

# Exploring village strolls as a potential for sustainable regional development as part of the Dutch tourism strategy 'Perspective 2030'



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## Abstract

Walking tourism has great potential for sustainable regional development in marginalised areas, as it can spread out tourism away from overcrowded urban areas. Walking itself has countless mental, physical and social benefits for both residents and tourists. This study explores the concept of 'dorpsommetjes' (or village strolls) and similar walks or paths, as a potential to aid the Dutch tourism strategy 'Perspective 2030'. An important aspect of this study, is the perceptions of the villagers, the meaning of village strolls and how it connects to their village identity. The methods used are mapping of village strolls which are further analysed through transect walks. To gain even deeper knowledge, and to improve the credibility of this research, semi-structured interviews were held with key informants. It is found that village strolls have high value for residents and tourists alike, but are lacking in accessibility and continuity as most are neglected and hard to reach. Also, concerns arose about attracting the wrong target group but this could be overcome through education. In the end, this research concludes that in theory, village strolls are suitable for the Dutch tourism strategy as they can spread out tourists and enhance sustainable regional development. The key is centralising the local community, their needs and wishes and involving them from an early stage to ensure higher satisfaction, participation, support and involvement among the local community. This study displays the positives and negatives of village strolls in the tourism strategy but also calls for further research among villagers.

**Keywords:** Village strolls; clog paths, regional development; marginalised areas; Perspective 2030; walking tourism; transect walks; local community focus

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## Definitions

Term	Dutch	Definition
Clog paths	Klompenpaden	These paths can be found in the Dutch provinces of Gelderland and Utrecht, and showcase how organisations in the agriculture cultural landscape work closely together with landowners, organisations and residents (Ter Maten & Vriend, 2015). The paths are circular and can be walked clockwise or counterclockwise. They are made by Landschap Erfgoed Utrecht en Stichting Landschapsbeheer Gelderland and usually take half a day to walk but do provide a shortcut making them longer than a village stroll.
Landscape management	Landschap-beheer	An organisation in the Netherlands, now every province has its own. They aim to preserve and develop the landscape in which people live, work and recreate. The landscape requires sustainable management to be enjoyed now and in the future
Perspective 2030	Perspectief 2030	This Dutch tourism strategy aims to, among others, attract visitors to different parts of the Netherlands, improve accessibility, realise more sustainable tourism, and – first and foremost – involve all Dutch residents in the Dutch tourism industry, also in marginalised areas.
Strolls competition 2007	Strolls competition 2007	A village stroll competition was held in 2007 by the Dutch landscape management, to claim the best provincial and national village strolls. Winners could use the won price to realize their stroll. Per province, the sum was 10.000 euro and the national price was 30.000 euro.
Village strolls	Dorps-ommetjes	An unpaved path in an agricultural landscape on a cultural-historical basis as far as possible. It is nature-friendly/landscaped and locally embedded. It is a circular walk of its own (or: a circular walk-through connection with other paths) or composed of existing paths and newly laid or restored historical paths. They preferably are adjacent to catering facilities (whether or not in the form of agritourism) (Baas, 2006, p. 10). These paths can be walked in one hour or two and thus are shorter than clog paths.
WaterFactsWalk	WaterWeetjes-Wandeling	Paths created by the Waterschap Aa and Maas to enhance the importance of water management, landscape cultural history and nature of the Heusden, Starkriet, Grave en Landhorst, North-Brabant. Similarly to Clog paths and Village strolls it is connected to landscape management, yet WaterFactsWalks are focused on the water and it is unclear how involved the local community, farmers and villagers are in creating the walks.

# 1 Introduction

“... walking is not simply therapeutic for oneself but is a poetic activity that can cure the world of its ills.... Walking is a virtue; tourism is a deadly sin”

(Chatwin, 1990, pp. 138 & 139)

This citation of Chatwin (1990) brings out the essence of this study. Walking can be much more than a utilitarian mode of transport, it can have both social and recreational value and can promote both mental and physical health for its user (Forsyth & Southworth, 2008). Some scholars even see further benefits in using ‘walking’ in their studies. Bendiner-Viani (2005, p. 461) describes that it can create an “almost tangible sense of place” through research participants. While France (2022) explains that walking through landscapes and truly immersing oneself is the only way to study landscapes, otherwise one ends up with a disembodied study.

As walking is essential in one’s own life and is considered to add great value in conducting research; it is also one of the key activities in tourism (Dihingia, Gjerde, & Vale, 2022). Tourism can affect residents positively and negatively (Nayomi & Gnanapala, 2015), especially in urban areas overtourism can put great pressure on local communities (UNTWO, 2018). In reverse to overtourism in urban areas, tourism can be used as a strategy to develop rural or marginalised areas (Kato & Prozano, 2018; Pileri & Moscarelli, 2020). According to UNWTO (2019) walking tourism is a great means to create social and economic benefits for residents and communities if properly managed and developed. It allows tourists to experience a destination and engage with local people, nature and culture, while a relatively small investment is needed for regional development.

The Netherlands is a great walking destination with 11,500 km of long-distance trails (LAWs) and regional trails (SPs) (Lange Afstand Wandelpaden en streekpaden) (Lekkerkerk & Koningsveld, 2023). The Dutch enjoy the rural areas for leisure or recreational purposes. However, international tourists who fly to the Netherlands prefer the urban areas and travellers from neighbouring countries favour staying near the coast (NBTC, 2019), leaving marginalised and rural areas in the Netherlands not benefiting from tourism from other countries.

This study aims to research how walking tourism, on the one hand, improves the well-being of local communities of marginalised areas and on the other hand, offers potential for a sustainable tourism development strategy in the Netherlands and especially its marginalised areas. To do this a phenomenon fairly unknown to the academic world will be explored, namely: ‘dorpsommetjes’ (from now on called village strolls).

## 1.1 Problem statement

This study will define and explore the concept of village strolls. The main focus will be on how village strolls fit the aims and objectives of the Dutch tourism strategy of 2030. This 'Perspective 2030' aims to, among others, attract visitors to different parts of the Netherlands, improve accessibility, realise more sustainable tourism, and – first and foremost – involve all Dutch residents in the Dutch tourism industry, also in marginalised areas (NBTC, 2019). Another focus of this study is to not solely see village strolls from a tourism point of view but also seeing it through the eyes of the local communities: what do these village strolls mean to the residents, and how do they see the socio-economic effects of using village strolls as part of their sustainable regional development? The concepts of 'village strolls' as a form of walking tourism and as a concept created by residents will mainly be explored using 'walking' as a research method.

## 1.2 Research questions

### Research objective

To explore the use of village strolls, through the eyes of the local communities, as part of the Dutch tourism strategy for 2030.

### Main research question

How do villagers perceive the use of their 'village strolls' as part of the Dutch tourism strategy 'Perspective 2030'?

### Sub-questions

#### 1 Where are the village strolls located in the Netherlands?

Creating visual maps of the village stroll concept is key to gaining a fuller understanding. A deep search into the locations, amounts and characters of these village strolls is needed for the further purpose of this study and to use in the next two sub-questions. This study will focus on 9 out of the 12 provinces of the Netherlands. The provinces of North- and South Holland and Flevoland will not be included. The former as most tourists already visit these provinces and the latter mostly due to time restraints, but also since it is a man-made province and the newest of the 12, so lesser cultural and natural history.

**2** What do village strolls mean to its residents?

Understanding the meaning of village strolls to its residents helps to define them even further. Also, a link can be made between the original purpose of these village strolls in correlation with the next sub-question, this is significant to answer the main question.

**3** How can village strolls be part of the 'Perspective 2030'?

What aspects do village strolls have that fit the Perspective 2030, and how can village strolls be used to attract tourists to marginalised areas, away from urban areas? Yet, without negatively affecting their village identity, the natural and cultural heritage and the local community at large. These questions are connected to how it can benefit residents, the tourists and connect to larger concepts of sustainable (walking) tourism development in marginal areas.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Village strolls

Walking for pleasure among Dutch is a popular activity in the Netherlands (Hoyng et al., 2023). Until the mid-20th century, there was much possibility to walk through rural fields and arable land through church paths, hedgerows and dirt roads (Baas, 2006). Land consolidation, urban expansion or infrastructure construction – or simply the disappearance of their function – caused many footpaths to disappear. Nowadays, walkers in the outlying area are condemned to walking on mostly paved roads in poorly accessible urban fringe or rural areas (Burger & Bruin de, 2004). From 2004 to 2005, landscape management Netherlands started a project to realise more village strolls to restore and open up (historical) paths in the (agricultural) cultural landscape called ‘dorpsommetjes’ (village strolls) (Baas, 2006). They defined a village stroll as...

“An unpaved path in an agricultural landscape on a cultural-historical basis as far as possible. It is nature-friendly/landscaped and locally embedded. It is a circular walk of its own (or: a circular walk-through connection with other paths) or composed of existing paths and newly laid or restored historical paths. They preferably are adjacent to catering facilities (whether or not in the form of agritourism)” (Baas, 2006, p. 10)

Village strolls serve a great purpose for villagers as they increase the village’s identity and that of the surrounding landscape (Schrijfburo Terwisscha & Wagenaar 2008). Walking (these strolls) also positively affects its residents and promotes walking behaviour and physical activity, discourages a sedentary lifestyle and reduces obesity among residents (Rabiah Wan Omar et al., 2012), and therefore improves their physical and mental well-being (Schrijfburo Terwisscha & Wagenaar 2008). With creating village strolls as a kind of regional development, it is important to keep the needs and wishes of the villagers in consideration (Schrijfburo Terwisscha & Wagenaar 2008). The primary users of village strolls are the villagers and other regional walkers. They use it to gain a deeper connection with the landscape near their homes (Baas, 2006), get exercise (Rozema et al., 2011) and it even has social purposes, as residents make plans to walk together or among elderly who feel less lonely meeting people on the way (Rozema & Bovenhoff, 2013); (Rozema & van den Beemt, 2011). A village stroll competition was held in 2007 by the Dutch landscape management, to claim the best provincial and national village strolls. Winners could use the won price to realize their stroll. Per province, the sum was 10.000 euro and the national price was 30.000 euro (Wiemer, 2007).



## 2.2 Walking tourism

Walking tourism is a great means to create social and economic benefits for residents and communities if properly managed and developed. It allows tourists to experience a destination and engage with local people, nature and culture, while a relatively small investment is needed for regional development (UNWTO, 2019). Walking has a certain slowness to it that allows for more attention to people and places. Thus, this kind of slow tourism demands more local engagement and is a way to enjoy a destination with a minimal impact on the environment (Kato & Prozano, 2018). In his study on the Alpine region in Europe, Matos (2004, as cited in Kato & Prozano, 2018) proposed two core principles of slow tourism: first 'taking time' to experience the natural landscape and gaining an understanding of the local culture. Second, it encourages 'attachment to a place', especially its local characteristics which contribute to a walker's sense of place. In this slowness, there is room for growth as it helps shape the kinds of tourism services provided by surrounding communities and direct destination planning and development (Kato & Prozano, 2018); walking tourism has even potential to improve the living standards of its residents (UNWTO, 2019) and to attract young settlers to move (back) to a village or rural area (Kato & Prozano, 2018).

To ensure the mental and physical benefits of walking in regional development the concept of walkability is highly important in motivating people to walk. Walkability is a concept where walking is made possible as a walkable environment is created that is safe for its users, makes a place lively, promoted sustainable transportation options and induces exercise (Forsyth, 2015). While walking tourism also contains aspects of health, well-being and self-improvement (Kato & Prozano, 2017); walkability is a concept solely to motivate residents to walk. A tourist's motive to walk differs from that of residents as do their walking behaviours and studying residents cannot be substituted to study tourist patterns (Dihingia, Gjerde, & Vale, 2022).

## 2.3 The Dutch tourism strategy

Tourism can affect residents positively and negatively (Nayomi & Gnanapala, 2015), especially in urban areas overtourism can put tremendous pressure on local communities (UNWTO, 2018). In reverse to overtourism in urban areas, tourism can be used as a strategy to develop rural or marginalised areas (Kato & Prozano, 2018; Pileri & Moscarelli, 2020). The Dutch Bureau for Tourism and Congress is established to attract tourists to the Netherlands (Staat, 2018), but now it thrives away from tourism promotion into tourism management (NBTC, 2019). In NBTC's 'Perspective 2030' (2019) they emphasize the importance of a shared interest of visitors, businesses and residents. This Dutch tourism strategy aims to, among others, attract visitors to different parts of the Netherlands, improve accessibility, realise more sustainable tourism, and – first and foremost – involve all Dutch residents in the Dutch tourism industry, also in marginalised areas.

The Netherlands is a great walking destination with 11,500 km of long-distance trails (LAWs) and regional trails (SPs) (Lange Afstand Wandelpaden en streekpaden) (Lekkerkerk & Koningsveld, 2023). The Dutch enjoy the rural areas for leisure or recreational purposes. However, international tourists who fly to the Netherlands prefer the urban areas and travellers from neighbouring countries favour staying near the coast (NBTC, 2019), leaving marginalised and rural areas in the Netherlands not benefiting from walking tourism from other countries. While spreading out tourists seems to be highly important for the liveability in the urban areas in the next coming of years. As worldwide more than half of people live in urban areas, and this number can reach up to 70% by 2050 (UNWTO, 2018), this growth translates into visitors to urban areas in the Netherlands where it is expected to grow by 50% in 2030 (NBTC, 2019).

In a study in the Dutch province of Overijssel, several information sources that lead tourists to certain areas or attractions have been researched, the information was adapted to lead tourists to lesser-known areas and their level of holiday valuation was measured. The outcome was that through storytelling and social interaction, tourists could be led to lesser-known attractions and areas, they spend more time there than they would in 'must-see' attractions and did not experience a lesser holiday quality overall (Mitas, et al., 2021).

Similarly, in an experiment to get tourists to visit the Van Gogh house in Drenthe, away from mass tourism from Amsterdam, a group was asked for their experience compared to that in Amsterdam. They were taken in a bus and did not seem to mind the two-hour travel to and from this tourist destination. What was striking is that they valued being away from the overcrowded area, and the personal touch of the Van Gogh house and mostly some even mentioned their overall experience to be better than being in Amsterdam (Staat, 2018).

## 2.4 Involving the local community

Eerie & Spek (2011) noticed a shift in awareness in the Netherlands where management of nature and heritage cannot be separated by public participation and it must be more integrated. Classically, residents are often insufficiently involved in the research, planning and policies by experts; or involved only at the end of the planning process when not much change can be or will be done. Yet early-stage involvement of residents, landowners and other stakeholders results in higher overall satisfaction and positive participation by all parties involved. Linking local and expert levels not only results in higher support for plans for the future landscape but also results in a more diverse and detailed landscape biography (Eerie & Spek, 2011).

This collaboration between locals and experts translates well in the village strolls concept, but also an earlier and more known concept: 'klompenpaden' (from now on clog paths). These paths can be found in the Dutch provinces of Gelderland and Utrecht, and showcase how organisations in the agriculture cultural landscape work closely together with landowners, organisations and residents (Ter Maten & Vriend, 2015). Spek (2015) says that many historic paths disappeared over time but were brought back by clog paths through stories and local and expert knowledge. Historically, stories and definitions connected to the landscape and its

elements played a social role as they connected residents with their landscape and each other. Therefore, historic paths through this landscape only exist through the collective; only in collaboration these paths, meanings and history can be preserved (Spek, 2015).

Similar to natural and heritage management, tourism should be local-community centred. Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) argue for a just and sustainable industry, where tourism should thrive away from profit growth and put the rights of the local community above that of the tourists and companies that provide tourist products and services. They claim the only way to do this is to redefine tourism as *“the process of local communities inviting, receiving and hosting visitors in their local community, for limited time durations, with the intention of receiving benefits from such actions”* (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019, p. 11). This can be facilitated by business or non-profit organisations and even local assets can be utilized, but solely under the authorisation and stewardship of the local community (see Figure 1) (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). With creating village strolls (and clog paths) as a kind of regional development, it is important to keep the needs and wishes of the villagers in consideration (Schrijfburo Terwisscha & Wagenaar 2008). Both village strolls and clog paths are made by and for the local community hence if these strolls and paths are used in the tourism industry it is only logical to act only on the needs and wishes of this local community. Any tourist visiting must respect the local culture, nature and heritage as if they are a guest. Any government, business and DMO must involve the community in its decision-making, from the start and listen to the community throughout the implementation. Only when the local community is involved entirely from the beginning, similar to the management of nature and heritage (Eerie & Spek, 2011), higher satisfaction, participation, support and involvement can be expected in the tourism industry.



**Figure 1** Community-Centred Tourism Framework as a mechanism for degrowing tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019, p. 11)

### 3 Study area description

This study focuses on the whole of the Netherlands and especially the rural and marginalized areas that realised one (or multiple) village stroll(s). The Netherlands is a great destination for walking tourism as it has a long network of long-distance and regional trails (Lekkerkerk & Koningsveld, 2023). The Dutch enjoy the outdoors and these walking trails for recreational purposes and to stay fit (Stichting Wandelnet, 2021). Yet there is much potential to attract our visitors from neighbouring countries and international tourists who fly to the Netherlands to marginalized areas. This might release some pressure on the areas which experience overtourism such as Amsterdam, coastal areas and other Dutch tourism highlights (NBTC, 2019).

The Netherlands is a small country compared to other countries in the world (Kästle, n.d.) and travelling distances within the country does not seem a struggle for tourists originating from larger countries (Staat, 2018). This makes it easier to reduce overtourism and shows the grave potential value for the Dutch tourism strategy 'perspective 2030' (NBTC, 2019).

Thus, for this research, the whole Netherlands is taken into account but will focus on 9 out of the 12 provinces of the country. The provinces of North- and South Holland and Flevoland will not be included. As most tourists already visit the former provinces and the latter mostly due to time restraints, but also since it is a man-made province and the newest of the 12, so lesser cultural and natural history. Yet, since it is not feasible to analyse all village strolls within this research time frame, the first step is to determine which ones to include and which ones not. This will be done in the form of mapping to determine the locations and characteristics. These maps and village strolls will be analysed and themed and from each theme, one or a couple of village strolls will be visited, walked and analysed.

## 4 Methodology

This study will use several research methods to answer the sub-questions and ultimately the overall research question. This study is a qualitative research approach as perceptions of people will be an important part of the research. It will construct meaning in the human-environment relations, generate insights from people's experiences, lives and communities, and thus explore building theories in human conditions (Hay & Cope, 2021).

The first step is to use location mapping to answer the first sub-question: *'Where are the village strolls located in the Netherlands?'*. Since the project of village strolls was established in 2004-2005 the initial plan was to make maps of the Netherlands over periods of 5 years to not only showcase the amount and locations of these village strolls but also visualise their growth over the years. Yet, during the collection of the data too many village strolls emerged per province, but also other similar cultural-natural heritage walks e.g., 'Klompenspaden' (clog paths) in the provinces Gelderland and Utrecht, WaterFactsWalk (Dutch: WaterWeetjesWandeling). Due to time constraints, maps were made solely per province, with no additional timeframes. As many locations of the strolls and paths as possible were gathered in 'Google my maps' to visualise their locations, an example of Groningen is given in Appendix A on page 34.

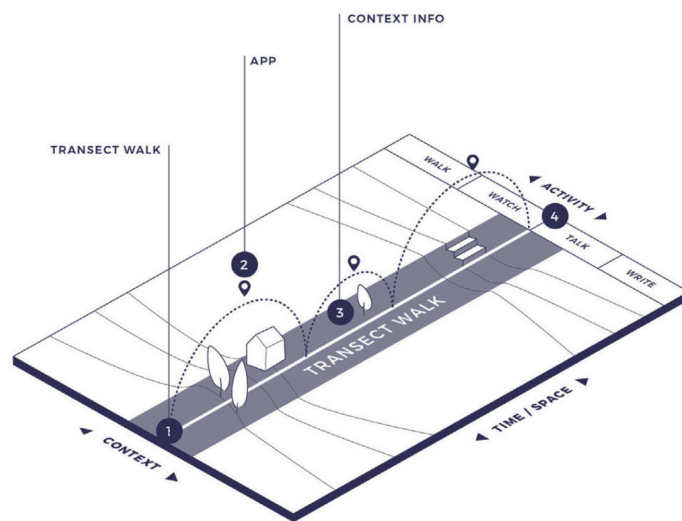
All strolls were then gathered in an Excel sheet and analysed based on (online) location and characteristics, this Excel sheet can be shared upon request. The characteristics were gathered, analysed and divided into themes. The strolls, walks and paths are chosen to make a good variety of themes and locations e.g., off the beaten path or near an unfamiliar highlight, solely a village stroll or another concept (clog path or cultural-historic themed walk). Yet, most importantly their core is to showcase the identity of the landscape, its cultural-historic elements and the involvement of the local community in creating the walk.

From each theme, one or a couple of village strolls were visited for further analysis. Themes were: 'Best national or provincial village stroll' during the 'ommetjes wedstrijd 2007' (Strolls competition 2007), mostly rural but also some city strolls, clog paths and WaterFactsWalk paths. Another distinction was made between how they were presented online, visible offline through signage or maps, and whether they had interactive, historical and/or cultural element(s). For paths presented online, some could be found on larger (tourism) marketing websites (e.g., Friesland.nl or Landschapoverijssel.nl) but others were just a leaflet online (e.g., sjweikeserrenelaot.nl) or very hard to find even though they were visible on the larger marketing websites.

As France (2022) argued in his research about landscapes, truly immersing oneself is the only way to study landscapes otherwise one ends up with a disembodied study. So, further analyses were done through transect walks, and aimed to answer the sub-question: *'How can village strolls be part of the 'Perspective 2030'?*

Transect walks are walked along one line (transect) across the community and are a way to explore spatial differences (Forestry, 2004). They usually are linear lines, but for this

research, the circular walk of the village strolls was used. Transect walks map methodological relations between situations, context, tools, participants and processes. By walking, talking, watching and writing (see Figure 2) context connected to time and space will be visualized data (Hemmersam & Morrison, 2016). Usually, transect walks are done in a group(s) and by observing, asking, listening and looking; a transect diagram is produced (Forestry, 2004). While most of this research was done by one researcher, villagers or other key informants were asked to join the walk where possible or were interviewed before or after the walk. Other methods used during the transect walk were talking to passers-by (Puttkamer, 2017) and the use of taking photos, as an image, to provide a greater understanding of social phenomena (Pink 2012). The goal of the transect walk method is to make a map with observations of characteristics and existing (tourism) solutions after the walk (Puttkamer, 2017). In the literature review is discussed that tourism attractions in marginalised areas or lesser-known tourism products need a personal element, social interactions and storytelling to attract visitors and enhance the quality. Through transect walks, the aim was to find out if village strolls have the means to attract visitors and consequently, if they could aid the Dutch tourism strategy 'Perspective 2030'.



**Figure 2**  
Transect walk (Hemmersam & Morrison, 2016, p. 31)

For this study 10 village strolls are walked in 9 provinces, the 10<sup>th</sup> is due to a double clog path in the province of Gelderland. All strolls, paths and walks found are collected in 'Google my maps'. Due to privacy concerns, it is not possible to share a link to these Google Maps in this study but can be shared upon request. The selected walks for the transect walk can be found in Table 1 and an example of the transect walk of Overijssel is shown in Appendix B on page 35.

**Table 1**  
**Chosen walks per province based on mapping with**

Nr	Place	Province	Name of stroll	Km given	What
1	Tholen	Zeeland	Ommetje Tholen	3.0	Village stroll
2	Sweikhuizen	Limburg	Wandelen langs de Rengelaot	6.7	Village stroll
3	Heusden	North-Brabant	Waterweetjeswandeling Heusden	3.5	WaterFactsWalk
4	Dwingelloo	Drenthe	Dwingeler ommetje Mars	4.9	Village stroll
5	Herbajim	Friesland	Swalkroute Herbaijum	9.3	Village stroll
6	Biessum*	Groningen	Onder klokslag van Oetwier	5.4	Village stroll
7	Emst*	Gelderland	Loobrinkerpad & Schaverensepad	10 & 10	Clog paths
8	Schalkwijk*	Utrecht	Lint- en Liniepad	10	Clog path
9	Markelo	Overijssel	Ommetje Markelose berg	11	Village stroll

\* Walked together with a participant

To gain an even more profound knowledge of the village stroll concept, this study also aimed to focus on the meaning for the villagers and the importance of village identity. Through semi-structured interviews the following sub-question will be answered: *What do village strolls mean to its residents?* Interviewing in tourism research is an excellent tool to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon which contains different perceptions, impacts, anticipations, behaviours and attitudes that are important (Picken, 2017). The participants to be interviewed should be key informants, which pairs well with conducting transect walks in a tourism-focused setting (McCombes et al., 2015). This type of participant will be found during the mapping process as certain names of people will come from online documents or websites. So, in this study, key informants will be those who either participated in creating or setting up village strolls, take part in municipal or regional development near those villages, or have a connection to the 'Perception 2030'. Contacting them will mostly be done via email and data gathered through online interviews, which are often used to overcome spatial and temporal barriers (Hay & Cope, 2021). Tools used were Teams, Google Meet or WhatsApp, chosen by the participant; the participant was also free in using video or not. Involving key informants also has a double purpose as data and findings throughout the research can be crossed checked on credibility, making it a more trustworthy and rigour study (Hay & Cope, 2021).

In the end, it was quite difficult to reach out to villagers or volunteers who worked on village strolls or similar walking paths due to time constraints and privacy restrictions. This study was able to reach out to four organisations that worked with villagers and volunteers in creating these paths. Additionally, three participants work in tourism and marketing paths, whereof one worked on realizing the tourism strategy 'Perspective 2030'. Also, two foreign participants were taken on a walk to see their perceptions of walking these strolls and paths. Table 2 shows a list of the interview participants who were involved in this study.

**Table 2**  
**Semi-structured interview participants**

Nr	Name	Work	Interview on (date)
1	Names anonymous*	Information Centre desk Heusden	25 April 2023
2	J. Li	Chinese international student	30 April 2023
3	A. R. Vriend*	Director of Stichting Landschapsbeheer Gelderland	2 May 2023
4	A. Lenghel	Romanian immigrant	5 May 2023
5	J. Hoekstra*	Coordinator regional marketing organisation Waddenland	8 May 2023
6	J. Kluskens*	Stichting het Limburgs Landschap	8 May 2023
7	I. de Vries*	Team leader Drents Friese Wold state forestry	8 May 2023
8	J. P. de Boer*	Senior project manager landscape management Friesland	10 May 2023
9	Anonymous 2*	Project manager destination management NBTC	12 May 2023

\* Interview held in Dutch and translated into English

All interview data is organised, beginning and closing remarks or other non-research related talks were taken out and the relevant text was divided through coding. While the transect walks were entirely analysed with inductive coding, as the researchers let the data speak freely and did not walk and gathered data with pre-prepared focus points or theories, the semi-interviews held were mostly with a deductive focus with room for some inductive coding. The semi-structured interviews focused on confirming or disconfirming issues and theories of the study but did allow some freedom in the conversation for unplanned, inductive data. This way of dividing, clustering and analysing text through coding made new themes, relations and patterns emerge (Hay & Cope, 2021).

## 4.1 Research ethics

When working with people a crucial part of research is research ethics, which are standards of behaviour that guide the researcher in how to conduct research concerning subjects or those who can be affected by it. The following ethics will be held in this study:

### Ethics concerning subjects

Clear communication is key to respecting the rights of participants or anyone who is involved in the research. Communication of the aim of the research, the use of the obtained data and who will have access to this data will all be communicated. Consequently, the subject voluntarily decides whether to give entire data, deny certain data, withdraw from giving data or remain anonymous or show some of their name or function. Additionally, to respect the dignity of a participant, any form of harm will be avoided, and any misuse or mis-



interpretation of data will be overcome by double-checking data with the participant before publishing. The researcher gave a paper version of the research information sheet to participants and an online version for those interviewed online. Participants also signed a consent form and were asked whether they allowed their name and title to be used or rather stayed anonymous.

### **Ethics concerning research**

Plagiarism will be avoided and all will be written down using own words or clearly as a quote when using other people's exact words. Most interviews will be held in Dutch, but translated into English for analytical purposes. Furthermore, the academic work of other authors will be cited and sourced using the APA7 style so it easily can be found back at its source. Finally, to allow the reuse of data or so this research can be conducted again in another setting, the data collected will be safely stored in the University of Groningen or Campus Fryslân database.

## 5 Results and discussions

Walking has been the red thread throughout this research, but so has writing. Writing has been continuously woven throughout this study, which resulted in many research-driven ideas. This next chapter will show the results of the transect walks and interviews and a direct connection to the theory will be discussed. Through writing themes, relations and patterns emerge (Hay & Cope, 2021).

### 5.1 Transect walks

Transect walks were mostly walked alone by the researcher, except for the ones in Friesland, Gelderland and Utrecht. Since the researchers' notes, interpretations and observations are used, these results are presented with the use of 'I'. The strolls and paths walked can be found in Table 1 on page 15. The table shows a difference between the km given and the km actually walked, this difference can be explained through a few reoccurring actions while walking. Namely, the researcher got lost due to unclear instructions or missing signage, and sometimes the researcher derived from the path looking at an interesting side or finding a resting place or a toilet. An example of the transect walk in Overijssel can be found in Appendix B on page 35. Further results and discussion of data are divided into three main topics: Accessibility, appeal for tourists and value for residents.

**Table 3**  
Chosen walks per province based on mapping with KM actual walked difference

Nr	Place	Province	Name of stroll	Km given	Km actual walked	What
1	Tholen	Zeeland	Ommetje Tholen	3.0	4,1	Village stroll
2	Sweikhuizen	Limburg	Wandelen langs de Rengelaot	6.7	7,9	Village stroll
3	Heusden	North-Brabant	Waterweetjeswandeling Heusden	3.5	6,5	WaterFactsWalk
4	Dwingeloo	Drenthe	Dwingeler ommetje Mars	4.9	6,3	Village stroll
5	Herbajim*	Friesland	Swalkroute Herbaijum	9.3	11	Village stroll
6	Biessum	Groningen	Onder klokslag van Oetwier	5.4	6,7	Village stroll
7	Emst*	Gelderland	Loobrinkerpad & Schaverensepad	10 & 10	11,6 & 11,0	Clog paths
8	Schalkwijk*	Utrecht	Lint- en Liniepad	10	13,8	Clog path
9	Markelo	Overijssel	Ommetje Markelose berg	11	12,3	Village stroll

\* Walked together with a participant

## Accessibility

Getting to most of these strolls has been an adventure on its own. I have been on regional trains, and local bus lines, experienced train delays and switch track defaults. In theory, it is doable to reach these strolls with one or two transits and get to and from Amsterdam within a day. But, due to unclear time schedules, delays and other disruptions it could be too long a day to visit the stroll and get back as well. In the town of Tholen, Zeeland buses 107 and 108 both go between the town and the train station in Bergen op Zoom but get in the wrong number at the wrong time and it takes you an hour sightseeing throughout the whole Tholen municipality, passing the same bus stop before taking you to the train station. Similarly, in Heusden I waited an extra hour and a half as I did not recognise the van as the local bus that drove around. This bus supposedly had to come every hour, but was half an hour late. The bus driver carried some passengers who missed their stop, as it was a large family with an invalid person in a wheelchair, he decided to drive back to drop them off.

After my third walked village stroll, I slowed down. I got the sense of the slowness of walking and this translated into the way I experienced public transportation too. I felt my journey started when I left home rather than upon arrival at the start of the stroll. I started to plan a bus later and take a local beer on one of the terraces near the bus stops, experience the people and area more, might also have to do something with the sunny weather.

Here the theory emerges that public transportation and the accessibility of an area do play a role in the overall experience. These findings support Sorupia (2005) who states that accessibility and transportation are integral parts of the tourism industry and do in fact affect the tourist experience. Another finding is that the 'tourist' that walks these paths must be open to the certain slowness that is connected to getting to remote areas and walking. While the researcher experienced the walk as more positive when embracing the slowness, Kato & Prozano (2018) take it further that this kind of slowness also allows for more local engagement and attention to people and places. Not only as a researcher but also as a tourist, slowness is experienced in being more open to the environment which connects to Matos (2004, as cited in Kato & Prozano, 2018) who proposed a core principle of slow tourism encourager of 'attachment to a place', especially its local characteristics which contributes to a walker's sense of place.

## Appeal for the tourist and tourism

All village strolls, paths and routes walked are unique on their own. Great appeal is detected for the tourist who is interested in a cultural, outdoor experience. These strolls showcase a piece of culture-history of the area, and the identity of the landscape and have an educational element. Some had information signs along the route, others had online explanations of sights and landscape elements.

During my stroll in Biesum, Groningen I was listening to an audio tour where every sight had its own story. In Markelo, Overijssel there were QR codes with folk tales and little fun

facts about the area. The clog paths of Utrecht and Gelderland had an app, which not only makes it easy to navigate, but sent push-up messages with video clips, stories, and historic photos of sights, but it also showed nearby catering facilities and toilets. This last, toilets, was quite a problem on most walks. When my walking companion and I walked in Herbaijm, Friesland, a nice local let us use hers, but when walking in long paths in between meadows and pastures, especially above 5 km, there are not many toilets on the way. Overall, I walked about 100 km within 18 days divided among 9 provinces, I felt good, and I definitely experienced a clearer head and was physically stronger.

What was striking was 'that almost all of these walks had no other language option than Dutch. Also, the QR codes and signs along the way were very Dutch-focused. Furthermore, it was often quite hard to navigate the correct route. I often got lost due to hidden, broken or missing signs or since there was no signing at all and I had to rely on a combination of online descriptions and Google Maps. This resulted in the amount of walked km being quite higher than the amount that was given in the description of the stroll or path (km differences can be found in Table 1, on page 15). Personally, I preferred the combination of online navigation and offline signs, this way you get the best experience as you do not have to focus too much on walking the correct route and it left you more open to experience the actual walk. In Markelo I was able to download a GPX file that let me do the same Google-maps-like navigation as the clog paths app has, which was quite convenient. *'GPX is simply a text file with geographic information such as waypoints, tracks, and routes saved in it'* (Hazzard, 2022).

These findings support that of Mitas, et al. (2021) who state that storytelling and social interaction have a great appeal to attract tourists to lesser-known areas. Mitas et al. (2021) even found out that tourists spend more time in the lesser-known attractions, which also play a part in the difference between the given and actually walked km. Other findings of this research were that the signs, audio tours, QR codes and local stories and visuals during the strolls or paths make for a great overall experience. This connects to Staat (2018), who found that the 'personal touch results in a better overall tourist experience. Yet, non-Dutch-speaking tourists will miss out on most of the personal and storytelling parts that create the overall experience as these are solely provided in Dutch and navigating through most walks is quite difficult or time-consuming. They will however still benefit from the aspects of health, well-being and self-improvement, which are regularly found in walking tourism according to Kato & Prozano (2017).

### **Value for residents**

Personally, I think it must feel special to have such a walk near your home. It allows one to walk on paths right through farmland, church paths, hedgerows and dirt roads, see things you otherwise would not be able to see and really connect with the landscape you are walking through. And the silence, while I was walking in Overijssel I had to stop for a moment, thinking my ears were blocked and I tried to pop them open. There was nothing wrong with my hearing, it was just so incredibly silent.

In Dwingeloo, Drenthe, I met a woman from an elderly home, she expressed her fondness for the Village stroll. She said she had a condition that did not let her sit, lie down or stand for too long, but walking was no problem. One day she walked it clockwise and the other day counter-clockwise. Two women crossing my path in Tholen discussed how much they loved walking and the positive effect on their well-being. Although, I have not been able to connect to more residents about their effects on mental well-being and health benefits due to these strolls and clog paths. I did experience positive effects on my own mental, well-being and health during and after walking these.

Through these findings, a connection with the landscape is expressed by the researcher due to the access a village stroll or clog path gives to the landscape. This new theory relates to Atmanagara (2010) who states that accessibility plays a necessary part in the construction of the resident's identity in correlation to their living environment. According to her, this accessibility is not only in terms of opening up an area but it is also important to include diverse social groups (Atmanagara, 2010). By opening up farmland, church paths, hedgerows and dirt roads residents are able to experience their environment differently and see things that they would not usually see. Burger & Bruin (2004) found that walkers in the outlying area are usually condemned to walking on mostly paved roads in poorly accessible urban fringe or rural areas. Yet, Baas (2006) argues that through village strolls and clog paths, the landscape is open and residents gain a deeper connection with the landscape near their homes (Baas, 2006).

Although not much data was gathered on the health and well-being benefits of village strolls and clog paths among residents during this research. The researcher did experience them herself through walking. Through the research of Rabiah Wan Omar et al., (2012) can be concluded that walking positively affects its residents and Schrijfburo Terwisscha & Wageenaar (2008) describe village strolls are improving physical and mental well-being.

## 5.2 Interviews

This section is dedicated to the findings and discussion of the semi-structured interviews with four organisations that worked with villagers and volunteers in creating these paths; three participants work in tourism and marketing paths, whereof one worked on realizing the tourism strategy 'Perspective 2030'; and two foreign participants were taken on a walk to see their perceptions of walking these strolls and paths. The list of interview participants can be found in Table 2 on page 16. Also, here the data speak and there is room for new themes, relations and patterns (Hay & Cope, 2021). The findings of the interviews are divided into the following emerging themes: Village strolls for residents, spreading out tourism, concerns of the wrong target group and involving the local community.

## Village strolls for residents

Multiple participants say that village strolls should be a short walk, about 3-7 km, a walk of one hour or two. It is meant for villagers to start and end near their homes and even enjoy it on a cold winter day after work. They explain that village strolls have a social aspect, not only through walking and meeting people on the way but especially during the creation process. People get together and have to discuss, make decisions and agree with each other, creating synergy. Some even say creating a walk like this creates friendships, not only for residents who have lived there the longest but also for those who just moved into the area, between different age groups. This is an emerging theme that was not discussed before in this study and is supported by the study of Mayaka et al. (2020) who studied community development practices in community-based tourism in Kenya. They found 'friend' relations developed over time due to the development of these practices. Another connection could be made with Brennan, et al. (2010) who say through collaboration and participation within community friendships are made, they did, however, refer to online communities. Additionally, a needed link between how the accessibility of different social groups enhances the resident identity as stated by Atmanagara (2010) previously in this chapter.

Participants working in Landscape Management organisations also say it is a great way of working together with the local community and gaining full support from establishing agreements with farmers to finding volunteers to help manage the landscape and maintain the continuity of the village stroll or clog path. This connects to Eerie & Spek's (2011) notice of a shift where the local community needs to be involved in the early stage to gain higher overall satisfaction and positive participation by all parties involved. All Landscape management participants agree that it is easier for the landscape organisation to manage nature and heritage while getting the full support of the community. They say that residents, in turn, get a village stroll, paths through places that are new, beautiful, away from traffic and showcase the landscape elements that make the villagers proud. The villagers have a great place to walk, and additional elements are added e.g., an insect hotel, a play area for kids, tree lines, fruit orchards, bridges, hedges, and places to rest or sit. A good example is the village stroll in Zweikhuizen, Limburg:

The idea of these strolls was that we, from our organisation Landscape Management, want to get people to take more pride in their surroundings. So that the protection of that environment also becomes a bit more natural. [...] people are often proud of their village. But are unable to pinpoint exactly where that lies in the landscape. [...] the rural surroundings of the village. Or a historical element or an old landgrave or a work that was once built. Through their strolls, they look at how we present that to others. How do we describe it? Where exactly is it and what does it look like? Then they sometimes find out that it doesn't quite look as they had hoped it would.

In Zweikhuizen they found out more or less by chance that there was a plum tree [...] that would have stood there in the past. [...] We only have a few plum trees left. And we should be

a bit prouder of that. In the meadows around Zweikhuizen, people made an appeal to plant plum trees. Those were done in large numbers. Everyone wanted those plum trees. [...] and those trees could also be adopted by people again. So that's actually a really nice [...] there are a lot of plum trees around Zweikhuizen now.

At the time, we also sometimes asked, do these people actually know how many plums they will grow and how much work it is to prune them? [...] people also start thinking, what should we do with all those plums? Well, then we are going to make a liquor out of them. That's a good idea too. liquor is delicious. Then again, they have something to be proud of (J. Kluskens)

The landscape management listens well to the local community and created a common goal. People worked together and were proud of their surroundings, plum trees and new local product of plum liquor. This example proves that creating village strolls does enhance social aspects, such as claimed by Rozema & Bovenhoff (2013) and Rozema & van den Beemt (2011). Furthermore, it shows a direct link between the village identity noted by Schrijfburo Terwisscha & Wagenaar (2008) and the identity residents feel with their surroundings argued by Baas (2006).

### **Spreading out tourism**

Interestingly, many participants mention village strolls and clog paths can be a way to attract visitors away from highlights. They say it is a good approach to attract people towards the in-between places and thus also relieve the pressure of highly-visited places e.g., natural parks, areas and reserves. All participants agree that routes are one of the most sought attractions among people who visit a new place. They say that visitors love exploring new villages, especially on foot as they can experience the place more deeply and interact with the local residents. This finding aligns with Mitas, et al (2021) and Staat (2018) stating that through social interaction and personal touch, the tourist experience is enhanced. Some participants say that it is a way to connect elements, that usually do not fit together as many stakeholders are involved. They also say that local people enjoy visitors walking their path, it creates a sense of pride, but also adds to the regional development:

[Village strolls] can contribute to the attractiveness of the area. Yes, provided they are maintained, accessible, findable, marketed, and that something is added that makes it interesting. [...] if you look for a connection with the residents. And it can be done with those village guides, [...] Street products [...] galleries [...] a tea garden. Then it can be really attractive for a village. [...] contributes a lot to the regional economy. [...] Those village strolls increase the liveability purely for the residents. [...] if things develop around it. [...] tourism and liveability are very much linked (J. Hoekstra).

Hoekstra mentions '*provided they are maintained, accessible, findable, marketed, ...*'. Many participants say that village strolls and clog paths are different in that way. Whereas clog

paths are a brand, seem well-organised and are great at ensuring continuity, village strolls often lack this (with the exemption of the Dwingeloo strolls). Many village strolls ran out of budget, and volunteers or farmers lost interest. The strolls were not available online and the brochure that was made at the time was outdated resulting in the stroll vanishing slowly. Many participants also say that during the creation of the village strolls there was no budget calculated for marketing nor a plan for additional subsidy. Some residents did get creative in keeping the stroll alive by making signs and keeping the path clear themselves. Most participants showcase that an initiator is highly important, someone with experience in managing such a project and keeping everyone involved but also, knows how to collect subsidies, market the village stroll and upkeep the continuity. These findings can be referenced back to the previous findings during the transect walks of lack of continuity as paths were neglected hidden, missing or broken signs.

Hoekstra also mentions '*... and that something is added that makes it interesting.*' The two participants that joint the transect walk both mentioned that they experienced the walks positively even though some parts were somewhat boring, but the translations I gave of local stories and information signs enhanced their walking experience. They did however would have loved to read, see or experience a translated version themselves. The other participants agree with the importance of informative or educational elements are highly important to enhance the walking experience, e.g., QR-code, information signs, online or offline stories, photos and or historic information. The clog path again excels as they have the app that does all of the above, except it is only available in Dutch. Many participants say it is not easy to realize village strolls or clog paths in English or other languages. It would mean more budget, manpower and time, which they do not have. Also, this references back to previous findings of this study. So, apart from lack of continuity, where hidden, missing or broken signs affected the overall experience, the researcher also notices a lack of other navigation possibilities and additionally, the non-Dutch language can negatively affect the tourist experience. This connects to Soruia (2005) who argues that accessibility is an integral part of the tourism industry and does in fact affect the tourist experience.

### **Concerns of the wrong target group**

Most participants do agree that village strolls and clog paths could potentially fit within the tourism strategy 'Perspective 2030'. yet there are concerns too. Most do say that it will be hard to attract visitors from outside the Netherlands solely to walk a village stroll or clog path. Usually, they are already in the area or need to be able to combine it with a highlight in the area. The largest concern some participants had was that during Covid-19 many rural nature areas experienced a huge increase in visitors. Even the clog paths had too many visitors:

We obviously cherish the fact that so many walkers come. But we do want that they keep to the rules. We had quite some problems during the corona with a very different target group. [...] they littered the paths and just walked through people's gardens, because they thought,



oh there we want to have a look. [...] We had almost 2 million walkers two years ago on the clog paths. [...]. what do you get? That farmers say I quit. Because there are just all kinds of people walking through my land [...] Because nobody has to cooperate on clog paths. You do it because you like it and because things are well organised. And even if you might be inconvenienced for a while, it will be solved quickly. But you should not get too bothered by the nuisance. So, we [...] are not necessarily keen on getting a whole lot more walkers on the trails (A. R. Vriend).

As UNTWO (2018) states, overtourism can put tremendous pressure on local communities and A. R. Vriend is not the only one with this concern, most participants did. Yet some participants also said that with the right communication, the right target group can be attracted and any new people outside of the usual target group need to be educated more. This emerging theory connects to a study by Wolf, et al. (2019) argue that education is a highly important, yet overlooked, but preventive and powerful strategy in visitor behaviour in nature areas. Similarly, Orams (1996) says that education is an effective means to reduce the negative effects of visitors to nature-based tourism.

### **Local community**

Through the concepts of village strolls and clog paths the local community is centred, as they are made for and by the local community. Yet, traditionally the Dutch tourism industry does not seem to have the local community centred as it relies or focuses more on entrepreneurs and other stakeholders:

Waddenland is the regional marketing organisation in Hoge Land. We are an organisation for and by tourism entrepreneurs. So, tourism entrepreneurs [...] can actively participate and help think about what needs to be done in the area. At the same time, we also use these entrepreneurs as ambassadors. [...] Of course, we do all this for visitors and residents of the area. We also have nine tourist information points where we inform visitors and residents (J. Hoekstra).

Anonymous 2 says that the Dutch tourism industry did involve many stakeholders, but not local residents directly:

But for perspective 2030, I think we did say that the resident should be given a much more important role. But I think ... that we didn't involve residents at that point. [...] We don't have that direct contact with the resident. Often this happens through other DMOs or municipalities. And we do try to facilitate or support it. We try to see how we can help municipalities. To start through conversations with those residents. But also, to see what kind of interventions can you make or can you use to give the residents the feeling that their voices are being heard. [...] Because it's their living environment. This has also become more and more clear to us through perspective. That is just a very important part (Anonymous 2)

The two participants of the information desk in Heusden also say their tourism is also mainly focused on promoting local businesses. However, these businesses did create a yearly mussel festival or art exhibitions for the local community. Anonymous 2 does agree that a type of reward is a must:

Because the residents have developed that (village strolls). So, you actually want to give something back that is of value to them. And it doesn't always have to be money. [...] It can also be of social value. [...] We also notice that this is still in its infancy. [...], what is suitable for such a community? [...] And then where can you contribute? And often we focus on our goal and then we say: 'They have village strolls and we're going to promote that'. While they haven't asked for that. [...] But actually, you have to try to let go of the goal 'we want tourists'. No, you actually want to know what the community or the village wants. And then see how tourists or visitors might be able to play a role in that (Anonymous 2).

These findings show two aspects, first, tourism in the Netherlands does not centralise the local community directly but rather entrepreneurs and other stakeholders (i.e., DMOs or the government) and second, giving back a certain reward for the local community is an obligation when implementing village strolls (or clog paths) in the tourism industry. The first finding contradicts while the second finding suits well with the Community-Centred Tourism Framework of Higgins-Desbiolles et al., (2019, p. 11) (can be found on p. 11). Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) argue that the local community should be the centre and all other parties should act and think in accordance with the wishes and needs of this local community. Additionally, they claim a just and sustainable industry, where tourism should thrive away from profit growth and put the rights of the local community above that of the tourists and companies that provide tourist products and services. They claim the only way to do this is to redefine tourism as *"the process of local communities inviting, receiving and hosting visitors in their local community, for limited time durations, with the intention of receiving benefits from such actions"*. (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019, p. 11). Schrijfburo Terwisscha & Wagenaar (2008) agree with keeping the needs and wishes in consideration when using village strolls (and clog paths) as a kind of regional development. Eerie & Spek (2011) take this even further by saying only when the local community is involved entirely from the beginning, higher satisfaction, participation, support and involvement can be expected.

Previously, we discussed that village strolls and clog paths seem similar, but are not. Mostly the continuity of the clog paths is stronger than that of the village strolls. In 2007 a village stroll competition was held by the Dutch landscape management, to claim the best provincial and national village strolls. Winners could use the won price to realize their stroll (Wiemer, 2007). This is the opposite of clog paths according to A. R. Vriend:

[...] It is not our intention to make a kind of competition of which clog paths are the most popular. Because then the people who maintain and contribute to lesser clog paths [...] could get the idea of, oh so we're not doing it well enough. [...] We are really into that sense of community and that participation. And every clog path is worthwhile. And one landscape might also be more attractive to someone than another (A. R. Vriend)

Traditionally, or when seeing tourism in the world of business, competition is something that is grounded within the tourism industry according to Vodeb (2012). Agreeing are Crouch & Ritchie (1999) who say that politicians are interested in a competitive economy, industries in the competition of their own industry and businesses in how they compete compared to others. Yet Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) and Eerie & Spek (2011) all describe a new way of looking at nature, heritage and tourism management. As village strolls and clog paths are made by the local community, this non-competition described by A. R. Vriend is somehow fitting the needs and wishes of the local community, as he describes that volunteers otherwise feel their time and effort was not good enough and might lose interest, while continuity is most important according to most participants.

## 6 Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

Village strolls can be found throughout the Netherlands and can be created in any village, town or area. While these strolls enhance the social and mental well-being of the local community (Schrijfburo Terwisscha & Wagenaar 2008) it also enhances the local identity and connection residents have with their environment (Baas, 2006). The accessibility by either opening up an area or including diverse social groups play a necessary part in the construction of the resident's identity (Atmanagara, 2010). Additionally, the social aspect is quite strong which results in the creation of friendships (Mayaka et al., 2020 & Brennan, et al., 2010). Thus, many positive effects are found from the creation process until the walking of village strolls. Yet, due to the loss of interest by farmers or volunteers and no additional funds or subsidies, village strolls slowly vanish. It is clear that continuity is the hardest part to maintain, but it is this continuity that can be found in the clog paths and Dwingeloo's village strolls. Here a strong sense of community and participation is found because villagers are involved in the early stage, something that Eerie & Spek (2011) say is important in nature and heritage management as it leads to higher satisfaction, participation, support and involvement.

So, can village strolls be part of the Dutch tourism strategy 'Perspective 2030'? It definitely fits the aims of the strategy, as village strolls (and clog paths) are everywhere in the Netherlands. If tourists can be attracted to visit these strolls, automatically they will spread out and visit every marginalised part of the Netherlands. More visitors mean more revenue, more investments and more room for regional development through local businesses and regional government. Still, accessibility is a problem with village strolls, as most parts are difficult to reach with public transportation. Accessibility also in terms of the online presence, marketing, and navigation during the walk, which currently is lacking, while Sorupia (2005) states that accessibility and transportation are integral parts of the tourism industry and do in fact affect the tourist experience. The village strolls and clog paths do have other aspects that enhance the tourism experience, through storytelling and social interaction with locals (Mitas, et al., 2021) or a personal touch (Staat, 2018) that can be found in the many QR codes, the clog path app, online audio recordings, video clips, historic photos or information texts. This together with the slowness of walking makes a tourist open to its environment and allows for local engagement and attention to people and place (Kato & Prozano, 2018).

That brings us to the main focus of this study: How do villagers perceive the use of their strolls to be part of the tourism strategy 'Perspective 2030'? Through Dutch landscape management and the creation of these village strolls and clog paths, the local community is at its centre and their needs and wishes are acted upon. The Dutch tourism industry, on the other hand, does not centralise the local community, something that is common, but must change according to Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019). Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) claim a just and sustainable industry, where tourism should thrive away from profit growth and put the rights of the local community above that of the tourists and companies that provide tourist prod-

ucts and services. They claim the only way to do this is to redefine tourism as “*the process of local communities inviting, receiving and hosting visitors in their local community, for limited time durations, with the intention of receiving benefits from such actions*”. (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019, p. 11). Schrijfburo Terwisscha & Wagenaar (2008) agree with keeping the needs and wishes in consideration when using village strolls (and clog paths) as a kind of regional development. Some concerns also arose about overtourism, whereas village strolls already serve the purpose of attracting people towards the in-between places and thus relieve the pressure of highly-visited places e.g., natural parks, areas and reserves. During Covid-19 many marginalised areas had problems with a different target group and this kind of tourist did not respect the rules of the walk. They littered and walked off the path and came in big numbers, which resulted in many complaints among farmers and volunteers. As UNTWO (2018) states, overtourism can put tremendous pressure on local communities. To overcome this, Wolf, et al. (2019) argue that education is a highly important, yet overlooked, but preventive and powerful strategy in visitor behaviour in nature areas. Similarly, Orams (1996) says that education is an effective means to reduce the negative effects of visitors to nature-based tourism. If villagers let their village strolls be part of the ‘Perspective 2030’ they must be the centre, it is their concept, and they must benefit and receive suitable financial or social rewards. A shift is important from working for, to working with the local community and involving them from the start without focusing on personal gain, profit or competition.

Whether all villagers want to have these paths and strolls open to the world is not something that can be found out through this one study. Due to time constraints, but also privacy restrictions it was not able to get in contact with enough villagers to base reliable research on. While this study mainly focused on organisations that work or worked with volunteers in creating village strolls, it makes a strong case for the importance of involving the local community in tourism. The positive and negative elements of implementing village strolls in the Dutch tourism strategy are displayed, but more research is needed on whether or not villagers want their village stroll, clog path including their landscape, home and village identity to be shared with the tourist and tourism industry.

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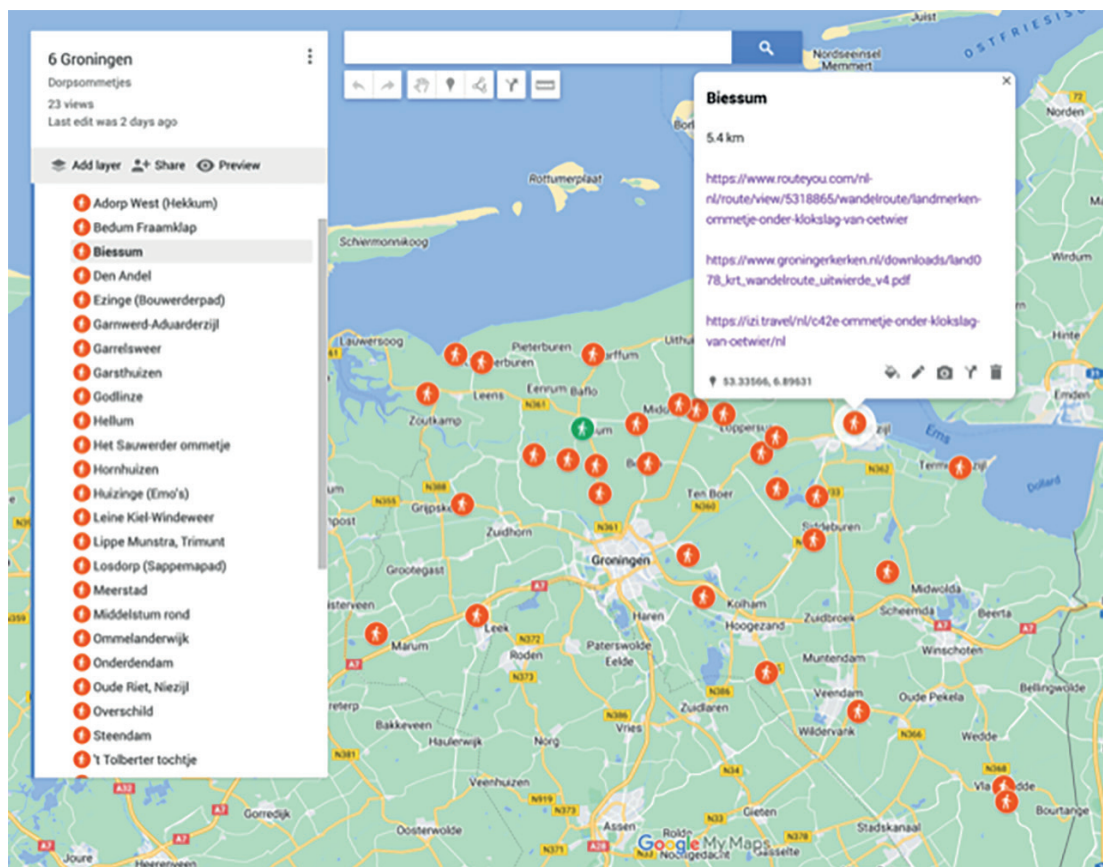


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## 8 Appendix

### Appendix A – Example of Groningen’s village strolls

This is an example of the village strolls to be found in the province of Groningen. The red symbols show a singular stroll and the green symbols are multiple strolls with the same starting point. When clicking on the symbols the amount of km emerges and a link where the stroll was found online. An example of Biessum is given, it contains the online leaflet, the route and an audio tour.



## Appendix B – Example of the transect walk in Overijssel

This is an example of the transect walk in the province of Overijssel. Green symbols mean a positive sight, red ones are negative and yellow stars are experienced as highlights. Every symbol can contain photos, text or a link to additional information, an example the Jewish hiding place is shown. Due to privacy concerns, it is not possible to share a link to these Google Maps in this study but they can be shared upon request.

