), the researcher in this study decided to take the managing directors of the destination and marketing organisations (DMOs) in the seven regional centres as experts. Their specific knowledge, which relates to the field of tourism and marketing in the destination, appears to be highly relevant to answer the research question.

### **3.2.5. Developing the interview guideline**

When developing an interview guideline and conducting the interviews, the order of the questions is an essential factor. The order determines the accuracy and extent of the interviewees and sometimes also the content of the responses. Moreover, care was taken to ensure that topics that belonged together in terms of content were dealt with one after the other and that a natural course of conversation was thus made possible (GLÄSER & LAUDEL 2009: 146).

As already described in the previous chapter, the interviews were conducted on an interview guideline following the SPSS-method from HELFFERICH (2009). Consequently, three content blocks with main- and subquestions were created, whereby only the main questions were posed to the interviewees. In the case of concretions, the sub-questions were used. The interview guideline can be found in the Appendix.

The first thematic block, *Networks and the project FLOW.NRW* should introduce the topic and focus on networks and the connection to the project FLOW.NRW. The two questions should serve as an easy entry point into the interview, as the interviewees could comment on networks in general (question 1) and describe their opinion on the project FLOW.NRW concerning their destination (question 2). The two questions of this thematic block were also posed in the preliminary study to the project partners: the first question in the same way and the second question as a counter-question (see chapter 3.2.3).

The second block, *FLOW.NRW in the context of the specific destination* then should substantiate the project FLOW.NRW concerning their destination, and evaluate in which areas there are points of contact and content intersections within the project and where opportunities for creative tourism of the destination lie within the framework of the project (question 3).

The interviewees were able to brainstorm and to communicate their creative potentials to the project and describe, how this integration could work from their perspective and where potential difficulties or obstacles may arise (question 4). Furthermore, the potential for improvement of the project and wishes to the project management could be expressed (question 5).

Concluding, the last block, *FLOW.NRW in a superordinate context* should shed more light on the project in general and the planned contents and projects. The project FLOW.NRW aims for more international orientation, thus it is necessary that also the regional centres give internationality in their destination a high priority (question 6). Questions 7 and 8 refer to the general character of the project at the interface between the cultural and creative industries and the importance of relationships and connections inside and outside of this developing network. The last questions 9 and 10 should give the interviewees the possibility to highlight their destination in the whole state NRW and to add information which is, from their perspective, maybe important for the project but wasn't mentioned in the questions before.

All in all, the interview guideline is constructed as open as possible. This is helpful on the one hand to explore new knowledge and insights, and on the other hand, concerning the analysis, to carry out a suitable analysis with the software WinRelan and GABEK (see chapter 3.2.7).

### **3.2.6. Conduction of the interviews**

Before the conversation started, the interview partners were informed on the one hand about the project FLOW.NRW by a colleague from Tourismus NRW e.V., on the other hand, the researcher informed about the goal of the investigation and about the role the interview plays in achieving this goal. The interviewees were also informed about the protection of their personal data and how their anonymity will be guaranteed. Furthermore, permission to record with a dictation machine was obtained from all interviewees, which ensured that the researcher can fully concentrate on the conversation (GLÄSER & LAUDEL 2009: 144).

Following, the tape recording was transcribed using the software 'easytranscript'. This ensured that the information was not distorted. The logs converted to normal font German were

given page numbers to appear in the results presented to provide a precise source. The transcribed protocols can be found on the enclosed CD.

As already stated in chapter 3.2.2, finally seven interviews were conducted. It turned out that in most cases not only the managing directors, but also colleagues from the marketing, press or event department of the DMO were included in the interviews. In one case, also two persons from the promotion of trade and industry of the city were invited from the DMO to the appointment. Altogether, the researcher had seven interviews but talked to 16 persons, of which five were men and eleven were women.

The interviews were carried out in the time between the 31<sup>st</sup> of October and the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 and were conducted in the offices of the interview partners in the regional centres. The interviews were scheduled to last about 40 minutes, the length of the interviews ranged from at least 15 minutes to a maximum of 85 minutes. In all interviews, the formal version of addressing somebody (“Sie”) was used and they were conducted in the German language to make sure to gain all relevant information and insights from the participants.

In the presentation of the results, the interviews are referred to as interview person (IP) 1-7 and Pre-Study (PS) 1-3.

### **3.2.7. Coding of data with GABEK/WinRelan**

By using a qualitative analysis tool, the researcher wants to examine and interpret complex and relatively unstructured data in a holistic and structured way (BUBER & KRALER 2000: 111). The aim is to expose connections between the themes from the different interviews and to gain new insights and understandings of the processes and situation which were investigated (ibid.).

In this study, the interviews were evaluated according to the GABEK (Ganzheitliche Bewältigung von Komplexität – Holistic Processing of Complexity) method, which is designed to analyse qualitative data such as unstructured text material like interviews or questionnaires with open-ended questions, transcripts or field notes (BUBER & KRALER: 112). With the analysis software WinRelan, GABEK enables to systematically evaluate the collected data material and to graphically display the textual references by taking syntax and semantics into account (ZELGER 2000: 206; BUBER & KRALER 2000: 112).

As a result of the evaluation with GABEK, association graphs and causal network graphs can be generated. Association graphs represent the mental connections of certain terms, which are

more frequently associated with selected topics than others. This frequency can be seen in the width of the connecting lines. From this, one can conclude that in the opinion of the interviewees, these recurring interrelationships between the knowledge elements belong together and that they need to be taken into account when analysing the topic investigated. In causal network graphs, arrows in different colours represent the relationships between positive and negative measures, objectives and framework conditions (SILLER & MATZLER 2010: 214f.).

GABEK is a helpful tool for the researcher, as it helps to present all the complexity of the qualitative data from different distances and perspectives: “it permits a complexity reduction while maintaining a comprehensive portrayal” (PECHLANER ET AL. 2012: 158).

Three steps are necessary for the analysis with GABEK: Definition of text units, coding of the text units, and finally the analysis of those text units. In the first step, the transcribed data is split into meaningful, shorter statements. After this, the statements are initially coded with keywords, these keywords are evaluated if they are positive, negative or neutral for the actual condition and the desired condition and coded if there are causal relations between them. The evaluation of the actual and the desired condition seems to be useful in this study, as the researcher wants to carve out the potentials of the regional centres on the one hand, and the potential which is thus offered for the future of the project on the other hand. The last step is the analysis of the generated association and causal net graphs (ibid.). Association graphs resemble mind maps and present the connections between the coded keywords while causal net graphs show the cause and effect relationships between the keywords (ZELGER ET AL. 2008). The three steps are done by the researcher and based on his/her own methodological judgement and should be, best possible, done without any interpretation (BUBER/KRALER 2010: 113). Table 1 shows the final codes according to the interview guideline, which were used to create the graphs in GABEK.

<b>Code in GABEK</b>	<b>Used in...</b>
Network_Definition	Interviews + Pre-Study
Project_FLOWNRW	Interviews
Fashion_and_Fashiondesign	Interviews
Integration_in_FLOW_NRW	Interviews
Integration_of_regional_centres	Pre-Study
FLOWNRW_Wishes	Interviews
Emergence_of_a_network	Interviews

**Table 1: Overview of the used codes in GABEK (own illustration)**

## 4. Empirical results

In this chapter, the empirical results of the interviews with the seven regional centres as well as the pre-study with the three project partners are presented. The structure of the sub-chapters hereby is based on the three content blocks (see chapter 3.2.5) of the interview guideline. The results of the pre-study were thematically matched to the results of the interviewees. Afterwards, the results are discussed and interpreted.

### 4.1. Networks and the project FLOW.NRW

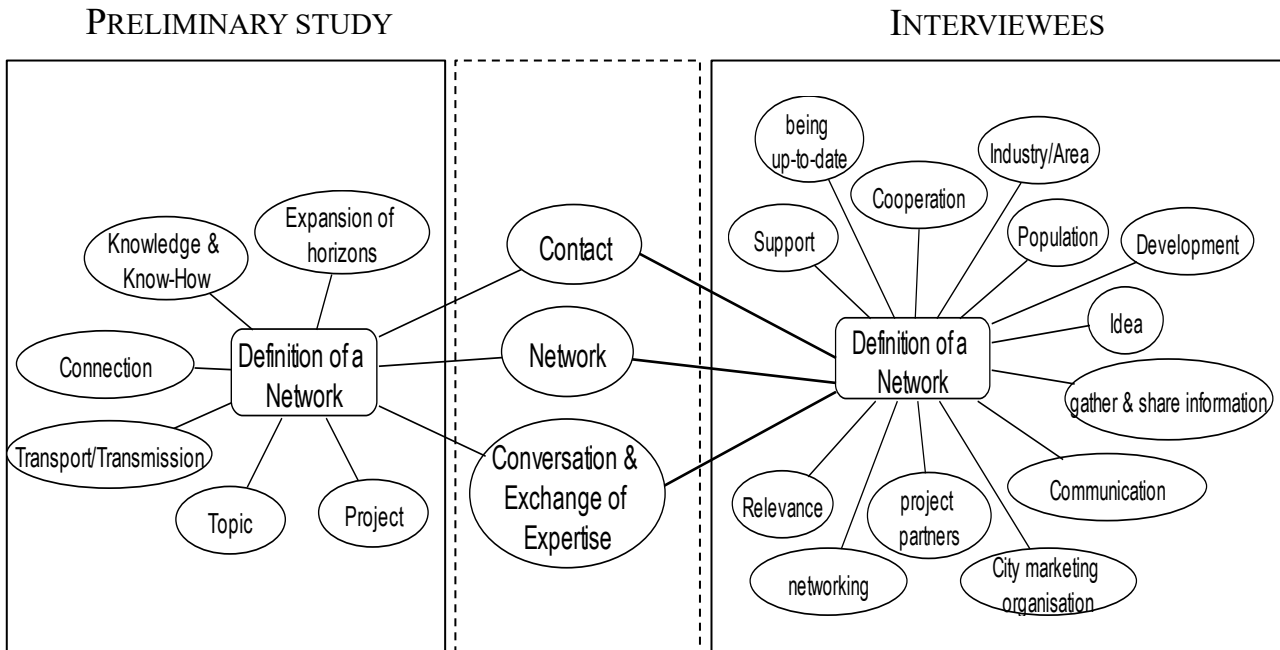
In this thematic block the topic of FLOW.NRW was introduced and focus was put on the term ‘network’ and the possible potential of the project for the regional centres.

#### 4.1.1. Associations with the term ‘network’

The first question to the seven interviewees as well as the three preliminary study partners was how they would define a network respectively what they associate with the term. Figure 9 shows the association graphs with the most connected codes as well as the three codes “Contact”, “Network” and “Conversation & Exchange of Expertise”, which were named by both the interviewees and the partners of the preliminary study and which seem to be the most important.

For the project partners, it is important to expand their horizons within a network and to exchange knowledge and know-how as well as to be connected within the same topic: “[...] *networking means creating a connection with partners, who in turn create new connections themselves, which do not function unilaterally, but in several directions. This creates a network of relationships, which makes the transfer of knowledge, know-how and expertise much easier and faster*” (Pre-Study 2: 1).

For the interviewees, a network means to be always up-to-date, to gain new ideas together, to gather and share information and to develop themselves through the support of other project partners. A major point is, that all destination marketing organisations (DMOs) see themselves as networkers, who bring people and institutions together: “[...] *what we offer is, of course, the coordination, we know them all and are also personally a lot in exchange and that is also extremely important [...]. And we can bring all that into the process*” (Interview Person 1: 2).

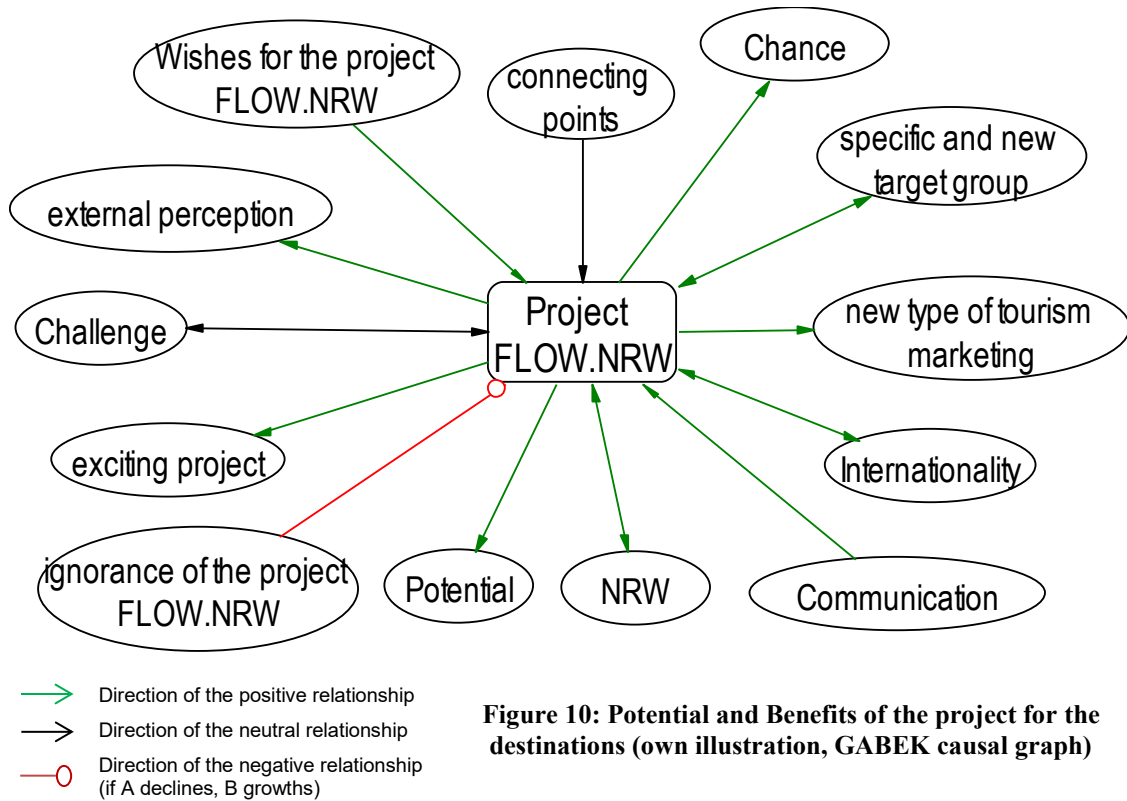


**Figure 9: Network associations of the preliminary study and the interviewees (own illustration, GABEK association graph without crosslinks)**

The answers of the interviewees and the project partners are largely similar to the various definitions of networks from chapter 2.2. The exchange of expertise and information can be seen as an important factor and should not be a problem in the regional network of FLOW.NRW, as the possibility of personal interaction and face-to-face contacts is given due to the geographical proximity of the destinations. Another factor which is necessary but was mentioned only in one interview (and therefore doesn't show up in Figure 9) is the code 'goal'. It is important that the actors in a regional network should pursue a common goal, in the case of FLOW.NRW to strengthen NRW as a tourism destination and to attract tourists to unknown places.

#### **4.1.2. Potential and Benefits of the project for the regional centres and NRW**

After the interview partners were informed about the project FLOW.NRW by a colleague from Tourismus NRW e.V. they were asked about the potential and benefits of the project for their destination on the one hand and the whole federal state NRW on the other hand. The results for both answers are graphically presented in Figure 10.



**Figure 10: Potential and Benefits of the project for the destinations (own illustration, GABEK causal graph)**

A major factor in nearly all interviews was the possible stronger perception of the own destination through the project. The regional centres expect that through the general perception of FLOW.NRW in Germany and internationally, their destinations are also perceived more strongly and get attention from tourists: *“when I think about how an international guest looks at a region, he looks at the bigger part and then he goes to the smaller part. We would [...] do the same thing when I look somewhere towards China, I don't look at the smallest province or the smallest unit, I look at the big one first. And when it shines and I find one of the smaller units there, then I have a perception”* (IP 1: 2). Conversely, cooperation and collaboration in projects are also important for the perception *“in order to lift these things, which one has collected, to a level where they become visible for the interested parties”* (IP 5: 3).

The project should furthermore not only have a positive effect on the regional centres, but also on NRW as whole federal state: *“NRW has a huge chance of gaining a different kind of appeal with these exciting, interdisciplinary projects. And not just the classic ‘we have a beautiful cathedral here in Köln (Cologne), a beautiful Rhine in Düsseldorf, a suspension monorail in Wuppertal’, because then the content is missing in the long run. And in my experience, more and more people and tourists are looking for content”* (IP 1: 4). This statement precisely reflects the goal of the project to attract people to NRW to discover not only the

classical places of interest in the cities (like here the famous suspension monorail in Wuppertal), but to be open for new and unexpected discoveries. The mutual influence between the two codes ‘NRW’ and ‘Project FLOW.NRW’ is graphically well illustrated (see arrow in Figure 10): on the one hand the project wants to strengthen NRW, but on the other hand the strengths and potentials of the federal state NRW are needed to manage the project successfully.

Another point which was mentioned positively is the new type of tourism marketing and the specific and new target group, which the project aims to reach: *“this [the project] is a little bit different from classical tourism marketing, but it is rather concentrated on topics, namely future topics (Ip 4: 2). IP 6 states: “[the project] moves away from the classic tourist themes. That’s good, because the classic tourist themes are known for the time being and also a little bit done. This does not mean that it has no more potential, but we need something new every now and then” (IP 6: 12).* Here it can be seen that the concept of the new approach and the structure of the project has met with the approval of the regional centres and that they are willed to implement this in their destinations.

A further important factor from the interviews is the developing internationalisation of FLOW.NRW. As the project aims to reach especially international students and expats to come to NRW, the interview partners see great potential in this respect: *“And that is why it is precisely this internationality in the context of the university, in the context of research institutions, in the context of the large companies we have here, which are all internationally positioned, some of which are world market leaders in this city, or come from this city, I believe it is a huge opportunity to describe this space differently” (IP 1: 4).* In addition, all seven regional centres have a university respectively university of applied sciences or even both with international students or offer events with international reference like the “InRegio-Conference” in Paderborn, where entrepreneurs were invited and the topic of “How can international students be placed in companies?” was addressed and discussed.

A critical point which was named throughout nearly all interviews was the ignorance of the project FLOW.NRW respectively the project #urbanana and the resulting difficulties for connecting factors: *“So I can not answer the question yet, because I really did not yet understand what the message is. So what is the message[...] what is the story behind the FLOW?” (IP 7:*



2), “*But for that we really need to know where are the starting points*” (IP 2: 6), “*we would need the topics to dock on first...so that we simply know that these topics exist and that would be interesting for us*” (IP 7:4). These quotes clearly show that despite the previously described motivation for the project there are still some uncertainties and challenges (see chapter 4.3.2). The regional centres want and need clear and unambiguous thematic guidelines, so that they can search for specific points of contact in their city. This is a little contradictory to the project, which on the one hand has specified three big thematic threads (“Culture & Music”, “Design & Art”, “Digital”), but on the other hand would like to give free rein to the regional centres in these threads and give them a little push to think about the theme-specific networking with other regional centres. Here, the regional centres need to show their creativity and motivation under the large project umbrella of FLOW.NRW and to take the initiative to link up more strongly within the project and thus also to strengthen the tourism in NRW.

Nevertheless, the regional centres agree that the project, even if it is only just starting, offers many opportunities that need to be seized and that an exciting project time lies ahead: “*If we handle it [the project] right, it certainly has the potential to be a unique selling point in contrast to other federal states. Because in every area in Germany there are regions where something special is strong. And there are certainly, especially in this scene, especially now in the Ruhr area, Düsseldorf, Köln (Cologne), as well as in the Lower Rhine area, there are certainly highlights that are also interesting for tourists*” (IP 5: 3): IP 1 concludes: “*I find exactly these stories, bringing these processes of change together, defining tourism in a different way, taking culture [...], taking different milieus with you [...] making it internationally known, exciting!*” (IP 1: 8).

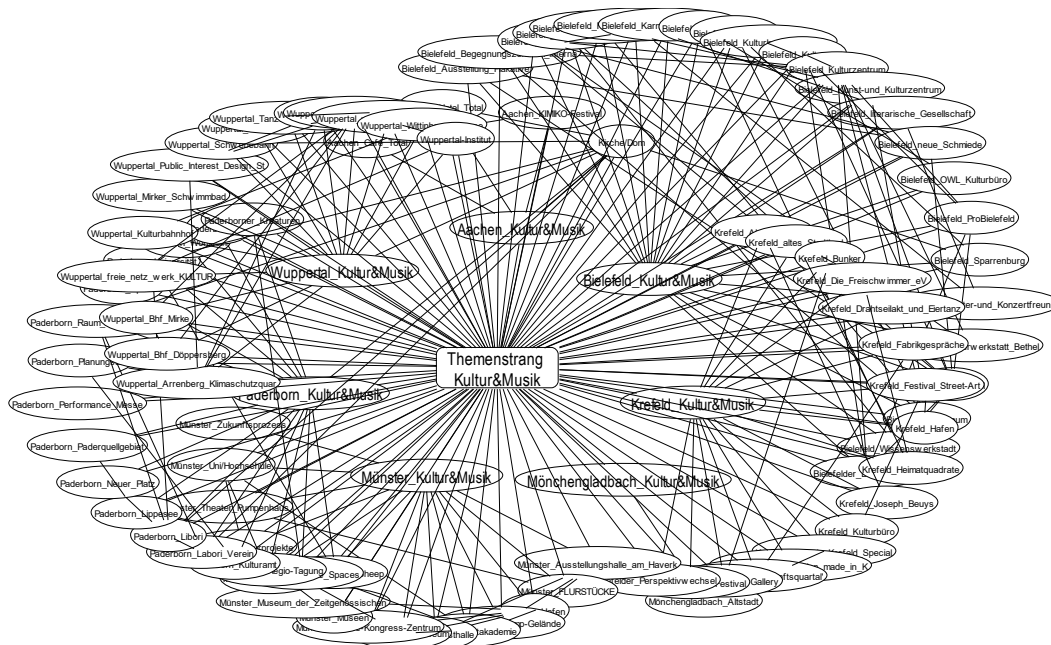
## 4.2. FLOW.NRW in the context of the specific destination

This thematic block evaluates the potentials in the regional centres that could be communicated to the project, how this integration could be successful and what wishes the regional centres have concerning the project. At this conjunction also the possible integration from the perspective of the pre-study is presented.

### 4.2.1. Potential linkages from the regional centres to the project FLOW.NRW

When the interview partners were asked which projects, institutions, actors, city districts or places in the three thematic threads would have the potential to be included into the project FLOW.NRW, a brainstorming started and many things were mentioned.

When analysing the interviews with GABEK, a lot of connections between the codes occurred. If e.g. only the associations with the thematic thread “Culture&Music” for the seven regional centres are represented graphically, a complex and, due to a large number of codes (in average 13 codes per destination), not very clear graphic emerges (see Figure 11).



**Figure 11: Association graph to "Thematic thread: Culture & Music"**  
(own illustration, GABEK network graph)

As this figure in this form is too huge and confusing and therefore hinders to make any conclusions, the potentials of the destinations in the three thematic threads are listed clearly in Table 2. Sometimes institutions are listed several times but in different thematic threads. Here, the researcher saw the potential in different thematic threads and linked the terms in each case, e.g. the universities in the cities are partly cross-cutting.

Empirical results

Thematic Thread City	Culture & Music	Design & Art	Digital
<b>Aachen (AC)</b>	AC_Café Total AC_Hotel_Total AC_KIMIKO-Festival AC_Kirche/Dom		AC_Café Total AC_Hotel_Total
<b>Bielefeld (BI)</b>	BI_Ausstellung_Plakative BI_Begegnungszentrum_intern. BI_Bethel BI_Campusfestival BI_Festival_im_Vogelviertel BI_Freundeskreis_der_Kunsthalle BI_Karneval_der_Kulturen BI_Kulturamt BI_Kulturhaus BI_Kulturpact BI_Kulturzentrum BI_Kunst-und Kulturzentrum BI_literarische_Gesellschaft BI_neue_Schmiede BI_OWL_Kulturbüro BI_ProBielefeld BI_Sparrenburg BI_Theater_und_Konzertfreunde BI_Theaterwerkstatt_Bethel BI_Uni/FH BI_werkraum BI_Wissenswerkstadt BI_Bürgerstiftung	BI_Ausstellung_Plakative BI_Bethel BI_Festival_im_Vogelviertel BI_Fotografenschule BI_Freundeskreis_der_Kunsthalle BI_Kunst-und Kulturzentrum BI_literarische_Gesellschaft BI_neue_Schmiede BI_Theater_und_Konzertfreunde BI_Uni/FH BI_werkraum  Mode+Modedesign	BI_Campusfestival BI_Founders_Foundation BI_Kulturhaus BI_Online-Marketing_Konferenz BI_Open_Innovation_City BI_Uni/FH BI_Wissenswerkstadt  Herford_Maker_Faire Hinterland_of_Things
<b>Krefeld (KR)</b>	Montags-Stiftung Urbane-Räume KR_FH_Niederrhein KR_Alexanderplatz KR_altes_Stadtbad KR_Bunker KR_Die_Freischwimmer_e.V. KR_Drahtseilakt_und_Eiertanz KR_Fabrikgespräche KR_Festival_Street_Art KR_Hafen KR_Heimatquadrate KR_Joseph_Beuys KR_Kulturbüro KR_Made_in_Krefeld_Special KR_Produktinnovation_made_in_Krefeld KR_Projekt_'Zukunftsquartal' KR_Rhine-Side-Gallery KR_Viertelpuls_Festival KR_Perspektivwechsel	KR_IDEGO KR_Kaiser_Wilhelm_Museum KR_Viertelpuls_Festival KR_Laufmasche KR_Perspektivwechsel KR_FH_Niederrhein  Mode+Modedesign	KR_Mies_van_der_Rohe_Businesspark KR_Pionierhaus

Empirical results

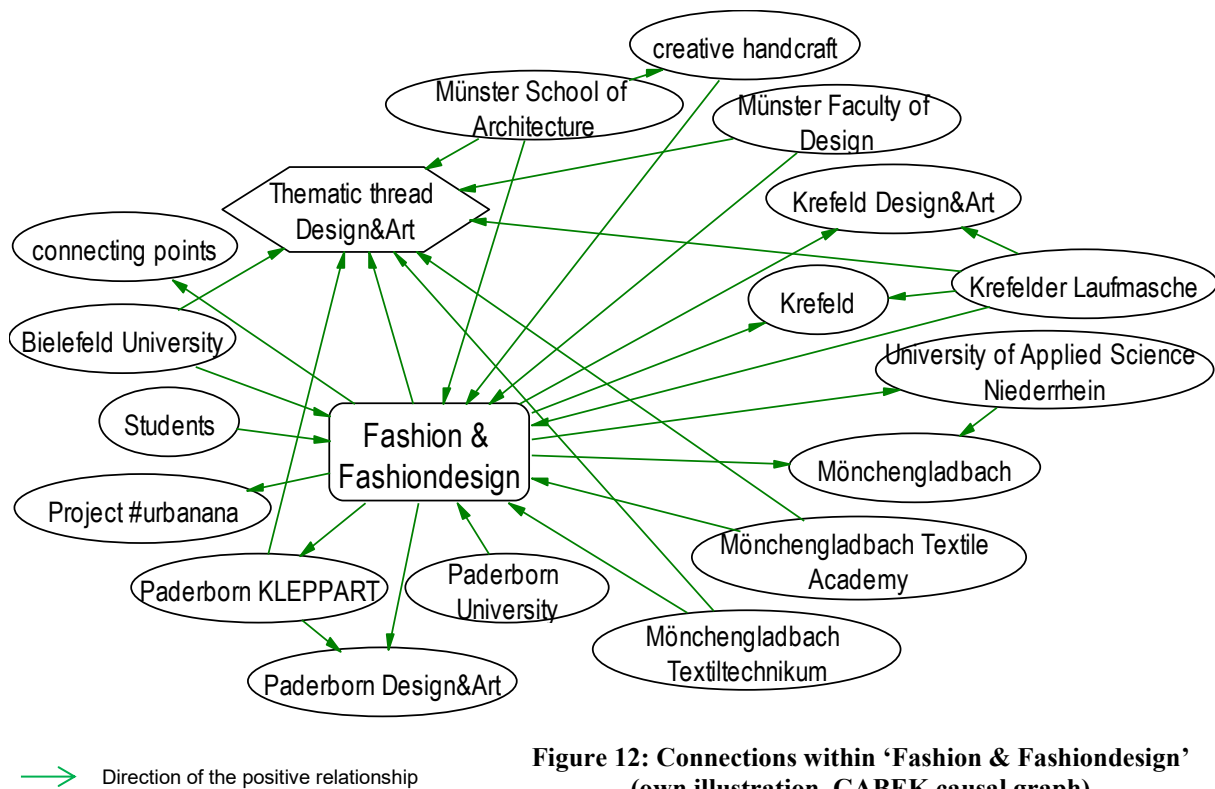
Thematic Thread	Culture & Music	Design & Art	Digital
City			
<b>Mönchengladbach (MG)</b>	MG_Altstadt	MG_FH_Niederrhein MG_Hotel_Oberstadt MG_Leinenweberei MG_Textilakademie MG_Textiltechnikum  Mode+Modedesign	
<b>Münster (MS)</b>	MS_Ausstellungshalle_am_Haverkamp MS_FLURSTÜCKE MS_Hafen MS_Haverkamp-Gelände MS_Kunstakademie MS_Kunsthalle MS_LWL-Museum MS_Messe-Kongress-Zentrum MS_Museen MS_Museum_der_Zeitgenössischen_Kunst MS_SCHLAURAUM MS_Skulpturprojekte MS_Theater_Pumpenhaus MS_Uni & Hochschule MS_Zukunftsprozess	MS_Architekturschule MS_Ausstellungshalle_am_Haverkamp MS_Designfakultät MS_Hafen MS_Haverkamp-Gelände MS_Kunstakademie MS_Kunsthalle MS_LWL-Museum MS_Museen MS_Museum_der_Zeitgenössischen_Kunst MS_Picasso_Museum MS_School_of_Architecture MS_Skulpturprojekte MS_Uni & Hochschule  Mode+Modesign	MS_Uni/Hochschule MS_Kneisterei MS_Hafen MS_Messe-Kongress-Zentrum
<b>Paderborn (PB)</b>	PB_Black_Sheep PB_Creative_Spaces PB_Fachbereich_Pop_Musik PB_InRegio-Tagung PB_Kulturamt PB_Labori_Verein PB_Libori PB_Lippesee PB_Neuer_Platz PB_Paderquellgebiet PB_Performance_Messe PB_Planungsamt PB_Raum_für_Kunst_e.V. PB_Sputnik PB_Universität PB_Wohlsein PB_XO PB_Paderborner_Kreaturen	PB_Ausstellung_Digital_Arts PB_Creative_Spaces PB_KLEPPART PB_Kunstverein PB_Labori_Verein PB_Libori PB_Raum_für_Kunst_e.V. PB_XO Paderborner_Kreaturen  Mode+Modedesign	PB_Kreativinkubator PB_GameLab_Uni PB_Garage_33 PB_Technologiepark PB_Universität PB_Heinz-Nixdorf-Museumsforum PB_Kultur-und_Kreativpiloten

Thematic Thread	Culture & Music	Design & Art	Digital
City			
<b>Wuppertal (W)</b>	Montags-Stiftung Urbane_Räume W_Arrenberg_ Klimaschutzquartier W_Bhf_Döppersberg W_Bhf_Mirke W_freie_netz_werk_KULTUR W_Kulturnbahnhof W_Mirker_Schwimmbad W_Public_Interest_ Design_Studiengang W_Schwebbahn W_Skulpturenpark W_Tanztheater_Pina_Bausch W_Universität W_Utopiastadt(Utopisten) W_von_der_Heydt-Museum W_Wittrinhauerstrasse W_Institut	Montags_Stiftung_ Urbane_Räume W_Bhf_Döppersberg W_Bhf_Mirke W_Kulturnbahnhof W_Skulpturenpark W_Utopiastadt (Utopisten) W_von_der_Heydt_Museum W_Wittrinhauerstraße	W_freie_netz_werk_KULTUR W_Institut W_Utopiastadt(Utopisten)

**Table 2: Potentials of the regional centres (own illustration, based on codes from GABEK)**

Table 2 shows clearly that the regional centres offer a lot of potential in the three thematic threads. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that there are fewer connection points in the digital field than in culture or design, which is also recognized by the interviewees: *“And with the digital scene there is, I think there is still a bit to do”* (IP 4: 4). Unlike in the project #urbanana, the follow-up project FLOW.NRW now also focuses on the digital economy in NRW. This step is perceived positively by the regional centres but is also reflected critically: *“There is probably still a lot of room to go up, but I think that's very, very important and actually also a correct approach”* (IP 7: 7), and IP 4 states: *“but the digital scene still needs to evolve and come together more, I think”* (IP 4: 5).

Besides, an interesting link exists in the thematic thread “Design&Art”: five of the seven regional centres, namely Bielefeld, Krefeld, Mönchengladbach, Paderborn and Münster are connected to the topic of “Fashion/Fashiondesign”. Figure 12 shows the exact positive connections.



**Figure 12: Connections within ‘Fashion & Fashiondesign’ (own illustration, GABEK causal graph)**

For the two cities Krefeld and Mönchengladbach is fashion/fashiondesign also a historical topic: “so from a historical point of view, fashion is definitely an issue for us, and silk too” (IP 4:4), “the subject of textiles naturally plays a very, very important role for Mönchengladbach, also historically seen”, and further: “for the people of Krefeld it was the silk weaving mill and here in Mönchengladbach it was the textile, the linen weaving mill where it all began” (IP 5: 2). In all five cities, the universities play a major role concerning the topic as they have own faculties of design or fashion where the students are educated and who also have own galleries or studios, where they hold exhibitions and present their results (IP 6: 5, IP 2: 4, IP 7: 4).

The interviewees only mentioned these connections to Fashion/Fashiondesign within their cities but didn’t know if there are already existing links or cooperations between the different institutions. Here, the project FLOW.NRW could make a start and try to connect them, that they get to know each other, that they are aware that there are other partners which also work within this topic and can initiate projects together in the future.

Another connection is existing between the cities Aachen and Münster, as they are both a member of the tourism brand “Historical Highlights of Germany” and cooperate within this

network (IP 7: 1, IP 3: 2). Furthermore, the cities Wuppertal and Krefeld are both cooperating with the independent non-profit foundation “Montag Stiftung Urbane Räume”. The foundation assisted with the renewal of the “Shedhalle” in Krefeld (IP 4: 2) and is as well supporting the project “Utopia-Stadt” in Wuppertal (IP1: 2)

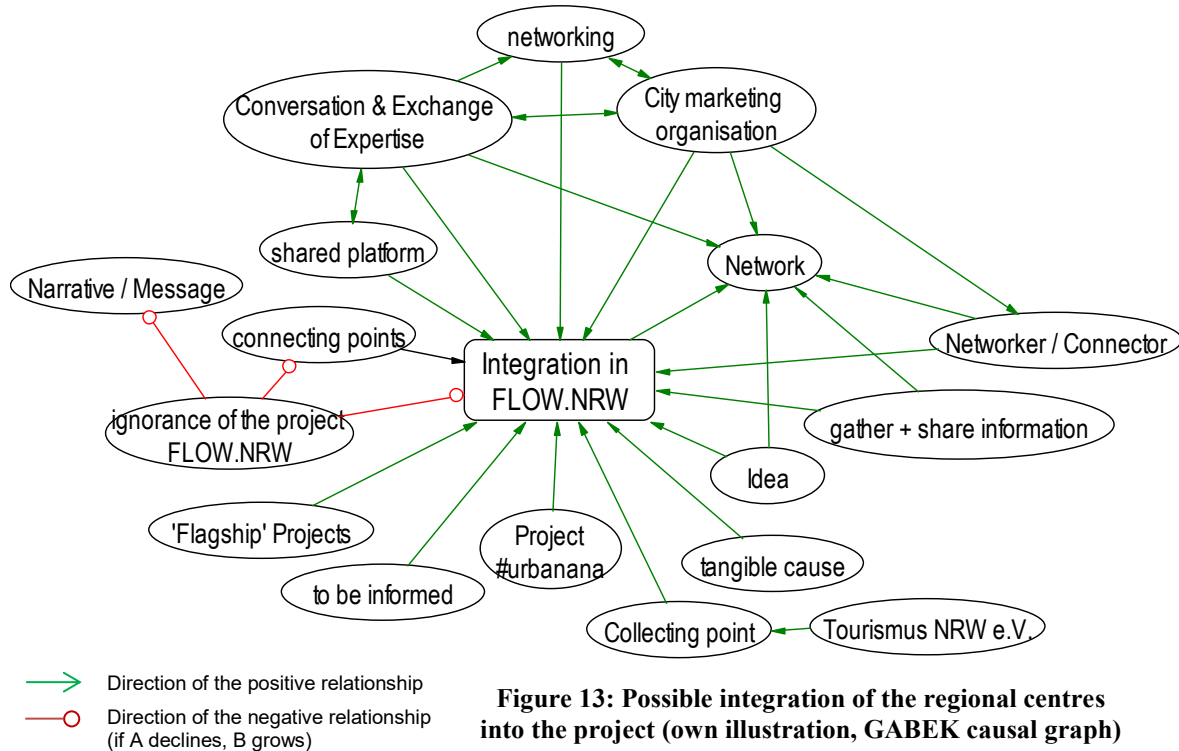
When analysing the linkages between the cities with GABEK, of course, more connections emerged. Aachen, Paderborn and Münster stated for example, that there exists a big alternative scene in their cities (IP 3: 3, IP 6: 15, IP 7: 4), but they didn't go into detail where there could be connection points. The same three cities are also a location of a cathedral which is seen bilateral to them: as Aachen is very famous for its cathedral and attracts innumerable (international) tourists every year, the DMO also sees great potential in FLOW.NRW: *“So, of course, it's also nice to see the cathedral, because it's quite impressive [...] But I think there's more to a city, to discovering a city somehow [...] And I think that's [FLOW.NRW] a great potential. And I think it even has to be, so we can't, I don't know how many years just with the cathedral attract the guests to Aachen”* (IP 3: 5). In Paderborn, however, the cathedral is used as a cultural event location: *“so when I think that a poetry slam can even take place in the cathedral”* (IP 6:18). Here it becomes clear, that traditional buildings like cathedrals are remaining an important attraction point for tourists in cities, but offer also the chance to be an attractive location for a cultural program.

Another linkage which was named by the interviewees in Paderborn, Münster, Aachen and Bielefeld was the organisation of own festivals, be it music-festivals (IP 3: 3, IP 2: 4), Street-Art-Festivals (IP 4: 1), Design-Festivals (IP 4: 3), Science-Festivals (IP 7: 5) or intercultural Festivals (IP 2: 4).

Concluding, a large part of the potentials above are fixed and established institutions in the cities. Therefore, it could also be exciting for the project to take a closer look at the various events (e.g. BI\_Karneval\_der\_Kulturen, MS\_SCHLAURAUM, PB\_InRegio-Tagung or associations such as KR\_Die\_Freischwimmer\_e.V. or study courses like W\_Public\_Interest\_Design - Studiengang) and to integrate them meaningfully into the project. It remains to be seen to what extent the individual mentions will have potential in the project. But in any case, they offer a first contact point to develop the project further step by step and to create more linkages between the regional centres.

#### 4.2.2. Possible integration of the regional centres

The central question of the interview guideline and also research question of this study is how the regional centres could be included into the project FLOW.NRW. Figure 13 shows the result from the perspective of the interviewees.



**Figure 13: Possible integration of the regional centres into the project (own illustration, GABEK causal graph)**

First of all, it can be noticed that, like already in Figure 10 (see chapter 4.1.2), the ignorance of the project FLOW.NRW is again a bad condition for the integration into the project: “*One needs to know the project even better, honestly*” (IP 2: 5). This also leads to the fact that the narrative, respectively the message behind the project is not understood and therefore there are no concrete connection points yet (IP 7: 4, IP 2: 6, IP 3: 2). The red connections in Figure 13 clearly underline: if the ignorance of the project declines, which would mean that the destinations know more about the project, the narrative/message, the connecting points and therefore also the possible integration into the project will grow.

However, the regional centres are convinced that they could include kind of own ‘Flagship’-Projects into the project: “*probably we first have to continue the brainstorming among ourselves and write down what we have [...] and then say 'look, these are our lighthouses' and that's what we can still dock to the different fields accordingly [...]*” (IP 6: 7). An important role in this context plays Tourismus NRW e.V. as the project manager. The regional centres assume that the various ideas and projects are first collected and bundled there and then



played back to the regional centres (IP 5: 2, IP 6: 11). This would help the destinations on the one hand to be informed about the project and on the other hand to get an overview which topics already exist and where there could be possible cooperations: *“you as Tourismus NRW are probably also the bundle and control centre of the whole, where you get a lot of input [...]...where it is said that we [Tourismus NRW e.V.] perhaps present examples here, ideas that we [Tourismus NRW e.V.] play back into the state [...] where others say 'oh have a look, this idea, that sounds good”* (IP 6: 11).

In one case, the interviewee already knew quite a lot about the topic through the project #urbanana and stated: *“just as I had the feeling until now how #urbanana worked, you found a theme or perhaps also a format or an event, whether it was StreetArt or fashion and then to create this connection”* (IP 4: 5). Here, a tangible cause like an event could be helpful.

One factor which was named by all interviewees is that the DMO could serve as a networker respectively connector to communicate the diverse potentials into the project. All the institutions, projects, associations etc. from Table 2 act and work independently from the DMO but both are usually well connected: *“We are absolutely the one who can summarize these multi-layered creative impulses, I can make FLOW.NRW known in these networks, we can request to participate there, we can create this taste of FLOW.NRW”* (IP 1: 2). IP 2 states further: *“just informing, just to say the key function, this and that is existing and to bring people to one table and then to arouse interest in it. [...] I see this as the main role, simply to lead the exchange”* (IP 2: 6). Despite their function as a networker, the issue of ignorance of the project comes up again: *“we can certainly open doors [...] and be a signpost and also [...] address the people[...]. But that [the project FLOW.NRW] simply has to come across more sharply, so that we also have something [...] that we can show what we are doing[...]. Because it is simply not yet tangible for us, not tangible at all”* (IP 7: 4).

One interesting way of integration was named by IP 6, who proposed the creation of a digital platform: *“I'm kind of thinking about a forum online [...] every city has a carrier, who coordinates this a little bit, then to look locally, what is there, what can we bring in here and [...] then you can just take a look, what is there in other cities, what might fit together? Or maybe start calls like 'we have a great project here and this and that is still missing, is there perhaps someone in NRW who has expertise in this area and is interested in helping us to assist with the project?”* (IP 6: 7). This proposal correlates with the idea of a platform ecosystem (see

chapter 2.3.4), through which the whole ecosystem NRW could be linked and connected and the partners could exchange information and expertise.

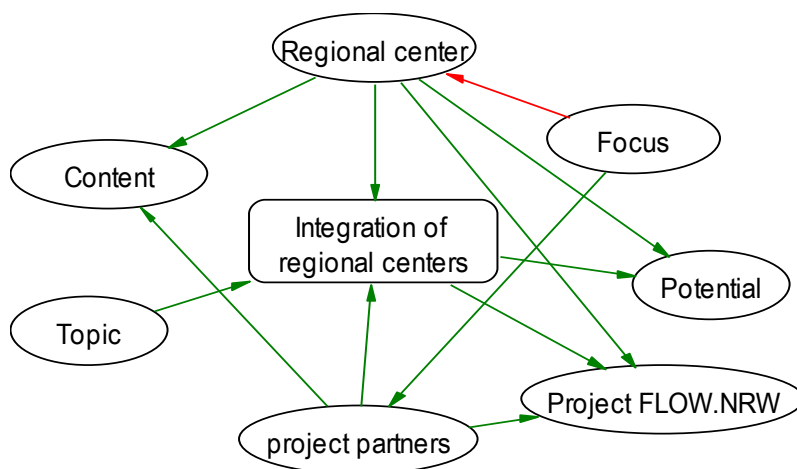
Concluding, it can be stated that the regional centres are generally open for integration into the project and want to be part of FLOW.NRW. In their function as DMO, they see themselves as the main networker for all the potentials in their destination which they can communicate to the project respectively can promote the project in their different networks. Nevertheless, it became clear in the interviews that the destinations still lack the ignorance of the project and thus connection points to which they could dock their own potentials. But to integrate the regional centres and to extend the project approach makes sense in any case, as it is: *“an added value both for us and for the project because it not only concentrates on the three 'metropolises' [...] but also shows that NRW as a whole has a lot to offer”* (IP 4: 5).

### 4.2.3. Integration of the regional centres into the project

In the preliminary study, the three project partners Düsseldorf, Köln and Ruhr Tourismus were asked how they assess the stronger involvement of other regional centres in NRW into the communication of FLOW.NRW (see Figure 14).

It becomes clear, that the focus of the project should not lie on the regional centres (red connection line), but more on the three project partners: *“Priority should be given to the partners involved”* (PS 2: 1). This answer stands to reason as the three partners put the most effort into the project and therefore are the focus of the project.

However, the regional centres should play an important role in the project as they are needed for the content and thereby for the general potential of the project: *“with regard to certain issues the involvement [of the regional centres] is certainly desirable and useful”* (PS 1: 1).



→ Direction of the positive relationship  
 → Direction of the negative relationship

**Figure 14: Integration of the regional centres from the perspective of the project partners (own illustration, GABEK causal graph)**

#### 4.2.4. Wishes and improvements for the project FLOW.NRW

Since the project FLOW.NRW only started in September 2019 and the project management needs to manage the project in small steps, the interviewees were asked what should be done by the project management to integrate the regional centres in the best possible way and which wishes and suggestions for improvement exist for the project in general (see Figure 15). As the wishes to be included and the possible integration into the project are relatively similar to each other, some codes partly overlap with the codes from the possible integration in Figure 13. Moreover, the researcher decided in this case to create a network graphic with colour coding according to the "target" evaluation, thus how the future of the project should look like.

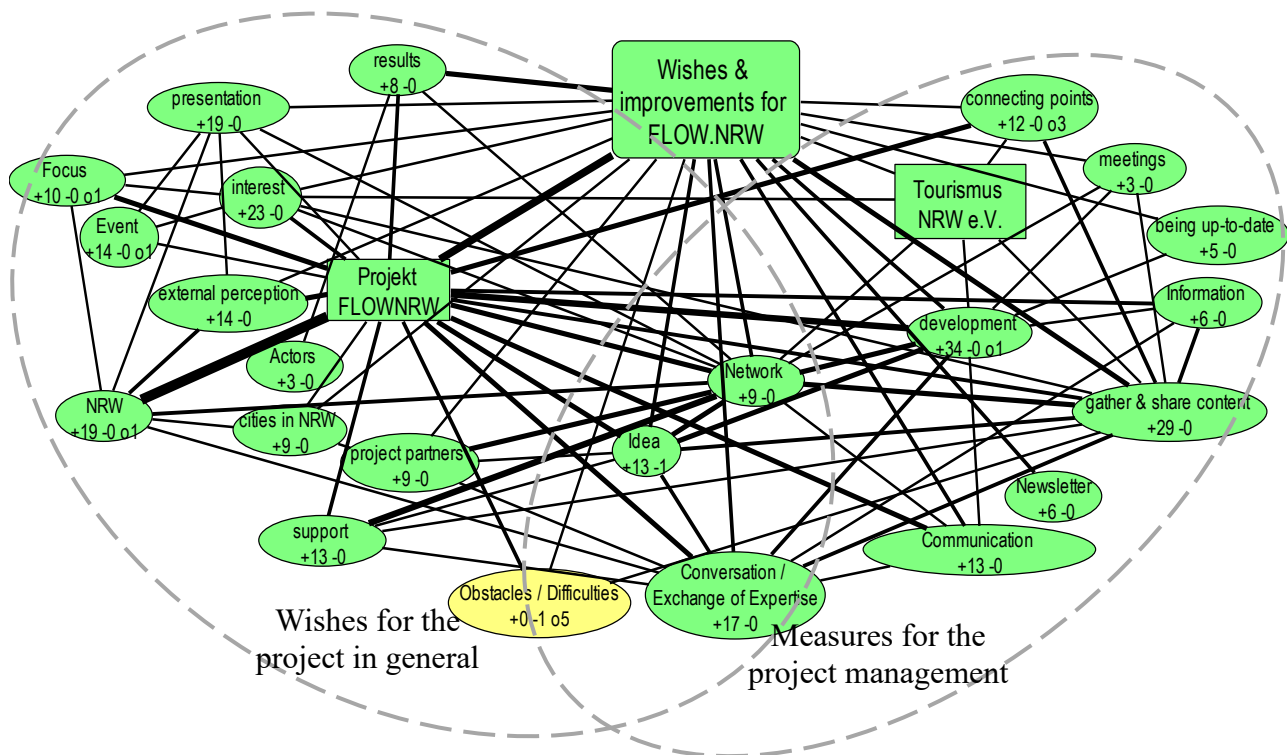


Figure 15: Wishes & improvements for FLOW.NRW (own illustration, GABEK network graphic)

First of all, it is noticeable that almost all terms are coloured in green, except for the term "Obstacles / Difficulties". This makes sense insofar as the regional centres expressed wishes, which should have a positive effect on the project and were thus rated positive in GABEK.

Concerning the improvements for FLOW.NRW, the interviewees stated that the project needs to have results and acceptance for the actors: *"Something measurable has to come out of it [...], we have to get the 'horsepower on the streets' [...] I want the actors to be noticed, I want them to be valued and I want us to have a measurable feedback in terms of requests, in terms*

*of activities. And that has to be presented to us.” (IP 1: 3). Another point is the focus which again, like already stated in the previous chapter 4.2.3, should primary lie on the project partners, but should also include the regional centres: “I don't think that the focus of the project has to move away from these centres like Köln (Cologne) or Düsseldorf, but the view has to be widened a bit” (IP 4: 6).*

One interviewee stated the idea of a ‘network day’: “*you could also make an event that you meet in person, because that is still somehow the most beautiful thing when you get to talk to people in person. Maybe there's the possibility of a network day or something like that, where all kinds of partners from NRW are invited and you just get to talk*” (IP 6: 10).

When thinking about the project FLOW.NRW, the interviewees expect some measures from the project management Tourismus NRW e.V., which can set guidelines and should monitor the project. One measure, which was named by nearly all interviewees, was the communication and exchange of expertise between the involved partners: “*But what I think is important [...] is simply to communicate regularly about the course of the project, to inform, what are the basic ideas, basic thoughts and to have an open exchange [...]. I think it is simply the communication, that is the most important thing. And that we stay close to each other, that we have an exchange* (IP 3: 4). IP 1 mentioned more precisely that it is important “*to have honest communication with the actors and not to create the feeling that the actors are only a means to an end to keep the project alive*” (IP 1: 3). This perhaps correlates to some extent with the already mentioned fact that the regional centres also aim to achieve an own external perception through the project (see Figure 10) and do not just want to serve only as content providers for it. Concerning communication, the regional centres wish to be informed regularly about the status-quo and the actual development of the project so that they are “*always at the pulse of time*” (IP 2: 1). The communication doesn't always have to be somehow totally formal or detailed; a short email or a simple phone call would be enough (IP 3: 4). IP 2 mentioned a kind of newsletter as a good distribution list: “*[...] to the actual state of affairs, what is there already, also to stimulate ideas, so to say that the project office itself already takes over this network function*” (IP 2: 8). This newsletter could also include kind of guest articles from the project partners or various regional centres (IP 6: 11, IP 4: 6) “*where you can say, ‘I can contribute’* “ (IP 6: 11). Another idea from an interviewee is to create a common hashtag which could be used for the project: “*that projects that happen on a local level are simply tagged with the fact that you can see ‘ok what is happening somewhere in other cities’. That you*

*don't have to search so actively for other partners and cities, but that you have bundled that somewhere”* (IP 6: 11). A last major point was the wish to get support from the project partners, be it support for staying power (IP 2: 8) or assistance with the connecting points (IP 5: 3).

### 4.3. FLOW.NRW in a superordinate context

The last thematic block focuses on the general emergence of networks in a framework like FLOW.NRW, the general character and probably upcoming challenges for the project.

#### 4.3.1. The Emergence of a Network

Since this research study deals in large parts with networks, the experts were asked how, from their point of view, networks develop and emerge and to what extent formal and informal contacts play a role in such a framework. The results are shown in a clear causal graph in Figure 16.

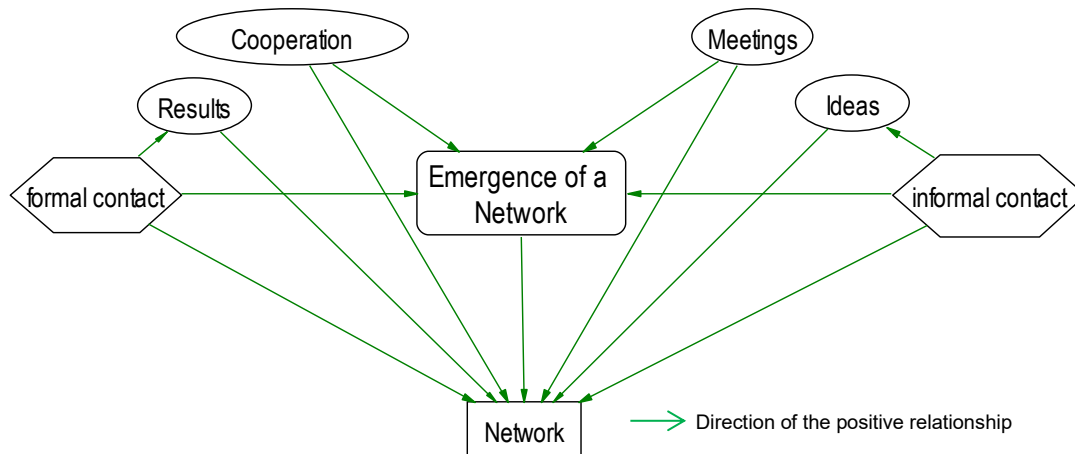


Figure 16: Emergence of a network (own illustration, GABEK causal graph)

For a network to develop, both formal and informal contacts are needed. But the two differ in their function: When it comes to results and the implementation of concrete things *“then the formal ones are certainly decisive. When it comes to financing, budgets and decisions”* (IP 3: 6). Formal contacts are also important in the end to distribute all the information into diverse channels, so that everybody feels taken along and that these contacts are also often the persons, who take responsibility and who absolutely need to be included (IP 4: 8; IP 7: 8).

On the other side, informal contacts play a major role as they serve as ‘door openers’ (IP 3: 6) and IP 2 states: *“I have the impression that for successful networks [...] informal contacts are almost even more important. Because that's the DNA“* (IP 2: 13). IP 6 describes that in the beginning, when a network emerges it is often more formal as everybody first needs to get to

know each other, but as soon as it comes to a familiar and personal environment like in #urbanana or FLOW.NRW, the level and atmosphere becomes more loose and therefore informal (IP 6: 16). Concerning the topic of CCI IP 1 states: *“I think the deeper we penetrate into such a free culture, into such a future-oriented cultural structure, the more informal is important* (IP 1: 6). When having both contacts, formal and informal, of course cooperation and meetings are necessary to exchange information and to finally set up a network.

This result reflects Granovetters Theory “The strength of weak ties” (see chapter 2.2.1): Strong ties are helpful to strengthen the network internally while weak ties are useful for new ideas and information. The emerging network around FLOW.NRW should therefore rely on well-known contacts, but should as well get in contact with new actors and to be open for new ideas and creative input to promote innovation in NRW.

#### **4.3.2. Challenges within CCI and the project**

As already stated in chapter 4.1.2, the regional centres think that the project has the right approach and will be successful if implemented correctly. However, as with any other project that the DMO’s carry out in their city, FLOW.NRW is also going to face some challenges and problems.

The first challenge which was named by the interviewees was the fact that it could be difficult to merge the different industries tourism and the creative- and cultural industry as they have different approaches: *“they [the two industries] speak a different language. [...] The hotel manager does the economical part first and the creative wants to sell and implement what he has thought about, and whether it is profitable or not doesn’t matter for the moment”* (IP 4: 8) and IP 2 states: *“there simply meet two worlds which actually have little connection to each other and which sometimes also speak a completely different language and pursue other goals”* (IP 2: 11). These different approaches and perspectives can be overcome if the partners are open and flexible, respect each other and give mutual freedom (IP 4: 8). Here the project management from Tourismus NRW e.V. should be the contact point for the different actors, coordinate the various partners, mediate between them and develop the project in an optimal way.

When working in a project with different project partners of course the topic of distribution and the fight for attention comes up (IP 2: 7): *“the more you bring into a network, the more desires arise, sometimes disappointments, because there were different expectations that you*

*couldn't meet, sometimes because you communicated fuzzily yourself, but also very often because some people want to listen fuzzily. And then somehow you have a misunderstanding.”* (IP 1: 3). To avoid these misunderstandings, a common goal and a clear communication is a prerequisite for a successful project. The project management must not set the expectations of the project too high and every participating city has to keep its independence so that it remains authentic for the tourist (IP 4: 6).

Another point, which initially concerns the DMOs, is the factor of interchangeability: “[...] *every city, and this is the great challenge of city marketing, is almost interchangeable in terms of its attributes*” (IP 1: 8). Just because one city is maybe a bit greener or more sustainable than another, it doesn't attract tourists: *“It's the sight seeings [...] it's the culture [...] And that's the special thing, I can work with it because it has a narrative”* (ibid.). This statement makes clear: cities nowadays need a certain appeal, they need to stand out and they need to tell a story to attract the tourist. The city needs to pick out a special attraction ('lighthouse-project') and communicate this in such a way to the outside that (young) people are getting interested and attracted by the city. Through this, other people will be influenced and will join in (IP 1: 3). Here the interviewees see still potential in their own city: *“the challenge will be [...] if I take a look, we have a lot to offer, but how do we make it possible for people to experience this?”* (IP 6: 13).

In this context the further development of the project, the resulting perception in a national or even international manner and the connection with labour issues or economic development is also mentioned as a huge challenge (IP 2: 12). Concerning the attraction of a new target group, which the project would like to address, the regional centres are optimistic: *“because the regional centres are all cities with a university / university of applied science, we don't have the problem that people don't come to the city”* (IP 2: 15), but states further: *“we have the problem or we have the goal to keep them”* (ibid.). This statement reflects perfectly the probably biggest challenge for the project FLOW.NRW: to attract people to NRW, to offer them a great experience and, in the best case, to retain and keep them. The attraction points for the tourists start therefore in the various cities, should have a positive effect on the people and need to ensure that the whole federal state develops its positive and attractive image.

#### **4.4. Interpretation, Discussion and Future of the project**

Summarizing the empirical results from this chapter it can be stated that the project FLOW.NRW has, like the project #urbanana, great potential to be successful. The new approach to integrate also the regional centres is well accepted, although the main focus should lie on Köln, Düsseldorf and the Ruhr Region as they are the main project partners. The regional centres are open and willed to try the new project approach and the attempt to address a new target group. Through FLOW.NRW the cities see opportunities and chances to change and improve the perception of their city. If several cities in NRW have a positive external image, it is transferred to the entire region which then also benefits from it. The federal state NRW needs to be aware of its creative resources and strengths, which can and should be used to generate advantages over other regions in Germany.

The mentioned potentials in the three thematic threads show that the cities have a lot to offer for tourists as well as the local inhabitants. Now the project management has to find a meaningful beginning and try to link the cities or to give them an impulse to take the initiative itself and to present their creativity externally through the project. Since most of the potential lies in “Culture & Music” and “Design & Art”, it makes absolute sense to also set a focus on the digital scene and to improve also this thread. As there is still a lot of potential for development in the cities - which the cities are aware of - the project now offers a suitable opportunity to deal with the topic and thus also to stimulate innovation in the cities.

Furthermore it is a great and important factor, that the marketing organisations in the cities see themselves as a connection and coordination point to communicate the different potentials into the project. Mostly they already have good contacts or a functioning network of contacts and can introduce FLOW.NRW to the institutions and convince them to take part. However, there still exist too many uncertainties about the project, its goals and the next steps. The cities are, despite its great potential, currently still having difficulties in finding concrete points of contact with the project. There is still a need for the project management for further clarification to implement the project optimally.

The project offers the chance to create a project-network with the included partners. In this network, conversation and the exchange of information through a newsletter or short emails is important. For the regional centres it would further be interesting to organize a network-



meeting, where they get an overview about the participation of other partners and their ideas and have the chance to get to know each other. Events like this are helpful, as they offer a first chance to broaden the connecting ties, be they strong and strengthen the connection or weak and bring new information and knowledge. Through the creation of a network with the project partners and the regional centres and the continuous development and the promotion and implementation of the planned projects, the region is given the opportunity to develop itself further and to exploit the existing potential in the region.

When looking at the evaluation list of the codes in GABEK, the current situation of the regional centres is assessed positively with 93,6% and 6,4% negatively. For example, certain prejudices about a city, the interchangeability of cities, misunderstandings and rumours were considered negative. In contrast, the target situation is with 99,3% assessed as positive (0,7% negative). Here, the means to an end of the regional centres for the project partners or the assumption that the project is a panacea were mentioned as negative. Although these are only statistics of a certain moment during the interviews, they show, together with the results from the other previous graphs, that the project FLOW.NRW has what it takes to link the creative industry in NRW with the tourism industry and thus to make it more attractive for tourists and locals.

## 5. Critical reflection

The project FLOW.NRW wants to break new ground by bringing together tourism and creative people as well as the digital scene and wants to make this impact visible for the whole state of NRW. Since this combination of topics does not have a single theory, the researcher was confronted with a lot of literature to various topics and it has taken time to work out the appropriate approaches. In the end, however, it was tried to outline the most important aspects of the foundations to describe the project in its fullness, and based on it, the possibility to develop it further.

Concerning the methodological part, a qualitative approach (see chapter 3.2) was proven to be helpful. The interviews with the regional centres allowed to get multifaceted insights into the cultural life and development of the cities and showed the diversity of North Rhine-Westphalia, also personally to the researcher. Although two cities unfortunately didn't want to be part of this study, the meetings with the remaining seven interviewees can be seen as successful. In most of the interviews, the managing directors brought one or two colleagues from other departments (e.g. social-media or PR) into the meetings. This shows the huge interest for the project FLOW.NRW and the motivation and initiative to get involved and was helpful for the content as they brainstormed together, complemented each other sometimes and reflected on their city. Concerning establishing contact with the regional centres, the cooperation with Tourismus NRW e.V. was valuable, as contacts were already existing and the interview-appointments could be done quickly. Besides, it was helpful to have a colleague present at the meetings, who introduced the project and was also able to answer any questions or ambiguities from the interview partners. As none of the interviewees wanted to have the guideline with the questions in advance and they got the project explained shortly before, the questions needed to be partly formulated or explained differently. Nevertheless, the structure of the guideline and the open questions (see chapter 3.2.5 and [Appendix](#)) were here an advantage to get a holistic view about the city and therefore useful content and could be easily adopted to each interview partner and their knowledge.

The decision to evaluate the data with the software WinRelan/GABEK made sense, as many connections and especially the potential of the individual cities to the thematic strands (see Table 2) could be identified. However, when combining terms in the synonym list in GABEK, unfortunately many terms were deleted because they have only a low frequency in the interviews and therefore needed to be combined with other terms to create useful graphs. In the

presentation of the results (see chapter 4) it was therefore tried to use quotations with the rare terms. When creating network graphs with colour coding in GABEK, the terms mostly turned green. This is because this study does a potential analysis and the interview partners naturally wanted to present their city in the best way possible. Therefore, almost exclusively positive things from the cities were mentioned, which were then logically evaluated positively in GABEK and led to the green colouring of the graphic. For another, more controversial research question, the colouring would probably be different and more diverse.

Finally, it must be stated that during the time of the conduction of the interviews, the project FLOW.NRW was still in its initial phase and did not yet have a precise structure (except for the three major thematic threads). This study is therefore only a first small beginning of the big project and the links and connections should of course be further developed and expanded during the project. Since the interview-meetings were usually also limited in time and both the project presentation and the questions had to be asked during this time, this study does not claim to be complete. It merely represents the statements of the interview partners at the time of the interview. For the success of the project it would therefore be essential for the project partners and the project management to meet again with the regional centres, to discuss unclear issues in more detail and to expand potentials. Since this study has illuminated the perspective of the regional centres, it would be interesting for further research to take the perspective of the population and tourists in the cities. For this purpose, a quantitative study could be carried out which examines the perception of the people as well as the possible own motivation to integrate themselves into the project. It would be conceivable, that locals would like to deal with the topic and bring their city closer to tourists in a creative way, as it is already the case in some bigger cities through platforms like “rentalocalfriend.com” or “withlocals.com”. Another future research topic could deal with the own development of creativity in the participating cities. With the help of Charles Landry’s model “Cycle of Urban Creativity” (see chapter 2.1.4), different cities could be examined and analysed, thought-provoking impulses could be given and the project FLOW.NRW could benefit from new creative approaches and results.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

This study aimed to get results about the creative potential of the regional centres in NRW, their possible communication into the project FLOW.NRW and the resulting potential for the future of the project. The main findings of this study show that the project has great potential. The new approach to integrate the regional centres in NRW can be regarded as meaningful as the cities are structured differently and thus offer a lot of creative, cultural and digital input for the project. In the field of “Culture&Music” and “Design&Art” the cities are already well positioned, while the Digital Scene still has potential.

Generally it can be stated that the CCI have a strong potential for added value and innovation and serve as a catalyst for innovation and knowledge-based growth in NRW. There is potential for spillovers from the CCI which then can be applied useful in the tourism industry. As already stated in the theoretical foundations, it is not always the tangible attractions, but rather intangible attractions which are important for the tourists and which promote the development and involvement of the tourists creativity. The regional centres offer of course a lot of tangible attractions like museums or classical places of interest, but also intangible attractions like festivals, exhibitions or municipal events. Through these, the tourist is included and integrated into the proceedings of the town and can interact with other people. This interaction, coupled with positive perceptions, leaves a lasting impression on the tourist and results in a transformation to the driver ‘Being’ (Figure 4).

Corresponding to Richard Florida everyone is a member of the creative class. This is reflected in the project FLOW.NRW, as everybody in the regional centres and also in the cities of the project partners can participate in the project with own ideas and creative engagement.

The interviews indicated, that the city marketing organisations are always open to new ideas and inspiration and provide support, which then can be transferred into the project. In this context, the strong and weak ties are of importance, by which the project-network can gain new information and strengthen old connections. Looking at the three processes, by which networks alter and emerge from JANSEN & WALD (see chapter 2.2.1), for the project FLOW.NRW the first phase can be considered completed, as the choice to extend the project approach and to integrate the regional centres was already done by the project partners. Now the second phase is about to start, in which the actors get to know each other, exchange experiences and information, but must take care to preserve their autonomy and thus authenticity.

As the cities are more or less spatially close together, personal interaction and face-to-face-contacts are occasionally possible. This corresponds to the characteristics of a coordinative, regional network. Furthermore, the project benefits from the core competencies, especially the cooperative core competencies, which are brought into the network by the different partners. The combination of various resources, especially through knowledge-sharing-routines like meetings, the project FLOW.NRW and thus also the destination NRW can realize advantages and benefit in terms of the relational view (chapter 2.2.3).

Concerning the distinction between network, cooperation and organisation (see Figure 6 in chapter 2.2.2), FLOW.NRW shows clear characteristics of a network: the goal is regarded as flexible and dynamic, there exists an open atmosphere since there are no formal memberships and the partners want to reach new actors. Since networks are designed for a longer and more permanent period, they take a long time to emerge, but to achieve an optimal goal with the integration of all the regional centres, and their creative potential this effort pays off.

Finally, Tourismus NRW e.V. can be regarded as network management, which coordinates the different actors and manages the linkages between the partners under the common and already known logo #urbanana. As a member of the project FLOW.NRW, the regional centres have to trust, that they will benefit from the project and their network participation. Since the project is still in its early stages, some partners are uncertain and still have some questions. Here the project must build up trust and assure that the participation does not serve to exploit the cities, but that a measurable result is achieved in the end, of which everyone can benefit.

All in all, the good network connections, sympathies between the actors in the network and the common goal of a strong tourism marketing for NRW would have a positive effect on the emergence of a fictitious NRW touristic ecosystem, as it tries to fulfil all the conditions mentioned by HWANG (2014) for a successful ecosystem: “It’s about how people meet, talk, trust, share, collaborate, team, experiment, and grow together”. In the sense of a business ecosystem, the project-management Tourismus NRW e.V. could therefore serve as a keystone around which the various institutions gather. However, a platform ecosystem would also be conceivable, although this would require a common platform on which the actors could exchange information.

Despite all the positive things and ideas that were mentioned in the interviews, however, creativity and the FLOW.NRW project should not be seen as a panacea, which from now on will immediately drive the cities forward economically. Moreover the cities must not become too obsessed with the creative, otherwise they no longer appear authentic for the locals and also for tourists. Nevertheless is FLOW.NRW a first good approach to merge the CCI including the digital scene and the tourism industry and is therefore perhaps also a pioneer project for other tourist regions.

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## 8. Appendix

### Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview guideline (german version)

#### Themenblock 1: Netzwerke und das Projekt FLOW.NRW

1. Was assoziieren Sie mit dem Netzwerk-Begriff? Welche Rolle spielt dieser für Ihre Destination?

- Welche Netzwerke nutzen Sie in Ihrer Destination?
- Gibt es Vernetzungen / (Projekt-)Kooperationen mit anderen Destinationen in NRW?

2. Wie schätzen Sie das Potential und den Nutzen des Projektes für Ihre Destination ein?

- Ist es ein sinnvolles Projekt für Ihre Destination? / Kann es sinnvoll sein? Inwiefern?

#### Themenblock 2: FLOW.NRW im Kontext Ihrer Destination

3. Welche Projekte, Institutionen und Akteure der eigenen Destination können in das Projekt mit eingebracht werden? Welche Chancen und Herausforderungen sehen Sie dabei?

- In welchem der drei Themenbereiche sehen Sie Stärken / Schwächen / Potentiale Ihrer Destination? Warum?
- In welche Richtung entwickeln sich die einzelnen Bereiche? (zeitliche Komponente)
- Welcher Themenbereich ist eher stark, welcher eher schwach? Welche Ursachen könnte es dafür geben?

4. Wie kann die Einbindung dieser Projekte, Institutionen und Akteure gelingen?

- Wie kann das genannte kreative Potential in das Projekt eingebracht werden?
- Wie kann Ihre Destination sinnvoll dazu beitragen? Welche Rolle spielen Sie dabei?
- Inwiefern können sich dabei Synergien / Synergieeffekte ergeben?
- Sehen Sie Probleme oder Schwierigkeiten, die dabei auftreten können?

5. Was sollte vonseiten der Projektleitung von FLOW.NRW unternommen werden, um Ihre Destination bestmöglich in das Projekt zu integrieren? Welche Wünsche und Optimierungsvorschläge an das Projekt bestehen von Ihrer Seite?

#### Themenblock 3: FLOW.NRW im übergeordneten Kontext

6. Wie beurteilen Sie das Potenzial des Projekts FLOW.NRW für eine erfolgreiche Entwicklung des Tourismus in NRW? Worin liegen dabei Chancen für eine internationale(re) Ausrichtung?

- Sind internationale Marketingmaßnahmen wichtig und werden umgesetzt?

- Welchen Stellenwert hat Internationalität in Ihrer Destination? (z.B. englische Broschüren, mehrsprachige Website, englischsprachige Stadtführungen, englische Studiengänge etc.)
7. Wie beurteilen Sie den generellen Charakter des Cross-Cluster-Projekts FLOW.NRW an der Schnittstelle von Tourismus und KKW?
- Wo sehen Sie mögliche Herausforderungen für das Projekt FLOW.NRW?
8. Inwiefern spielen in einem solchen Rahmen formelle und informelle Kontakte eine Rolle beim Aufbau funktionierender Netzwerke?
- Welche Abteilung in Ihrer DMO wäre verantwortlich für den Austausch mit dem Projekt? Gibt es konkrete Ansprechpartner?
9. Welche Rolle spielt ihre Destination in der Gesamtdestination NRW?
- Mit welchen drei Attributen heben Sie sich von den anderen Destinationen in NRW ab?
10. Gibt es aus Ihrer Sicht noch weitere wichtige Aspekte zum Thema, die im Verlauf des Interviews noch nicht gefallen sind oder die noch nicht berücksichtigt wurden?

## **Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview guideline (english version)**

### **Thematic block 1: Networks and the project FLOW.NRW**

1. What do you associate with the term network? What role does it play for your destination?
  - Which networks do you use in your destination?
  - Are there networks / (project) cooperation with other destinations in NRW?
2. How do you assess the potential and benefits of the project for your destination?
  - Is it a useful project for your destination? / Can it be useful? In what way?

### **Thematic block 2: FLOW.NRW in the context of the specific destination**

3. Which projects, institutions and actors from your own destination can be communicated into the project? What opportunities and challenges do you see?
  - In which of the three thematic threads do you see strength / weaknesses / potential in your destination? Why?
  - In which direction are the individual areas developing? (time component)
  - Which thematic thread is rather strong, which rather weak? What are the possible causes?
4. How can these projects, institutions and actors be successfully integrated?
  - How can the mentioned creative potential be communicated into the project?
  - How can your destination make a meaningful contribution to the project? What role does your destination play in this process?
  - To what extent can synergies / synergistic effects arise?
  - Do you see any problems or difficulties that could arise?
5. What should be done by the FLOW.NRW project management to integrate your destination into the project in the best possible way? What wishes and optimisation suggestions do you have for the project?

### **Thematic block 3: FLOW.NRW in a superordinate context**

6. How do you assess the potential of the project FLOW.NRW for a successful development of tourism in NRW? What are the chances for an international orientation?
  - Are international marketing measures important and are they implemented?
  - How important is internationality in your destination? (e.g. english brochures, multilingual website, english city tours, english study courses etc.)

7. How do you assess the general character of the cross-cluster project FLOW.NRW at the interface of tourism and CCI?

- Where do you see possible challenges for the FLOW.NRW project?

8. In such a framework, to what extent do formal and informal contacts play a role in building functioning networks?

- Which department in your DMO would be responsible for the exchange with the project? Are there specific contact persons?

9. What role does your destination play in the overall destination of NRW?

- Which three attributes set you apart from the other destinations in NRW?

10. From your point of view, are there any other important aspects of the topic that have not been mentioned in the course of the interview or that have not yet been considered?

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Delbrück, 13.05.2020

Rebekka Büscher



## **Statutory Declaration**

I hereby declare that I have written the present Master thesis independently and without the help of third parties. The Master thesis did not use sources other than those specified. All verbal or analogous contents taken from the given sources have been marked by me accordingly.

Delbrück, 13.05.2020

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