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Research Paper

Discursive contradictions in regional tourism marketing strategies: The case of Fryslân, The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

Discourses in tourism destination marketing play an important role in constructing and consuming tourism destinations. However, various discursive contradictions can emerge, potentially limiting or facilitating tourism development. This paper has two objectives. First, it aims to identify discursive contradictions embedded in the positioning statements of regional tourism marketing strategy documents. Second, it intends to highlight how such contradictions simultaneously prioritize and destabilize certain destination identities. Employing the case of the Dutch province of Fryslân, discourse analysis of tourism marketing documents was conducted. Findings revealed contradictions emerging along five themes: place branding, identity claims, target groups, roles and collaboration. Regional Frisian tourism marketing appears to prioritize external orientations and homogenizing identities, with limited consideration of geographically proximate markets and a selective perception of internal stakeholders' roles in tourism. Possible implications of such destination positioning are discussed and suggestions are made to balance various positioning orientations in regional place branding.

1. Introduction

Tourism marketing strategies can have significant implications in terms of the social construction of tourist regions and the opportunities and limitations for stakeholders to engage in tourism. Importantly, tourism marketing as a policy tool aims to influence representations of tourism destinations (Cousin, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2012). Destination identities may therefore be politically charged (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003) and attributed meanings may be far from neutral. As such, various interests may underlie the discourse employed in destination positioning statements made in regional tourism marketing.

Regions and tourism destinations alike are socially constructed and derive their meaning and identities from discursive practices (Saarinen, 2004). While discourses do mobilize meanings themselves, they are always incomplete and contested, giving room for the emergence of tensions between attributed meanings (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003). Such tension can result from discursive contradictions and paradoxes, reflecting opposing interests or unrealistic aspirations for tourism development. Marketing strategies then can become contradictory or even counterproductive, communicating conflicting signals. An example is when destination marketing is developed for external visitors only, without considering the consequences for the local environment and residents (Burns, 2004; Choi & Sirakaya, 2005; van Rekom & Go, 2006; Ziakas, 2013).

This is particularly relevant for regions in which tourism mainly relies on markets that are geographically proximate or even within the regions that are branded as destinations. In a context where home and away are geographically proximate, binaries of tourist–host, visitor–resident and consumer–producer become increasingly indistinguishable, which makes them vulnerable to contestation and to contradictions between attributed meanings. Contradictions can become problematic in tourism marketing when they are not acknowledged or wrongly used. At the same time, when consciously used they might form a basis for tourism development by positioning destinations through otherness and authenticity on various levels, and by constructing and reconfirming differences between and within destinations (Salazar, 2010).

However, the 'intraregional' perspective of tourism and its societal dynamics has for a long time remained largely overlooked. Mainstream understandings of tourism have become almost equivalent to international travel, crossing territorial borders and the mixing of cultures (Salazar, 2010). It is stated that tourism research suffers from an 'international bias' (Eijgelaar, Peeters, & Piket, 2008). Much tourism research has ignored touristic activities and experiences near to everyday environments, where tourism is produced and consumed by people living within a region (Canavan, 2013) or a city (Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenke, 2013). As such, a number of challenges arise when aiming for an improved

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comprehension of tourism at a regional level.

One challenge pertains to the way everyday experience of places, attractions and regions intermingles with tourist experiences and vice versa (Díaz Soria & Llurdés Coit, 2013). Another challenge is to better understand how regional destination identities are produced and reproduced (Pearce, 2014; Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011) and how key stakeholders in this process engage in this through the discourse they use. While top–down understandings of tourism development are countered or complemented by bottom–up processes such as word of mouth (Chen, Dwyer, & Firth, 2014; Pan, Maclaurin, & Croots, 2007), governments, destination marketers and policy makers maintain essential players in this process. Therefore, we aim to disentangle various contradictions present in the discourse of regional tourism marketing. Employing the case of the Dutch province of Fryslân, a thematic analysis of destination positioning in tourism marketing strategy documents forms the basis of this paper. As such, the paper is guided by the following research questions:

(1) What kind of contradictions emerge in the ways Fryslân is positioned as a tourism destination by regional tourism marketing strategies?

(2) What are the possible implications of destination positioning discourse and the concurrent contradictions for Fryslân as a destination for intraregional tourism?

By focusing on the implications of destination positioning discourse for tourism as an intraregional phenomenon, this paper aligns with a small but growing number of tourism researchers who identify a lacuna of academic knowledge on the social, economic and psychological processes involved in tourism on national and (intra)regional levels (Canavan, 2013; Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2013; Schänzel, 2010; Singh & Krakover, 2015). After further embedding the paper in relevant academic scholarship, we introduce the particular geographical context of the study and outline the methodology and data used. The paper continues with the analysis and findings, followed by a discussion about the implications of discourse in destination marketing, particularly with respect to the various roles of internal stakeholders in relation to tourism and the potential of tourism to (re)create value to everyday life environments.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The discursive construction of tourism destinations

The branding of tourism destinations is an important way of giving meaning to regions (Cox & Wray, 2011; Lee & Arcodia, 2011; Ploner, 2009). Similar to regions, meanings of tourism destinations are continuously contested through discourse (Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011), with an ongoing interaction between hegemonic, emergent and residual meanings (Harrison, 2013) and several phases of institutionalization (Paasi, 2003, 2009; Zimmerbauer & Paasi, 2013).

Representing regions as tourism destinations is increasingly central to regional policy and tourism marketing. Destination positioning, defined as 'establishing and maintaining a distinctive place in the market for an organization and/or its individual product offerings' (Lovelock, 1991, in Pike, 2012, p. 101) is an important part of competitive marketing strategies. The discourse used in tourism marketing, and the ways destinations are positioned, frames identities (Cousin, 2008; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013) and (re)constructs destination imaginaries (Salazar, 2012). Moreover, discourses have multiple functions, as 'language is both a means of attributing authenticating value to the tourist product as well as a means of selling it' (Heller, Pujolar, & Duchêne, 2014, p. 551). Destination positioning is therefore politically charged, reflecting and affecting various interests and rooted in societal issues extending far beyond the realm of tourism itself (Cousin, 2008). As such, tourism marketing and the branding of regional as tourism destinations are important planning tools for regional governments (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003).

However, despite the popularity of destination branding, successful examples are limited and the results of substantial financial investments in marketing campaigns are difficult to identify or absent altogether. Literature points to considerable problems of extrapolating conventional product and corporate brand positioning tools to destinations (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011). For example, marketing campaigns initiated by destination marketing organizations (DMOs) or regional governments tend to have difficulties accounting for perspectives and interests of stakeholders such as residents (Burmann, Hegner, & Riley, 2009; Hall, 2008; Zenker & Petersen, 2014). This results in a lack of bottom–up support, despite the increased acknowledgment that 'living the brand' by local stakeholders is essential (Aronczyk, 2008). Moreover, as pointed out by Braun et al. (2013), residents who do not identify with top–down enforced brand positioning claims might engage in 'counter branding' as a form of protest.

Institutionalizing destination identities is therefore far from being a one-way process. Meanings are circulated (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2004) by commodifying both tangible and intangible aspects, for example through the representation of heritage (Ashworth, 2009) or collective identities (Cousin, 2008). In this process, conventional stakeholders such as DMOs increasingly share the arena with other who have obtained a legitimate voice through word of mouth facilitated by travel blogs and customer review websites (Chen et al., 2014; Chu & Kim, 2011; Pan et al., 2007). Place branding thus is a process of co-creation (Oliveira & Panyik, 2015), forcing regional governments, tourism entrepreneurs and DMOs to be even more conscious about their role in destination branding and the ways they attempt to position regions and destinations.

Constructing and transforming tourism destinations is characterized by processes of homogenization and differentiation (Saarinen, 2004). Tourism destinations tend to homogenize both from within and compared to other destinations, aligning with Relph's classic idea of 'placelessness' (Relph, 1985) and Appadurai's 'cultural absorption' (Appadurai, 2011). Differentiation occurs in a rat-race with other destinations, attempting to create a 'competitive identity' (Anholt, 2007). This is done by emphasizing unique features of places, varying from physical assets such as beaches or mountains, to cultural ones such as local food or festivities (Saarinen, 2004). In this vein, regional tourism marketing strategies aim to develop destinations that can compete globally by capitalizing on regional identities, authenticity and local distinctiveness (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003).

Tourism marketing is also strongly spatially structured, often along territorial boundaries on various levels (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003), with possible limitations in the translation to tourism regions and destinations, which tend to be less territorially bound (Messely, Schuermans, Dessein, & Rogge, 2014; Pearce, 2014). This can create contradictions between internal and external orientations of destination marketing, for example when different municipalities, states or countries attempt to develop tourist regions collaboratively (García-Álvarez & Trillo-Santamaría, 2013; Terhorst & Erkuş-Öztürk, 2011; Thomas, Harvey, & Hawkins, 2013), and where histories and identities have to be aligned.

Tourism marketing can thus be a mobilizing force, connecting and unifying stakeholders (Cousin, 2008), but at the same time a basis for tensions and conflicts (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003; Stepanova & Bruckmeier, 2013) between them. Awareness of how discourses among these stakeholders implicitly and explicitly prioritize some meanings and neglect others, include some stakeholders and

exclude others, is necessary because discourse is a linguistic commodification (Heller et al., 2014) of meanings and can in tourism marketing become symbolic capital in itself. Therefore, studying discursive contradictions in destination positioning is important not only in order to understand the critical conditions for tourism marketing, place branding success and policy implementation, but also to critically examine issues of power and stakeholder equity.

2.2. Intraregional tourism

Attention on domestic tourism is increasing slowly but still is in its infancy in comparison to the scholarship on international tourism (Singh & Krakover, 2015). While some early research and theorizing on domestic tourism exists (Archer, 1978; Hughes, 1992; Jafari, 1986; Pearce, 1993), attention on tourism as a phenomenon taking place in close geographical proximity to the tourist's home has remained scarce, despite worldwide domestic arrivals (4000 million) greatly exceeding international arrivals (750 million) (UNWTO, 2008). This lack of research on tourism occurring 'close to home' might relate to the economic importance of transportation and travel, and the relatively large financial contribution per capita by international visitors in some destinations (Page & Thorn, 1997). Eijgelaar et al. (2008), however, show that this is not always the case, as domestic tourism generates more income than international visitors in many countries, particularly in the long term.

Franklin and Crang (2001) recognize that '[t]ourism studies [have] often privileged the exotic and strange, reflecting anthropological legacies, to speak of dramatic contrasts between visitors and locals' (p.8). Yet various scholars provide evidence for a limited applicability of conventional tourism binaries (Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011) in view of the blurring of tourism places and everyday places. For example, there appears to be a non-linear relation between (un)familiarity and geographical distance in second-home tourism (Müller, 2006). Similarly, Canavan (2013) shows how residents on the Isle of Man engage in various 'microdomestic' tourist experiences in their everyday environment. Further, Díaz Soria & Llurdés Coit (2013) attempt to understand how the everyday environment can be valorized through 'proximity tourism', thereby reframing understandings of otherness, tourist experiences and spatial identities. Yet, it seems that the field of tourism has not yet found a more widely accepted terminology to engage with such themes (Singh & Krakover, 2015).

Important in the context of destination marketing, classic taxonomies of tourist, traveler or guest versus resident, inhabitant or host, become increasingly contested and might even lead to the 'exclusion and narrow acceptance in destination development and strategic tourism decision making on local, regional, national, and international levels' (Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011, p. 140). For example, while every individual is a potential tourist for every destination, this does not automatically mean that people do actually go everywhere. When the sky seems to be the limit, it might be forgotten what is actually on the ground; the people who visit destinations may actually be from nearby.

These notions have only partly found their way into the field of destination marketing, as has also become clear in Section 2.1. It seems that both the mundane of the exotic and the exotic of the everyday tend to be overlooked, affecting tourists' destination choice, the scope of potential visitor markets among DMOs and the ways cities, regions and countries are positioned as tourism destinations.

Among the challenges of intraregional tourism with which DMOs and tourism entrepreneurs are confronted, dealing with the multiplicity of meanings attributed to places by internal stakeholders is one of the most important. Touristic places are both familiar and unusual, both mundane and different (Díaz Soria & Llurdés Coit, 2013). This blurring of meanings and perspectives brings possible contradictions between tourism practices, stakeholders and meanings attributed to destinations. This makes positioning regions as tourism destinations both for people coming from outside and for people living within the region particularly difficult.

2.3. Conceptualizing dimensions of destination positioning discourse

Building on the reasoning above, two important dimensions along which destination positioning discourse and inherent contradictions can emerge can be discerned. The first pertains to homogenization and differentiation, signifying the continuous encounters between the local and the global, the perceived competition between tourism destinations and the struggle for authenticity (Saarinen, 2004). The second concerns internal and external orientations, reflecting contradictions between various coexisting aims underlying the marketing strategies (Terhorst & Erkuş-Öztürk, 2011), and pertaining to the question of for whom tourism is developed and where the benefits are located. For example, through an explicit objective to increase incoming tourism, less attention might be paid to returning visitors or intraregional tourism. This dimension helps to explain the ways binaries such as host–guest and tourist–resident are used, thereby enabling us to particularly focus on the ways intraregional aspects of tourism are considered. By juxtaposing these dimensions (Fig. 1), a conceptual quadrant appears with four parts: (i) nternally oriented homogenization; (ii) externally oriented homogenization; (iii) internally oriented differentiation; and (iv) externally oriented differentiation. These four parts each imply a different discourse and a particular positioning of a destination. Integrating these two dimensions provides for an explicit framework to analyze destination positioning discourses.

3. Case study and method

3.1. The province of Fryslân

Fryslân is one of the 12 provinces of the Netherlands (Fig. 2). With about 650,000 inhabitants, it is considered a relatively rural area. Over 40% of its 574,874 km² surface is water, including a large part of the Wadden Sea and a maze of interconnected fresh water lakes.

Part of the population speaks Frisian, the second official language of the Netherlands. Fryslân and Frisians are signified by a strong regional identity that is rooted in a long history of territorial

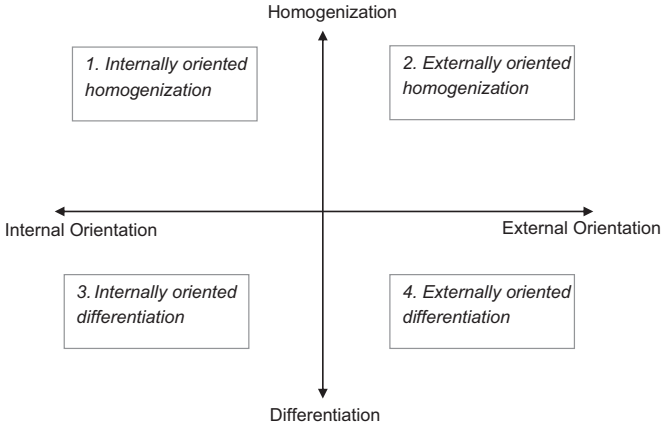

Fig. 1. Conceptual dimensions for analyzing regional tourism marketing discourse.

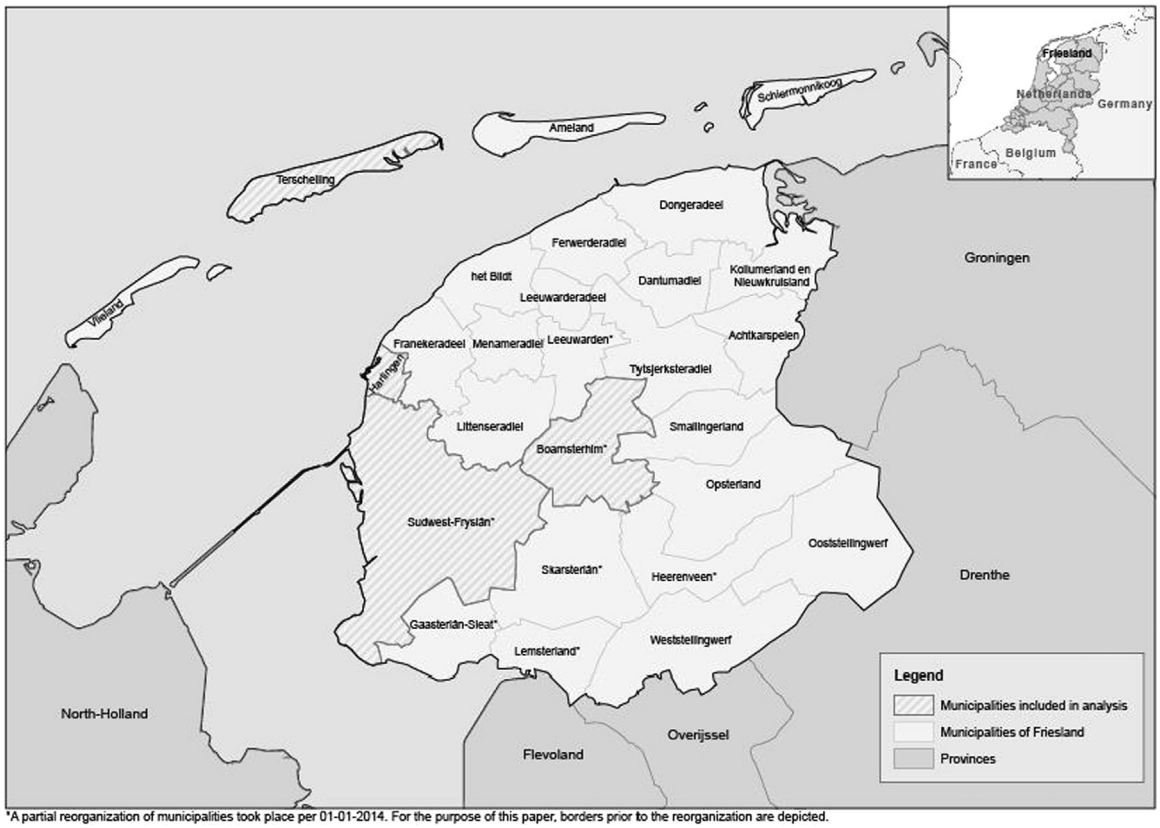

Fig. 2. Municipalities of Fryslân.

changes. However, heterogeneous spatial identities exist within the province, and various areas employ their own linguistics (Pietersen, 1969). Similarly, intraregional identities are enacted, for example through the rivalry between Fryslân's two major football clubs SC Heerenveen and Cambuur. This intraregional differentiation exemplifies the layering (Boisen, Terlouw, & van Gorp, 2011) and multiplicity of regional identification.

Tourist activities in Fryslân at least go back to the early 19th century, when an early form of cultural tourism on the Wadden Islands emerged (AFUK, 2013). After the Second World War, a steep increase in tourism activities occurred, with an emphasis on watersports such as sailing at the lakes and beach tourism on the Wadden Islands. Cycling has become another main outdoor tourist activity (ISM, 2010). Currently, tourist accommodation is widespread with major tourist regions being the Wadden Islands and the southwest of Fryslân (CBS, 2012; ETFI, 2012). Tourism generates almost one billion euros on a yearly basis and around seven percent of the Frisian workforce (19,000 jobs) is employed in the tourism and recreation sector.

Located on a relatively high latitude, Fryslân enjoys a moderate Atlantic climate. With a weather pattern that is highly variable and significant seasonal differences, tourism in Fryslân peaks during school holidays, particularly in spring and summer season. Similar to other higher-latitude destinations (Denstadli, Jacobsen, & Lohmann, 2011), intraseasonal variation in weather challenges the local tourism sector in terms of stable income, tourist experiences and destination image (Jeuring & Peters, 2013).

Most people visiting Fryslân are from the Netherlands, with Germans making up for the largest proportion of foreign tourists. Moreover, 82% of all daytrips of Frisian residents in 2011 took place within the province itself (Table 1) (CBS, 2012). This fits within a broader tendency where 76% of Europeans spend their holidays in their home country (EUROSTAT, 2014), emphasizing the importance of near-home destinations in Europe.

Table 1
Daytrips of Dutch inhabitants per province of residence and by visited province in Northern Netherlands (CBS, 2012).

	Destination			
	Total	Groningen	Fryslân	Drenthe
Province of residence				
Groningen	31,090	**77.2%**	4.6%	11.5%
Fryslân	33,710	5.0%	**81.6%**	3.4%
Drenthe	25,130	13.7%	2.0%	**70.4%**
Overijssel	55,680	0.5%	0.5%	2.5%
Flevoland	16,200	0.6%	2.0%	1.1%
Gelderland	103,950	0.3%	0.2%	0.4%
Utrecht	67,990	0.1%	0.2%	0.4%
Noord-Holland	148,210	0.5%	0.4%	0.2%
Zuid-Holland	190,460	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%
Zeeland	18,630	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Noord-Brabant	140,010	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Limburg	75,580	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Total	906,640	3.5%	3.5%	2.8%

Frisian destination marketing has not been completely straightforward and without struggles. In 1998, the North Netherlands Bureau for Tourism (NNBT) was set up as a collaborative regional marketing office for the provinces of Fryslân, Groningen and Drenthe. Also in 1996, an independent company named Friesland Holland set itself the goal of promoting Fryslân as a tourism destination and offering tourism products. After early termination of the NNBT in 2003, Fryslân Marketing became its successor. Specifically focusing on Fryslân, it not only aimed at increasing tourism but also attempted to attract businesses and new residents. In 2012, an intermediate DMO called Beleef Friesland took over, from which in 2014 the current marketing organization Merk Fryslân emerged.

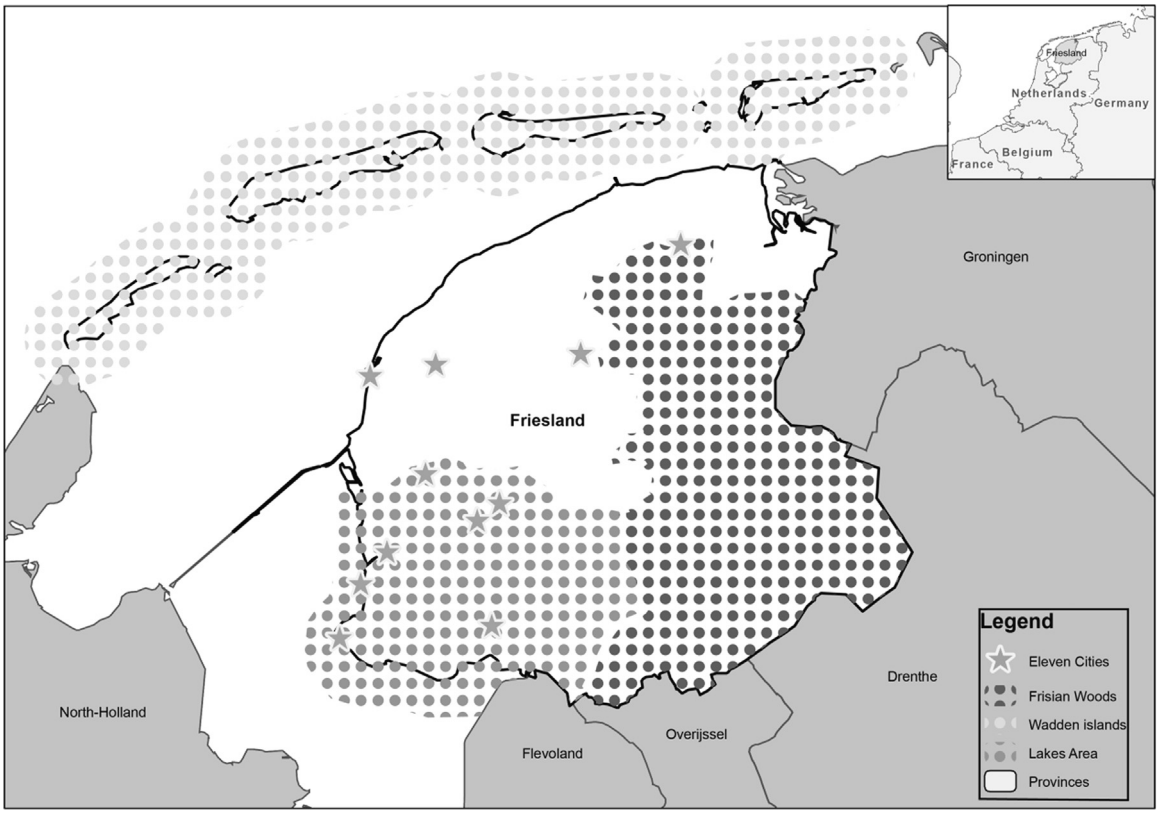

Fig. 3. Tourist regions in Fryslân.

DMO activities have arguably contributed to the positioning of Fryslân as tourism destination. For example, current destination branding strategies discern four sub-provincial themes along which tourism is promoted: the Wadden Islands, the lakes area, the south-east forests and finally the 11 Cities, referring to the towns that obtained city rights from the 12th to the 15th century (Fig. 3).

These choices affect both the external image of Fryslân and its

Table 2
Documents included in analysis.

Title	*Governmental level*	*Written in year*	*Period concerned*
1. Marketingplan Fryslân Marketing	Province	2009	2009–2013
2. Uitvoeringsagenda Fryslân Toeristische Topattractie	Province	2010	2011–2013
3. Evaluaasje Provinsjaal Belied Rekreaasje en Toerisme	Province	2011	2002–2010
4. Uitvoeringsagenda Streekplan 'Fryslân, op afstand de mooiste provincie van Nederland'	Province	2011	2011–2014
5. Gastvrij Fryslân. Uitvoeringsprogramma Recreatie & Toerisme	Province	2013	2014–2017
6. Marketingplan Fan Fryslân	Province	2012	2012–2014
7. Uitvoeringsplan Merk Fryslân	Province	2010	2010–?
8. Samen op weg naar één brede regiomarketingorganisatie voor Fryslân	Province	2013	2014–?
9. Trots, trend en traditie in het Noorden	Province	2009	n.a.
10. Toeristische toekomstvisie Terschelling	Municipality of Terschelling	2007	2007–2017
11. 'Koers houden'. Actualisatie beleidsnota Recreatie en Toerisme 2006–2016	Municipality of Harlingen	2011	2011–2016
12. Visie Toerisme & Recreatie gemeente Súdwest-Fryslân	Municipality of Súdwest-Fryslân	2013	2012–2022
13. Visie Recreatie en Toerisme Gemeente Boarnsterhim	Municipality of Boarnsterhim	2012	2012–?

internal identity processes, sometimes sparking discussions around intraregional competitiveness. For example, the Frisian Woods area was added only recently to the key tourism regions that are promoted, following claims from policymakers and tourism entrepreneurs in this area stating to be underprivileged by provincial destination marketing. While tourism is widely seen as an important economic resource for Fryslân, the above makes clear that tourism is neither undisputed nor evenly spread across the province. Therefore, Frisian tourism marketing makes for an interesting case to explore emerging discursive contradictions in its attempts to position the province as a tourism destination.

3.2. Study method

Data analyzed in this paper consist of tourism marketing strategy documents at the provincial and municipality levels. The documents cover two decades of consecutive periods of regional tourism marketing plans, ranging from 2002 up to 2022 and were written between 2007 and 2013 (see Table 2). In order to obtain the documents, websites of the province of Fryslân and Frisian municipalities were searched, resulting in 13 relevant documents. Not all municipalities had marketing plans or policy visions, and the nature of the documents varied from commissioned visions to marketing plans written by governmental bodies themselves. The municipalities included were spread across the province, thereby covering various tourism areas (Fig. 2).

Using ATLAS.ti software (version 7), the study followed the guidelines of 'the spiral of analysis' (Boeije, 2009), which forms the core of thematic analysis. This methodology provides a structured approach for themes to emerge, along a number of iterative steps. Rooted in grounded theory (Glaser, Strauss, & Strutzel, 1968), thematic analysis can be used to generate theories and hypothesis, but it can also be used to generate themes deductively based on previous research or existing theory (Bos, McCabe, & Johnson, 2013), which is the case in this paper.

The first step was concerned with reading all the documents and highlighting pieces of text that signified the discursive construction of Fryslân in terms of homogenization–differentiation and internal–external orientation dimensions (open coding). Selection of text was guided by the following argumentation. The primary spatial unit of interest was 'Fryslân' as a province, a governmental territory. Therefore, this was the point of departure for selecting various discourses. Homogenization–differentiation discourse was selected when references were found relating to Fryslân in terms of unity and similarity (homogenization), or competition, differences and comparisons (differentiation). Similarly, internal and external discourses were selected when text was found about various stakeholders for whom tourism is developed and where the benefits are located. For example, when marketing documents talk about incoming visitors, this was interpreted as external orientation, while benefits for residents were interpreted as internally oriented discourse.

The second step involved a more abstract categorization of the selected quotes. Several rounds of coding were employed, resulting in more abstract codes and themes (axial coding). The goal here was to find thematic similarities across the selected quotes in terms of how these destination positioning statements were attributing meaning to Fryslân as a tourism destination and to the process of regional tourism development. The themes that emerged from this analysis are discussed below. Quotes are translated from Dutch. Pages and document numbers referring to Table 2 are in brackets after the quotes.

4. Analysis and findings

Discursive contradictions of homogenization–differentiation and internal–external orientation emerged in five themes. The first theme, *place branding*, addresses the ways destination marketing highlights characteristics of regions that are employed in the construction of competitive place images. Place branding discourses strongly prioritize outward communications above intraregional orientations. Second, various *identity claims* are being made, which feed the circulation of hegemonic discourse of what regions and tourism destinations are, what they are not and for whom they are constructed. Third, a focus on different *target groups* reveals how Fryslân is seen clearly as a destination for some but not for others. Issues of inclusion and exclusion permeate the discourse of this theme, with consequences for intraregional visitors. The fourth theme is named *collaboration* and pertains to attempts to achieve integration, participation, co-creation and the formation of networks, either between different stakeholders, entrepreneurs, tourism destinations or territorial regions. Finally, the attribution of *roles* to tourism stakeholders both shapes and is shaped by tourism discourses, affecting the ways stakeholders can participate in tourism on the regional level. The themes that emerged will now be addressed separately, illustrated with exemplary quotes.

4.1. Place branding

Place branding has become inherent to regional tourism marketing in Fryslân. Marketing strategies appear highly concerned with the creation of a positive image of Fryslân as a whole, reflected in a homogenizing discourse of a Frisian umbrella brand: "*To successfully develop and promote Fryslân, it is necessary to depart from one common image of Fryslân, usable for all stakeholders, connecting and enhancing all initiatives*." (#7, p.4). At the same time, this holistic image is differentiated by the framing of a number of touristic regions, called Unique Selling Points (USPs): "*The Wadden, the Frisian Lakes and the Frisian Eleven Cities should develop into strong international tourist attractions, our Unique Selling Points*." (#2, p.4). Contrasting between higher-level homogenization and lower-level differentiation appears, however, to be at least partially a conscious strategy: "*As point of departure for collaboration between province and regions we assume: attract on a provincial level and guide on a regional level*." (#8, p.23).

Similarly, on the municipality-level marketing strategies emphasize unique features of municipalities instead of adding to the Frisian umbrella brand: "*South-West Fryslân possesses various unique characteristics. Enough munition to strongly position our municipality within Fryslân and Northern Netherlands*." (#12, p.33). This contradiction between provincial and municipal interests is also recognized by Dredge and Jenkins (2003), who note that local stakeholders might oppose strongly to homogenizing regional policies. A fear of losing local identities might be rooted in a need for internal differentiation, deemed necessary for stakeholders to give meaning to themselves, their products and their everyday lives.

Further, while place branding is inherently aimed at incoming (international) tourists, internal marketing is discussed, for example to change the 'mentality' of people living in Fryslân: "*Internal promotion – aimed at residents and entrepreneurs-is concerned with changing an introvert mentality that abides to an extent. The Northerner and Northern entrepreneurs should become more modern, open and extrovert*." (#9, p.115). This somewhat surprising and negative quote reflects a discourse that is at the same time internally homogenizing and externally differentiating. It positions a 'Northern mentality' in contrast with mentalities that are supposedly characteristic of entrepreneurs from other regions (i.e. other parts of the Netherlands).

Internally oriented place branding is mentioned as a necessity to deliver externally made promises. This is in line with literature

stating that stakeholder involvement in place branding is essential for successful branding and positive tourist experiences (Aronczyk, 2008). Thus, people living in Fryslân have to support and sustain the communicated imaginaries: "*Winning outside, means starting from the inside. It is useless to promote outside what cannot be fulfilled on the inside*." (#6, p.6). Therefore, there is a need "*To create commitment by Frisians (and preferably ambassadorship). The brand belongs to everyone and we can only get results when Frisians are the new brand*." (#7, p.9). This can be done by positive word-of-mouth communication: "*Foreign students play an important role in the promotion and internationalization of touristic Fryslân*." (#5, p.11). However, holistic brands are difficult to identify with for local residents, who likely have fragmented and multiple identities in relation to Fryslân. As a result, the contradictions between homogenizing, external place branding and the differentiated perceptions, interests and expectations (Eshuis, Klijn, & Braun, 2014; Kavaratzis, 2012; Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012) of people living within the province make destination management in Fryslân particularly challenging.

4.2. Identity claims

Marketing strategies strongly tend to rely on an externally differentiating and internally homogenizing 'Frisian identity', positioning Fryslân as distinctive from surrounding provinces and other destinations. On several occasions, reference was made to 'Frisian characteristics', supposedly typical for Frisian communities and people: "*The Frisian mentality, the Frisian feeling, is crucial for success and will play an important role in the image building*." (#7, p.6).

Contrary to contemporary understandings of identity as a process (Paasi, 2003), these type of identity claims refer to a 'static' identity. The meaning of Frisianness is thus represented as a given, an almost tangible attribute that is self-evident. This homogenized discourse of Frisian feelings, mentality, core values and 'Frisian DNA' are also brought up to establish and 'brand' regional marketing strategy itself: "*The strategy must be 'Frisian' too: Authentic, fresh, surprising, expressing belonging and trustworthiness…*" (#7, p.7). Interestingly, this signifies a rather pragmatic use of supposed regional characteristics of Fryslân and its people: positive here, negative elsewhere. Recall the earlier quote about the typical 'Northern mentality', which was negatively framed.

Language is also an important way to enhance differentiation and functions as a major force through which identities are enacted. For example, Frisian language is seen as an asset to emphasize perceived otherness among visitors: "*The visibility and creative use of Frisian language next to Dutch, English and German enhances the touristic experience, through which tourists become aware they are in a special region*." (#5, p.11). Similarly, an ongoing discussion about the use of Dutch versus Frisian language in tourism communication signifies how identities are claimed through language use: "*In 2017, 60 percent of Frisian tourism and recreation related information is multilingual, including Frisian and regional languages*." (#5, p.28). Interestingly, various dialects exist within Fryslân, but these intraregional differences are not used in the marketing strategies. This again reflects how priority is given to homogenized representations of Fryslân.

The context of The Netherlands as a nation is obviously important in identity discourses. At this level, Fryslân is represented as a peripheral region, different from the urbanized Randstad area that includes Amsterdam and Rotterdam. This representation strongly refers to dichotomies of urban versus rural, but also frames Fryslân as less progressive and modern: "*There is an image of tradition. Reflected by commercials through images of silent, rural and small village characteristics. Also, this is the image of the down to earth countryside people. A positive image in itself, but also emphasizing the contrast between the dynamic, urban parts of the Netherlands and the traditional, backwards, rural North*." (#9, p.51). Employing such a narrative is useful for creating an image of idyllic rurality, where people can find peaceful villages and quite nature.

Finally, identity claims reflecting an internal orientation tend to be homogenized by calling upon a sense of community ('*mienskip*') among inhabitants of Fryslân. They are seen as key stakeholders in tourism products, '*have respect for Frisian culture and nature*' (#5, p.21) and form a part of the tourism product that can be externally consumed. Such a discourse creates an image of uncontested commitment to a regional Frisian identity.

4.3. Target groups

The identification of potential groups of visitors is an important element of destination management and marketing (Hallab, Yoon, & Uysal, 2003; Yannopoulos & Rotenberg, 2000). An overall tendency to prioritize target groups from outside the province emerges, reflecting an externally oriented discourse of internationalization. While currently relatively few foreigners (except for German tourists) visit the province, tourism marketing emphasizes that future market growth is to be found abroad. As such, Fryslân increasingly aims to strengthen its position as a non-domestic tourism destination: "*We plan to focus on promising countries like Spain, Italy and the* U.S." (#5, p.27).

Target groups reflect strategies of prioritizing certain types of tourists and tourism above other. At the same time, framing target groups might be stereotypical homogenizations, based on generalized demands, behavior or other discerning features. Indeed, a discourse of 'classic' tourism binaries is found, reflecting an external orientation of tourism marketing. Visitors are claimed to be seeking otherness and unfamiliarity: "*Medieval villages: worshiped when abroad, but at home they become all too mundane. Sometimes we forget that our environment and daily life can be someone else's adventure*." (#12, p.14). Hereby a differentiation is made between mobile, excitement-seeking outsiders (visitors) and the immobile, daunting life of residential insiders (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2013).

An internally oriented discourse, pertaining to target groups from within the province is found as well. However, in contrast with external target groups, discourse about internal target groups is shaped around issues of well-being and positive impacts on local infrastructure: "*Development of tourism in Fryslân enhances quality of life in terms of living environment, livability of the countryside, social cohesion of cities and health and well-being*." (#5, p.7). People living in Fryslân are thus considered to be stakeholders who might (indirectly) benefit from tourism development. Such accounts align well with contemporary ideas of responsible tourism development and stakeholder involvement.

However, a discourse of externally oriented tourism development, aimed at incoming tourists, neglects potential benefits for residents as intraregional tourists. Internal target groups are mentioned mainly as day recreationists and framed around various lifestyle segments. In this way, a clear connection is made with everyday life and people's well-being, "*supporting policy makers and entrepreneurs to meet needs of various recreationists from within the province*". (#5, p.68). Thus, target groups for tourism in Fryslân tend to be framed around a division between tourism and recreation, between the out-of-the-ordinary needs of tourists and the everyday-life needs of residents.

4.4. Collaboration

Destination marketers and governmental policymakers increasingly aim to collaborate with other stakeholders. Similarly, provincial destination marketing aims at collaborating with municipalities in order to support local tourism development

initiatives: "*The provincial scale is too large as a basis for collaborative, continuous and concrete touristic products.* […] *The region is the level where connections and inspiration emerge*." (#2, p.14). As such, the local government is attributed a leadership role of organizer and motivator.

Collaboration in itself can be seen as internally oriented, aiming to create cohesion among participants (Coca-Stefaniak, Parker, & Rees, 2010; Lee & Arcodia, 2011). This aim is also found here, and a homogenizing discourse of unity and shared goals is evident. In line with this, an important motivation to promote collaboration in Frisian tourism is its small scale and spatially dispersed nature, thereby challenging the options for communicating consistent brand information and ultimately providing attractive tourism products: "*Due to the small scale and dispersed character of the tourism sector, a collective profile is difficult to attain*." (#5, p.24).

However, the challenge of diverging interests among stakeholders is acknowledged as well. This becomes evident in the construction of the *Eleven Cities* brand, which involves several municipalities: *"Support for developing an Eleven Cities tourism product has proven difficult. Commitment is essential for promoting the Eleven Cities as a whole*." (#2, p.23).

While collaboration has proven to be essential for tourism destinations as a whole to become competitive (Arnaboldi & Spiller, 2011; Olsen, 2003), tensions may arise when internal competition is not acknowledged. For almost any tourism product, particularly when these products are the result of collaboration between various stakeholders, there is a multiplicity of choices for tourists how and where to obtain it. This provides opportunities for competitors to indeed collaborate by passing on customers in busy times, which will "*strongly increase the quality of the tourism product; after all, the customer is not interested in internal competition and rivalry. He wants a successful holiday*." (#10, p.22).

As becomes clear, there is a thin line between competition (differentiation) and collaboration (homogenization) in order to maintain attractive tourism products. Trying to maintain this balance, regional tourism marketing seems to be entangled in a quest to deal with interconnectivity, formal and informal networks, both within and outside of Fryslân.

4.5. Roles

Role attributions of stakeholders were made on various occasions. Roles can pertain to responsibilities (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003), for example in the case of governmental organizations; marketing and branding of the province as a destination is explicitly a responsibility of the provincial governmental marketing. Yet internal differentiation occurs when a distinction is made between marketing aimed at gaining new visitors and the maintenance of the current, established market, which is attributed as a responsibility to tourism entrepreneurs: *"Fryslân Marketing is mainly concerned with attracting new visitors.* […] *Enhancing repeat visitation is primarily the responsibility of tourism entrepreneurs*." (#1, p.15).

Based on the idea that repeat visitation is strongly affected by positive experiences during a holiday, entrepreneurs directly interact with tourists and can therefore play an important role in visitor satisfaction. This role division makes sense for incoming visitors: "*Attract on a provincial level and guide on a regional level*." (#8, p.23). Yet for intraregional tourism an approach is needed that takes into account the hybrid nature of people being both residents from and tourists within the same region (Canavan, 2013). It is not clear how roles are attributed in this context.

Next to roles ascribed to governmental organizations, DMOs and entrepreneurs, various roles can be attributed to individual residents. On this level, several contradictions surface in the ways regional tourism marketing understands differences between tourists and residents, how they interact and how they can contribute to regional tourism development. In this respect, residents are mentioned as stakeholders in the production of tourism and the representation of the identity of Fryslân and Frisian destinations within the province (Braun et al., 2013): "*Winning outside is certainly starting from within. Together, over* 640,000 *potential ambassadors can make great things happen*." (#6, p.17). Referring to ambassador roles of residents is rooted in organization studies (Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013), and is increasingly popular in branding literature (Andersson & Ekman, 2009; Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013) as a tool for dissemination and institutionalization of destination imaginaries (Salazar, 2012) (see also the Place Branding theme above). Yet such roles assume a certain commitment on the part of residents to a brand and might not do justice to intraregional identifications, differences between destinations and the personal experiences of residents.

Similarly, in the context of the roles of residents, who produce tourism products for external visitors, a discourse of residential non-mobility and a touristic mobility (Salazar, 2012) emerges: "*Tourists feel a need to be part of authentic villages and be among local* inha*bitants*." (#5, p.22). While this is a commonly used dichotomy, it does constrain the understanding of potential roles of Frisian residents as they engag in tourism within the province itself. When they visit another area of Fryslân, are they a 'local resident' or a 'tourist'?

The externally oriented imaginaries of homogenization and unified identities are differentiated and even contradicted by intraregional variation and difference within municipalities: "*The villages of the Boarnsterhim municipality all have their own qualities. These are their strength and are shaped by residents, cultural history, authenticity and events*." (#13, p.15). Here, residents are differentiated from each other according to the village they live in, which is more or less contradictory to the previously mentioned unity of Frisian people. This contradiction between homogenized Frisian identities and localized identities further signifies the pragmatic way in which roles are attributed to residents in regional tourism marketing.

5. Discussion and implications

5.1. Discussion

Discrepancies and paradoxes are inherent to society, particularly when it comes to tourism (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003). Contradictions are not undesirable by definition, as they are part of a learning process, requiring constant evaluation, education and measurement (McLennan, Ruhanen, Ritchie, & Pham, 2012). They do have consequences, however, for how the world is perceived and acted upon. The results of this paper show that the positioning of Fryslân as a tourism destination is indeed 'politically charged'. Having an important influence on these processes, destination marketers and policy makers thus find themselves challenged to acknowledge the contradictions between co-existing discourses inherent to their work. They need to explore continuously how the discourses they use are not only a possible source of conflict and inequality, but also how they can provide added value for the various stakeholders involved.

Partially contributing to filling the often-acknowledged but still-existing research gap on tourism taking place in proximity to home and everyday life (Canavan, 2013; Jafari, 1986), the analysis points to a need for different ways of thinking about the meaning of tourism. Such an approach means challenging both academic and practitioner discourses of otherness, destination identities and how relationships are negotiated between people and the places they inhabit (Hauge, 2007; McCabe & Stokoe, 2004; Twigger-Ross

& Uzzell, 1996).

The dimensions of homogenization–differentiation and internal–external orientation employed in this analysis provide a useful basis for analyzing the complexities of positioning a region as tourism destination and accounting for both internal and external stakeholders in tourism marketing strategies. In line with other scholars, this study highlights the uneven and unstable (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003) transformation process (Saarinen, 2004) of regional institutionalization (Paasi, 2003; Zimmerbauer & Paasi, 2013).

The study draws on concepts that are not new for tourism research. On the contrary, they address the core of tourism scholarship and practice, the ways destinations are constructed, consumed and gazed at (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Still, it is clear that the various ways homogenizing, differentiating, externally and internally oriented discourses that steer tourism as an industry should be continuously studied and re-interpreted. These forces emerge in multiple ways and on many levels, and the contradictions that exist between them become particularly clear through the use of this two-dimensional framework.

In the case of Fryslân, an important reason for these contradictions pertains to the target groups in which destination marketing is investing. While various target groups are mentioned, a main focus on external, incoming target groups can be discerned. Fryslân aims to grow quantitatively as a tourism destination, with visitors coming increasingly from abroad. Interestingly though, the vast majority of current tourists visiting Frisian destinations are Dutch or even Frisian. There is little evidence in current Frisian destination marketing documents, however, of a specific strategy for intraregional tourists. Destination marketers and regional governments seem to have a hard time dealing with people being inhabitants at one moment and tourists at another. Tourism is still often approached as something outside of everyday life and potential local benefits of tourism development are mentioned mainly as a positive side-effect of incoming tourism. In this regard, based on the findings in this paper, a number of suggestions can be made.

5.2. Implications for regional destination marketing

Tourism in Fryslân tends to be seen primarily as an economic tool. From an intraregional perspective, however, priority should also be given to societal aspects of tourism. Canavan (2013) emphasizes that an active intraregional tourism dynamic characterizes a healthy and attractive region. In line with this, Fryslân might capitalize even more on intraregional benefits such as learning (Falk, Ballantyne, Packer, & Benckendorff, 2012), self-awareness and mutual understanding (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2013): not commodified in monetary terms but as a social force that acts within a region (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006).

Second, discursive contradiction might result in misunderstandings, contradictory policies or even in tensions and conflicts between stakeholders. This can pertain to struggles between destinations, but most certainly also within them (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2013). The way stakeholders are represented in discourse in relation to the spaces they inhabit, use and shape, brings power issues and inequalities to the fore. A key challenge for destination marketers and policy makers, therefore, both in tourism and other fields, is to balance difference and similarity, across people, groups and places. In the case of Fryslân, externally oriented discourses in place branding might suppress the ways contradictions can do their work from an intraregional perspective. For example, to valorize intraregional differences and authenticity (Díaz Soria & Llurdés Coit, 2013), marketing strategies need to incorporate and acknowledge existing differences. One context in which this can be done is the 'regional agendas' (Streekagendas), in which sub-provincial policy is developed beyond territorial borders of municipalities[1], but options on other spatial levels are worth exploring too.

Third, in times where regional, social and self-identities become increasingly commodified for tourism purposes (Aronczyk, 2008; Pomering, 2013), various intrapersonal roles affected by these practices need also to be considered. Attributing value to identities prioritizes specific role attributions among stakeholders, as if performing tourism on a stage (Edensor, 2001). In this regard, while roles that *produce* tourism are attributed to internal stakeholders in Fryslân, this is less so for *consuming* roles. This is a limitation found in current Frisian tourism marketing strategies: tourism could be approached more as contributing to inhabitants' well-being as potential consumers, as tourists themselves. For example, in Fryslân a 'lifestyle' monitor has been developed to assess leisure preferences of its inhabitants[2]. This is a promising start that should find a broader ground in regional tourism development.

The variety of discourses along which tourists are addressed are not necessarily always in opposition with each other, but possible conflicting interests are not mentioned either. For example, it can be questioned whether the lifestyles of residents comply with demands and travel schedules of international visitors. This can become problematic when place branding and destination marketing strategies aimed at certain groups are interpreted (differently) by other groups. Given the large number of intraregional visitors, there is a need to address how externally oriented measures affect destination identities, perceived attractiveness and tourist behavior among people living within the province. A lifestyle approach seems promising (Sherlock, 2001) but a mere focus on day recreation might not be sufficient.

Fourth, Fryslân has been attributed a strong regional identity rooted in its particular history and enacted in symbols, culture and language. Simultaneously, a sophisticated level of intraregional differentiation exists in terms of languages, identities, landscapes and socio-political processes (Krauss, 2005; Pietersen, 1969; van Langevelde, 1993). While these differences are employed in externally oriented destination marketing to a certain extent, it can be argued that various opportunities could also be taken from intraregional tourism perspective.

For example, as noted elsewhere, regional unity is often challenged (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003) and a strong internally oriented measures are needed before external homogenized imaginaries are 'lived' and made real (Aronczyk, 2008). Flags, slogans and other symbols carry the message only partially and are themselves continuously reinterpreted (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Felgenhauer, 2010). Citizens are therefore indispensable in destination branding. Similarly, it is important to approach citizens as potential tourists themselves. For example, by organizing guided city trips for citizens (Braun et al., 2013) and particularly by calling upon a link between self-identities and regional identities.

Successful intraregional tourism destinations, as stated by Canavan, are 'accessible to locals, providing social interest and leisure opportunities, supporting community infrastructure and industry, and ultimately [are] contributing to social cohesion and civic pride' (Canavan, 2013, p. 349). Obviously, this does not shut the door for external visitors, but the goal to develop tourism destinations not only with but also for residents, enhancing the ways along which they attribute meanings and identities to their everyday environment, surely deserves more attention, both from regional destination marketing and tourism scholars.

[1] http://www.fryslan.nl/streekagenda

[2] http://ondernemen.touristinfofryslan.nl/mediadepot/34414e7dc6eb/DefinitiefprogrammaGastvrijFrysln2014-201730092013.pdf

6. Conclusion

This paper has sought to disentangle some of the discursive contradictions that emerge in regional tourism marketing strategies, by exploring the ways Fryslân is positioned as a tourism destination (Research Question 1). A discourse analysis of regional tourism marketing documents for the Dutch province of Fryslân and four of its municipalities revealed how various discursive contradictions, along dimensions of differentiation versus homogenization and internal versus external orientation, characterize the ways representations and meanings of Frisian tourism are attributed, (re)negotiated and (re)constructed along five themes: place branding, identity claims, target groups, roles and collaboration.

The second aim of the study was to interpret destination positioning discourse and the concurrent contradictions in terms of their potential implications for Fryslân as a destination for intraregional tourism (Research Question 2). One of the main emerging issues pertains to externally oriented destination branding increasingly relying on internal factors, such as Frisian inhabitants and entrepreneurs being brand ambassadors who confirm and are expected to 'live' the externally created brand. Identity claims follow a similar pattern of claiming a Frisian unity, which supposedly represent what Fryslân 'is'. A contradiction exists between such holistic claims on a provincial level and the complex differentiation between Frisian regions, places, destinations, intraregional dialects and most importantly the interpretations of people living in Fryslân itself. Ignoring intraregional differences in local languages, regional identities on smaller levels and various perceptions of what it means to live in Fryslân and to 'be Frisian', might limit the extent to which the needs and perspectives of people living in Fryslân are properly considered in destination marketing.

A more refined mix of perspectives is found around collaboration between tourism stakeholders. Bottom–up and decentralized strategies are acknowledged on several occasions, with various notions of involving inhabitants of touristic places and working together with tourism entrepreneurs. Yet an external discourse is again evident: incoming tourists benefit first, which in its turn has potential local benefits. Closely related to the framing of collaboration are the contradictions in the final theme, roles. The various stakeholders are often attributed a single role only. Entrepreneurs are not inhabitants, and inhabitants often are not tourists. This rigid approach is clearly limiting the ways tourism strategies account for inhabitants as potential tourists and creates boundaries between the mobility of being a tourist and the immobility of being an inhabitant.

In sum, it can be concluded that regional tourism marketing strategies in Fryslân rely strongly on internal symbolic, physical and social resources which are often framed as a foundation for a homogenized destination identity that can be communicated in externally oriented branding. Marketing strategies have a priority for external orientations in terms of tourism demands and market growth. The imaginaries created often seem to be dominated by holistic representations of Fryslân as a destination for people from elsewhere. However, this discourse is contradicted in several ways by aims to differentiate locally, create sub-brands and emphasize intraregional destinations. As such, discourses used in marketing strategies reflect a negotiation between spatial scales, socio-cultural contexts and goals along which different expressions of and attributions to Fryslân are made. Insufficient attention on the various relations between internal stakeholders and the places they inhabit can have negative consequences for the extent to which Frisian residents support policy on tourism development and marketing campaigns, but also limit the positive regional effect of incoming tourism.

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