

Perceptions of entrepreneurs about VVV

Master Thesis



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I hope you will enjoy reading it,

Patrick de Baat

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Summary

VVV contributes to the development of the leisure economy in the Netherlands. However, the leisure market is changing. Both political and technological developments influence the market position and necessity of the VVV. In former days the physical location of the VVV was a unique service, but now consumers have the ever increasing information source of the internet. Moreover, these days the recession results in a critical view on many elements of the sector, also on the VVV. Both entrepreneurs and governments think more consciously about the contribution and the added value of the VVV for their business and sector. The perceptions of entrepreneurs are very important for the future development of VVV. Therefore, the aim of this research is to examine the perceptions of entrepreneurs about the VVV. The central question of this research is:

- What are the perceptions of entrepreneurs about the VVV and to what extent are they involved in the work of the VVV, and how do they imagine the VVV in the future?

To answer the research question a qualitative research is done, consisting of 27 semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs spread over the Netherlands. In order to frame the research question a conceptual model was developed about service branding and collaboration in tourism, from which the interview guide was drawn. The selection of participants was done by selective sampling, with a suitable geographical division and representation of different types of VVV organizations. All interviews are recorded, transcribed and coded in a qualitative data analysis program, from which five themes could be identified.

The results showed the VVV is still seen as trustworthy, ably to facilitate tourists and even as an authority in the sector. The VVV is mainly visualized as the physical location, but what exactly happens in the location is unclear. Entrepreneurs do recognize the possible added value of the VVV, but this is decreasing in the modern market. They call the need for a proactive attitude of the VVV, as the interaction with the VVV and the roll of the VVV isn't like it was before. This is significantly important, as a positive relation is seen between the contact entrepreneurs have with the VVV, their involvement with the VVV and their attitude towards the future roll of the VVV. The central position of the VVV and the brand equity are still considered very valuable, but as the market is changing, VVV has to show their contribution themselves. Therefore the VVV should more actively inform and involve their network.

In short, the role of the VVV was undeniable, but this is not the case anymore. The VVV clearly has to demonstrate their contribution to both the sector and individual entrepreneurs. In order to do this they have to make a transition to a proactive VVV, which is always present and looking for new opportunities. Next to that they have to suit the demands of the market and make a transition to digital information supply. The central role which the VVV had physically should be translated to the internet, where it can offer a central platform within tourist information. Next to that the VVV should very actively use its network. Results showed a positive relation between the notion of added value and willingness to contribute, therefore this is essential for the future of the VVV. On the long term, VVV should also reconsider its concept, as physical locations are expensive and become less relevant for the digital citizen. Stepping-stones, digital information sources on location, could possibly replace agencies and locations on the long term. Entrepreneurs could host the stepping-stones, enter information in the system and financially support the system themselves.

1. Introduction

In the 19th century, a new economic opportunity began in Valkenburg. People started to visit the beautiful hills in the South of the Netherlands for a daytrip or a short holiday. In 1885 the three hoteliers in Valkenburg started the first VVV organisation, to attract more visitors by promoting the destination and to provide visitors with information during their stay. By now Valkenburg is a popular destination in the southern region and VVV developed into a well-known brand and tourism information centre (TIC) in leisure, tourism and recreation throughout the Netherlands. In 2010 VVV celebrated its 125th anniversary. A local VVV organisation can be seen as a host that guides visitors in the process of searching information and decision making within a recreational or tourism destination. By doing so, the VVV is the link between the entrepreneurs of the local tourism sector and the visitors (see figure 1).

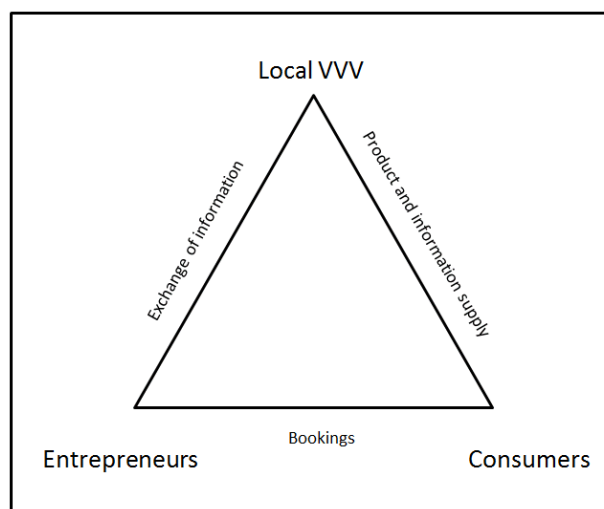


Figure 1. Relationships within context (Gartrell 1991)

In order to accomplish this, there are local VVV locations which consumers can visit for all necessary information about the area and to buy products like maps, souvenirs and postcards. Next to these locations there are agencies located in bookstores, visitor centres and libraries where visitors also can find tourist information. Moreover, providing information on the internet is increasingly important these days. VVV Nederland developed a new website layout, which can be personalised by every VVV organisation. The new website is connected to the 'Dutch Databank for Tourism, Recreation and Culture' (NDTRC). This database is developed by the VVV and contains all relevant activities, horeca, events and so on in the fields of tourism, leisure and recreation in the Netherlands. The database is the central source of information for visitors, is constantly updated and can always be accessed by local VVV employees. In 2013 a consumer app will be released, through which visitors can have direct access to all information available about their current location.

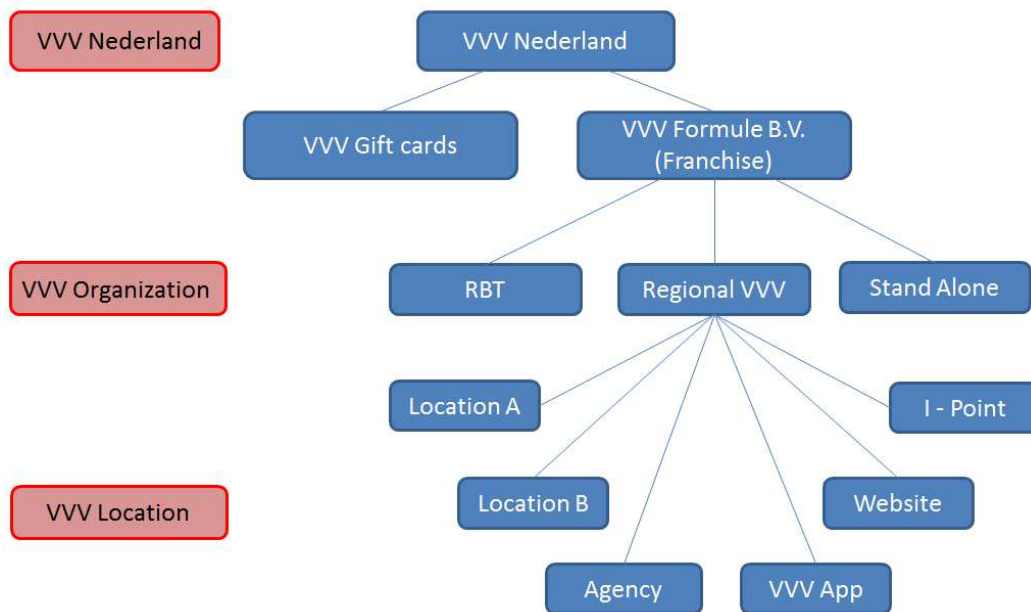


Figure 2. Organisational structure VVV

VVV Nederland is the umbrella organisation which supports and coordinates the network of VVV organisations in the Netherlands. There are 79 franchise takers and over 450 locations in the Netherlands (VVV Nederland, 2013). As illustrated in figure 2, there are three different VVV organisations: a regional bureau for tourism (RBT), a regional VVV and a stand alone. A RBT is an organisation that is responsible for the marketing of a set of neighbouring towns and/or cities, such as Groningen or Zuid Limburg. A Regional VVV is responsible for the marketing of a specific area like the Utrechtse Heuvelrug. And a stand-alone encompasses a single town or city like Zandvoort. Being affiliated to the VVV network involves among others the right to use the brand and its services such as the connection with the Dutch Database for Tourism, Recreation and Culture and access to the educational program for managers and employees within the organization. Every affiliated VVV can use the services of the franchise, but is free in the way it arranges its local business. As such, every VVV is an individual entrepreneur, supported by VVV Nederland and as a result no two VVV organisations operate exactly similar. In some cases, it is even hard to recognise VVV as a brand as local organisations have their own name and representation. In Utrecht for example there is a destination marketing organisation, 'Tourism Utrecht', which is responsible for the promotion and marketing of the destination. For them VVV is one of the tools to achieve their aims within their own visual representations. This may result in the usage of the VVV brand with minimal brand expressions. Therefore some VVV organisations are hardly recognisable as such.

VVV Nederland contributes to the development of the leisure economy in the Netherlands, and develops VVV as a leading brand in the field of tourism, leisure and recreation (Metzemaekers, 2011). To finance all this VVV Nederland exploits three gift coupons, namely 'VVV Cadeaubon', 'Nationale Dinercheque' and 'Boncadeau'. This makes VVV Nederland the market leader in gift coupons in the Netherlands. Every VVV organisation is responsible for its own finances, which comprise the sales of products to visitors, subsidies by local government and contribution of local entrepreneurs. Internationally this is a unique situation, as most tourism information centres (TIC's) abroad are governmental organisations.

1.1 Problem statement

The familiarity of the Dutch public with VVV as a brand within the tourism, leisure and recreation market is unmistakable. Blauw Research (2008, 2011) showed the familiarity with the brand increased in comparison to the initial study. In 2008, when respondents were asked about the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of tourism, leisure and recreation, 21 percent mentioned the VVV. In 2011 this number even increased to 28 percent (Metzemaekers et al. 2011). The same study showed that the spontaneous familiarity with the brand increased from 32 percent in 2008 to 43 percent in 2011 (see figure 3). They concluded that VVV is the most familiar brand within the field of tourism, leisure and recreation in the Netherlands. A research, about indispensable brands by EURIB in 2012, showed that VVV is well known and possibly even indispensable. It ranks number 88 in the top 100 of indispensable brands and has the strongest position in its field (Riezebos and Verhorst 2012).

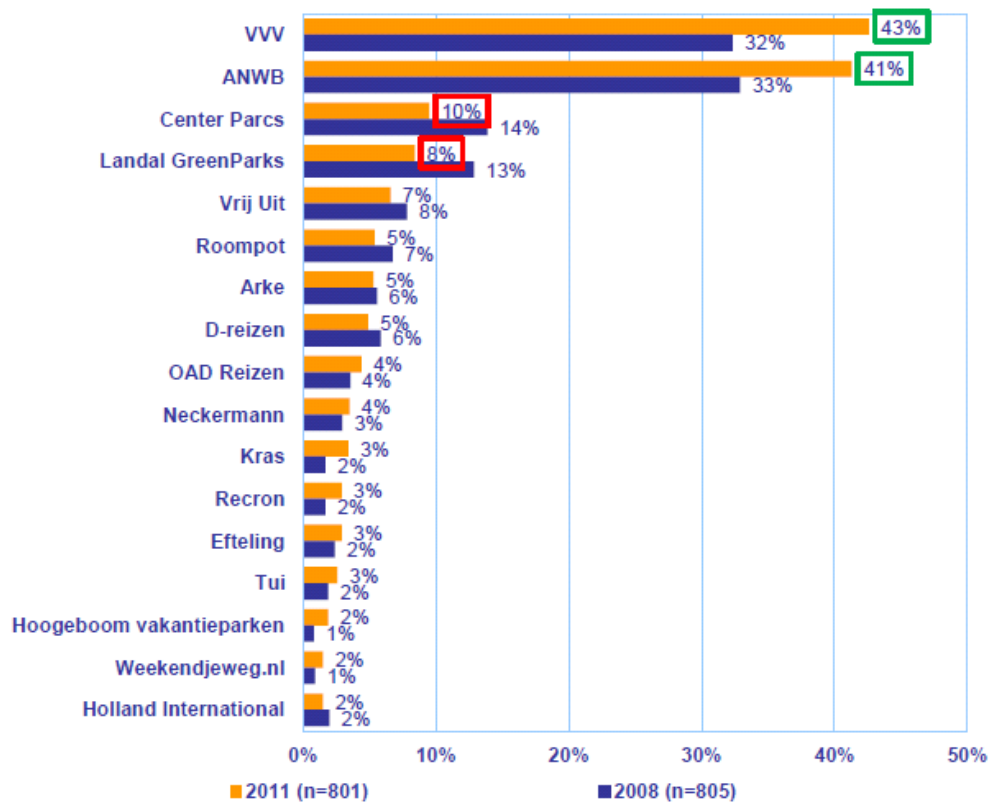


Figure 3. Graph of spontaneous familiarity VVV (Metzemaekers et al. 2011)

However, the market is constantly changing. Both political and technological developments influence the market position and necessity of the VVV as local host. Besides, these days the crisis has major impacts in a lot of sectors, and also in the leisure sector. Many elements of the sector are evaluated and considered upon in terms of costs and benefits, by both governments as recreational entrepreneurs themselves. Like the VVV, which is also reflected again. In former days, a VVV organisation brought consumers and bookings directly to entrepreneurs. But nowadays the VVV delivers the necessarial information for visitors to make these arrangements themselves. So VVV doesn't directly account for extra bookings for entrepreneurs. They more and more facilitate the demand and choices of visitors. Whereas in the past bookings were facilitated by the VVV, nowadays the direct supply of extra consumers and income is absent. The essence of the VVV is more and more the marketing and promotion of a place or region as a whole, which is difficult to express in terms of money. This makes it harder to show the added value and benefits of a VVV organisation in a destination. Nevertheless VVV's are still present throughout the country; there is no trend which shows

a strong decrease of local VVV's. VVV's are often supported by local governments. Since the crisis governments have less money to spend, so less governmental support should be taken into account.

There have been major technological developments in the last twenty years that have influenced the position of the various VVV organizations. In former days a physical VVV location was a unique service in the field of tourism, leisure and recreation. Nowadays consumers have access to the ever increasing information sources on the internet. Consumers can easily find information and orientate on the internet before they actually visit a place. Social media also contribute in this process, as this makes it easy to reach a large amount of people and share personal experiences and advices. Next to that there are also new suppliers that pop up on the digital market, which offer comparable services in tourism and leisure information, like weekendjeweg.nl, zoover.nl and anwb.nl. Nowadays, VVV also develops digital services and is more and more visible on the internet. Continually improvement is necessary to keep up with developments these days. It is important for the VVV to constantly work on their visibility on the digital market. Statistics showed increasing website visitation by consumers results in an increase in the visitation of the physical location (Braun and Witte 2013). This shows that the physical location still has a major role in the information supply and guidance of visitors in a destination.

Thus, the reputation of the VVV as a host in the leisure sector is shown by the reports of Blauw Research and EURIB (Metzemaekers et al. 2011; Riezebos and Verhorst 2012). However the market is financially and technologically dynamic, which makes it essential to evaluate and improve the services of the VVV continually to satisfy the needs of both the entrepreneurs as well as the visitors within a destination. These days there is supposedly less money available, so the VVV has to verify its added value to the market. Entrepreneurs are direct stakeholders of the VVV, therefore their vision is very valuable. In order to achieve the best results, it is essential to know what the perceptions of entrepreneurs of the VVV are and how they consider the role of the VVV in the future. When this is known the VVV can improve their services, by which they optimally serve both entrepreneurs and visitors. Although, perceptions of entrepreneurs are known from contacts in the field and informal conversations with entrepreneurs, these perceptions have never been examined more structured.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

This research has two research aims. The first aim is to examine the perceptions of entrepreneurs about the VVV in order to clarify the image of entrepreneurs about the VVV. The second aim is to determine the view of entrepreneurs on the position and role of the VVV in the future. This can help the VVV to improve its policy and services, in order to optimally serve the entrepreneurs as well as visitors.

To obtain these research aims, the following central question and sub questions have to be answered:

- To what extend are entrepreneurs involved in the work of the VVV, and how do they imagine the VVV in the future?
 - Do entrepreneurs know the strategic orientation of the VVV and does it correspond with their own orientation?
 - What do entrepreneurs think of the presented VVV brand and services?
 - How do entrepreneurs evaluate their experience with the VVV?
 - What is the added value of the VVV, the brand equity, for entrepreneurs?
 - How would entrepreneurs like to see the position and role of the VVV within the recreation sector in the future?

1.3 Structure of the report

After this introduction, the second chapter discusses the theoretical framework, which evolved from a literature study. In chapter three the methodology of the research is explained. In the fourth chapter the results of the interviews are presented. Chapter five contains a discussion after which the conclusion is given in chapter six. Ultimately in chapter seven, recommendations are given.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Overview

Destination marketing organizations such as the VVV form a collaboration with a range of stakeholders in the tourism, leisure and recreation sector in a specific region or city. Tourism destination marketing is a service, which facilitates collaboration between entrepreneurs to promote and market their place. Next to that, DMO's offer visitors services like information, guiding and products which could improve their visit. To make this work, it is essential that entrepreneurs recognise the goals of destination marketing and implement it in their own work (Lombarts 2011). To accomplish this entrepreneurs have to be aware of the contribution and necessity of the collaboration (Bregoli 2013). For a tourism destination marketing organization it is therefore important to know what the entrepreneurs' image of the brand is. Do they recognise the goal and the value of the brand or do they have a distorted image of it, possibly because of personal experiences or lack of communication.

This chapter will start with a closer look on service branding in leisure and tourism. What characterizes a service brand, what is the relevance of a service brand in this sector and which elements contribute to the brand equity. The service-branding model which Berry described in 2012 is used to determine this relation. Hereafter a description of the actual reasons and needs for collaboration within the sector follows. After which critical success factors of such collaboration are defined, based on a study of Baker and Cameron in 2008. This will then result in the conceptual framework that guided this research.

2.2 Service branding in leisure and tourism

Products and services are recognised by a brand that consumers associate with experiences of the past. By branding services, consumers become familiar with it and they know what service to expect from a certain brand. Well known service brands are for example ING, ANWB and TNT. Services in leisure, tourism and recreation are about the deliverance of experiences (Pikkemaat et al. 2009). Experiences are composed of a range of elements like accommodation, undertaken activity and the sense of the destination (Buhalis 2000). Every visitor is looking for an unique experience on a chosen location. On a destination a Tourist Information Centre can help visitors find what they are looking for to create their experience or inspire them with other features of the destination.

Services within a destination can be facilitated by a service brand. However services are different from products. Unique characteristics of services are intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity of quality and perishability (De Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2001). Because of these characteristics, a service brand promises a quality service and the consumer has to trust the company, that it is able to accomplish this. Service branding is about increasing consumers' trust in the invisible purchase the brand offers, which may result in repeated use of the service or word-of-mouth recommendation (De Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2001). As a product is the primary brand in packaged goods, the company is the content of a service brand (De Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2001). A service brand focuses on the experience and is formed by social encounters instead of the quality of a product (Berry 2000). Clarke (2000, p. 330-331) emphasises the relevance of branding in destination marketing by applying marketing advantages, which can be summarized in six points:

- Tourism consists of a complex network of products and services to be chosen by consumers, branding helps to structure and reduce the choices.
- Branding helps to overcome the intangibility of a tourism experience, the brand represents the experience by visual presentation and a name.

- Branding creates unity and can communicate consistently in a sector which includes a high variability of experiences.
- Branding can help to avoid spending time in unsatisfactory destinations, due to proper selection and marketing.
- Given the inseparable character of tourism products the need for alignment of elements is high, branding can have a valuable contribution in positioning the elements.
- Tourism experiences are to a large extent based on service encounters, a brand can offer a standard which provides direction and focus for service personnel to work towards the same outcomes.

In the leisure en tourism sector service encounters are essential. The interaction between consumer and service provider fairly contributes to the experience of the consumer (De Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2001). Evaluation of service brands highly depends on service personnel, their understanding of and commitment to the brand. As service branding is about making promises, consumers should have the feeling you are able to help deliver the experience they are looking for.

A service brand draws promises of future satisfaction, through marketing and advertisements. When choosing a brand the perceived brand equity is important. Brand equity is the extent to which a consumer is familiar with the brand and what experiences it had with the brand. These two factors account for the value of the brand as is illustrated by the service-branding model by Berry (2000). This model explains what service-brand equity is composed of and how the different elements relate to each other (see figure 4).

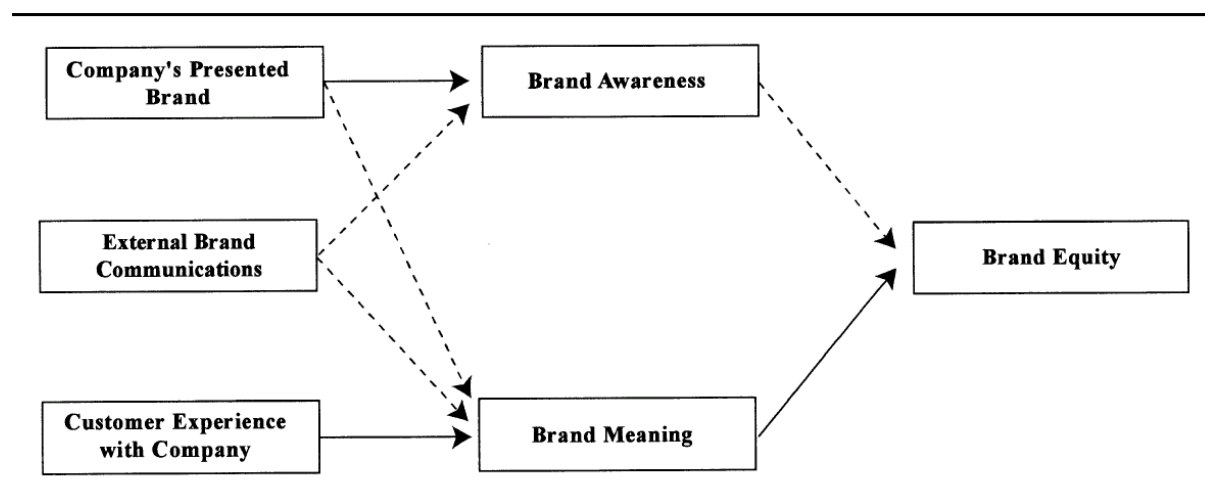


Figure 4. Service-branding model (Berry 2000)

The model of Berry (2000) starts with the concept 'Company's Presented Brand', which is the controlled communication by the brand itself. It involves the logo, visual presentation, advertisement, service facilities and providers. By these features the brand actually presents itself to the market; it's everything a consumer can see. The presented brand directly influences the concept of 'Brand Awareness', which is the degree to which a consumer recognizes and remembers the existence of a brand. Brand awareness can be measured by asking consumers about the brand that comes to mind in a specific branch. When asked about fast food for example, McDonald's and Burger King probably have a very high brand awareness. Underneath company's presented brand, the concept of 'External Brand Communications' is situated, which encompasses all information that reaches the consumer different than information provided by the company itself. This contains for example word-of-mouth communication and publicity. These communication forms are intangible for a company and may be

very leading in consumer's choices, as we are often influenced by people within our social environment. In the left bottom of the model the concept of *'Customer Experience with Company'* can be found, which encompasses the actual encounters consumers have had with a company. Typically for services, the actual service-encounter largely influences the appreciation of it. This is shown in the way the consumer experience directly influences the concept *'Brand Meaning'*. Brand meaning is the range of perceptions and impressions which directly comes to someone's mind when thinking of a brand; the dominant thoughts about the brand. Finally, brand meaning and brand awareness together determine *'Brand Equity'*, which is the value consumers in the end give to a brand and results in the response of consumers to the marketing of the brand (Berry 2000).

2.3 Collaboration in a tourism destination

Collaboration vs. Cooperation

Cooperation and collaboration are frequently used terms in tourism planning, but there is little literature which distinguish the two inter-organisational processes (Jamal and Getz 1995). Cooperation is characterized by Jamal and Getz (1995) as 'working together to some end', they argue the absence of the complex interpretations and necessary conditions presented in the term collaboration. Cooperation is often stated in the aims which should be achieved when working together. Collaboration focuses on mutual goals as part of a joint working process. As cooperation starts because of a stated agenda, collaboration starts with defining the communal goals (London 1995). A regularly used definition for collaboration is given by Gray (1989, p. 5):

"A process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible."

Chrislip and Larson (1994, p. 5) also give a useful definition, which describes important aspects of the process:

"It is a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties who work toward common goals by sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for achieving results. It is more than simply sharing knowledge and information (communication) and more than a relationship that helps each party achieve its own goals (cooperation and coordination). The purpose of collaboration is to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party."

These definitions stress the fact that collaboration is a way to reach a goal which is beyond the reach of each individual participant. In this framework collaboration is used to describe the complexity of the strategic relationships of entrepreneurs in tourism destination marketing. Gray (1989) argues that collaboration could advantage competing stakeholders in a destination when they recognize the potential benefits.

Collaboration characteristics

Within a destination the fragmentation within services is high. There are many products, stakeholders, organisational bodies and individuals who together deliver the tourism product. For visitors, these all partially contribute to the actual destination image that they have, which is established through numerous experiences and encounters within the destination. Due to a large range in different stakeholders and the complexity of the relationships between them, a destination is said to be one of the most difficult products to manage and market (Fyall and Garrod 2005; Fyall and Leask 2006; Fyall et al. 2005). It is argued that for the destination to be best marketed, a collaborative marketing approach is needed to coordinate all different entities involved (Fyall and Leask 2006; Blumberg

2005). This is claimed to be particularly relevant to tourism as a variety of organisations form a relational cluster which draws up the actual destination perceived by visitors (Pavlovich 2003). Next to this, there are interdependencies between entrepreneurs within a destination because of the different products and services delivered (Bregoli 2013). Within the destination, tourism destination marketing is necessary both to coordinate the stakeholders working in the destination and the marketing of the destination as a whole. A challenge within tourism destination marketing is to get stakeholders working on communal goals, make them recognize the need to work together on a set of goals and, recognize and adopt them in their daily work.

There are numerous reasons for entrepreneurs to collaborate with other entrepreneurs, which commonly are in line with evolvments in the market. Possible reasons which lead to the willingness or possibly even necessity to collaborate are changes in the economy or technology, decreasing growth, increasing competition or increasing interdependency (Gebrekidan and Awuah 2002). Generally the primary goal of an entrepreneur to collaborate with others is to increase its profits (Lombarts 2011), which in tourism is accompanied by the goal to enhance the physical, economic and social renewal of the destination (Novelli et al. 2006). Collaboration works when a number of entrepreneurs together can achieve better results than each entrepreneur could individually. However, in order to have valuable collaboration, entrepreneurs should be willing to contribute. In this case willingness strongly relates to the degree to which they are aware of the added value. The following points explain possible added values of collaboration (Fyall et al. 2001):

- Better access and efficient use of resources as time, finance, training, expertise
- Opportunity to improve destination marketing and establish destination branding
- Possibility to advance shared visions and state communal goals
- Natural congruence of objectives between small and medium sized enterprises
- Ability to reduce individual risk and uncertainty through the sharing of market information
- Increase the interaction with partners, with possible joint-research and discussion groups
- Effective representation of the industry to government and politics

Lombarts (2011) and Londen (1995) mention some aspects which can lead to bottlenecks or problems within collaboration:

- Stakeholders don't agree on the actual problem and/or goal of the collaboration
- Stakeholders have different interests within collaboration or a different degree of interdependency
- The availability of power and/or resources differs between stakeholders
- Stakeholders have a different level of expertise and different access to information about the goals
- The degree to which stakeholders are able to collaborate is unequal

Collaboration exists of processes which don't always occur flawless. As stated by Gray (1989) it is a process of giving and taking by which results can be achieved, which couldn't be achieved by any individual stakeholder.

A question that may rise: what management elements do result in successful destination marketing? Destination marketing and branding are intertwined in a way that branding is the starting point to create a destination image and framework for further destination management (Kotler et al. 2002). Baker and Cameron (2008) wrote a research paper in which they emphasize critical success factors in destination marketing. They start with underlining the fact that destination marketing can only be successful if both the local market as well as the target market are satisfied. The satisfaction of the needs of local entrepreneurs and residents is as important as the satisfaction of the actual visitors

(Baker and Cameron 2008). Furthermore Buhalis (2000) stated four marketing objectives of strategic destination management, which describe successful destination marketing:

- Enhance long-term prosperity of local inhabitants
- Satisfy visitors by maximising their desired experience
- Maximising profits of local entrepreneurs and maximise multiplier effects
- Optimise a sustainable balance in economic benefits and, social-cultural and environmental costs

The success factors for destination marketing as stated by Baker and Cameron (2008) are divided in four categories: 'strategic orientation', 'destination identity and image', 'stakeholder involvement' and 'implementation, monitoring and review'. These four elements together can explain why destination marketing might be successful or not. '*Strategic orientation*' can be defined by the four marketing objectives by Buhalis (2000) which are stated above. These are the actual achievements a destination marketing organisation wants to pursue through time. These objectives again emphasize the role and necessity of a destination marketing organisation, as they transcend all individual entrepreneurial capabilities. '*Destination identity and image*' is the way a brand characterizes itself and wants to be perceived by visitors. This is expressed in the logo, visual representations, communications and facilities, which correspond with the 'Company's presented brand' in the service branding model by Berry (2000). '*Stakeholder involvement*' draws back on the earlier stated necessity of including both the local market and the target market. The involvement of internal stakeholders is essential as they are the ones who eventually have to correspond the message. They can be considered as representatives of the brand and comprehend a major part of the actual brand meaning and equity through interaction with consumers. This again describes the relation between 'Customer experience with company', 'Brand meaning' and 'Brand equity' as explained in the model of Berry (2000). '*Brand implementation, monitoring and review*' form the last two faces of the destination marketing process, but are essential for the destination marketing strategy to succeed. Baker and Cameron (2008) stress the importance of constant monitoring, evaluation and adjustment in order to control and increase the effectiveness of the brand. Only by constantly reviewing and improving necessarily elements in the process and objectives, the intended results can be achieved.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

In the conceptual framework, the service model of Berry (2000) and the critical success factors of Baker and Cameron (2008) will be combined. First all factors from both sources are combined (see figure 5). Later in this chapter this figure is simplified and focused on the situation of the VVV, which is used as the conceptual framework for this research.

In the figure the two theories are taken together, to display the complete picture of destination branding and strategic collaboration. On top of the figure strategic orientation is situated. For successful collaboration, first a common strategic orientation should be present and agreed on. This orientation consists of a material component which contains the destination identity and image, and a social component which contains stakeholder involvement. These two components will on their turn effect the first three components of the service branding model: company's presented brand, external brand communication and customer experience with company. These components are responsible for the actual evaluation of the brand, as seen in the framework as brand awareness and brand meaning. Which in combination lead to the brand equity, the perceived value of the brand. Then implementation, monitoring and review is at the right side of the figure, which connects brand equity back to strategic orientation. This connection illustrates the necessity to always monitor and evaluate the results of the process, which may lead to improvements of the actual strategy. The figure could also be illustrated as a circle, a process which is continuously running to optimize destination marketing and strategic

collaboration.

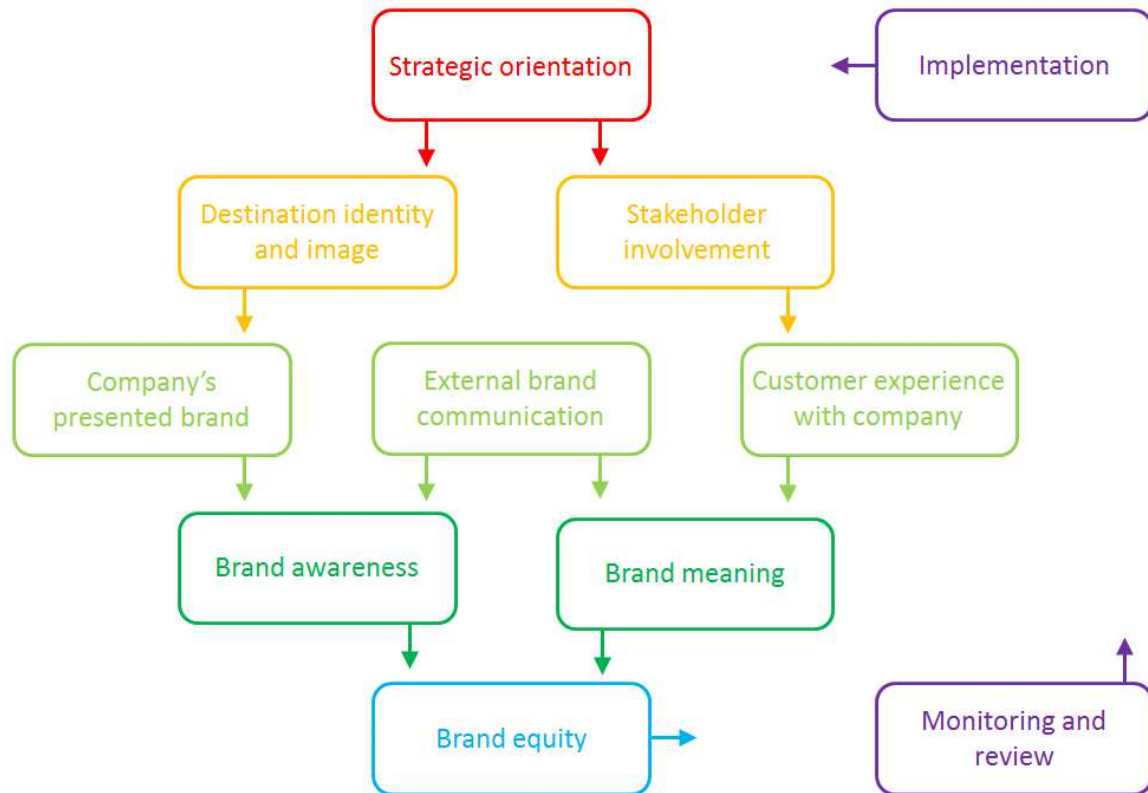


Figure 5. Combining Service model and Critical success factors

In this research the emphasize is put on 'Stakeholder involvement'. As Baker and Cameron (2008, p.90) state:

"..before a destination brand can attain success with visitors, its internal stakeholder groups such as local residents and businesses must understand and be made aware of the destination brand and its potential impacts."

The figure above illustrates a general model applicable on service brands. To make a suitable conceptual framework for this research, the focus will be on a number of the components from this model. In figure 6 the conceptual framework is illustrated, featuring stakeholder involvement and influencing factors. 'Strategic orientation' has a direct effect on stakeholder involvement. This relation is in line with the literature, as stakeholders have to be able to recognize and adopt the strategic orientation in collaboration. In this research, the strategic orientation of the VVV has to be recognized and adopted by the entrepreneurs to be successful. When entrepreneurs do not recognize the purpose of the VVV, they won't be involved. Next to the direct effect of strategic orientation on stakeholder involvement, the strategic orientation has an effect on both the 'Company's presented brand' and 'Customer experience with company' (De Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2001; Berry 2000). Which in this research involves the presentation of the brand VVV, and how this is perceived by entrepreneurs. In the figure above 'Company's presented brand' and 'Customer experience with company' are placed underneath 'Stakeholder involvement', but they also have an effect on stakeholder involvement. The brand itself has to be attractive to the entrepreneur, which is among others determined by the design and interactions with the brand. When the 'Company's presented brand' or 'Customer experience with company' is experienced negatively, the entrepreneur is less likely to get involved with the brand. The 'Company's presented brand' is the appearance of the brand, the message it conceptualizes and distributes (Berry 2000). If this doesn't contribute to the

entrepreneur’s message, he is less likely to collaborate. The branding company should ensure there’s a fit between the entrepreneur’s needs and the values and features of the brand (Baker and Cameron 2008). ‘Customer experience with company’ is essential, in this case the entrepreneurs are the customers of the VVV. Marketing and communication build a brand, but the actual experience an entrepreneur has with the brand is far more powerful (Berry 2000). This experience is for example based on the way the company/staff interacts with the entrepreneurs (De Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2001). Employees have an important role in building entrepreneur’s relationships with the brand (De Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2001). These two factors have an effect on ‘Brand equity’. The ‘Brand equity’ has to be perceived as an added value to the existing marketing. Branding can only be successful when there is unity and commitment for a common branding strategy (Bregoli 2013). ‘Brand equity’ is also influenced by ‘External brand communication’, but as this isn’t in control of the company itself it is left out of the conceptual framework.

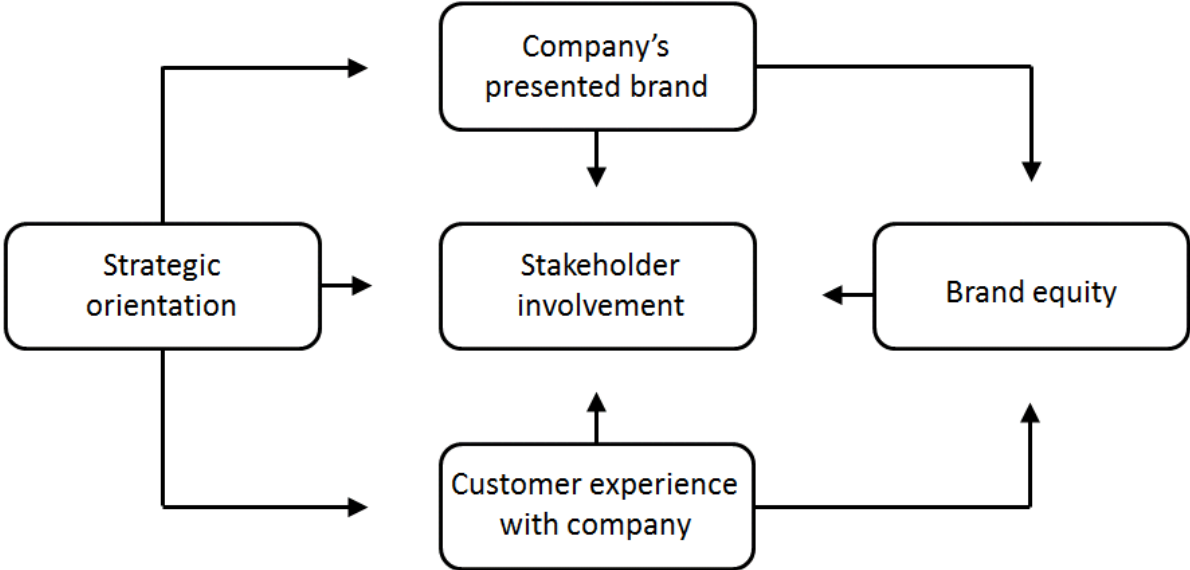


Figure 6. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework is used as a guide to structure the questions stated in the interview guide. By operationalizing the concepts and the relations between them, the interview questions are formulated. The framework will again function as a guide when structuring results and drawing valuable conclusions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The research questions of this study are answered by a qualitative study. A qualitative approach is suitable in this context as we're looking for perceptions and the opinions of entrepreneurs. The advantage in this approach is the ability to probe and interrogate about the deeper meaning or thoughts of specific elements of behaviour or attitudes which are highlighted by respondents. Next to that respondents can tell their own story and are able to give extra information which is important to him/her. The research has an exploratory character, it takes the whole sector in account without focusing on a specific target group or geographical characteristics. In this way it can give a clear image of the variety of perceptions of entrepreneurs, but can't align details to a specific selection.

Data is collected via interviewing 27 entrepreneurs within the field of tourism, leisure and recreation, scattered over the Netherlands. The interviewed entrepreneurs are members of the local VVV organisations. They have experience with the practices and services of the VVV and have been in contact with them. This has given them knowledge about the organisation, by which they can give a valuable subjective image of the VVV which is based on actual experiences.

For the interviews an interview guide is designed, which structures the interviews. Next to the interview guide probing will be used to ask about the thoughts and visions which lay behind the perceptions of entrepreneurs. The disadvantage of this method is that the results are indicative and not representative for the whole network.

3.2 Selection of participants

The aim is to have a good division over the network of the VVV. A selection of 27 entrepreneurs is drawn, with businesses scattered over the Netherlands. The NDTRC will be used to select the entrepreneurs. This database which is maintained by the VVV consists of the majority of entrepreneurs in tourism, leisure and recreation in the Netherlands. Within the selection there has to be an appropriate distribution over the Netherlands and over the different types of VVV's: Regional Bureau of Tourism, Regional VVV and Stand Alone. As a more regional VVV organisation can function totally different from a big city or an individual town.

The sample of entrepreneurs is chosen selectively. Choices in the selection of the entrepreneurs are based on input by professionals of VVV Nederland. By this a proper geographical division and representation of the different types of VVV's is obtained. The entrepreneurs which are invited for an interview work in the field of tourism and recreation. A network which mostly contains accommodation, attractions and activities. Restaurants and cafes for example aren't taken into account as they're more dependent on residents and less involved in the VVV organisations.

In this research the type of VVV is an important characteristic in the selection of participants, as the three different types are likely to have a different management style. An equal distribution over the Netherlands is less important, as there is no aim to state differences in place characteristics. Said differently it is interesting to know what an entrepreneur thinks of the VVV along different management styles, the actual location of the reviewed VVV is irrelevant.

3.3 Data collection and recording

The data was collected by 27 semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs in the tourism, leisure and recreation sector. The interviews were held according to an interview guide which is designed from the theoretical framework. The essential concepts are operationalized and used to formulate the questions of the interview guide. In the semi-structured interviews the interview guide is directorial, which should lead the interviewee to express about the topics of interest in this research. Then the interviewer's task is to get in-depth information about the thoughts and views which result in the perceptions of the entrepreneurs. Probing was used, when further information is needed to get a insight in the way the perceptions are constructed by specific thoughts and experiences. Probing was essential to get a clear insight in the situation and will be used according to own understanding. However the interviewer avoided to be leading and shouldn't impose meanings. The interview guide that was used for the interviews can be found in appendix 1 of this report.

An important point of interest in the approach to entrepreneurs is the way the central subject is addressed. The service brand VVV is used by 79 franchise takers, but every entrepreneur is free to use it in its own way. Some entrepreneurs call themselves VVV, as VVV Zuid Limburg for example, by which there is a very clear affiliation with the brand and the organisation will be recognised as being a VVV organisation. For other organisations it's just a tool within their own destination management. In these cases the organisation has its own name and presentation in which VVV is less visible. In bigger cities, where regional bureaus for tourism are active, the VVV brand is often almost invisible. In these situations entrepreneurs have a connection with the destination management organisation (DMO) instead of the VVV. When these entrepreneurs are being interviewed they will respond with answers that are applicable on the DMO as being a VVV organisation. The answers may not always derive from the management that is typically of a VVV, but of this specific organisation. These results won't be directly applicable on the VVV organisations in general, but may provide interesting information about different working methods.

By using interviews, the data is also dependent on the interview skills of the researcher. Dependent on the questions and probing of the interviewer, relevant and in depth answers are given. Especially within the first interviews the interview guide was strictly followed, and probing was limited. As more interviews were held, the structure of the interviews was getting looser and there were more in depth questions and answers. Important aspects were getting clearer, so there was more attention paid to the crucial aspects. Because of these developments within the research technique, the data of the first interviews may differ from the data of the last interviews. However, this difference mostly consists of an increase in the quality of data. The difference is mainly the completeness of the information, instead of the meaning and kind of information.

Since the research is qualitative, it can't be said to be representative. However, through the interviews there were a number of attitudes which returned several times. After approximately 20 interviews there were no unique answers given, except for details. Still it was worth to do 7 more interviews, to confirm the image there was and to strengthen patterns through the interviews.

All interviews were recorded by a voice recorder, after the participant agreed on recording at the start of the interview.

3.4 Data processing and analysis

The data received from the interviews is literally transcribed. The transcriptions of the interviews only involve spoken words. Features as pauses, thinking and body language were not taken into account. After transcription all sentences were coded according to the content, by assigning them to a specific subject. After all sentences were coded, data with the same subject were distinguished and analysed sufficiently. By doing so, conclusions could easily be drawn by the structure of the subjects.

Even since there were no complete unique answers after 20 interviews, what makes the answers of the respondents exhaustive, it is not representative. That's because of the qualitative character of the research, as every situation is unique. Every VVV location is able to determine its own strategy and activities. There is no strict plan for members of the VVV to follow within their marketing plan, they are free to follow their own way. By this, every VVV organization is simply unique. They may be comparable on many aspects, but in the end they are all independent entrepreneurs.

Within the research there have been a number of moments where the researcher made choices. The participant selection for example, which was chosen selectively, with a proper geographical and function distribution. Within the process of choosing respondents there are anyhow subjective choices made, possible because of personal interests or other reasons with or without noticing. Next to that, within the analysis there are also choices made in the quotes which are used to clarify the results. Even before the choices, the interpretation of the data is also subject to subjectivity, as the researcher already got an impression of the situation and always has its own opinion. Even as the research is done as objective as possible, there may be an effect of subjectivity by the author. Next to that, the interviews were all held in Dutch, after which the chosen quotes were translated to English. Therefore, the quotes are not literally the words of the respondent and may consist of some nuances.

The results were analysed and the conceptual framework is evaluated according to them, as the results are also structured according to the concepts of the conceptual framework.

4. Results

In this chapter the results of the data collection will be described in five themes: Organisation and strategic orientation, service and image, contact and experiences, added value and brand equity, and position and role in the future. The quotes of respondents are used to clarify and support the results. Respondents are used anonymous, the names in the text are fictional.

4.1 Organisation and strategic orientation

Entrepreneurs have diverse thoughts and opinions about the VVV as an organization in the leisure and tourism sector in the Netherlands. Commonly VVV is seen as a trustworthy organization which is able to inform visitors about the leisure possibilities in the area. VVV did build a good reputation in the past and is considered as an authority in the sector. As Rianne Roodhuis, manager of a large holiday park, mentions: *"It is an authority, which is developed through the years. I don't know how long they exist, but certainly very long. They developed it and simply have a strong name"*. Especially in the past they were an excellent place to visit when you needed information about the surrounding area. Evelien Overgaww of a large attraction says: *"The trustworthiness which they disperse. To my opinion, the VVV has all necessary information, at least they should have all information"*.

What entrepreneurs notice as being the VVV is the physical office that can be visited in a town centre, a host who can help you in terms of information, promotion material and relating products as maps and souvenirs. Jan Glaser, a medium sized leisure entrepreneur, for example said: *"The name VVV, then I think about the VVV offices, the real office itself. So actually not about 'Liefde voor Limburg' (Regional Bureau of Tourism), I really think of the offices where people can ask for information. That is the VVV to me"*. As this was very clear in the past, it is getting less obvious these days. New organizational structures appeared, such as city marketing organizations or regional promotion offices, the organizational structure became less transparent for entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are not always sure about the relationship between the VVV and other promotional organizations. As different organizational titles are used in the field and the VVV concept is often used next to a destination marketing organisation or regional office of tourism, respondents find it hard to distinguish the actual focus and tasks of the organizations behind it. In Utrecht for example there is a central organization named Tourism Utrecht, which also includes the VVV office, but the relation between these two and the division of tasks is not completely clear to entrepreneurs. Especially for entrepreneurs for whom leisure and tourism is not a core business, the relation is hard to understand. As Froukje de Bruyn, an entrepreneur who has a campsite as an additional function, states: *"It's not clear who does what. But if I want an advertisement, it's usually linked to the VVV or Tourism Utrecht. For me it is not clear who does what exactly"*.

Entrepreneurs do have a clear view on the aim of the VVV. According to the respondents the main objective of the VVV is to inform visitors about an area or a city and show them the many possibilities the area has to offer. The original function of information supply is most recognized by entrepreneurs. As Saskia Slager, manager of a campsite, states: *"The word already says it, inform tourists about everything we have here. Bringing together supply and demand, I have the idea the focus is still on the visitor who walks in physically"*. Entrepreneurs do also see an added value in attracting more visitors, in the promotion of the place and/or area. Subsequently they do link the work of the VVV to the revenues of leisure entrepreneurs, they have the feeling it does contribute to the leisure economy. The answers about the objective of the VVV were unambiguous, the goals of the VVV are recognizable. What is less obvious, is the actual handling within the physical locations. Entrepreneurs have a lack of insight in the number and kind of handlings the hosts do and find it hard to predict to what extent the

service is actually used for what it's meant for. Like Josien Olislager, employee of a museum, says: *"They can't provide me with this data, which would help to clarify their status. I want to know, if I place a banner, how many persons clicked on it. Or when I bring my brochures there, how many people take them. You can measure so many things"*. When asking about the future of the VVV, the fact that entrepreneurs don't have a clear insight in what actually happens in the VVV shop is regularly referred to. Rianne Roodhuis for example recalls the objectives of the VVV, but is uncertain about the actual actions: *"Yes, cause in the end the VVV and we both want the same. But like I said, so now and then I go to the shop, but what they exactly do is unclear to me"*. Since they do not exactly know what is happening in the VVV location it is hard to name the necessity, the added value for the sector. Entrepreneurs are interested in the visitor numbers of the VVV, both in the physical location and on the website, where do visitors of the VVV come from and what do they come for. For example, for entrepreneurs with a more regional target group it is very valuable to know if the regional public is visiting the VVV or not. Like Froukje de Bruyn, who has a regional target group: *"If you would see that 50% of the visitors are from this region and 50% is tourist, that would change the story. So, that's something that would be interesting, but I expect 80% to be tourists"*.

The respondents were asked about their junction with the VVV, like the similarity in objectives, and a wide range of answers was given. The focus and the target group of the entrepreneurs largely influenced their involvement with the VVV. When entrepreneurs have a purely touristic focus, when their main target group consists of people from outside the region, the connection with the VVV tends to be large. They do see common objectives in attracting visitors to the area and taking care of the quality of the visit. A pure recreational entrepreneur, Jasmijn Nieuwekerk, also recalls common objectives: *"In the end we all have the same objective and that's making people come here. That's what we work on, and everybody here is. And as VVV you should endorse it"*. However, entrepreneurs find it hard to give concrete expression to the meaning the VVV has for the sector and the entrepreneur themselves. This is of course diffuse, it isn't easily stated in extra euro's. However, when recreation and tourism is an additional task or they have a different target group, like a focus on local residents, the connection with the VVV rapidly decreases. An entrepreneur who focuses on its restaurant, with a small campsite next to it does recall the objective, but doesn't see what they offer them: *"They are a platform for everybody who wants to know what's going on in the province, that's the place to be. But that's all I know. What added value can they really have for me as entrepreneur, what do they contribute.."*

Entrepreneurs do see the value that the VVV could have for the sector, both for now as well as for the future. It appears that the *'strategic orientation'* is recognized by most entrepreneurs and also seen as valuable for the sector.

The VVV is still considered as an authority in the sector, which is embodied in the physical locations. However, what happens in the shops themselves is unclear to entrepreneurs.

4.2 Services and image

In former days, the services of the VVV were more exclusive and unique since people didn't know so much about other places and were not able to look it up as easily as nowadays. Among others, internet did change these facts, as we can find almost everything we need at any place. We already know far more when arriving at our destination, and we can also find the information online at the destination. Marianne Overbeek, who is organizing daytrips, notices better preparation on forehand: *"Nine out of ten times when you want to do something and you have the opportunity to prepare yourself, you're surfing the internet"*. Next to this also new information suppliers pop up, like

'dagjeuit.nl' or 'zoover.nl'. Entrepreneurs notice these, and whether or not free, they do offer them a substantial response of new visitors. Like Gerrit de Vries, owner of a campsite, who found out an advertisement on 'Marktplaats' has a good result: *"When I put something on 'Marktplaats', you don't want to know how many reactions I receive. All new customers and there are always 1 or 2 who stay. There is much more in it than the VVV at the moment"*. Besides, entrepreneurs tend to help their visitors more and more themselves, they provide all kind of information both on their own website and on location, and sometimes they even sell tickets for attractions at the accommodation.

As already stated, traditionally the VVV is seen as a well-known truthful information source, which involves an enormous amount of information. However, entrepreneurs think it is getting outdated and notice passivity of the organization. Entrepreneurs compare it with a library. As Jos Lantink, an active horeca entrepreneur, said: *"My image of the VVV is that it's the same image as a library for example, these are institutes of the past. So I don't get a sparkling feeling with it, with the VVV"*. They're aware of the enormous amount of information it has to offer, but the position of the VVV is changing. Some entrepreneurs expect the VVV to have a lower budget and do relate this to passiveness in the organisation. The hostesses are also mentioned in relation to this passiveness. As they are often thought to work voluntarily. This results from the image entrepreneurs may have of the VVV, an organization with low professionalism. As Jos Lantink talks about a VVV location: *"...the treat is not that sparkling. It is like housewives having a voluntary job, who are mostly busy with themselves and each other, and then ..oh ..oh there is somebody, you know. Being surprised there is somebody, almost feeling uncomfortable"*.

The logo of the VVV is considered extremely recognisable, entrepreneurs expect everybody to know the logo. Therefore they wouldn't advocate to change it, as it could lose its recognition. Some would modernize it a bit, but then only by modest adjustments. As Marie Groot, running a small bed & breakfast, mentioned: *"The logo is very recognizable, sometimes you shouldn't want to change things. You could of course restyle it, but you shouldn't totally change it"*. The opinions about the VVV locations are varying, from very positive to rather negative. What entrepreneurs value the most is a central location, if people enter a town centre they should almost automatically walk right into it. Like Jasmijn Nieuwekerk stated: *"At a central location, the VVV just needs a very central and clear point where people notice them. When I'm in a city and I would like to go to the VVV, then you simply walk into the centre and you should automatically walk into it"*. A train station is evaluated as a good location, depending on the distance to the city centre. A VVV shop in a car free city centre is evaluated negatively, since it isn't easy accessible by car. A shop-in-shop formula, a VVV merges with a library or a bookstore, received varying evaluations. Some entrepreneurs do understand the situation, as they are well informed about the situation. Others see it as an abatement, through which it becomes harder for a VVV to show their strength. Jasmijn Nieuwekerk saw a strong decrease of the VVV as a result of a change in location: *"In the past we had a nice VVV, somewhat central. Then it was hidden in a building on the upper floor, of which you almost couldn't find the entrance. Then it was replaced to the library. So in the past it was good, but the last years up till now, it's just bad"*.

Entrepreneurs would like to see a more active, even a proactive VVV. They state that the VVV should always look for new opportunities to better facilitate the sector, both entrepreneurs and consumers. In this way the VVV will also reach a top of mind position. For reaching this, entrepreneurs suggest a location which is customized to different target groups, for example divided in different age groups or interests. Every visitor should walk out with a personal and independent advise. Instead of having to pick a number and wait for your turn, which makes it feel like a governmental office. As Marianne Overbeek said: *"Inspire people, and not that you have to pick a number when you walk in. At the municipality you also have to pick a number when you want a new drivers license"*. Entrepreneurs talk about a lack of professionalism, and they acknowledge that especially small locations often don't have enough manpower themselves, nor professional employees to stimulate professionalism. A solution could be to profit from combined developments such as administrative software or advertisements. Larger entrepreneurs mention that they also work with ticket-selling at VVV locations, but the response

from this locations as part of the total is insignificant. They do value the marketing approach of the VVV, in which the VVV thinks along with entrepreneurs and they know what is going on in the sector. As Josien Olislager mentions: *“Yes, with the organization regarding marketing the VVV is doing very good, they really think along, they understand the situation, they know what's going on. Which is very pleasant”*. However, entrepreneurs often have to deal with more than one location, as many entrepreneurs have a more regional or even national market. Which makes it inefficient as they have to pay contribution and communicate with different locations. That's why entrepreneurs see the advantages of more regional VVV locations. Like Dirk de Graaf, manager of a zoo: *“You notice a regional bureau develops according the trends, as it has to. They have a wider distribution, so they develop booklets and campaigns for a large area. Which gives a bigger volume, which is much more interesting for us than the VVV on the corner”*.

Entrepreneurs do value the network of the VVV's, which consists of all locations in the Netherlands and the network of all kinds of leisure and tourism entrepreneurs, located at the destination. At several places the VVV is organizing events to bring the sector together, like network meetings. But in many places entrepreneurs don't know about these events. This can be due to the fact that not many VVV's organize such meetings or that the VVV doesn't communicate these events well enough. However, it became clear that many entrepreneurs would be interested in these events, especially for meeting entrepreneurs from their sector, favourable comparable ones. Like Evelien Overgaww says: *“That seems very interesting to me, VVV facilitating a kind of network day. Where you can get in contact with other VVV locations, other attractions, other hotels”*. Some entrepreneurs have been to a meeting of the VVV, but didn't feel involved because the topic was not applicable or on a different management level. So for the VVV it is important to address the right entrepreneurs on the right event. The entrepreneurs state that simply meeting other entrepreneurs is most valuable to them, like Richard Ruygt, owner of a campsite: *“Yes, start with the organization of a branch afternoon or evening, just to sit together. Arrange a guest speaker and especially a long pre- and after drink. Mutual contact is very valuable, which is absent now, at least not organized by the VVV”*.

In short, it became clear that the brand of the VVV is evaluated properly by the respondents, who are familiar with the brand. The strength of the brand mostly relates to the enormous brand awareness, everybody is familiar with it and knows what it stands for. This has to do with the fact that the VVV is relatively old and well-known, and as such there is a continuity in the presented brand. People know it, and are familiar with it. Therefore respondents think this brand should not be changed because it could lose its familiarity. However, it may be updated in some cases. Moreover, the respondents do have some remarks about the products of the VVV which could move more towards the digital domain.

Originally the VVV has a very strong image, but this is decreasing because of changes in the market. Entrepreneurs call the need for an proactive attitude of the organization.

4.3 Contact and experiences

Entrepreneurs were asked about the contact they have with the VVV. Some entrepreneurs do have good and frequent contact with the VVV which can be weekly, monthly or once a year. In these cases, both the VVV and the entrepreneur know what is going on in the other organization and what they can do for each other. However more entrepreneurs indicate that the contact is not sufficient or minimal, and moreover, that contact decreased compared the former days when there was more personal contact. For example someone of the VVV walked in or called on a frequent basis and entrepreneurs mentioned that there was more direct contact about possible visitors. As Gerrit de Vries notices: *“Well, they will probably be active, but you don't notice it anymore. Before you noticed it. Then we had*

contact with each other, they called once in a while, or the other way around". This decline in personal contact is sometimes related to the internet. As said by Gerrit de Vries: *"In former days you went to the VVV ladies once in a while, where you could discuss some things. Which is still possible, they do not chase you away, but it is far easier to sneak behind the computer and write an email"*. VVV incidentally visits an entrepreneur, where entrepreneurs indicate that they appreciate personal contact. There is often a lack of a contact moments or a lack of a central platform, by which contact with other entrepreneurs is possible. It's not only personal contact, but the overall contact with the VVV seems to be limited and regularly only consists of contact because of advertisements. Like Richard Ruygt indicated: *"Well, they only call when an advertisement has to be bought. Furthermore you do not hear them"*.

The findings show a positive relation between the quality and the amount of contact entrepreneurs have with the VVV, the involvement of the respondent and their vision on the future role of the VVV. When entrepreneurs have more and better contact with the VVV, the involvement with the VVV organization is higher, as can be seen in the response of Josien Olislager: *"..since I know the organization behind the VVV, I look at it in a different, a better way. So maybe they should better promote it, I don't know. Cause you notice there's a lot of knowledge and a lot going on, which you do not notice as consumer. You only see the VVV location, that's it"*. Jos Lantink has a similar response: *"I think many entrepreneurs, except for hotels and theme parks, have little reason to contact the local VVV. And if there isn't much contact, or no contact at all, you can't say you're involved"*. However, when the entrepreneur feels more involved in the organization, they are more positive about the future role of the VVV. This can mean that much more is happening within the VVV organization than people notice automatically. When there is no sufficient contact, entrepreneurs don't know everything which might cause a distort image of the amount of activities organized by the VVV. A lack of communication can be the cause of this. Some entrepreneurs see a decline in the role of the VVV, like Anita Brendert, manager of a large attraction: *"However with the introduction of the internet, and since 50+ers become handier with the computer, the VVV starts to lose its role in information supply"*. However, more involvement and confidence with the organization in the future might be gained by improving the communication about the activities and the added value of the organization as a whole and of single locations as well. This is also necessary as visiting a VVV is not that obvious anymore, as Gerrit de Vries notices: *"It is as if people do not go there anymore, the road there was far easier before... In former days you went there without a doubt, it was obviously"*. At this moment the involvement of entrepreneurs is decreasing, following the answers of the respondents. This can be related to the fact that the amount of contact moments is decreasing, which can result in a decreasing confidence in the future role of the VVV.

However, it also became clear that relatively large entrepreneurs do evaluate the contact they have with the VVV as accurate. As Evelien Overgauw, a large entrepreneur, says: *"Yes, about once or twice a year we meet each other to sit around the table and next to that we have regular contact by mail or telephone"*. But this is partly because of the entrepreneurs' initiative, who often have employees who focus especially on marketing and promotion, and contact the VVV when needed. The same entrepreneur, Evelien Overgauw, continues talking about improving the communication: *"I think it is a matter of proactivity, it now mostly comes from our side. VVV is one of our partners, so we do approach them for an appointment"*. Thus it seems to be related to the capacity; small entrepreneurs lack the capacity to contact the VVV themselves. Moreover there is no relation between the type of VVV organization and the amount of contact: some stand-alone VVV locations do have good contact with the entrepreneurs where a city marketing organization doesn't, and the other way around. An owner of a small museum, member of a stand-alone VVV organization states: *"He knows exactly what kind of museum you are, as he has already been here a few times. The contact is pretty close and that's of course important"*. At the same time a campsite owner connected to a RBT states: *"No, they come once a year and then they ask if I want an advertisement"*. It's more likely that there's a tendency in which the amount of contact is dependent on the relevance of the type of entrepreneur, but this isn't found continuously either.

The findings showed that the *'Customer experience with the company'* is very important. A decrease in the perceived added value of the VVV for the sector and changes in the market, made the position of the VVV less strong and entrepreneurs' experiences with the organization changed from. In former days, the VVV was a crucial part of their promotion, what isn't present these days. The entrepreneurs claim that the decisiveness of the VVV decreased and therefore also the benefits for entrepreneurs decreased. There was less contact and entrepreneurs stated the added value of the VVV started to fade away. The reputation of an organization can be good, but it still has to stay relevant for its customers.

The contact an entrepreneur has with the VVV, their involvement, and vision on the future are positively related. However, the amount of contact seem to decrease.

4.4 Added value and brand equity

When respondents were asked about the added value of the VVV to the sector, the most common answer was the central position it obtained through time. The VVV is seen as an excellent place to go when you're looking for personal information in the recreational sector. Saskia Slager compares it with the 'telefoongids': *"When I look for a telephone number I go to 'telefoongids.nl' and when I want to do an activity in the region or I'm looking for an accommodation then I should think of the VVV. That's what it always was, and what should remain"*. It used to be the place to visit if you were looking for information about the surroundings and its possibilities. Entrepreneurs state that it is easy accessible, there is an opportunity for personal contact and they have a lot of knowledge about the place and its surroundings. When respondents were asked about the strength of the concept, it was obviously the brand awareness of the VVV by visitors. Everybody knows the brand, and they know what it stands for. As Peter Verschoor, director of a company in guided tours, mentions: *"Everybody is familiar with it. As we know the ANWB, we also know the VVV"*. Another important strength is the image and central information position it obtained through many years, people associate it with trustworthiness and a complete information supply.

However, the added value starts to fade away in the eyes of the entrepreneurs. In former days it was self-evident that you would visit the VVV if you were looking for information, but entrepreneurs doubt if that's still the case. The enormous growth of information on the internet is a very important cause mentioned by entrepreneurs. Next to that they mention the number of new suppliers of touristic information, both on the internet and in other media like magazines. As Anita Brendert states: *"Yes, that's totally different now. Because of the new kinds of media which are present now, by which the VVV to some extent loses its dominant role"*. In the meantime entrepreneurs see a decline of physical VVV stores, some locations have to stop and others start a collaboration with a library or a bookstore. As Leon de Boer, owner of a campsite and marina, states: *"Why did they start a collaboration with another? That's a good indicator, right? Before it was a separate building in the center, which had charisma. But if you're part of a bookstore, you can't provide this charisma"*. At the moment some entrepreneurs say they support the VVV to extend its right to exist. However, entrepreneurs should be willing to contribute since they have the feeling the VVV can offer a valuable contribution for their company and to the sector as a whole.

Despite the decreasing added value and decline in locations, several entrepreneurs indicate that it would be a shame if the VVV would disappear completely. Like Judith Vermeer, manager of a hotel, said: *"Everybody knows what the VVV is, so it would be a shame if it would disappear. But something"*

has to happen". However, when they were asked which aspects they would miss if the VVV disappears they were hesitant. In the end, many entrepreneurs mentioned the ability of personal contact as an important contribution. At the same time other entrepreneurs predict the drawback of the VVV, these entrepreneurs are mostly not involved and do not have good contact with the VVV. Like Leon de Boer, who doesn't show any involvement, says: *"I think it's the past. People search on the internet in the evenings, they ask if you have a wireless network and then look up everything they need"*.

Visitors already have a lot of information when arriving at their destination. Next to that they easily look up information at the destination, in the hotel or on the campsite. Therefore internet is considered as the main competitor of the VVV and an important reason of a possible decreasing amount of visitors. Like Anita Brendert states: *"People also become more skillful themselves, they find more and more via the computer. I expect internet to be the biggest competitor of the VVV"*. Rick van Overschot, owner of a luxury holiday park, measured the source of their website visit: *"What is clearly seen, in fact Google is the boss. Of almost 1000 visitors on our website last Sunday, 49% came via Google. About 30% directly and the rest via links or other sites"*. Though, an important role for the VVV on the internet is considered positively, when they would gain such a central position as they have had on the physical market.

From the findings we can conclude that the *brand equity* of the VVV is high because of its reputation, which evolved throughout many years it exists and the brand awareness it has for both entrepreneurs and consumers. On the other hand the brand equity decreased, because of a decrease in the added value experienced by entrepreneurs. So in the past the brand equity was very high, but it decreased because of recent developments. The possible added value of the VVV is still known from earlier days, however the added value these days is questionable.

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| The VVV obtained a central role and is seen as an icon in the recreational sector. But the added value started to fade away in the eyes of the entrepreneurs. |
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4.5 Position and role in the future

Asked about the future of the VVV, entrepreneurs find it hard to foresee the developments in coming years. They notice rapid changes in the last 15 years with the internet for example and they sometimes doubt about the future role of the VVV, but at the same time it is hard to say what should be changed or improved.

As already noticed it is not self-evident anymore that customers visit the VVV when they're in need of information. The entrepreneurs mention the VVV has to prove its contribution and its equity these days. People do not simply walk in anymore, they actively have to approach the visitors and entrepreneurs themselves. They have to take initiatives to demonstrate their added value for both consumers and entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs mention the need for the VVV to take action. Like Gerrit de Vries states: *"You have to present yourself, when you would stay and sit here there won't be any visitors in five years. You have to invent things, be active in attracting customers yourself"*. Entrepreneurs request to put a well-developed entrepreneur within each VVV organization, someone who is able to give it a boost and show its contribution and appeal. Jasmijn Nieuwekerk compared it with the management of its own hotel: *"Who is responsible for what this hotel is, that's us. We represent it and we endorse it, we give its appearance. I think it works the same with the VVV, there has to be someone who can express it. Otherwise it's never going to work"*. These days, next to the

internet, VVV is dependent on the personnel, as the experiences of entrepreneurs often include personal interactions. In several cases, when the organization would continue in the current pace, entrepreneurs do not exclude the chance that the VVV would totally disappear.

Entrepreneurs consider digitalization as essential for the future of the VVV. Especially to reach the younger generations, who grew up during times of smartphones and tablets, there should be a transition of the VVV to the internet. Older generations are also seen to get used to the trends and often already use the internet to collect information. Because of these developments, the service on location has to add something to the standard information, which can also be found on the internet. Personal contact is an important aspect which brings people to a physical location. As Jasmijn Nieuwekerk indicates: *“At a certain moment, people want to have a person in front of them. Maybe in ten years that’s not the case, but I actually can’t imagine”*. Entrepreneurs suggest that a VVV should offer tailor made advises to compete with the information supply on the internet. Like Evelien Overgaw, who states: *“..only an information desk isn’t sufficient. I don’t know to what extent it already happens, but what is more and more a trend these days, people who want personalized advices”*. Besides, the VVV location should reflect the character of the location and/or region. To keep entrepreneurs VVV-minded, the VVV should better connect to their needs and demands.

Some entrepreneurs see opportunities for the VVV in broadening their services, they suggest for example to access the business market including meetings and conferences, or wedding and party locations. Like Froukje de Bruyn states, who is more focused on the business market: *“Maybe focused on several markets. So not only on that tourist, but also on the business market. Then it could also be interesting for us”*. However, the entrepreneurs only mention these markets when they’re able to offer these facilities. Next to a broader market there was a suggestion for a different concept, a concept in which every VVV location would be a combination with a grand cafe. As Dirk de Graaf said, a pure recreational entrepreneur: *“Or, I really believe in a different concept. Maybe you should use a coffee concept, or a grand cafe. You know, a place where people can sit down and from where they can absorb the information”*.

These days the finances of VVV locations can be insecure, governments have to economize and revenues may decline. Entrepreneurs were asked about their willingness for a financial contribution when governments for example would retrieve their contribution. It appeared that the willingness to contribute was linked to their notion of the added value of the VVV. Entrepreneurs who perceived a positive added value of the VVV to the sector and their company, were more willing to contribute. However, in order to contribute they would like to have a clear indication what they would get in return. Like Evelien Overgaw says: *“In principal we are willing to obtain promotional packages, but we like to see what is happening. We are willing to invest, but then we simply want to see results”*. For entrepreneurs it is essential that the VVV can show them what outcomes a financial contribution brings them. They are not willing to contribute to the VVV only to give them longer right of existence, they would like to support because they have the feeling it will be valuable for their own company. Entrepreneurs who indicate a decrease in the added value of the VVV are more sceptical, they are less or not willing to contribute. Amongst these were also entrepreneurs who collaborated with the VVV for many years, but who’ve seen a decline in the effectiveness of contributing to the VVV in recent years. Like Richard Ruygt, who has already been a member of the VVV for a long time: *“Well, I think you should see it in a different way, coincidentally I got the bill two weeks ago. When there is no bonding, the arising question ‘if you’re going to pay’ becomes bigger”*.

Another topic that was discussed was the added value incoming tourists have for entrepreneurs in the area. The interviewed entrepreneurs stated that the government should pay an important role, like Rianne Roodhuis: *“To my opinion, the municipality simple has to contribute. I understand there isn’t a lot of money, but without tourists many municipalities and entrepreneurs within municipalities can’t exist”*. They mention that if tourism is beneficial for the whole region, it’s a governmental task to support city marketing and a promotional organization, such as the VVV. Tourism taxes, one of the

biggest discussions in the sector, were also discussed. Entrepreneurs stated that they had to pay the taxes, despite the fact that all other entrepreneurs in the region also benefit from the visitors. Next to that there is no clarity where the money goes to. Entrepreneurs claim that it should directly be used for tourism matters. Rianne Roodhuis claims it is enough to run a VVV location: *“Yes, and see what tourism taxes we have to pay. You could easily exploit a VVV of that amount and possibly even more. But nobody knows where the taxes go”*. However, this is such a big discussion that it is not taken into consideration in this research.

VVV should work more actively on their relationship with both visitors and entrepreneurs. If they have a notion of the added value, entrepreneurs would be willing to contribute.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In the past the role of the VVV in the sector was undeniable. The VVV was the central point if you were looking for information about the surroundings and they were able to provide you all necessary brochures, maps or spoken information. As an entrepreneur, when you were a member of the VVV, the public would automatically find you within the information of the VVV. It was obvious that each self-respecting entrepreneur was connected to the VVV, by which he did reach a large public. However this status has been subject to many changes in the market. People nowadays do not automatically go to the VVV anymore. They can easily find their information on the internet, and other information suppliers have arisen. Despite of the changes in the market, entrepreneurs still recognize the value the VVV can have within the sector. Entrepreneurs still agree on the 'strategic orientation' of the VVV, mentioned as one of the critical success factors of destination branding by Baker and Cameron (2008). Lombarts (2011) and Londen (1995) both mention stakeholders who don't indicate the goal of collaboration, as a possible bottleneck. As entrepreneurs recognize the goals of the VVV, this isn't a bottleneck in this situation. Strengths of the VVV are the enormous brand awareness, a personal approach, trustworthiness and easy accessibility. Though, entrepreneurs do not directly notice added value of the VVV anymore in their daily work. They have seen a decline in the response of consumers via the VVV and a decline in the number of physical locations. Some locations turn into agencies within different stores, which lacks the possibilities to express the actual strengths of the organization namely the completeness, trustworthiness and personal approach.

VVV organizations have to make a transition, to match the demands entrepreneurs and visitors have today. They can't simply stay in the office and wait for consumers to walk in and for entrepreneurs to contact them. Since the market changed, they really have to express themselves and gain a central role in the recreational sector. The VVV has to distinguish themselves in terms of quality and services. They have to be more entrepreneurial and communicative, especially for entrepreneurs to show their contribution they offer for a membership. In doing so, they can strengthen the presented brand which is important because as Berry (2000, page 130) states: "*A presented brand can generate greater brand awareness, stimulate new customer trial, and reinforce and strengthen the brand meaning with existing customers*". This could possibly be in terms of marketing information, e.g. how many visitors they have in the location, as well as on the internet, the characteristics of their visitors, what they actually do within the location and on the website. Entrepreneurs want to know precisely what happens with the money they invest in an organization as the VVV. Therefore, the organization has to be very transparent about what they do and they have to be able to communicate this to their members, by which everybody knows what is going on. This is in line with the model of Berry (2000), claiming that *external brand communications* both has an effect on the *brand awareness* and the *brand meaning*. In order to stay relevant these days, the VVV has to take a different role. In the past visitors and entrepreneurs used to approach them, as they knew there was something in it for them, whether it was information or extra revenues. However, nowadays this is not the case anymore. Therefore, the VVV has to leave their offices and approach both visitors and entrepreneurs more actively. Since personal contact is still very much appreciated by entrepreneurs, this will lead to more involvement of them.

The representation of the VVV is changing. In the past the VVV location was the central, and one and only, point which represented the VVV. Now there is movement between locations, agencies and the internet. In the eyes of entrepreneurs the VVV is still mainly seen as the physical location. Some VVV locations start a collaboration with other shops and establish a corner with regional information in for example a bookstore or a library. However entrepreneurs evaluate this as an abatement. They state it is out of sight and an agency is not able to keep the original strengths, like easy accessibility, personal

contact and a complete offer. Next to that, many entrepreneurs are familiar with the internet website, but do not mention it as an added value of the VVV these days. There is a transition going on from physical information in terms of maps and brochures to almost any kind of information on the internet. The VVV is also developing its online services, a new template for VVV websites is developed and individual VVV organizations have developed websites and applications. But entrepreneurs are only limited aware of these developments. A possible cause is the enormous offer of information on the internet, which could distract from the online VVV service. A question is whether people associate the VVV website with the actual organization or that they perceive this as general information from the internet instead of linking it to the VVV. In short, the representation of the VVV changed a lot and there isn't one single central strategy for all VVV organizations. Possibly there has to be more attention for the role the VVV could get on the internet. Some entrepreneurs say they could have the same central role on the internet as they had physically, as the information is spread over the internet now, without a central platform.

The continuation of the VVV is dependent on the finances. Especially in these days of recession the revenues are crucial. Governments are likely to cut down some of the financial supports and entrepreneurs evaluate their expenditure. Findings show a positive relation between the amount of contact an entrepreneur has with the VVV, his involvement and his vision on the future of the VVV. This is in line with the conceptual framework, that showed a relation between the 'Customer experience', the 'Stakeholder involvement' and 'Brand equity'. Next to that a relation was found between the added value of the VVV and the willingness to financially contribute. Both relations are useful. The VVV should focus on their relationship with the entrepreneurs and show in what way the entrepreneur can benefit from collaboration. Then involvement will increase, which has both a positive effect on the vision on the future and on the notion of the added value, which lead to an increase in the willingness to contribute. Entrepreneurs are not willing to contribute to the VVV to expand its right to exist, but they are willing to contribute if they see they will also benefit from it. The VVV should earn a contribution of entrepreneurs by good service and should constantly look for new ways to gain extra profits.

Looking back to the research, the conceptual framework was helpful in getting a better understanding of the thoughts of entrepreneurs about the VVV. It was a useful framework to get an insight into the status of a destination marketing organization is. In the case of the VVV, the focus was on customers experience, as the brand is already long settled within the society. In case of a younger organization, it would be more useful to focus on the strategic orientation and presented brand. Thus the focus in the framework is very dependent on the stage of development of the organization. To improve the framework the different factors could be subdivided in a number of aspects which influence the factor. Moreover, depending on the case, a specific factor can be analyzed closer according to the different aspects which are called.

Continuous research is necessary for the VVV to have a central position and contribute to the development and innovation in the sector. First and most important, is finding ways to express the value of the VVV in the sector to entrepreneurs. For both the physical location as the website analytical tools should be used to collect marketing information. In doing so, every VVV should exactly know how many visitors come in, where they come from, what they come for and what the actual contribution of the VVV in the process is. Do visitors simply buy a gift card or are they looking for an accommodation or attraction, and in what way does the VVV guide them in this process. VVV's should not only be able to show exactly what their organization does, but also what the effect of that is for entrepreneurs. Do visitors for example stay longer in the area because of the information of the VVV and how many people visit the entrepreneurs' website via the VVV website. These details should be known on a monthly basis, by which the VVV can also improve their services and visualize the effect. Next to that, a research is suggested about the perceptions of the VVV organizations themselves. They are the ones who have practical experience. How do they consider their role themselves, what problems do they face in practice and what do they expect of VVV Nederland in the future. These are

questions that have to be answered in order to strengthen the organization and services of VVV Nederland in the future.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Short term

Spread the word

The position of the VVV in the market has changed in the last 20 years. The VVV can't just wait in the office till the consumers and entrepreneurs approach them. These times have passed by. VVV's should actively approach both entrepreneurs and consumers. The findings showed a positive relation between the amount of contact between a VVV and an entrepreneur, the involvement of the entrepreneur and their view on the future role of the VVV. It is essential to keep intensive contact with the entrepreneurs because in doing so, entrepreneurs know what is going on, what is happening within the organization. When there is no contact, the entrepreneurs are not aware of all the things that are going on. This strongly influences their vision on the future role, and indirectly their willingness to contribute financially. Therefore, the VVV has to contact entrepreneurs more intensively and moreover the contact has to be very relevant for entrepreneurs. There shouldn't be an overload of communication, as everybody for example already receives numerous newsletters. Communication has to be concrete and relevant, make sure it does interest every receiver. However, it is not only about sending information, if the VVV wants to acquire a central position in the sector. An important aspect to reach that, is to be seen. The VVV should be present on any occasion that is important for the sector. Every meeting, opening, conference or reception the VVV should be present. Next to that they should simply visit entrepreneurs, just go along once a year. By doing this the VVV will know what is going on in the sector and, maybe even more importantly, have an opportunity to tell entrepreneurs directly what the VVV has to offer. When entrepreneurs do see a familiar face of the VVV over and over again in the right places, it helps to obtain this central position. Being a central player in the sector, the VVV can have a significant added value.

At the moment, many VVV's are not able to communicate their added value to the sector. That should change, the VVV should clearly demonstrate its central role again.

Be more entrepreneurial

The added value of the VVV more and more faded away. Entrepreneurs find it hard to say what the VVV concretely contributes to their companies. Therefore the VVV should show their added value. Since it is hard to express what this exactly is, they have to find a way to explain the results of their efforts. This can be the number of visitors in their shop and the services they provide, characteristics of their visitors, or online statistics. An advantage of insights in the actual added value of the VVV is also the fact that it can help to sell the services. Show entrepreneurs what is developed in recent years and possibly even offer unique services like the NDTRC (Nederlandse Databank voor Toerisme, Recreatie en Cultuur). Only a location with booklets, brochures and a friendly word isn't sufficient anymore. VVV's should be very active in their region. They should actively approach entrepreneurs and offer their services. They should be extremely active within the sector by organizing events, set up meetings and shared arrangements for entrepreneurs to benefit. Everything that can be valuable for the sector within the region should be of interest to the VVV. They have to show their willingness to actively contribute to strengthen the sector as a whole, which may result in a central position in which they're also actively approached if new initiatives pop up. As the VVV is a central player in the sector, with a valuable network, all necessary contacts and the capacity to make things happen. Marketing information is an important tool to express the added value in order to prove their added value. But they also have to innovate, they constantly have to improve their services and products to stay relevant for entrepreneurs. At a national level there have to be new developments, in line with the

demands of entrepreneurs, to keep them interested. A good way to get entrepreneurs interested is by developing a digital tool which is easy, fast and complete in the national touristic information supply. Then the VVV would be able to receive the involvement of entrepreneurs again. The process, of connecting entrepreneurs to the VVV can be very important for the continuation of the VVV in terms of finances. As the financing of the VVV is a crucial point these days, they should more and more create their own revenues. VVV's these days should become more financially orientated, simply because it's necessary to survive as governments may be less willing to give subsidies. They should try to create a sustainable situation in which they earn their own income. Traditionally a part of the revenues come from memberships/donations/partnerships of entrepreneurs, but the VVV should look for new ways to receive income like ticket-selling, organization of events or the provision of specific sector related rights. In doing so, they can regain a central position within the sector, by which the sector would be willing to contribute to a durable VVV organization.

The VVV has to become more proactive, and should always look for opportunities to make their network stronger, to create chances for both entrepreneurs and consumers to benefit and ways to gain own benefits.

Digitalization

The internet is an important factor in the changing role of the VVV, as all information can be found on the internet nowadays. Since the internet developed rapidly, other suppliers came on and took over a share of the VVV. Especially youngsters easily find everything on the internet, but older generations also easily pick up the advantages of digitalization. Therefore a proper representation on the internet is unmistakably important. The offer on the internet is enormous and very diverse by now, therefore VVV has to set up something that distinguishes itself from the rest in order to obtain a central role. The VVV is already developing online services, but the entrepreneurs still consider the VVV mostly as the physical location. As VVV was the central physical information supplier in the past, the present brand awareness can be used to take a central role on the internet. To achieve this, online services need to be extremely visible, easy, fast and complete. The reputation of a trustworthy, complete and personal organization should be used to set up a central online platform for consumers in the Netherlands. As 'zoover.nl' is the central platform for evaluations of accommodations, 'VVV.nl' should be the central point for touristic information. A tool that is already developed and that can play an important role in this process is the NDTRC, the Dutch Database for Tourism, Recreation and Culture. This can become the central database which consists all relevant information. To achieve this, the VVV's have to take care of the input. The tool will only be valuable if it is extremely complete and updated. This is also the way to make it attractive and valuable for entrepreneurs to be part of the network. In the coming years this should be evolved in a tool that gives the VVV its value in the recreational sector. This year a central VVV app is launched, connected to the NDTRC, which can play an important role in the digital development. These products should constantly be evaluated and improved to offer the best service as possible, in line with both the wishes of entrepreneurs and consumers. These services can also be implemented in the physical locations rather easily, for example by the tablets which are recently introduced. The combination of the personal contact at the physical locations and the digital database is very valuable. To make the system work in the end, communication to the sector is essential. There has to be a campaign which shows the online developments, to make it as well known as the physical location in the past.

The strength which the physical VVV locations had in the past should be translated to the internet. To provide a central platform for everybody who is looking for touristic information.

Activate the network

The VVV has a huge network of leisure entrepreneurs throughout the Netherlands, probably the biggest network in the sector. However, in many places the network is not used at all. Entrepreneurs

said they're especially interested in meeting similar entrepreneurs. The network of the VVV could easily be used to connect different entrepreneurs. Especially since the network is unique in the Netherlands, it can be of significant value in the sector, facilitated by the VVV. This can be used as a tool to show the contribution which the VVV can have and in doing so, strengthen the role of the VVV within the sector. To make this happen, the network has to be activated. To start, it is most important to get entrepreneurs in contact with each other. Later on, the VVV can organize various meetings, depending on the requests of the entrepreneurs themselves. In both cases, the entrepreneurs have to be actively invited to the meetings and the meeting has to be relevant for every attendee. When the contact is established it can be expanded, the VVV can facilitate knowledge sharing or the development of collective arrangements. It is very important that it fits the demands of the entrepreneurs, and as such it becomes attractive and of added value for all participants.

These meetings can also be perfectly used for communications about what the VVV actually does. In a yearly meeting for example entrepreneurs could be informed about the accomplishments of the VVV in the last year and their ambitions for the upcoming year. This will increase the awareness of the entrepreneurs of what is happening. Next to that, at this meeting entrepreneurs can give feedback and input. For the VVV to know what is going on in the sector and what entrepreneurs would like to be developed.

The VVV simply has to activate its network and add value to it.

6.2 Long term

This recommendation does not directly result from the findings from the interviews. It is a long-term vision of the author based on the developments and information obtained in this research.

Stepping-stones

When a physical location is financially not reachable anymore and/or visitation of VVV's drop, there should be a strong focus on digital developments in the form of digital information pillars on important points in a city instead of an agency within for example a bookstore. It is impossible to express the strength and the added value of the organization in an agency, it is rather seen as an degradation. Next to that, large entrepreneurs can be ideal locations for the information supply, e.g. a hotel or bungalow park, as many visitors already go there. By using tablets for example, a stepping-stone construction can be made. By having information tablets on large touristic locations, visitors can figuratively step through the destination from one digital information point to the other. By which accurate information is always available. The entrepreneurs who will host an information point, a stepping-stone, have to pay a fee. Subsequently these entrepreneurs have an additional service to offer to its visitors, as he has a complete overview of the region on his location. As such, visitors have all information they need on location. There is a chance the entrepreneur will also welcome new visitors because of this facility, this can be promoted at both the central national platform of the VVV as the local VVV website. This will add value for the visitor, as well as for the entrepreneur and the VVV. On the short term the stepping-stones can replace only agencies, which are often evaluated rather negatively and don't express the strength of the organization. On the long term the stepping-stones can replace the physical locations as well. Digital developments can be included, like a digital host on a tablet who can speak to visitors. Additionally, the entrepreneur who hosts the stepping-stone is free to expand the service by brochures or an information desk. In the end, the stepping-stones information service will only bring in money to develop the system, instead of the locations or agencies that cost a lot of money. Every entrepreneur will pay for a proper announcement in the system. In the ideal situation, every entrepreneur has to be in there, as it has to be complete and trustworthy. Additionally, there will be packaged services as the ability to add an additional amount of words, pictures or videos, which the entrepreneurs can purchase. Entrepreneurs who do not contribute to the

system, have to feel that they are missing something. These contributions by entrepreneurs will on the long term replace the current membership or donation systems. As stated before, the VVV has to earn its own income.

Stepping-stones, digital information sources on location, can replace both agencies and locations on the long term. Entrepreneurs will pay for this system which is both online and on the spot digitally available and provides all necessary information.

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Appendix 1. Interview guide: Perceptions of entrepreneurs about VVV Nederland

Introductie

De respondent wordt welkom geheten en de interviewer stelt zich voor. De achtergrond en het doel van het onderzoek wordt kort toegelicht en vervolgens wordt toestemming gevraagd om het interview op te nemen.

Vragen

Algemeen

1.1 Wat is volgens u de rol van de VVV binnen de toerisme en vrijetijdssector? (Hoe ziet u de VVV?)

Dit is een algemene introducerende vraag. Om een eerste beeld te schetsen van de gedachten van de ondernemer en tevens om te controleren waar de ondernemer over spreekt.

1.2 Wat betekent de VVV voor u als ondernemer?

Deze vraag onderzoekt hoe de ondernemer de VVV ziet in verhouding met zijn eigen ondernemerschap.

Strategie

2.1 Wat is volgens u de doelstelling van de VVV?

Met deze vraag wordt onderzocht of het daadwerkelijke doel van de VVV duidelijk is ondernemers, of wat zij als het doel beschouwen.

2.2 Wat vindt u hiervan en sluit dit aan bij uw eigen doelen?

Met deze vraag wordt nagegaan in hoeverre de ondernemer het idee heeft dat het doel van de VVV aansluit bij zijn eigen doelen.

Presentatie van het merk

3.1 Wat denkt u van de uitstraling en het aanbod van de VVV? (Apart vragen: het logo, de vestiging, de website)

Deze vraag onderzoekt de mening van ondernemers over de manier waarop het merk VVV in de markt wordt gezet.

3.2 Spreekt de VVV u persoonlijk aan, voelt u zich betrokken bij het merk?

Door middel van deze vraag wordt de relatie tussen de presentatie van het merk en de betrokkenheid van de ondernemer onderzocht.

3.3 Wat kan er naar uw mening verbeterd worden en het image en de producten van de VVV?

Deze vraag geeft ruimte voor de respondent om aan te geven wat er volgens hem/haar verandert of verbeterd kan worden.

Ervaring met het merk

4.1 Hoe beoordeelt u het contact dat u heeft met de VVV? (acquisitie, hulpverlening, boekingen)

Met deze vraag wordt gevraagd naar de ervaring die de respondent heeft met de VVV.

4.2 Bent u tevreden over de communicatie vanuit de VVV? (ontwikkelingen & gebeurtenissen)

Deze vraag kijkt naar de tevredenheid wat betreft de communicatie van de VVV.

4.3 Zijn er activiteiten vanuit de VVV die samenwerking binnen het netwerk van recreatie ondernemers stimuleren?

Deze vraag gaat na wat de mening van de ondernemer is wat betreft de samenwerking binnen het netwerk van de VVV.

4.4 Vindt u de wijze van communicatie met de VVV prettig? Bevordert het de samenwerking met de VVV?

Met deze vraag wordt de relatie tussen de ervaringen en de betrokkenheid onderzocht.

4.5 Heeft u suggesties of verbeterpunten voor communicatie en diensten vanuit de VVV?

Deze vraag geeft de respondent ruimte om zijn visie te uiten.

Aanwezigheid en waarde van het merk

5.1 Wat is volgens u de kracht van de VVV binnen de vrijetijdssector?

Deze vraag kijkt wat de ondernemer beschouwt als de waarde van de VVV als bijdrage aan de sector

5.2 Hoe zou de VVV nog meer kunnen toevoegen aan de vrijetijdssector?

Met deze vraag wordt onderzocht wat de ondernemer beschouwt de kansen die er nog liggen voor de VVV om extra toe te voegen aan de sector

5.3 Voelt u zich betrokken bij het VVV merk?

Deze vraag onderzoekt de relatie tussen de merkwaarde en de betrokkenheid van ondernemers

Reflectie en verbetering

6.1 Hoe zou u de ideale rol van de VVV in de toekomst omschrijven?

Met deze vraag wordt gevraagd naar de manier waarop de ondernemer de VVV in de toekomst zou willen zien

6.2 Wat zou er naar uw mening verbeterd kunnen worden bij de VVV?

Deze vraag geeft ruimte voor diverse verbeterpunten vanuit de ondernemer.

6.3 Hoe denkt u dat de VVV er over 10 jaar uit ziet?

Deze vraag gaat na hoe de ondernemer denkt over de duurzaamheid en het vermogen tot verandering van de VVV.

Afsluiting

Er wordt gevraagd of de respondent zelf nog aanvullingen heeft. Vervolgens wordt de respondent bedankt voor deelname en wordt het interview afgesloten.