

The Driving Forces of Regional Innovation Systems

The Case of the LEADER Region Marburger Land in Germany



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Abstract

This exploratory research intends to understand the driving forces within a regional innovation system (RIS), analysing the example of a rural area in Germany. It seeks to investigate how RIS help to create sustainable tourism products in rural areas.

The theoretical framework focusses on the concepts of rural tourism, innovation and sustainability. Rural areas are often less developed than urban areas and need to innovate in order to strengthen their infrastructure and economy. One strategic area for innovations is tourism, often contributing considerably to the wealth of a region.

The role of a RIS for promoting sustainable innovations in rural areas is discussed. Due to their locality and smaller size, RIS are highly flexible in their response towards changes in the external environment. They are embedded in national, or even global, framework conditions affecting them. Special attention is given to the role of local entrepreneurs as a key resource.

This theoretical framework serves to analyse the "Region Marburger Land" comprising 5 communities in Germany participating in the European LEADER programme during the funding period 2007 to 2013. The case study presents information from desk research and document analysis complemented by semi-structured interviews with persons leading tourism projects.

Results of the LEADER programme, like specific tourism projects in the region and their effects, are analysed to understand the working of this complex system. Literature shows a research gap with regard to RIS and tourism. This study can contribute to closing the gap and to increase the possibilities for comparing cases.

Keywords: *Case Study, Regional Innovation System, Rural Tourism, Sustainability, LEADER programme*

Research Question:

"Which are the driving forces within a Regional Innovation System fostering sustainable products in rural tourism?"

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents Rosario and Bernd.

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List of Abbreviations

IS – Innovation System

NIS – National Innovation System

RIS – Regional Innovation System

RT – Rural Tourism

SME – Small and Medium Enterprises

R&D – Research and Development

HR – Human Resources

LEADER - Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale

EU – European Union

ENRD - European Network for Rural Development

BMLE- Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft

(Eng.: Ministry for Food and Agriculture)

ELER - Europäischer Landwirtschaftsfonds für die Entwicklung des Ländlichen Raumes

(Eng.: European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development)

LAG – Local Action Group

SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

MTM – Marburg Tourismus Marketing

(Eng.: Marburg Tourism Marketing)

1 Introduction

In today's fast changing and competitive global world with its markets driven, also at the local level, by changing trends and a large variety of different life-styles, innovations are of major importance to remain competitive and financially successful in the long run, but also to ensure sustainability and a decent quality of life (Alsos, Eide & Madsen, 2014; Bossel, 1998; Florida, 2002; Florida, 1995; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010b). In order to develop further and to ensure financial growth and wealth of the local society and economy, a geographic area or a city benefits from branding activities, especially when using tourism as an enabler and branding a destination as tourism destination. Moreover, sustainable developments to increase the quality of life of the inhabitants can be very helpful to make a destination attractive, not only for inhabitants but also for visitors (Colomb, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Kolb, 2006). This can be considered a chance, especially for rural areas, which often face such problems as long-term unemployment, depopulation, particularly in the agricultural sector, a weak infrastructure, and a decrease of the service industry (Carson, Carson & Hodge, 2014; Cowan & Van de Paal, 2000; European Commission, 2006; Novelli, Schmitz & Spencer, 2006; Romão, Guerreiro, & Rodrigues, 2012; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

Research suggests that, in order to enhance innovation and foster the development of geographic areas, the implementation of innovation systems (ISs) is a valuable approach, as these systems permit to organize and manage activities in a certain geographic area in order to enhance innovation which helps to develop these areas (Hall & Williams, 2008; Rubach, 2012; Sundbo, 2009). There are, however, different types of ISs, of which the regional innovation system (RIS), restricted to a small geographic area, is seen as very beneficial, because its small size ensures flexibility in terms of organization and management and allows to quickly adapt and respond to the changing trends and market demands (Asheim, Coenen & Svensson-Henning, 2003; Cooke, Uranga & Etzebarria, 1997; Chen, 2004; Cook & Memedovic, 2003; D'Allura, Galvagno, & Li Destri, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Saldaña Rosas 2014; Ronningen & Lien, 2014; Schrempf, Kaplan & Schroeder, 2012). Based on this theoretical approach, the European Commission introduced the LEADER (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale) programme in 1990, which is considered to work with RISs and was designed to support the development of rural areas by fostering innovation through cooperation and collaboration between the private and the public sector (European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

In order to implement, use, and keep improving a RIS, it is of major importance to explore and understand how the different factors comprised by a RIS influence each other, interact, and how they are influenced by external factors. Therefore, a theoretical exploration of this topic is important to better understand reality (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b, Yin, 2009).

This, however, cannot be achieved in a purely theoretical way but needs to take into account and be informed by empirical knowledge that can be provided by case studies, which, however, need to be described concretely and with sufficient precision for this purpose (cf. Brown, 2008; Cresswell, 2007; Yin, 2009).

Research in this field reveals, that the notion of ISs in general is a rather new phenomenon, and existing research mostly focuses only on network patterns, synergistic influences, and market competition, leaving a gap with regard to research focusing on the outcome of innovative activities (Hjalager, 2010a; Hjalager, 2010b; Hjalager, 2014). However, ISs are very dynamic and complex, and so is the real world. Therefore it is argued that ISs can be better understood if particular cases are studied in depth, and if theory is used as a basis for analysing many details (cf. Yin, 2009). This in turn leads to the confirmation, modification, and extension of the theoretical base (Hjalager, 2010a). For these reasons the present research aims at closing the gap pointed out above by contributing to the understanding of driving forces and outcomes within the broad concept of ISs. This is to be achieved by conducting a single instrumental case study, which adds to the number of similar case studies available already (cf. Cresswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Moreover, it has to be mentioned that this research is designed on the basis of a case study conducted by Hjalager (2010b). Hjalager is one of the most well-known researchers in this field of research.

RISs in particular, play an important role in managing and organizing innovation in rural areas, by aiming at improving their local economy (cf. Alsos et al., 2014; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014). Therefore, this study does not only aim at understanding the relationships within a RIS but also at contributing to the understanding of what the driving forces in such RISs are, that foster innovations, by looking at the outcomes in terms of specific products. The number of this type of case study is relatively limited still (Hjalager, 2010b). Therefore it is expected that this case study adds to the number of existing studies in order to provide a broader base for comparison, further research, and possible generalizations on the long run (cf. Cresswell, 2007; Yin, 2009).

Following the case study designed by Hjalager (2010b), the author decided to examine the LEADER region Marburger Land in Germany, because the geographic boundaries of this region are clearly defined, and the region was found to be small enough to narrow down the empirical scope of the case study. Moreover, the author originates from this region and therefore had personal interest in gaining more insights into current developments. Also it could be expected that access to information and informants would be easier under such conditions, last not least with regard to the very severe time constraints of this study. In order to further delimit the case, the LEADER funding period 2007 to 2013 was chosen for this research.

This was the first period for the region investigated to participate in the LEADER programme, and it had been finished already when the research was conducted. This was of importance to ensure that there were outcomes which could be evaluated (cf. Cresswell, 2007; Yin, 2009).

To find out what are the important driving forces (cf. Bürgi, Hersperger & Schneeberger, 2004; Hjalager, 2010b; Ronningen & Lien, 2014) within a RIS by looking at specific outcomes, the following research question was formulated:

“What are the driving forces within a RIS, fostering sustainable products in rural tourism?”

It was decided to focus especially on sustainable products in rural tourism (RT), as, first of all, in the case of the LEADER programme a RIS is designed to support the development of a rural area (cf. European Commission, 2006; Peña, Jamilena & Molina, 2012; Wade & Rinne, 2008). Then sustainability in terms of financial, social, and environmental longevity and viability is of major importance in order to succeed in the long run. Only under such conditions local resources will not be exploited until they are exhausted and disappear, and the availability of resources can be ensured in the long run (cf. Bossel, 1998; Cavagnaro, 2012; Munasinghe, 2007). Moreover, looking for sustainability has become a global trend in the past years and is considered to contribute to possible regional branding activities, as the demand for sustainable products is still increasing in general, but also in RT in particular (cf. Chan & Baum, 2007a, b; European Commission, 2006; Florida, 2002; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Peña, Jamilena & Molina, 2012; Zografos & Allcroft, 2007).

The specific focus on the tourism sector was chosen because the service industry is considered to grow further in the future and is expected to become an even greater economic factor in general (Cowan & Van de Paal, 2000; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Wade & Rinne, 2008). In rural areas in particular, the most promising and most feasible service industry seems to be tourism and the tourism-related industries. Apart from being an enabler of innovative activities, the tourism sector also benefits from innovations, just like other sectors. Therefore it can be seen as a sector which is suitable to positively reinforce the local rural economy and developments in local rural areas (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

Although the main focus in everyday life is on financial feasibility and economic growth, when it comes to innovation and development it has to be taken into account that regional development does not only have impact on financial funds but also on the inhabitants, for whom development can result in a higher quality of life (cf. Florida, 1995; Hall & Williams, 2008; Kolb, 2006). In that sense this research field should be of general interest to society and to the inhabitants of rural regions in particular.

In order to provide the reader with an overview of the theoretical concepts related to the topic and used in the present study, and in order to provide the scientific theoretical background on which the basic theoretical framework used in this study is based, relevant literature is reviewed first. Then the content of the literature is narrowed down to the most essential parts and summarized in a conceptual framework designed specifically for the present study. However, as already mentioned, the phenomenon is rather new. Therefore the main emphasis is put on research and literature written by the authors Hjalager and Hall & Williams, who have focused very much on the present topic and who are well known scientists in the field. After the theoretical discussion the methodological approach is presented, introducing the research question and the setup of the case study. In the following chapter data collected by the review of relevant documents, other than scientific literature, is analysed. Additionally their layout and accessibility are discussed (cf. Cresswell, 2007; Yin, 2009).

First, insights into practices and policies of the European LEADER programme in general are presented, before a detailed picture of the Region Marburger Land and related development efforts is provided. These analyses are supported by information collected by means of semi-structured interviews (cf. May, 2011) with a LEADER administrator and the five LEADER representatives of the Region Marburger Land. Finally the findings are discussed and summarized and general conclusions are drawn from the different parts of the data analysis in order to answer the research question.

Apart from contributing to academia in general, this study was designed to contribute to the information that people participating in LEADER programmes can access in order to gain knowledge and collect and develop ideas for implementing development projects in their own regions. It might also provide interesting insights to policy-makers. The latter might help to improve related policy-making in general in order to exploit the full potential of rural areas, when using a RIS as a platform for innovation. The study is relevant for the labour markets and the business communities of rural areas to the extent that it aims at contributing to the improvement of RISs and their management, in particular in the context of the LEADER programme. The latter, among other purposes, aims at improving business opportunities in its regions as well as at supporting and promoting start-ups. All of these activities contribute both to job generation and to the stabilization or increase of rural demand. Both are important issues for a business community. These factors, in addition, contribute to attractive living conditions and the quality of life, topics which should be of high interest to communal leaders, administrators, and policy-makers, as the findings could help to improve practices and policy-making in particular in the region studied but also in general.

Furthermore, the present paper should be of interest both to scientists dealing with theoretical issues of regional ISs or with the empirical investigation of issues related to such systems and rural development, and to practitioners involved in the design and implementation of ISs in rural areas, whether in the framework of LEADER or not. Of course, it should be of particular interest also to anybody involved in the LEADER programme, be it at the level of management and local action groups (LAGs) or at the level of inhabitants developing and implementing their projects (cf. Alsos et al., 2014; European Union, 2006; Florida, 1996; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b).

Ethically questionable effects of the study are not expected, as it is designed to promote scientific progress and practical improvements in the region investigated. Thus it will not cause any disadvantages to particular stakeholders or the inhabitants of the region in general. Instead, it is expected to promote their interests along with the general well-being of the region, without supporting one-sided interests of a particular stakeholder or sponsor. Furthermore, the interviews are all based on written informed consent and the interviewees were given the opportunity to check the transcriptions of their interviews. In this way it is made sure that their privacy is not violated and confidentiality is protected (cf. Creswell, 2007).

2 Literature Review

This chapter aims at providing the theoretical base for the empirical case study, in which the focus is on the development of rural areas through innovations. Relevant literature is reviewed in order to introduce, discuss and define the concepts of RISs, RT, and Innovation. Substantial theory, based on theory reviewed, is explained and summarized by the conceptual framework (Fig.1). On the one hand, the conceptual framework serves to clarify and structure the relationships between the different concepts and factors. On the other hand it will be used later on in the research to analyse the empirical data collected in the course of the research, in order to compare real life practice to the theory. According to Fig.1, the main concept of the RIS is introduced. Then the special role of RT is explained and later on the notion of innovation and service innovation in particular is discussed.

The service industry is still growing and with it the dynamic sector of tourism. Tourism is subject to globalization facilitating travelling. At the same time it is subject to trends such as an increasing demand of tourists for sustainability in general and environmental friendliness in particular. Apart from that, at a smaller scale, tourism development is crucial nowadays especially for non-industrial rural areas. Cities and regions are depending on marketing and branding themselves in order to stay competitive and financially successful in the long run.

In particular tourism development often also brings along networking and growth opportunities for other sectors and enhances the growth of infrastructure of information, resources, and humans (Colomb, 2012; Kolb, 2006). This contributes to the development of a region and is closely linked to innovation and its conceptualization in ISs (Hall & Williams, 2008).

It is understood that ISs can provide a useful platform for promoting and managing innovation in the different industries in order to advance innovative activities (Doloreux & Parto, 2005; Hall & Williams 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Ronningen & Lien, 2014). However, reviewing literature, it became evident, that the notion of RISs is a recent phenomenon and that related concepts are blurry (Alsos et al., 2014; Hall, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a, b). Therefore, the discussion focuses on the very comprehensive research by Hall & Williams and by Hjalager, who can be considered to be experts with regard to this topic.

2.1. Regional Innovation Systems

The notion of ISs appeared as there was the need to conceptualize the blurry and complicated idea of innovation in order to conduct scientific research (Ronningen & Lien, 2014). Furthermore, it is argued, that

“... the interest for identifying innovation systems is political. The concept of innovation system presents an instrument that researchers could identify and politicians could operate to increase innovation and accordingly economic growth.”

Sundbo (2009, p. 450)

However, it has to be kept in mind that the concept is not perfect. As a part of the concept of ISs, Rubach (2012) introduces the idea that,

“... geographical proximity between actors promotes interaction and hence innovation.”

(Rubach, 2012, p. 3)

She furthermore explains, that this idea implies that there are manifold actors involved which cooperate in an interrelated, complex network. This introduces the idea that the concept of ISs is linked to geographic or political areas, in particular national innovation systems (NIS) and RISs (Schrepf et al., 2012). These have been understood by academic researchers and policy-makers as concepts that can help to analyse and gain knowledge about how innovation processes work (Doloreux & Parto, 2005).

According to various authors (Asheim , Coenen & Svensson, 2003; Chen, 2004; Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Cooke et al., 2004; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a; Ronningen & Lien (2014); Schrepf et al., 2012) the concept of NISs was established first by Freeman (1987) and Lundvall (1992). Later the concept was developed further and the notion of RIS emerged.

Hall and Williams (2008) explain that the NIS and the RIS share the characteristics of comprising entangled and vigorous network interactions. The differences lie in the size and geographic dimension, as a RIS concerns a smaller geographic region, whereas a NIS is tied to the geographic borders of a country. As in the present study the object of interest is only a certain part of a country, it is considered appropriate to focus on a RIS, while, however, not neglecting its embeddedness in a NIS.

The Concept of Regional Innovation System

According to Hall and Williams there is

“... the notion that territorial agglomeration provides the optimum context for an innovation based learning economy which promotes localized learning and endogenous regional economic development.”

(Hall & Williams, 2008, Ch. 6, p. 142)

The concept of the region as a geographic agglomeration and an area of localized learning is agreed upon by various other authors (Asheim et al., 2003; Cooke et al., 1997; Chen, 2004; Cook & Memedovic, 2003; D’Allura et al., 2012; Saldaña Rosas 2014; Ronningen & Lien, 2014; Schrempf et al., 2012).

Moreover, Chen (2004) notes that there are inconsistencies in defining a RIS, as it is complex and dynamic and also implies the concept of innovation, which in itself is hard to grasp and which is often not clearly defined either. The concept of innovation and the definition used in this study will be discussed at the end of the present chapter. This idea of a RIS becomes clearer when looking at the definition given by Hall and Williams (2008), stating that a RIS is

“... a set of economic and institutional relationships occurring in a given geographical area which generates a collective learning process leading to a rapid diffusion of knowledge and best practice.”

(Hall & Williams, 2008, Ch. 6, p. 145)

This definition is also given by Bialk-Wolf, Pechlaner and Nordhorn (2013). Doloreux & Parto (2005) specify that the label “region” has been applied mainly to geographic territories and jurisdictions. Apart from that, Hall and Williams (2008) also note that there are many different definitions of a RIS. However, all agree that

“... institutions and cultural environment of a region interact with activities of private firms.”

(Hall & Williams, 2008, Ch. 6, p. 145).

Furthermore, they state that the related concept of clusters is also not always clearly defined in literature. Hall and Williams define clusters as agglomerations of companies within the same industry which are not to be confounded with regions, which in turn can be composed of various sectors and clusters (Hall & Williams, 2008). This means, that for the present study the concept of region has to be used, as the concept of cluster would not cover the non-economic aspects involved in the LEADER programme.

The Region as Context for Innovation Systems

Literature (Doloreux & Parto, 2005; Florida, 1995) acknowledges the importance of the region, as regions become more and more involved in innovative activities which in turn help the region to grow economically. It is argued furthermore, that the learning-regions focus on knowledge creation and learning due to the fact that in modern times all industries become more and more knowledge dependent (Doloreux & Parto, 2005; Florida, 1995; Romão et al., 2012).

This is underlined by Rubach (2013), stating that innovation should be understood as a continuous learning and improvement process. In this respect networking has to be considered as an important factor supporting such learning processes. With regard to networking, it has to be understood that, in the present case, the notion of networks is integrated into the concept of a RIS. It refers to any already existing or newly established network, be it a formal or an informal one (Alsos et al., 2014, Hall & Williams, 2008).

RISs are considered to be more flexible than NISs in adjusting and creating innovations that are responding to the constantly changing needs of the market which is influenced by globalization and fast changing life-styles and consumption patterns. They are more flexible because the actors are located in geographic proximity which makes interactions and communication easier and more efficient (Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf et al., 2013; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b). This argument goes hand in hand with the fact that

"... in this new economic environment, regions build economic advantage through their ability to mobilize and harness knowledge and ideas. In fact, regionally based complexes of innovation and production are increasingly the preferred vehicle used to harness knowledge and intelligence across the globe."

(Florida, 1995, p. 532)

Literature (Asheim et al., 2003; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a; Rubach 2013) explains that innovation, and therewith a RIS, highly depends on resources which are subject to geographic location. This is because those resources are highly influenced by the local economy, culture, and politics, which provide unique capabilities that are of major importance to foster innovation.

The resources may be mobile or immobile, tangible or intangible, but in any case they depend on the preconditions. Preconditions are defined here as human resources (HR) and education, (other) goods and information, interactions, policies, research and development (R&D), natural resources, such as landscapes for example, but also interactions, communications and exchanges with actors outside the RIS. All these preconditions influence the characteristics of a region, which comprise in particular its stakeholders, including private and public sectors,

politicians, R&D institutions, and inhabitants (Asheim et al, 2003; Chang & Chen, 2004; Bialk-Wolf et al, 2013; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams 2008; Schrempf et al. 2012).

Important actors amongst stakeholders are entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises (SME) (Fig.1). These are subject to special attention because they are considered an important part of the human infrastructure of a RIS as they are usually very eager to innovate. Due to the rather small sizes of their businesses they are usually also very dependent on a network of co-operators and suppliers in order to innovate (George & Mair, 2009; Hall & Williams, 2008; Rosas, 2014). This leads to the notion, that in order to establish a well-functioning RIS, it is crucial to have a human infrastructure to foster knowledge which can be applied to production processes in order to enhance innovations (Florida, 1995).

Hall and Williams (2008) sum up the importance of understanding ISs in a regional context in the following six (6) arguments:

(1) The first argument is the importance of the preconditions which are predetermined by the region. These include a qualified labour force, the offer of education, and the presence of research organizations, for example, as they help to create knowledge and therefore can be used to create a competitive advantage for the region.

(2) Second, Hall and Williams state that local proximity often enhances the networking between companies and public organizations. In the present research networking entails the exchange of goods, services, and information. Especially the latter is important to foster innovations.

(3) Furthermore, for the before-mentioned reason, personalized interactions between knowledge providers and companies are more likely to occur in local contexts.

(4) Hall and Williams also state that regions have proven to play a vital role with regard to innovation policies. The latter are used to encourage the development of innovation plans and strategies. Literature (Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Cooke, 2004; Schrempf et al., 2012) explains furthermore, that in this case policies can be better adjusted to the local needs and be brought closer to the citizens. This is of major importance, as, due to the fact that every region has individual and unique features and resources, one and the same policy cannot be used to suit the needs of all.

(5) Moreover, the local proximity within a region can lead to a mutual learning and therefore foster innovation activities. This is based on a shared organizational structure in which the networking activities between companies, knowledge providers, and political bodies take place.

(6) Finally it is argued that the RIS contributes its outcomes to the entity of the NIS, which in turn influences the RIS with its policy-making.

In the literature study conducted by D'Allura et al. (2012), these six factors are summarized as:

"... Regional Science, Economics and Innovation, Social Embeddedness, Evolutionary Economic Geography, Knowledge and Organizational Learning, and International Business."

(D'Allura et al., 2012, p. 149)

Chang & Chen (2004) refer to similar features with (1) a culture of cooperation, (2) an associative culture, (3) the ability and experience to carry out institutional change, (4) coordination and public/private consensus, (5) a productive culture with sub-elements of labour relationships, cooperation at work, company responsibility for society, and productive specialization, (6) existing interface mechanisms located in scientific, technological, productive, and financial skills. Because of the language used, these features can be interpreted as derived from the level of business management, but they are nonetheless applicable to the broader concept of a RIS. Bialk-Wolf et al. (2013) wrap up why innovative networks and geographic proximity are so dependent on each other. They argue that

"... the regional context shapes innovations. To the characteristics of regional culture belong trust, openness and risk-taking which in turn influences also the nature of networks."

(Bialk-Wolf et al. 2013, p. 116)

These six arguments are understood to be supported by the three characteristics discussed below. The interrelationships between regional factors and characteristics of a RIS are considered to be useful later on, for developing a concise framework which will be of help to analyse empirical data. The six arguments and the three characteristics give a precise, short but all-encompassing overview of the most important factors and their interrelationships in a RIS. Moreover, they are considered valid, as both lists are redundant in literature.

Characteristics of Regional Innovation Systems

According to Hall and Williams (2008) there are three (3) significant characteristics of a RIS. These are the entity which defines and forms the region, the focus on "soft" characteristics of the region (the emphasis put on soft aspects of economic activity), and the extra-regional networks (extra-local connections).

(1) Hall and Williams (2008) state that the entity defining and forming a region includes all stakeholders of a region. These can be categorized as companies and individuals in the private and the public sector, policy-makers, and education and research institutions. Bringing the stakeholders together can result in a greater exchange of goods, services, and knowledge, and it can foster innovative actions at a low financial risk for all stakeholders.

This is supported through the notion that the creativity of an individual benefits from the knowledge of other individuals with diverse backgrounds in a social network. It is moreover suggested that this creativity, derived from a diverse pool of knowledge, enhances innovation (Ching, 2014).

(2) The focus on so called “soft” characteristics is of major importance, as they refer to tacit knowledge, quality of life as well as regional connections, infrastructure, communication, exchange and creation of information, financial investments, and technological developments within the community.

All of them are very place specific and are linked to the geography, history, and culture of the region (Hall & Williams, 2008). Asheim et al. (2003) underline, that the latter are geographically immobile and therefore very unique and bound to the regional area.

“Soft” characteristics comprise “quality of life” factors, which, amongst others, include a good infrastructure, recreational areas, good housing, safety, and education (Hall & Williams, 2008). According to Florida (2002), those are the important features for a community to attract the “creative class” which brings along knowledge and creativity. The latter help to foster innovation. Bialk-Wolf et al. (2013) reach consensus with the before-mentioned issues, saying that it is crucial for a region to attract skilled workers and also tourists by offering proper economic conditions and a pleasant social environment. A link between stakeholders and the “soft” characteristics of a RIS are what Schrempf et al. (2012) define as institutions. In their definition institutions include

“... mutually agreed rules and norms ...” as well as “... laws, social conventions, contracts, traditions ... and organizations.”

(Schrempf et al., 2012, p. 5)

(3) The third characteristic, the extra-regional networking, refers to communication, financial and technological channels, and infrastructure connected to companies and stakeholders outside the region (Hall & Williams, 2008). Asheim et al. (2003) find in their study that this characteristic is of major importance in order to create a competitive advantage in the long run, as new information and knowledge can be integrated from the external environment.

The before-mentioned features of a RIS are defined similarly by the literature in terms of the networking of local stakeholders with the focus on knowledge exchange, institutions supporting the networking activities, and the role of the RIS in policy-making and with that in entering in dialogue with external parties (Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf et al. 2013; Chang & Chen, 2004; Ronningen & Lien, 2014; Schrempf et al., 2012).

Moreover, findings suggest that

"... the RIS approach stresses that a successful regional innovation system needs to develop a collective identity. The regional identity acts as a crucial vehicle for activating social capital and enhancing regional innovation capability."

(Chang & Chen, 2004, p. 23).

This statement is underlined by Kolb (2006), who is very explicit about the fact that all stakeholders should be involved equally in a project, such as destination branding for example, and that a shared vision and mission should be understood by everyone. Everyone should identify himself with it. Literature agrees that the regional resources constitute the preconditions of a region, which in their turn influence the characteristics of a region.

In order to foster innovation however, resources need to be exchanged within the region in order to find new applications, combinations or transform them into new products, services or processes, for example. This can be achieved through bringing resources and actors, in this case the stakeholders, together for networking and collaboration, which is facilitated by geographic proximity and a shared culture. Networking and collaboration are considered as especially relevant for building relationships between public and private sectors, non-governmental organisations, and also between individuals. (Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010a; Kisiel & Gierwiatowska, 2013; Schrempf et al. 2012; Sorensen, 2007). This is understood and managed best by using the concept of system defined as

"... a set of elements dynamically interacting and organized in relation to a goal."

(Francois, 2004, p. 580, no. 3322 System, similar Bossel 1998, p. 35)

It can be concluded that this definition can also be used for networks, which can be considered as a particular kind of systems, i.e. systems with one level only. Moreover, when looking at the wider picture and considering a RIS as part of a NIS, as previously discussed, the system with one level only becomes part of a hierarchy of nested systems. This provides a context for analysing innovation at different levels such as the business level, the region as an entity, which relates to the notion of RIS as it is discussed here, and the national or European level. This definition means that a system is a theoretical construct which consists of a lot of different elements and relationships (Fuchs-Heinritz, Lautmann, Rammstedt & Wienold, 1994).

Such relationships can form circular feedback loops, which lead to systemic self-renewal through constant learning and knowledge creation in order to survive on the highly competitive market (Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Hall & Williams, 2008; Senge, 1990). This leads to the conclusion that innovation is not only subject to feedback mechanisms but also affecting its external environment and vice versa.

Moreover, such elements are usually organized at different levels in a systems hierarchy (Francois, 2004, p. 588, no. 3365, System Hierarchy). It is formed, for example, by communities constituting regions which form nations which in their turn join to build international systems like the European Union (EU) and, at the highest level, the global world system. A more generic approach to this systemic hierarchy can be found in the appendix (Appendix 2).

Literature agrees on the importance of connections between the stakeholders of a RIS and partners from other regions and other national, international, and global networks. This helps to prevent a RIS from a "lock-in", which would mean that at some point knowledge exchange stagnates because the system is closed in itself, which implies the existence of some kind of feedback circle which is blocking change. The danger of a lock-in is dealt with as a major point of criticism of the concept of RIS (Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Cooke, 2004; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010a; Schrepf et al., 2012). This way of supporting knowledge creation and exchange can be understood as very important for the use of knowledge as a source of innovation. This is discussed in more detail later on.

Typology of Regional Innovation Systems

As can be seen in Fig.1, the main focus lies on the concept of a RIS, which can manifest itself in 3 different types: Genuine Innovators, Adapters, and Adopters (Hall & Williams, 2008).

Hall and Williams (2008) develop a typology of RISs (see Appendix 1), the features of which are similar to the one developed by Cooke (2004). According to the table in Appendix 1 they differentiate between 3 types. Genuine Innovators focus on high road solutions and use tourism as enabler, whereas Adopters focus on low road solutions and focus on financial issues and investments by exploiting the benefits of tourism through maximizing the numbers of visitors. Adapters are usually depending on the State which supports the function of entrepreneurs and tourism as enabler in order to innovate (Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Cooke, 2004). The Adapters can, therefore, be understood as a middle path between the two extremes of the Genuine Innovator and the Adopter.

Low road solutions foster disruptive innovations, and are mainly focusing on property-oriented growth strategies which will help to repackage and promote a destination. High road solutions are usually more incremental and linked to innovation through learning and knowledge creation. Moreover, innovations are more incremental and contribute to a region's competitive advantage in the long run (Hall & Williams, 2008). This implies that high road solutions are closely related to the geographic and "soft" features of a region. It also points towards sustainable innovation. This notion will be discussed more in detail later on. It also relates to the "stickiness of place", which includes such features as attractiveness, culture, and the attraction and retention of the creative class (Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008).

However, all of these different types consist of three components: The region, which is defined as a geographic area (Hall & Williams, 2008), the system itself, and innovation. The latter is not shown or defined as a process in the conceptual map but as an outcome (Fig. 1). The innovative process itself can be understood to take place throughout the whole RIS and the region, the way it is conceptualized here. The innovation process is based on the "input" of resources which are mainly subject to the geographic area constituting the region which is implementing or using a RIS. However, in the case of the European LEADER programme external resources also play an important role. The concept of innovation will be discussed in more detail later on.

The concept of Hall and Williams (2008) of a RIS seems rather complete, as it includes the delimitation of a RIS by the limits of a region, the internal differentiation into different sectors like economy and "institutional" relationships, which can be interpreted as including social, political, and cultural relationships, and the notion of relationships itself, which connect such sector or component. Furthermore, it includes the dynamic process of learning, itself a kind of innovation.

2.2 Rural Tourism Rural Tourism and Its Destinations

The service industry is considered to grow further in the future, also at a regional level. Therefore it is expected to become an even more important economic factor (Cowan & Van de Paal, 2000). Tourism constitutes a large part of the service industry but can be understood as very distinct from the rest of this industry. It offers a mixture of services and products, in which services in particular have special features such as intangibility and co-creation, in which the customer takes part (Alsos et al., 2014; Hall & Williams, 2008; Weidenfeld, 2013).

With regard to Fig. 1 it can be understood that RT, as a specific sector of the tourism industry, shares similar features and the same relationships with other concepts as tourism in general. However, specific features and the definition of RT will be discussed later in this chapter.

A destination is sold as a packaged tourism product in the first place. Once arrived, however, tourists start to purchase smaller tourism products. This enhances competition amongst businesses within the region (Kolb, 2006; Romão et al., 2012). Therefore there is a strong need to differentiate a region clearly from other regions. That can be achieved by means of destination branding (Fig.1) (Kolb, 2006; Romão et al., 2012). Destination branding can exist by itself, regardless whether a RIS is implemented or not. It is, however, closely related to tourism. Tourism, and therewith RT, is subject to destination branding (Fig.1). Tourism is enhanced and promoted by the branding activities and at the same time supports these in turn (Kolb, 2006). This means that a self-reinforcing feedback cycle can be set in motion.

Branding is characterized as establishing the recognition of a destination and of its attractive features. It is considered as an important economic factor for the wealth of a destination because resources, or even some of the services and products, are not necessarily related to the tourism sector only but to other sectors of the industry as well. This indicates that the image and the attractiveness of a destination is highly important in order to attract tourists and visitors. However, in the long run this can be ensured only by carefully using and sustaining the region's resources and identity, and by permanent innovation (Colomb, 2012; Romão et al., 2012; Guerreiro & Rodrigues, 2012; Hjalager, 2014; Kolb, 2006).

This is shown in Fig. 1, where tourism, and as part of it RT, is influenced by the innovations created through the innovation processes within the RIS and the region. It shows, as an indirect relationship, that tourism is influenced by all three components of a RIS (geographic area, the management and networking system, and innovative outcomes and changes), but most importantly by the resources used to create those touristic products and services that are highly dependent on the particularities of the region. Here it can be noted that the concepts of tourism and RIS overlap to a great extent. They are, however, not dependent but, if combined, they are related and can enhance each other in a feedback loop.

Literature states that a RIS does not guarantee the outcome of a successful innovation which leads to services or products which are profitably placed on the market. However, also if success cannot be guaranteed, it is acknowledged that a RIS includes elements, such as tourism, which definitely facilitate innovation (Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Saldaña Rosas, 2014). In most cases

"... tourism can most effectively contribute to regional innovation and development over the long term through establishing linkages with other sectors."

(Hall & Williams, 2008, Ch. 6, p. 170)

As previously discussed, literature suggests that the concept of a RIS can be seen as a help for understanding and managing regional innovation. In particular also with regard to innovation in the field of tourism (Doloreux & Parto, 2005; Sundbo, 2009). The RIS can therefore be seen as a platform for innovation (Hjalager, 2010b). However, literature points out that the geographic areas where RISs are implemented and used are usually less developed regions, namely rural areas, as those usually struggle harder in competing than other regions with more urban structures (Carson et. al., 2014; European Commission, 2006; Novelli et al., 2006). With regard to this, RT becomes an interesting sector of tourism to focus on, as there can be a great potential to develop and exploit, if the preconditions and resources allow it.

Defining rural areas in terms of a region is difficult. Literature shows controversies in defining them. Some definitions refer to networks, clusters, and agglomerations of industries with geographic boundaries (Bialk-Wolf et al., 2013; Chang, & Chen 2004; Cooke et al., 1997; Doloreux & Parto, 2005; Florida, 1995; Novelli et al., 2006; Schrempf et al, 2012). However, it can be argued that clusters, for example, are closely related to RISs and may form part of it but they are not the same as a RIS (Hall & Williams, 2008). The criteria vary but all agree that *“... the notion of rural is constructed, perceptually at least, as a contrast to the urban.”*

(George & Mair, 2009, Ch. 1, p. 9).

For the present study it appears useful to specify this contrast between urban and rural by defining the rural as characterized by a low density of population, low density of housing and other infrastructure, and by a low density of industrial and other business activities, apart from agriculture, which may or may not be possible due to the geographical conditions of a landscape. Such a notion of rural then needs to be connected to the concept of region, which, as argued above, not only includes the geography, but also the socioeconomic, political, and cultural structures which go along with such a geographical area.

Moreover, in Europe the competition in agriculture has become tenser and many farmers have to rely on other market opportunities such as tourism (European Commission, 2006; Novelli et al., 2006). Hjalager (2014) argues, that it is most important that innovation in rural areas is not only understood as creating competitive advantages but also as strongly connected to regional resources. This means that innovations are often used to add value to regional resources. The latter are not only exploited in terms of farming but also through sales of regional and traditional food and beverages, handicrafts, events, and other tourism products. Touristic activities in the rural environment are events such as food festivals and other celebrations, markets, hiking, especially on particular trails, guided tours (Hjalager, 2014), and any

“... indoor and outdoor activities, the consumption of local, organic and traditional products, and the use of local family run accommodation.”

(Novelli et al., 2006, p. 1145).

These activities are frequently offered and created by SMEs and entrepreneurs (Hjalager, 2014; Peña et al., 2012). Especially in RT entrepreneurs play a crucial role as innovators. Most often these entrepreneurs are families running a small business together. For example, by operating guest houses or farm accommodations, the family members depend highly on the success of their business and are usually very committed and stimulated to keep their business running by means of sustainable and innovative measures.

This not at last, because they can live their preferred life–style and, on top, work-life and private life overlap to a very large extent (Alsos et al., 2014; George & Mair, 2009; Hall & Williams, 2008).

The differences and interrelationship between entrepreneurs and SMEs are not always clear-cut in literature. Some authors understand the individual entrepreneur as working at or owning an SME, whereas others state that the two concepts are not always related (Aposotol, 2013). In this paper entrepreneurs are understood to act individually or as part of the SMEs. The concepts of entrepreneur and SME holder are understood to be closely related, as objectives, influencing factors, and characteristics of entrepreneurs and SME holders are the same. In addition, it is not intended to go deeply into this topic in the present research. Literature agrees that SMEs play an important role in the tourism industry as they aim at answering customers´ demands for sustainable, sophisticated, and very personalized tourism. SMEs should be understood as important actors in RISs. Therefore special attention should be given to supporting them by creating policies, for example, which will help them to learn how to develop management and organizational strategies which enable innovation (Asheim et al., 2003; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Novelli et al., 2006; Saldaña Rosas, 2014).

There is evidence that the potential of rural areas is based on the idea that agriculture and developments of other industry sectors are closely related. This is, for example, because agriculture has been impacted by modern technology. It is furthermore stated that, due to agriculture, these rural areas focus on preserving natural resources and building an environment which is appealing to rural residents, farmers, and tourists alike (European Commission, 2006; Kisiel & Gierwiatowska, 2013; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

The issues mentioned previously, together with the trend to environmental friendliness and the growing demand for sustainable products (Chan & Baum, 2007b; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Peña et al., 2012) lead to the consideration of RT as a potential sector which, through innovation, could contribute substantially to increase a rural region´s competitive advantage and in this way contribute to its economic wealth (George & Mair, 2009).

The Concept of Rural Tourism

According to Peña et al. (2012) manifold expressions can be found with regard to RT: Farm tourism, green tourism, (soft) adventure tourism, ecotourism, nature-based tourism, and sustainable tourism are only a few of them. However, it is stated that they all have the aim to

“... get closer to the values of the rural world, such as its culture and heritage, contemplation of the countryside, and tranquillity.”

(Peña et al. 2012, p. 1046)

Peña et al. (2012) explain that the concept of RT should be based on the notion of taking place outside of urban centres, at a small scale, using resources which are available at the destination, and contributing to the local (regional) development. This already points to the issue that the concept of sustainability needs to be included in RT in order to succeed. Moreover, all previously mentioned expressions with regard to RT, can be understood as sub-categories of tourism which can be included in the more general concept of RT.

Rural Tourism and Sustainability

Tourists are in general interested to preserve natural resources in destinations to a smaller or greater extent. However, it is argued that the number of tourists who are committed to a greater extent increases, and that they become more and more important. Therefore the industry should offer products suiting this demand (Peña et al., 2012). It is furthermore argued that RT is one of the tourism sectors answering this demand, as

“RT is based on the premise of sustainable environment, economic and social development. It can be used to foster the sustainability and regeneration of rural areas ...” and therefore, “... constitutes a valuable tool for the sustainable development of rural areas.”

(Peña et al., 2012, p. 1049)

Literature agrees, that on the demand side there are the rural tourists, who have values such as the concern for nature and environment, culture and sustainability, which are reflected in their life-styles and social identities. In this way these values impact their purchase decisions (Chan & Baum, 2007a, b; Florida, 2002; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Zografos & Allcroft, 2007).

On the supply side there are, amongst others, the quality of life factors (Hall & Williams, 2008), which inhabitants value, but which at the same time can help to attract tourists and investors if integrated into destination branding activities. After all, tourists and also investors value cultural diversity, safety, and a healthy natural environment, for example (Chan & Baum, 2007a, b; Florida, 2002; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Zografos & Allcroft, 2007). This shows, that either side influences the other, and that existent “quality of life factors” (Hall & Williams, 2008) will not only help to attract and maintain the “creative class” (Florida, 2002), but that they are also a factor within the RIS which will help to sustain (rural) tourism by fostering innovation. Apart from that, it is suggested that, like innovations in tourism in general, also innovations in RT mostly manifest themselves in incremental changes. This ensures continuous improvement of existing products and processes. However, disruptive innovations may take place as well, for example in form of new attractions or festivals and events.

The emphasis on sustaining innovations goes hand in hand with the image of entrepreneurs and SMEs in RT, who are not only focusing on offering unique, regionally grounded products, but also on their sustainable features, last not least in terms of production (Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014). As literature points out, RT is very much depending on the natural and cultural resources of a region (Chan & Baum, 2007a, b; Florida, 2002; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Zografos & Allcroft, 2007), which are usually very sensitive to excessive use (Romão et al., 2012). The conclusion drawn from that is, that in the long run the aim must be to sustain those resources in order to ensure the further (economic) wellbeing of the region and its residents. In order to do so, it has to be clarified that the notion of sustainability does not only refer to environmental friendliness but also to further aspects. Cavagnaro (2012) develops a model (Appendix 3) including three layers, referring to the sustainable individual in the inner core, which forms the base for the creation of sustainable businesses. This in turn is a precondition for creating a sustainable society.

Munasinghe (2007) explains the triangulation of sustainability as (1) economic sustainability ("profit") referring to the increase of profit through efficient production and consumption, (2) social sustainability ("people") referring to all stakeholders involved, and as (3) the environmental component ("planet"), which obviously refers to environmentally friendly practices. The latter are of major importance, as

"... ignoring safe ecological limits will increase the risk of undermining long run-prospects."

(Munasinghe, 2007)

Munasinghe's triangulation is understood to take place at all three levels. Cavagnaro (2012) explains, however, that the more global notion of a RIS can be understood to be located at the outer level of the triangle as designed by Cavagnaro (2012). A similar holistic approach is also adopted by Romão et al. (2012) and, Holden and Sparrowhawk (2002).

Peña et al. (2012) take it one step further and integrate this holistic definition of sustainability into the concept of RT by asserting that RT should aim at (1) maintaining culture and character of the host communities, (2) preserving landscapes and habitats, (3) supporting the rural economy, (4) sustaining a tourism industry that will succeed in the long term, and (5) developing sufficient understanding and leadership skills among the decision-makers of the different areas, so that they will diversify and balance the rural economy, quite apart from the very explicit fifth aim.

Referring to Fig. 1, sustainability can be understood as an underlying concept for society in general, not only for the tourism sector. Social, financial, and environmental sustainability aim at longevity and can relate to any product or service in any industry.

However, as discussed previously, literature suggests that especially with regard to RT sustainability plays an important role, as consumers value those features. Moreover, only financial, environmental, and social sustainability combined can lead to long-term success, because only then resources are treated in responsible ways in order not to overexploit them within a short time. Moreover, the concept of a RIS integrates all the elements of the sustainability triangle (Cavagnaro, 2012; Munasinghe, 2007). Especially the "soft" elements of a RIS, encompassing the "quality of life factors", are important within a RIS when it comes to innovation and innovation in tourism in particular. The "soft" elements benefit all stakeholders, but especially the inhabitants and visiting tourists of a region. Moreover, quality of life factors are strongly connected to the immobile resources of a region and can therefore help to create an image which can be used for destination branding in order to attract tourists and investors (Colomb, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008).

Summarizing all of these statements on sustainability it must be said, however, that all of them say more about what sustainability should achieve, where it should be implemented, and about its wide applicability than about what it is itself. In this respect, Bossel (1998, pp. 7-8) defines sustainability as the long-term survival or persistence of a dynamic system, for example society, an organization (or another human activity like providing a service or product), under conditions of a changing environment by adapting to such an environment without damaging or destroying it.

This definition supports and completes the related concepts which were previously discussed (Cavagnaro, 2012; Munasinghe, 2007; Peña, 2012; Romão et al., 2012). Taken together this leads to the conclusion that longevity of a product, a service or a system, etc. is the core of sustainability. Longevity, however, means only that a new service, for example, persists in time. If it can cope with external influences, e.g. by using resources and also by handling problems, it can be considered as viable (Bossel, 1998, pp. 74-75). Moreover, if a low impact (a small "ecological footprint" for example) on the environment, natural or societal, goes along, it can be referred to as sustainable. For the present study this means, that with regard to the different components of the region, the RIS, and the concrete innovations implemented, a differentiated view of sustainability is needed.

2.3 Innovation and Service Innovation

As mentioned previously, innovations are of major importance to remain competitive and financially successful in the long run, as the market changes rapidly and demand is often driven by trends and life styles of consumers (Alsos et al., 2014; Hall & Williams, 2008). This is underlined by Hjalager (2010b), stating that the driving forces behind innovation are usually trends that are caused by current issues such as global warming or the financial crisis in recent years.

Fig. 1 shows, that through the networking and collaboration between the different actors within the system resources are transformed or combined into something new. The results are innovations, which manifest themselves as new products and services. These innovations can be summed up as output of a RIS associated with a region. The innovations resulting from a RIS influence the market, demand, or working processes, for example. This means that they also influence resources in their turn. The cycle closes here and can therefore be conceived as a feedback loop. Therefore it can be concluded that the cycle described can result in a positive or negative reinforcement loop which either supports and reinforces innovative activities and innovations or also blocks and obstructs them.

Defining Innovation

The concept of innovation is often very blurry and not very clearly defined in literature (Chang & Chen, 2004; Cozzens & Sutz, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a). A rather broad definition of innovation is given by Cook and Memedovic (2003), who explain that any type of change in any sector can be understood as innovation. They, however, emphasize that these processes of change are subject to learning and knowledge creation, which, he says, are collective processes. They define, that

“Innovation is the process of whereby exploration knowledge, or research possibly leading to discovery or invention, is transformed by the application of exploitation knowledge into commercial products, processes and services that have market value.”

(Cook & Memedovic, 2003, p. 508).

A more detailed definition of innovation by Kanter states that,

“Innovation refers to the process of bringing any new, problem-solving idea into use. Ideas for reorganizing, cutting cost, putting new budgetary systems, improving communication or assembling products in team are also innovations. Innovation is generation, acceptance and implementation of new ideas, processes, products or services. Acceptance and implementation is central to this definition; it involves the capacity to change and adapt.”

(Kanter, 1983 quoted in Alsos et al, 2014, Ch.1, p. 4).

This definition will be used in the course of this paper. The definition of Alsos et al. (2014) is also used by Hall and Williams (2008) and Hjalager (2010a). Compared to Cooke's (2004) definition, it adds the importance of knowledge creation and learning. The essential components of these definitions can be summarized by stating that innovation (a) brings forth something new, which (b) is implemented and applied, and which (c) persists over (some) time, that is, has a certain longevity or even sustainability. The persistence, however, is only a more or less implicit component in the definition of Kanter which will be used in the following.

Sources of Innovation

Schrempf, Kaplan and Schroeder (2012) supplement the definition of innovation by categorizing learning, search, and exploration as sources of innovation. This notion is outlined in more depth by Hjalager (2010a), who identifies knowledge as main source for learning, search, and exploration and categorizes knowledge into (1) embedded, (2) competence and resource-based, (3) localized, and (4) research based knowledge.

According to Hjalager (2010a) (1) embedded knowledge is knowledge that will be unleashed with the introduction of a new technology, (2) competence and resource based knowledge refers to knowledge management which facilitates in-depth understanding of processes and makes information available and understood. (3) Localized knowledge is knowledge bound to companies of the same industry sector located geographically close to each other, so that knowledge can be exchanged easily. Furthermore, (4) research based knowledge refers to the knowledge made available by research and educational institutions such as universities. This is backed by the argument, that innovation is based on complex interrelations and communication of firms, which in turn are better facilitated, if local proximity is given (Hall & Williams, 2008). The latter is also important to facilitate learning and knowledge creation amongst stakeholders, who should all be involved, when it comes to innovative activities aiming at regional development. All the features mentioned previously will, in addition, help to prevent misunderstandings amongst stakeholders and ensure access to necessary resources. Especially in the tourism sector businesses depend on ad-hoc, incremental innovations which are subject to an individual's specialized knowledge. This specialized knowledge is usually created and exchanged through informal networks (Chang & Chen, 2004; Doloreux & Parto, 2005; Hjalager, 2014; Romão et al., 2012 ; Sorensen, 2007; Schrempf et Al., 2012; Weidenfeld, 2013).

The notion that tourism and tourism innovation are strongly depending on geographic features is explained by Weidenfeld (2013). He says that especially tourism innovations are not easy to protect against competitors and imitators. He argues, however, that many innovations in tourism, just like tourism products and destinations themselves, are strongly grounded in their geographic, regional, and cultural context, especially in terms of resources. This makes it often hard to simply copy tourism innovations. Moreover, Hjalager (2014) explains, that the features of the physical location are crucial for innovation in tourism, because the consumption of the tourism product usually takes place at the destination. Moreover,

“... tourism destination development includes improvement in transport and accessibility, which enable human mobility, network and establishing linkages beyond tourism and therefore increases connectivity with external actors in the RIS.”

(Weidenfeld, 2013, p. 201)

This shows that the interrelationships between the various factors and stakeholders are very intense. Therefore a RIS can be understood as a useful platform for conceptualizing and understanding innovation and innovative processes. These interrelationships mentioned previously are important to be kept in mind with regard to any type of innovation, be it product or service innovation. The latter is discussed below. Furthermore, there are strong parallels between these sources of innovation and the six arguments by Hall, why ISs should be understood in a regional context.

The Special Features of Service Innovation

Literature agrees on Schumpeter's (1934) concept of innovation as a starting point. He established the notion of knowledge creation as essential for innovative activities in business companies. He was, therefore, one of the first ones to understand that the concept of innovation does not only apply to technology and manufacturing processes, but is also applicable to services (Alsos et al., 2014; Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Cooke, 2004; Cozzens & Sutz, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Hjalager, 2010a, b; Lundvall, 2007; Sorensen, 2007; Sundbo, 2009).

The Schumpeterian approach to service innovation, also called the assimilation approach, is based on manufacturing, as this used to be conceived as the main force behind economic change. In terms of service innovation in tourism, the assimilation approach refers to innovations as new products and services, process innovation, market innovation, input innovation and organizational innovation (Alsos et al., 2014; Hjalager, 2014; Hall & Williams, 2008; Schrempf et al. 2012; Schumpeter & Opie, 1934). In this way Schumpeter's concept covers all business aspects from production to marketing. Hjalager (2010b) also refers to the above mentioned categories. However, she uses slightly different names and focuses on tourism in general, whereas Alsos et al. (2014) refer more to the business level of innovations and therefore consider examples derived from business companies and take a management perspective. This underlines the notion that all of these types of innovations can be found in the service industry and therefore also in tourism (Alsos et al., 2014; Hjalager, 2010b). However, they should be understood as quite product and manufacturing oriented, so they might not be easy to apply to the service industry. This also explains why these categorizations lead literature to the conclusion that the ability of the service industry to innovate is very limited (Hall & Williams, 2008).

More recently research started to acknowledge that the assimilation approach lacks to take into account that service innovations are quite different from manufacturing innovations, as usually the production process and the product cannot be separated clearly. This is due to the fact that services are intangible, require customer co-creation, and are often produced and consumed at the same time.

These aspects become even more entangled in the tourism sector, where services and products are often sold in packages, and packages are often delivered by several different suppliers. (Alsos et al., 2014; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b)

A more recent approach acknowledging these features is called the demarcation approach. This approach allows a broader perspective on service innovation (Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Schempf, 2012; Sundbo, 2009). The latter will be used in the present study. It is understood that it can be related to the more general definition of innovation discussed previously. At the same time it develops a classification of service innovations into disruptive and sustaining innovations.

Disruptive innovations aim at providing satisfactory services at a low price or at creating demand for something new on the market. Sustaining innovations aim at incremental changes in order to sustain and improve an existing product in the long run (Alsos et al., 2014; Hall & William, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Schremppf, 2012). The latter are mostly linked to the service industry, which often innovates by means of small changes in operational processes, whereas disruptive innovations are more often linked to technological and manufacturing industries innovating in big steps by introducing, e.g., a new technology (Hall & Williams, 2008; Sundbo, 2009). This is underlined by the statement that

"... tourism innovations are rarely major breakthroughs for the entire industry but more often constitute smaller changes or improvements."

(Weidenfeld, 2013, p. 195).

In order to be able to better classify and assess how radical service innovations are, Hjalager (2014) developed a scale of four sub-dimensions: Resource profile, value for the customer, production and provision, and cross sector collaboration (Appendix 4). These dimensions are considered useful in order to define and classify innovative outcomes of a RIS in terms of products in the service industry and RT products in particular.

The definitions of service innovation given above and the evolution of related theory show, that innovation in tourism can be explored and understood at various systemic levels (Alsos et al., 2014), one of them is the business or managerial level. However, in the present case the focus is on service innovation in tourism as outcome of a RIS, which can be understood as higher up in the systems hierarchy and as more complex in its outcomes. Therefore, the categorization of innovations into disruptive and sustaining ones is considered as useful, when analysing empirical data later on. With regard to that, the demarcation approach is considered as helpful to analyse tourism destinations as a whole, as they are marketed as packages (Alsos et al., 2014; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014).

Moreover, as suggested by literature (Alsos et al., 2014; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014), it is expected that the service innovations in RT are more likely to be classified to be of the sustaining kind, which in turn picks up the notion of sustainability in general.

2. 4 Specifying the Research Question

The following research is inspired by Hjalager's (2010b) qualitative study on "Regional Innovation Systems: The Case of Angling Tourism" in Denmark. In this research she aims at identifying specific driving forces of a RIS. This is done by analysing specific outcomes in terms of products in angling tourism fostered by a RIS and identifying what led to these outcomes. The purpose is to contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of the RIS and with that, support the creation of more effective tourism policies. With regard to this, it is first of all important to understand what driving forces are and why they are important.

Literature suggests that the concept of driving forces refers to those actors or processes that have a particularly strong positive influence on (a particular) innovation (Bürge et al., 2004; Hjalager, 2010b; Ronningen & Lien, 2014). Moreover, external and internal driving forces are distinguished. Especially with regard to innovation there seems to be an emphasis on external driving forces, when networking activities with other firms are considered. However, in order to ensure such networking, internal driving forces become also prominent, as for example management, strategy, or employees can support activities that take place externally (Ilijins, Eriņa & Gaile-Sarkane, 2014; Ronningen & Lien, 2014). This definition refers to a business level perspective. However, it is understood to be applicable at a regional level as well. In general terms this can be expressed by stating that driving forces are those factors (actors or other kinds of processes), which have a particularly strong positive influence on specific outcomes produced or facilitated by a RIS.

The theoretical framework developed by Hjalager (2010b) covers the concepts of the IS, and RIS in particular, and the notion of innovation is explained, whereas the characteristics of Angling Tourism and the notion of sustainability as a spin-off are introduced later on only. In comparison to Hjalager, in the present paper the particularities of RT and sustainability as all-pervading ubiquitous underlying concepts are discussed in the theoretical bedrock already, in order to show the interrelationships between all these concepts directly.

According to Hjalager's (2010b) findings in the case of Angling Tourism, there are three driving forces which can be identified. These are policies, funding, and public management. It is therefore of interest to find out which driving forces can be found when exploring another case by focusing on outcomes in terms of RT products. It is also of interest to see whether the new findings would support Hjalager's findings or not, as it can be assumed that similar findings might point towards a generalization of driving forces of RISs (May, 2001) with regard to tourism products.

As literature showed, RISs are mostly implemented with the aim of improving the economic performance of rural areas (European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2008). This in turn could benefit from exploiting the potentials and opportunities of tourism and specifically RT, which is closely related to the concept of sustainability. Moreover, RT is characterized by mainly being consumed at the location itself and by depending on local resources. These, in their turn, are related to geographic proximity and therefore to the concept of region. Inspired by Hjalager (2010b) and based on the idea of a RIS as a platform for bringing together all resources necessary for innovations benefiting tourism, as explained above, the following research question was formulated:

“Which are the driving forces within a Regional Innovation System fostering sustainable products in rural tourism?”

Based on relevant literature Hjalager (2010b, p. 196-197) develops five features which should be taken into account when analysing data (Appendix 5). These features summarize the main aspects playing an important role in a RIS. She lists: (1) complex institutional set-ups and collaborations in the development process, (2) determination of links to specific national/regional policies, (3) spreading and expansion mechanisms for ISs, (4) innovative products and services, and (5) a permanence, where the system and main actors are in operation for a considerable length of time.

These five features are adopted in the present research to analyse empirical data in order to find out if relationships and actors of the RIS in real life are found congruent with the ideal conceptualization found in theory, and also to find out why they are or are not congruent. Based on that, it is expected that the driving forces of the whole process and its particular outcomes will become visible. Hjalager’s five features are considered as useful, as they reflect and summarize, also in this case, the main issues found in literature. In addition the characteristics and the features of a RIS, as identified by Hall and Williams (2008), show up in Hjalager’s five features.

When comparing the driving forces found by Hjalager to the five features, the first three can be identified as referring to the driving forces, because (1) complex institutional set-ups and collaborations in the development process can be understood under the heading of public management, (2) determination of links to specific national/regional policies points towards the driving force of policies, and (3) spreading and expansion mechanisms for ISs can be related to funding. Furthermore, (4) innovative products and services relate to the general outcome in terms of innovation, which in this paper is service innovation in RT, taking into account that the term “service” includes products as well (Alsos et al., 2014, Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b).

Furthermore, (5) permanence, which means that the operations of the system and the main actors go on for a considerable length of time, can be identified with longevity which, in this paper, is understood as part of the broader concept of sustainability (Bossel, 1989, pp. 7-8).

3 Methodology

This chapter describes and justifies the research design and the methods used in the course of the research. Moreover, the relevance and limitations of this research will be discussed.

As previously stated, this exploratory research study (cf. Cresswell, 2007) was designed based on the research on RISs conducted by Hjalager (2010b), who chose to explore what were the driving forces of a RIS by examining the particular product of angling tourism in Denmark. There is not yet a broad base of qualitative research focusing on the outcomes of a RIS by analysing specific products in detail (Cresswell, 2007; Hjalager, 2010b).

The aim of this social constructivist research (cf. Cresswell, 2007) of Hjalager (2010b) was, to contribute to the general understanding of driving forces within the broad concept of ISs by conducting a single instrumental case study. The latter is useful, if a broad topic is studied by using the example of a single bounded case (Cresswell, 2007; Brown, 2008; Yin, 2009). This notion is also emphasized by Hjalager (2010b), who argues more specifically that ISs can be better understood if particular cases are studied in depth, and if theory is used as a basis for analysing a large number of details. This in turn leads to the extension of the theoretical bedrock.

The present study intends follow this proposition of Hjalager and to take a look at the overall system formed by a RIS and the region it operates in. This is one case and a historical situation. Therefore it is not feasible to work quantitatively. A quantitative approach would require at least a certain number of very similar cases. On the other hand, this particular case study might permit to identify certain detailed questions which might be suitable for quantitative research later on (cf. Cresswell, 2007; Hjalager, 2010b; Yin, 2009). Furthermore, existing research

"... is mainly focused on network densities, patterns of influence and synergy and comprehensive competitiveness."

(Hjalager, 2010a, p.195-96).

This shows that there is a gap in the research focusing on the outcomes of innovative activities within an IS (Hjalager, 2010a). In this case outcomes are referred to as specific products or services emerging from innovation. For this reason it appears valuable and important to conduct a study focusing on outcomes and the driving forces producing them, with the aim to contribute to closing this gap. The reasoning of this research is mainly deductive.

It is based on a theoretical framework, as Hjalager suggests, which is compared to empirical data and used to understand the empirical findings. However, some inductive characteristics can be found as well. In the final part findings are not only compared to theory, in order to see whether it confirms the latter, but new theoretical knowledge is also created based on the findings (cf. Bryman, 2012; Yin, 2009).

3.1. Case Study

Similar to the case study by Hjalager (2010a), it was decided to examine a region taking part in the European LEADER programme, namely the region "Marburger Land" in Germany. This region was chosen because the geographic boundaries are clear cut and the region is small enough to delimit the case examined. Moreover, the first funding period had already finished, which allowed to limit the case to the time frame between 2007 and 2013, and to analyse specific outcomes from this period (Brown, 2008; Yin, 2009). This appeared to be a promising case, also because according to the knowledge of the author no previous scientific research had been done on this particular LEADER region. Also good access to information sources and informants seemed to be feasible, as the author comes from this region, and therefore could use an existing social network and relate easily to people involved in terms of language and culture (Cresswell, 2007; Hjalager, 2010b).

The case of the Region Marburger Land was studied as a single case in order to explain how the LEADER programme was implemented and used. This was accomplished by extensively describing the various details and links of this contemporary phenomenon (Brown, 2008; Yin, 2009).

The present case study can be understood under the rationale of a representative or typical case study (cf. Yin, 2009), as the case itself is one of many within the European LEADER programme, and has no obvious particularities or deviant aspects. Its outcomes are expected to inform about experiences of the average participant in the programme. This, together with the fact that the single case study aims at explaining

"... presumed causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies."

(Yin, 2009, p. 19)

provides the reason, why qualitative document analysis and semi-structured interviews were chosen to collect data. This, however, will be discussed in detail later on (Schutt, 2012).

3.2 Theory

In this research the theoretical bedrock was introduced by reviewing literature which helps to understand and define the notions of the RIS, RT, and innovation. While reviewing literature, the broad theoretical framework was broken down and concretized in order to narrow down and define the research topic more precisely (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, it was decided to develop an own conceptual framework, a conceptual map, based on the literature in order to summarize relevant theory and the relationships between those concepts which seemed of major importance, because in general concepts and definitions used in the literature are blurry and interrelationships are entangled. The conceptual framework furthermore helped to understand and analyse Hjalager's (2010b) research and findings, which were used to formulate the research question and to analyse the empirical data in the present case, as discussed previously.

3.3 Research Question

The goal of this research (see above) was to specifically examine the outcome of innovative activities fostered by the LEADER programme, representing the RIS, and their driving forces. This was to be accomplished at a concrete level by studying innovative sustainable RT products which had been created in the course of the programme by analysing relevant documents and conducting interviews.

It was decided to focus on RT products as the LEADER region, which was to be studied in this case, is a rural area which does not comprise any big city such as Frankfurt, Munich or also Kassel, a large city in the vicinity of the region. In addition, the bilateral relationship between the concepts of tourism and RIS and the importance of tourism for the infrastructure and economic health of any region drove the decision to focus on tourism products. Furthermore, based on the literature reviewed, it was understood that fostering sustainability in general should be of great importance to society and therefore be included in the research.

In order to define the boundaries of the case even more clearly, it was decided to restrict the time frame in which the programme and its outcomes were to be investigated to the LEADER period 2007 to 2013. This time frame was chosen, because on the one hand it represents very recent developments in the region, but on the other hand the period had ended already and final outcomes could be examined. The resulting research question was:

“What are the driving forces within a RIS, fostering sustainable products in rural tourism?”

The research question already implies, that the aim was to explore the topic of RISs and, by doing so, to draw a picture of how elements within the RIS come into play and interact in their different roles. This was achieved by exploring the case of the Region Marburger Land.

Only the qualitative approach was considered to give sufficient insight into details and perspectives from different angles, which would allow to see the broader picture and would allow to identify driving forces at the same time (Cresswell, 2007; Yin, 2009).

3.4 Data Collection

In order to answer the research question, empirical data was collected by using several methods. This has the advantage that the same issue can be studied from various perspectives in order to obtain knowledge about the broad picture and its different aspects (Silverman, 2013; Schutt, 2012; Yin, 2009). The information collected by means of document analysis was used to better understand information collected by the interviews conducted. At the same time, the information collected by means of the interviews was sought to supplement information found in the documents and to close possible gaps. The latter takes into account the fact that documents were publicly available and therefore could not be expected to display individual and subjective information (Yin, 2009).

The main emphasis was put on collecting data by means of desk research, as documents were easily accessible on the Internet and provided a rich base for gaining insights into the case (Yin, 2009). Its details had to be explored carefully with regard to the fact that the region was part of the overarching LEADER programme of the EU. This implied the existence of a lot of official and public documents.

Also the strong participation of the different communities with their formal and documented decision-making processes contributed to a wealth of information. The documents were considered to be useful in order to gain an overview as well as detailed information on relevant aspects of what had been going on during the programme, how things had developed the way they had, and what had been the outcome (Yin, 2007). Most documents were found in the Internet in the form of websites. But also media in terms of regional and local newspapers, brochures and magazines were used.

Internet research was mainly done by using the Google search engine. In order to search by topic (cf. Hennink & Hutter, 2001) the following key words were used: LEADER programme, European Leader programme, funding period 2007-2013, LEADER region Marburger Land, Marburg, Ebsdorfergrund, Weimar/Lahn, Fronhausen, Amöneburg, KulTourErlebnis, KulTourSchätze, Marburger Land, Region Marburger Land Tourism, Region Marburger Land Projects 2007-2013. After basic data was collected, information about specific projects mentioned in the region was searched. Also web-addresses found on printed material were checked. Moreover, it has to be mentioned that the official website of the Region Marburger Land was under reconstruction, when this research was conducted. However, the reports accessible in spite of the reconstruction were of great help and gave more ideas what could be searched for on other websites.

The main focus was put on German websites which were provided by regional and communal authorities, newspapers, and websites by German national authorities. Moreover, the LEADER website and its database, published by the European Commission, as well as academic research papers on the setup and work of the LEADER programme were consulted. Apart from that, evaluation reports published by the management of the Region Marburger Land were accessed and used as a starting point for finding related documents. Furthermore, some brochures and magazines were collected from the offices of the participating municipalities and the tourism office at Marburg.

Academic articles, research papers, and publications from relevant sources such as the EU Commission dealing with the topic were collected. Public documents in form of reports published by the EU and the Association Region Marburger Land were also used for information on this topic (cf. Cresswell, 2007). All in all, it can be said that all available documents were analysed at first and then references with regard to projects, which were found in the texts, were used to follow up on more specific information about the respective subject. A detailed layout analysis of all documents used can be found in Appendix 7.

To find out how people perceived taking part in the developments of the LEADER programme and how they worked as actors within the RIS, 6 semi-structured exploratory interviews with the five LEADER representatives and a LEADER administrator of the Region Marburger Land were conducted. These persons were considered as helpful for providing information as they were involved in all activities throughout the entire funding period and were expected to have an overarching knowledge about the programme. This not only in terms of sub-projects but also in terms of management and policies. This was confirmed when analysing the interviews and resulted not only in detailed but also in holistic insights.

The interviews were designed after analysing the documents. Therefore, the interviewer had already gained rich insights into the case and could focus on asking questions which were designed to specifically confirm or refute the information found through documents and to cover knowledge gaps. Moreover, the interviewer mentioned the fact that there was prior knowledge to the case, which helped the interviewees to understand that they did not necessarily need to explain what certain projects entailed or what the LEADER programme was, for example. This helped to focus the conversation more on their personal experiences and evaluations.

The interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes and the interviewees were found through snowball sampling (cf. Brown, 2008; Silverman, 2013). This was started by contacting one of the LEADER representatives at the beginning of this research, who referred to other team members of the regional management as well as a LEADER official. These persons were contacted by E-mail or phone and the purpose and background of the research was introduced to them.

Then it was agreed to conduct the interview in the course of a meeting which took place at their respective offices. Before the meeting a written introduction to the research subject was sent to them by email in order to ensure that they could take time to read and prepare themselves for the interview. Additionally, a form for obtaining their informed consent for the use of their data was attached to the introduction. The form was to be signed and handed back to the researcher after the interview.

The method of conducting semi-structured exploratory interviews had been chosen because in this case study the interviews were not intended to confirm or reject particular detailed hypotheses but to obtain additional viewpoints of key stakeholders of the system investigated, which might enrich the findings of the document analysis from different perspectives. The questions in the semi-structured interview (Appendix 11) helped to keep on track and to guide the interviewees into talking about the specific topic. But on the other hand the semi-structured interviews left enough space for whatever the interviewee considered as important and wanted to contribute to the topic (May, 2011). It turned out that this openness led to interesting and valuable statements.

The latter was important in order to facilitate a deeper understanding by collecting a large variety of details and to get to know the personal points of view of the interviewees (May, 2011). Before the interview, the interviewees were introduced to the subject and purpose of the research by means of a handout (Appendix 10), as mentioned already. They were also informed that the interviews were voluntary and participation was highly valued (May, 2011). Moreover, it was explained that personal information would be kept confidential. In order to do so, the interviewees are all referred to as male, regardless to their gender, and their names are replaced by letters (Silverman, 2013, Cresswell, 2007). However, their position or job within the LEADER programme is still mentioned, as this is considered to be relevant for the findings. Therefore an identification of the persons behind the letters cannot be excluded completely.

The interviews were conducted in German, as the author is a native speaker and considered that the interviewees, all Germans, would feel more at ease and be more open and eloquent when talking in their native language. The interviewer also recorded the interviews on a voice recorder in order to be able to get better involved in the conversation and to focus on asking supplementary questions if necessary. In order to protect privacy, comments that were very personal opinions were not included in the analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The present study is designed as embedded, as various units are analysed at various levels (cf. Yin, 2009) in terms of various sub-projects and outcomes of the LEADER programme in the Region Marburger Land, but also in terms of the national and international context. Yin (2009) distinguishes four general strategies to analyse case studies.

In the present study the analysis relied on the strategy of theoretical propositions. In a certain sense the most important proposition or model was the study conducted by Hjalager (2010b), as it inspired this research. The present research, however, is not based on specific hypotheses to be checked and verified, but it is of exploratory nature because it intends to find out what are the outcomes of innovation in this case and on which driving forces they depend.

Embedded analysis is helpful for analysing one specific aspect within a case which implies manifold complex relationships. This is done by collecting data which helps to understand complex dynamics by gaining detailed, chronological insights into the case and related activities and events (Brown, 2008; Cresswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). This method was applied in the present case study in terms of focusing on sustainable tourism products in a rural region. Moreover, issues that were of major importance were not only addressed in the interviews but also underlined by relevant quotes found in the documents in order to make them better understandable and to add credibility (Bryman, 2012).

In order to evaluate the extensive data collected through documents the approach of qualitative content analysis (May, 2011) was used. The data collected was interpreted directly as a whole. This was done by explanation building, as the analysis seeks to explain how the LEADER programme worked in this particular case and what its driving forces were. For this purpose the causal links that led to certain outcomes in terms of RT products were analysed and, in this way, the driving forces behind them were identified (Yin, 2009). However, it has to be mentioned that the topic is very complex and therefore it is very difficult to identify or even measure such links. Therefore the causal links were outlined in a descriptive way in order to show the richness in concrete details and to find out to which degree they reflect theory. In general, description is indispensable for dealing with theoretical issues (cf. Brown, 2008; Cresswell, 2007; Yin, 2009).

Possible gaps between theory and real life were analysed by using Hjalager's (2010b) five points of reference (Brown, 2008; Hennink & Hutter, 2011; Hjalager et al., 2008; Yin, 2009). The five points were used as topics to focus on while reading and understanding the collected documents, so information could be grouped according to those topics. After doing so the information grouped around each topic was compared to the theoretical bedrock and to information previously found. The latter refers to the fact that information about the case itself was compared to information found about the general setup of the LEADER programme. This was done in order to illustrate to which degree the managerial implications were followed in real life practice. Brown (2008) defines this approach as a heuristic case study, which explains a certain phenomenon in order to add to a reader's experience, create new meaning, or support what is known already.

The content of the interviews, conducted afterwards, was transcribed from audio tape into text. Then the most important and most frequent statements were summarized and analysed by means of close reading and they were grouped according to patterns matching Hjalager's (2010b) five points. These include the topics of public management, policies, funding, innovation, and sustainability (cf. Cresswell, 2007; Schutt, 2012; Yin, 2007). The contents of the interviews was then analysed, by comparing it to information found previously in the documents, and was brought into relationship with the theoretical concepts which had been developed on the basis of the literature review. In both cases, the document analysis and the analysis of the interviews, this was done in order to validate information found through document analysis (cf. Bryman, 2012).

3.6 Limitations

Structured interviews, systematic content analysis of documents or more quantitative methods were not suitable at all, as the purpose of the study was not to investigate many issues of the same kind and to ask many persons about the same issues, but to obtain a picture of the different views of different stakeholders in different parts of the system and their possibly different perspectives (Bryman, 2012). Such stakeholders were either single persons in different positions or at most very small groups or teams. Such an overall picture, however, might provide the framework for more detailed and quantitative studies later on.

In addition, the time frame of this study did not permit to interview a larger number of persons nor to conduct participant observation, which is very time-consuming. The latter, although probably resulting in plenty of details, would not have provided an encompassing, complete overall view of the region and the RIS (May, 2011). However, as explained previously, it was intended to collect detailed and holistic information by choosing to interview members of the management team of the region, who, at a general managerial level, had a good overview of the processes at lower levels, the regional level as well as the extra-regional ones.

With regard to the interviews, general limitations were that the interviewees, although willing to collaborate, needed to take time off their working time. The interviews took place in their offices. This might have affected the information shared in the sense that some interviewees maybe had some time pressure. Also disturbances in form of ringing phones could not be avoided, which might have affected the interviewees focus. Moreover, the funding period 2007 to 2013 had already been finished 2 years before, and interviewees sometimes had to take a pause and re-think before answering questions. This points to the risk that some things were perhaps not mentioned by the interviewees due to fading memory.

The documents were used in order to find out if the setup of the LEADER programme corresponds to the theoretical concept of a RIS, how the management, organization, funding and decision-making worked, which parties were involved, how resources were used, which projects were implemented, and what the overall outcome was at the empirical level. A wide range of documents from various sources could be found and was analysed in detail. In this way a very rich base of empirical data was collected. However, it has to be taken into account that the documents came from particular contexts and therefore may have been subject to manipulation or selective approaches (May, 2011; Yin, 2009). The Internet offers many different sources, also of very different quality.

The researcher was critically selecting the sources and tried to rely as far as possible on official websites which were assumed to be most reliable. Using documents from the Internet also means that these documents are often subject to frequent change and updates. This can lead to unreliable, vanishing or changing information (Bryman, 2012; Yin, 2009). The documents used were mostly official and the information they contained has to be understood as formulated to suit the general public reader. With regard to official documents, it may be suspected that they imply an increased risk that critical issues, problems, and failures are not presented, but that they are biased towards success stories. For these reasons it was considered as appropriate to conduct the semi-structured interviews in order to gain insights into the subjective thoughts and subjective experiences of individual participants (May, 2011) in the LEADER project. Analysing their stories and reports and comparing them to the findings of the document analysis was expected to permit a critical assessment of the documents, thus giving more credibility to the interpretation of those documents (Bryman, 2012).

Moreover, it was understood as particularly important to give room to various points of view and to subjectivity up to a certain degree. After all, literature had shown that innovation, and especially ISs, are functioning best within a small geographic scale and that they are highly dependent on the regional resources and culture to provide a variety of ideas and initiatives. This indicates that the persons taking part in innovative activities within a system are subject to their local culture, and that their individual, subjective contributions to innovation are essential. Not only their activities but also their perceptions and interactions are influenced by this local culture (Hall, 2008). This was expected to become evident more clearly and with more likeliness in interviews than in documents.

In terms of limitations of this case study, it has to be taken into account that, although it was attempted to consider existing theoretical concepts comprehensively when drawing the broad picture and the conceptual map, these concepts are related to very broad issues and general theories, which have been addressed and understood in more than one way by other researchers.

The consequence is, that, after all, some of the definitions still remain blurry to some extent. Moreover, it has to be noted that the interviews and documents were analysed through the author's personal lens. Therefore the results of these analyses are, to some extent, subject to her own mind-set and cultural background (May, 2011). This, however, is the case with any scientific observation. This type of qualitative case research often explores broad and unstructured topics. Also it is always subject to the abilities of the researcher and his or her personal background and mind-set, which can lead to different choices of focus and different ways of interpretation and understanding (Bryman, 2012).

Furthermore, it could be argued that it would have been more reliable to collect more data by conducting more interviews (Bryman, 2012). However, the time frame for conducting this research was quite limited. Therefore it was decided to rely on the data collected by desk research in the first place. The strategy chosen resulted as useful, because the information collected during the interviews coincided with the information found in the documents. But at the same time the interviews revealed the more personal experience of what it was like to work in the setting and where problems arose. These issues could not be found in the documents.

Concluding, it can be said that one case study alone is always of little value for generalizations or theory building. It can be of great benefit, however, if several case studies about the same subject can be compared (Hjalager, 2010b; May, 2001). In this sense, the more ambitious aim of the present case study is to increase knowledge by contributing to the number of case studies already available with regard to RISs (May, 2001), and specifically to contribute to closing the gaps in case studies by focusing on the specific outcomes of RISs and their driving forces.

4 Analysis

In the following, the documents informing about the European LEADER programme in general are analysed according to content, in order to find out if the LEADER programme at the regional level can be identified as a RIS. Moreover, information about the case of the LEADER region Marburger Land itself is analysed in order to find out what practices and outcomes can be found and in order to determine which are the driving forces. The description of the LEADER programme and the LEADER region Marburger Land can be found in Appendix 6 and 8.

With regard to both topics, the content is analysed according to Hjalager's (2010b) five features of (1) complex institutional setups and collaborations in the development process (public management), (2) determination of links to specific national/regional policies (policies), (3) spreading and expansion mechanisms for ISs (funding), (4) innovative products and services (innovation), and (5) a permanence, where the system and main actors are in operation for a considerable length of time (sustainability).

Moreover, the findings of a detailed layout analysis (Appendix 7 and 9) of the documents used are summarized in order to find out if there are congruencies and if they support what has been analysed from content. Last but not least, the contents of the six semi-structured interviews with LEADER representatives from the Region Marburger Land are also analysed according to Hjalager's (2010a) five features, in order to find out if information collected by the interviews supports the findings of the document analysis and in order to close possible information gaps in the documents.

4.1.1 The European LEADER Programme - Content Analysis

This analysis is mainly based on information found on the websites of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) (2015), DVS (2015), in "The LEADER Approach: A Basic Guide" (European Commission, 2006), and in "A LEADER Dissemination Guide Book" (Wade & Rinne, 2008). These documents were published by official authorities and show congruency of information with regard to what the LEADER programme comprises, how it is organized and managed, and how it evolved over time. Due to the nature of the documents it has to be understood that the content is about policies and instructions on how to set up the LEADER programme.

Policies

When analysing the history of how the LEADER programme was founded and when looking at its aim of developing rural areas in Europe, it becomes evident, that the LEADER programme was initially embedded only in the policies of the EU and participation was not mandatory. The programme developed over time, based on bottom-up feedback procedures and reports which aim at monitoring and evaluating the overall success of all member regions. Based on this it has, now, become an essential part of the national policies. Even more, in Germany, the LEADER programme has been integrated into the development policies at state level. (cf. Asheim et al, 2003; DVS, 2015; DVS, n.d; Canever et al., 2001; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010; The European Network for Rural Development 2015; Wade & Rinne, 2008). This is understood to make hierarchies and policies more complex but at the same time communication ways should have become shorter and therefore more direct and personal (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008).

LEADER focuses on long-term developments and can therefore be considered as focusing on highroad solutions, which involve incremental innovations and long-term success, but at the same time do not exclude disruptive innovations. This also holds for service innovations, which are more often of incremental nature (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008). However, as explained in the theory chapter, the long-term focus might collide with changes in regional politics (cf. Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Cooke, 2004; Schrepf et al. 2012).

This is not expected to have much impact on the LEADER activities, as those are integrated into policies on the one hand but on the other hand they are not directly and not only subject to the regional policy-makers but subject to the LAGs, which are legal bodies and incorporate actors from the private sector as well (cf. DVS, 2015; European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

Policies within the programme, as enforced by the 7 key features of LEADER, can be interpreted as guidelines how to organize rather than what to do. This is shown by the accessibility and contents of the LEADER handbook and guidelines, which give clear structures on how to proceed, manage, and organize a region. But they do not explain in detail what projects should be carried out, which resources should be used, or what should be the overall strategy and aim of a region in terms of development (cf. European Commission, 2006; Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz, 2013). This is summed up by the following statement:

“The difference between the LEADER approach and other more traditional rural policy measures is that it indicates ‘how’ to proceed rather than ‘what’ needs to be done.”

(European Commission, 2006, p. 6)

With regard to policy-making itself at the regional level, but also at the European and the national level, the bottom-up approach becomes a prominent feature of the LEADER programme. The bottom-up approach can be understood as a tool to facilitate communication, especially between locals and the policy-makers. It is moreover facilitated by keeping procedures simple and transparent so that everyone feels they can be part of the programme.

This goes hand in hand with the aim of including all stakeholders in the decision-making process and in projects (cf. Florida, 1995; European Commission, 2006; European Network for Rural Development, 2015; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz, 2013; Hjalager 2010b; Falkowski, 2013; Wade & Rinne, 2008). This approach was much emphasized in the literature reviewed as well. Moreover, it is understood that making locals speak up and making them share ideas will lead to useful innovations. After all, those are the people who ought to know best about the soft characteristics and resources of their region. Therefore they also experience and use them on a daily basis, and they know where improvements should be made. Locals can also easily evaluate what is likely to be useful and what not (cf. Chang & Chen, 2004; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Florida, 1995).

Apart from that, formulating local development strategies ensures that local resources and preconditions are used, may they be tangible or intangible. This also ensures that policy-making aims at exploiting capabilities which can highly vary from region to region (cf. European

Commission, 2006; Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz, 2013; Wade & Rinne, 2008). That is why only individual, local strategies will help to make policies which support the development of the region (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010a; Rubach 2013). The local development strategy is understood to be based on the following statement by the European Network for Rural Development (2015):

"The valuation of local skills and knowledge does not only boost the self-awareness of local people and changes their perception of the area in which they live, it also fosters innovative solutions and competitive advantage of value-adding activities, ultimately of the territory itself."

<https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/leader>

This can be related to establishing or supporting the tourism sector. Only if the preconditions and resources, that is for example the natural environment, allow RT activities, to implement policies supporting innovations in RT can be considered a useful strategy (cf. Chan & Baum, 2007a, b; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Novelli et al., 2006; Peña et al., 2012; Zografos, 2007). The guidelines on how to implement LEADER (European Commission, 2006; OECD, 2013) refer to capacity building as a first step and demonstrate how the way to finding a regional development strategy and getting organized is based on knowledge which is obtained through capacity building because it involves to create an inventory of all regional preconditions and resources (cf. Asheim et al, 2003; Chang & Chen, 2004; Bialk-Wolf et al., 2013; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Schremp et al. 2012).

Public Management

The previous statement about local development strategies implies that it is of major importance to include regional stakeholders not only in policy-making but in any of the activities shaped by the LEADER programme in order to use knowledge, and especially tacit knowledge, which will help to foster innovations (cf. George & Mair, 2009; Hall & Williams, 2008; Rosas, 2014; Schrempf et al.; 2012). This is done by forming public-private partnerships, which is facilitated by the LAG. The LAG is supposed to bring people together in order to develop project ideas by exchanging and creating knowledge. Then, the LAG chooses which projects will be implemented in order to comply with the local development strategy (cf. European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; The European Network for Rural Development, 2015; Wade & Rinne, 2008). Partnerships and inclusion in the LEADER programme concern all stakeholders in the region, inhabitants, policy-makers, research and educational institutions, and associations and businesses from the public and private sector (cf. European Commission, 2006; Florida, 1995; Hall & Williams, 2008; Kisiel & Gierwiatowska, 2013).

This also refers to the LEADER feature of the Integrated, Multi-sectoral Action, which aims at involving different sectors in order to ensure variety. The latter should be seen as a priority, especially in rural areas, as, for example, the reliance on agriculture alone is not economically feasible anymore due to global trends and economic developments. Furthermore, this feature includes SMEs, as according to theory they play a vital role in rural areas, where they like to settle due to lifestyle reasons of entrepreneurs. The SMEs are understood to be strong sources of innovation, especially with regard to the tourism industry (cf. Cooke, 2004; Cowan & Van de Paal, 2000; DVS, 2008; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010b; The European Network for Rural Development, 2015; Wade & Rinne, 2013).

It can be said that the LAG manages and organizes (human) resources in order to facilitate networking and cooperation and innovative activities resulting from these (cf. European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2013). Networking and collaboration are very important according to theory and are related to most other features and outcomes of LEADER. They are understood to be supported by the feature of regionality, as the latter facilitates networking by geographic proximity. Moreover LEADER has official, institutional networks at the national and transnational level (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf et al, 2013; Chang & Chen, 2004; Ching, 2014; European Commission, 2006; The European Network for Rural Development, 2015; Hall & Williams, 2008; Ronning, 2014; Schremppf et al. 2012; Wade & Rinne, 2008). However, with regard to the regional level, former informal networks become very important and can become formal in the course of a project.

For the existence of these informal networks, which people need to rely on when first implementing LEADER, geographic proximity is an important precondition. This is because in small communities people know each other and they can more easily refer to contacts who might help out with solving a problem, for example. This corresponds to the theory stating that interactions are more likely to happen and are more efficient in a local context, and therefore geographic proximity helps to foster innovation (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf et al. 2013; Chang & Chen, 2004; Doloreux & Parto, 2005; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; OECD, 2013; Hjalager, 2014; Hjalager 2010b; Sorensen, 2007; The European Network for Rural Development, 2015; Wade & Rinne, 2008; Weidenfeld, 2013).

The LEADER feature of cooperation takes the previously discussed feature even further, as cooperation is understood to enhance local competition and activities. This not only by exchanging knowledge and information but also by designing joint projects, for example, tourism initiatives based on a shared cultural heritage. This is reinforced, by the fifth step of implementing LEADER, which refers to creating partnerships (European Commission, 2006; OECD, 2013).

When looking at LEADER from a regional perspective, this approach of cooperation is a way to prevent lock-ins, which can become a major pitfall for the programme, as discussed in the literature review. In the case studied here, the regional network cooperates with other networks and groups at the regional, national or even international level. This ensures that there is a (social) infrastructure which can be used to exchange and transport information and goods. The literature reviewed talks about extra-regional networking (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Biak-Wolf et al. 2013; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010b).

All of this results in a setup of complex collaborations with actors and resources located within the region but also externally which is also reinforced by the second implementation step of bringing together local actors through networking activities (cf. European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; OECD, 2013). Linking this with the citation of the ENRD (2015) previously stated, which mentions self-awareness of the inhabitants and the perception of the area, the notion of branding becomes relevant. Branding is not directly discussed in the documents analysed. However, it is understood to be part of public management, as branding aims, among others, at raising awareness amongst the population and creating or strengthening a shared identity within a destination, in this case the region. At the same time it aims at promoting the destination externally. The internal awareness is considered to be helpful to enhance the exchange of ideas and knowledge leading to innovative activities, whereas the external promotion of the region as a brand is considered useful to attract visitors and tourists from outside the region. The latter effect, of course, can be reinforced through innovations, especially innovations in RT (cf. Alsos et al., 2014; Colomb, 2012; Hall & Williams 2008; Kolb, 2006).

Moreover, when implementing the LEADER programme and building capacity all the issues discussed previously become relevant for those involved in the implementation process. They have to learn by doing and can only obtain knowledge and inspiration by accessing the knowledge and experience of other LEADER participants from other regions and from documents made available by the European Commission or the national and state governments. Another related aspect is the analysis of the territory, which is further step to implement the LEADER programme. Analysing the territory will create knowledge about the region. It supports the building of a development strategy which is tailored exactly to the needs of the local economy and fosters innovation accordingly (cf. European Commission, 2006; OECD, 2013; Schrempp et al., 2012; Hjalager, 2010a; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

Funding

In the documents dealing with the LEADER programme in general not much detail is given about funding. However, it is mentioned that public authorities often play a vital role in public funding.

From this, and the statement that the LAGs are in charge of selecting projects to be funded and implemented, it can be concluded that the LAG is crucial in order to provide the link between stakeholders and possible investors and public authorities. This in order to ensure funding, also by providing a platform which supports networking activities and collaboration, as discussed previously. This is due to the fact that, in order to access LEADER funds, a certain amount of money needs to be invested by local, private or public, stakeholders.

When looking at the structures of the LEADER programme in Germany, it turns out, that funding is also subject to decisions of national and state authorities as they distribute and manage the funds. This results from the fact that LEADER has been integrated into national and state policies (cf. Communication Department of the European Commission, 2015; DVS, 2015; European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2008). However, each LEADER region is permitted to take part in the programme only for one funding period. For the next period another application is required which includes information about the progress and results achieved during the previous period.

It is assumed that this is done in order to ensure financial sustainability by assessing if the funds are still needed and if they are used carefully enough by the regional management (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; DVS, 2015; European Commission, 2006; Kreissausschuss Landkreis Marburg–Biedenkopf, 2015; Munasinghe, 2007; The European Network for Rural Development, 2015).

Innovation

With regard to the way the LEADER programme is based on policies which are designed to guide participants on what to do rather than how to do things (European Commission, 2006), the approach was new to the policy-making of the EU and can therefore itself be understood as an innovation in policy-making. The documents explain that it is more of experimental nature. The experimental nature results in further developing the guidelines and policies by the frequent use of feedback and evaluation methods which are used both bottom-up and top-down. In this way a feedback cycle is established which aims at frequently developing and improving the programme policies. This can be considered as a way of innovating incrementally. However, it becomes evident also, that the LEADER policies do not prescribe the type of innovations that should be the result of the programme, but at the same time they aim at incremental, sustaining innovations through knowledge creation (cf. European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Schrepf et al., 2012; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

Implementing LEADER at regional level can itself be understood as an innovation, because the implementation will result in new policies and guidelines at the regional level, which will aim at implementing the overall regional strategy. This is done by creating official documents containing policies, strategies, and actions to be taken (European Commission, 2006).

Moreover, amongst other types of innovations that should be promoted by the programme, also service innovations are included, which are of major importance for innovation in the tourism sector and in RT in particular. Furthermore, strengthening the linkages between regional actors and actors from outside the region and facilitating cooperation and networking can be interpreted as activities which enhance knowledge exchange and creation as well as communication. With that they support creativity and innovation, as discussed in the theory chapter (cf. Ching, 2014; European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2008). This is crucial from the perspective of the LEADER programme, as LEADER was set up to develop rural areas through innovative activities in general and through exploiting the economic potentials created by the development of regional tourism in particular. In this way it was intended to improve infrastructure, create jobs and improve the economy of such rural areas. Here tourism can be understood as RT as it takes place in rural areas and is usually linked to rural resources and traditions (cf. European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

Sustainability

In the documents little is said directly about sustainability. However, with regard to environmental sustainability it is mentioned that practices of the LEADER programme should aim at raising awareness, at maintaining natural resources, and at fighting global warming (cf. Bossel, 1998, DVS, 2015; European Commission, 2006; Kreisausschuss Marburg–Biedenkopf, 2015; Navigation und Service, 2015; Wade & Rinne, 2008). It remains unclear, however, how this is to be promoted directly by policies.

The policies and practices of the LEADER programme can be interpreted in terms of longevity and social sustainability though, as they aim at transparent procedures, inclusion of all actors and incremental innovation and adjustments based on feedback both bottom-up and top-down. Theoretically all of this makes the participation and funds accessible for everyone interested in implementing projects in this framework. Furthermore, using the bottom-up approach and continuously relying on feedback gained through careful project evaluation and monitoring of results at the regional level in order to change and adjust general programme policies, ensures the longevity of the programme (cf. European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2008). Moreover, the aim of developing rural areas as such and the acknowledgement of the general problems rural areas face, point towards improving the quality of life of the inhabitants. Indeed, they can be considered as contributing to social sustainability, because the society in general benefits from such developments (cf. European Commission, 2006; Hall & Willimams, 2008; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

4.1.2 The European LEADER Programme - Layout Analysis

The detailed description and analysis of the layout of the documents used for the document analysis can be found in Appendix 7. Based on this it can be said that the accessibility and the way in which of information is displayed and organized are in line with the policies of the programme. They are clearly designed for self-study and they also aim at creating knowledge by showing various cases how LEADER was implemented and used to promote innovations (cf. DVS, 2015; Hjalager, 2010a; The European Network for Rural Development, 2015; Schrempf et al., 2012; Wade & Rinne, 2008). The availability of evaluation reports and regional development strategy reports is understood as a way to put transparency into practice. This in turn leads to the notion of knowledge creation and learning by doing as promoted by the European Commission (2006).

4.1.3 The European LEADER Programme - Conclusion

Analysing the documents with regard to the general structure and organisation of the LEADER programme, it can be concluded that the features of the programme are matching with the theoretical definitions and characteristics of a RIS as presented in the theoretical part of this study.

The six features discussed by theory comprised shared preconditions, local proximity, personalized interactions, innovation policies, a shared organizational structure, and the contribution of outcomes of a RIS to a NIS (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b). All of them are present in the setup and guidelines of the LEADER programme (European Commission, 2006).

At the European programme level this is demonstrated best by the key features of LEADER as stated by the EU (2006). These key features are cooperation, networking, area based local development strategies, local public-private, integrated, and multi-sectoral actions, bottom-up elaboration and implementation of strategies, and innovation. These features can only be put into practice under the preconditions discussed previously (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010a; Rubach, 2013). The parallels between the theory discussed and the organizational guidelines of the LEADER programme become even more clearly visible when analysing the six steps of implementing LEADER specified by the European Commission (2006). The way resources need to be allocated in order to build capacity, provide platforms for networking, analyse the territory, make an inventory of existing initiatives and activities, create partnerships, and design the organizational structures at the local and regional level implies the features of a region and the characteristics of a RIS as described by theory (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010b).

The bottom-up approach practiced by making information available, stimulates self-organization. When combined with top-down mechanisms it forms part of a feedback circle. This keeps the RIS flexible, so that it can be modified and improved in order to respond better to new developments or also to threats and risks from within or from outside the region. It is a way to ensure that the RIS is organized and managed in a way which is tailored to the needs and the preconditions of the region. In short, the RIS is a learning system (cf. European Commission, 2006; Florida, 1995; Francois, 2004; Hall & Williams, 2008; Senge, 1990). Moreover, the way the setup of the programme encourages periodic changes and promotes evaluation and monitoring from the bottom up in order to adjust policies within the programme, leads to incremental innovation of the programme itself. In a second step it leads to innovation in its projects and consequently in the region (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008; Sundbo, 2009). With these characteristics the LEADER programme can be understood to contribute to sustainability (cf. Bossel, 1998; Cavagnaro, 2012; Munasinghe, 2007). First of all in the sense that through the incremental innovation of the programme itself it can be ensured that the programme remains viable and useful in the long run, and second by supporting corresponding, i.e. sustainable, projects and project results (cf. Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Hall & Williams, 2008; Senge, 1990). Furthermore, the documents state that the LEADER programme aims at supporting the development of rural areas.

When looking at the reasoning behind the founding of the programme in the first place, it becomes evident that the problems dealt with in rural areas can only be solved by development strategies which help to create social and financial sustainability, along with the environmental sustainability which is indispensable for example for agriculture and cattle breeding in the rural environment.

The LEADER programme is set up in a way to support all three of them and consequently contributes to a better quality of life in a rural area which counteracts migration to urban centres and the ageing of the population. It makes a region attractive for RT as well (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; European Commission, 2006; Munasinghe, 2007; Wade & Rinne, 2008). All of this is based on a holistic approach which encompasses variety but acknowledges at the same time the special importance of infrastructure and RT for the long-term socioeconomic viability and inhabitability of rural regions (cf. European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2008). The analysis did not reveal much precise information about innovation and products in RT in particular. However, indirect links to branding and RT could be identified. Sustainable RT products and service innovation in RT are understood as only two of the many possible outcomes of the LEADER programme which are not discussed in particular, since the documents analysed aim at explaining how to manage and organize innovation rather than giving guidance to which innovations should be focused on.

However, the opportunities provided by the tourism sector and therewith RT are acknowledged by these documents (European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

Concluding, it can be said that the LEADER programme at the regional level cannot only be classified as a RIS embedded in a NIS, but, due to its aim to develop rural areas by promoting sustainable, mainly incremental, innovations, and due to its dependence on state funding, it can be classified as an Adapter (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008). Moreover, it turns out that much attention is given to reinforcing policy-making and public management, especially at the regional level, because most of the key features of the LEADER programme are related to them. This can be interpreted as indicating that policy-making and public management are indeed driving forces which can be considered as essential. Although there was not so much information found on funding, the whole programme is based on the notion of funding specific activities. Money is obviously essential in order to implement projects and develop a region. Therefore it is also considered as an essential driving force (cf. European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010b). According to the documents analysed, the aim of the programme is to use funds for the sustainable development of rural areas through innovation. Therefore the two features of innovation and sustainability are considered as desired outcomes of implementing the LEADER programme (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; European Commission, 2006; Hjalager, 2010b; Munasinghe, 2005; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

4.2.1 The LEADER Region Marburger Land - Content Analysis

In this chapter, the content of documents is analysed in order to gain insights into how the RIS was implemented in the case of the LEADER region Marburger Land, to find out which activities took place, who was taking part in them, what were the results, and how the work was organized and managed during the funding period 2007-2013.

This is necessary in order to get a picture of the region and to understand the case as an example of a real life implementation of a RIS. The main documents used are the "Concluding Evaluation Report of the Region Marburger Land e.V.", "ELER Region Herrenwald" (2014), and the "Regional Development Strategy for the Region Marburger Land" (2014). The latter is the application as LEADER region for the funding period 2015 to 2020. It is in general not relevant for this research, as it does not concern issues from the past funding period but it provides some general understanding. The Region Marburger Land has somewhat grown in its geographic borders. The main characteristics and analyses found in the first part of the Regional Development Strategy report are similar to the funding period 2007 to 2013, however. Other documents, such as newspaper articles and brochures from the funding period 2007 to 2013, were analysed too.

Policies

The map showing regions in the German State of Hesse participating in the LEADER programme, including the Region Marburger Land (Appendix 8, Fig. 5), shows that the majority of regions located in the State of Hesse were participating in the LEADER programme during the funding period 2007–2013. The reason is assumed to be the integration of the LEADER programme into the German state policies (cf. Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz, 2013). Policies which permit financial support for the development of rural areas provide a reason for stakeholders to participate in the programme. The problems faced by rural areas in general, which were mentioned previously as one of the reasons why the LEADER programme had been founded, are also faced by the Region Marburger Land.

They can be understood as the reasons for implementing the LEADER programme in this particular case (cf. European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). As more and more regions join and benefit from funding, it can be assumed that economic competition is increasing amongst regions. This should also favour participation in the LEADER programme. This development can be understood as an example of how policies can support innovative activities in a RIS embedded in a NIS. Moreover, this matter can be related to tourism and RT in particular.

When regions compete on the market, this should be supported by regional branding, which in turn helps to promote RT in general, because the region is promoted as a packaged destination (cf. Colomb, 2012; Cowan & Van de Paal, 2000; Doloreux & Parto, 2005; Hall & Williams, 2008; Kolb, 2006; Romão et al., 2012; Sundbo, 2009).

As previously discussed, LEADER policies aim at rural regions formed by communities which are located in geographic proximity. This is also the case in the Region Marburger Land. In addition, the five communities forming the Region Marburger Land share a local culture, traditions, and geography which, according to theory, favours the innovative activities within a RIS. This is due to shared preconditions and (in)tangible resources, tacit knowledge, for example. In this way policies provoke the forming of a region according to the theoretical definition (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf et al., 2013; Chang & Chen, 2004; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Hjalager, 2010b; Schrempf et al. 2012; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

The RIS, here in form of the LEADER programme at the regional level, was implemented in the Region Marburger Land according to the managerial LEADER guidelines discussed in the previous chapter.

This was done by setting up formal documents, analysing the region with regard to its preconditions and resources and by establishing a regional management team and the Association Region Marburger Land, which ensured a legal status and legal capacities of the management team (cf. Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). It can be said that in this way the foundations for policy-making at the regional level were laid. With this, also the general regional development strategy, aiming at a sustainable development of the region, was formulated. It can be conceived as a general policy which, together with the four focus points of the region, led to the formulation of the four lead projects: "Marburger Land with Energy", "Our Villages", "Regional Networks", and "Culture Experience".

The lead projects reflect the focus on renewable energy, revival of old villages by promoting quality of life factors, and networking, which is understood as a support for innovative activities (to be discussed later on as part of public management), and tourism. These policies were also reinforced by the checklist used by the LAG to assess funding possibilities for the projects proposed. This shows how the general development strategy was used to guide all activities related to managing the innovative activities in the region (cf. Beckmann, 2008; Ching, 2014; Doloreux & Parto, 2005; DVS - Deutsche Vernetzungsstelle, 2015; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Gemeinde Weimar - Wirtschaft: Region Marburger Land, n.d.; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Kreisausschuss Landkreis Marburg-Biedenkopf, 2015; Oberbürgermeister Egon Vaupel, 2006; Ronningen & Lien, 2014; Schmidt, 2008; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2008; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012a).

The implementation of a decentralized management in the Region Marburger Land was an innovation in policy-making and was meant to shorten communication ways for stakeholders interested in participating (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf et al., 2013; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). Documents revealed that the regional managers evaluated this as a problem for their own communication and teamwork. The decentralized structure proved to be time-consuming, although the amount of projects that were successfully carried out in this period can be interpreted as an indicator of successful regional management.

However, this feature is known to have changed for the upcoming funding period. It can be concluded that this change was made due to the feedback of the regional management team. This can be seen as an example of how feedback is used to improve policy-making within the LEADER programme (cf. Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Hall & Williams, 2008; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Senge, 1990). Moreover, the mixture of the members of the Association Region Marburger Land e.V., coming from various backgrounds, was evidently ensured by internal policies. This indicates the inclusion and representation of all kinds of stakeholders (cf. Chang & Chen, 2004; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Kolb,

2006; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). This is understood to ensure a diversity of knowledge in order to foster innovation, according to the theory and LEADER philosophy (cf. Eidam, 2015; European Commission, 2006). Moreover, representing the RIS by a legal body (cf. Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014), can be a way to ensure more diversity in policy-making, which in turn can support innovative activities and can be used as a role model for other stakeholders from the region. They may be able to identify themselves better with this legal body than with a group of experts (cf. Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Cooke, 2004; Hall & Williams, 2008; Schrempf et al. 2012).

Public Management

The documents reveal that the LAG first of all promoted the founding of the LEADER region Marburger Land and the creation of lead projects through local media, mainly newspapers, aiming at raising awareness that the region had been formed (cf. Bambey, 2011; Becker, 2013; Beckmann, 2008; DVS - Deutsche Vernetzungsstelle, 2015; Eidam, 2015; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2010; Gemeinde Weimar - Wirtschaft: Region Marburger Land, n.d.; Kreis Ausschuss Landkreis Marburg-Biedenkopf, 2015; Oberbürgermeister Egon Vaupel, 2006; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Schmidt, 2008; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2008; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012a). This points at inclusion, because it aimed at making inhabitants participate. At the same time it can be interpreted as a way to raise awareness with regard to a shared regional identity.

This, according to theory, is of major importance for branding activities. At the same time, this is an example of cooperation, as local media were usually informed about activities of the LAG and promotional activities in general (cf. Chang & Chen, 2004; Colomb, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Kolb, 2006; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). Furthermore, the implementation of the decentralized management resulted in the presence of one official LEADER representative in each community of the Region Marburger Land. This way of facilitating communication through the use of already established social networks at the level of communities shows, that the power of personal communication had been acknowledged. In small communities people know each other personally more or less. This makes it easier to approach someone working at the municipality in order to share an idea or collect information, although one might still feel insecure about it. This way of using private networks may help to develop and strengthen the official networks needed for taking a project to success (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf et al., 2013; Ching, 2014; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Verein Marburger Land e.V., 2012a).

Furthermore, documents revealed that the management team of the Region Marburger Land had to learn by doing and by finding information by itself. It is mentioned in the documents that in the team of the LAG the team members supported each other doing so. This shows the LEADER approach in action and demonstrates that learning by doing also means to rely on a social network. It is furthermore an example of how innovation depends on knowledge (cf. DVS, 2008; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a); Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Schrempf et al., 2012; Verein Marburger Land e.V., 2012a).

Cultural events, activities, and projects supporting social networking, such as the round table for example, were implemented in order to raise awareness amongst local stakeholders and to facilitate social networking in order to discuss and collect ideas for projects. The idea of bringing locals together to discuss project ideas is a way to provide a platform for the creation and discussion of innovative ideas. Everyone interested is welcome to join, so it can be expected that people knowing the region and sharing the same tacit knowledge will get along. But at the same time they might have diverse backgrounds in terms of education and work and can, therefore, share a variety of experiences and expert knowledge in order to discuss solutions to problems and project ideas from different perspectives (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf et al., 2013; Ching, 2014; Florida, 1995; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012a). This is also considered to raise awareness of the inhabitants with regard to a shared culture, traditions, and history.

This, in turn, contributes to building a shared regional identity which will help to promote the region as a whole to the outside world. After all, the destination is understood to be sold as a package. At the same time, however, if inhabitants are aware of a common regional identity, this will help to create authenticity which will influence the experience of external visitors positively. In addition, it will increase the positive word of mouth promotion and the likeliness of visitors to come back again (cf. Alsos et al., 2014; Colomb, 2012; Kolb, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Romão et al., 2012).

Promoting the region to the outside world was done in the case of the Region Marburger Land especially with regard to tourism. The synergistic effects of the geographic proximity of the region to the urban area of Marburg were used as a basis for a marketing strategy of promoting the region together with the City of Marburg, which already had been a well-established tourism destination before (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2014). This is illustrated by the name given to the region. The strategy resulted in organizational change and the merging of two tourism associations. It is an example of how to benefit from extra-regional cooperation and networking (cf. Agricola,

2013; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, 2014). This is understood as a great possibility, also because the Region Marburger Land is a rural area and offers the natural environment for outdoor activities needed to be able to offer RT products, whereas Marburg as a city offers cultural and historical attractions mainly. As an urban area the City of Marburg should not be considered as a direct competitor of the region. Apart from promoting the region to visitors of the City of Marburg, by developing and offering two flyers, the region was promoted at state fairs (cf. Kolb, 2006; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, n.d.; MTM, 2014 – 2015b; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012b; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012c).

The flyers contained cultural events and outdoor activities such as hiking and cycling along regional paths passing historical, cultural, and natural attractions. Furthermore, cooperation with transnational, national, and state level associations took place as can be seen in the cases of the Huguenot and Waldensian hiking trails and the Lahn hiking and cycling path. This way of cooperation in order to support touristic activities in the region is understood to be crucial in order to boost the local economy and promote the region. It is assumed here, that the connection with these extra-regional tourism projects will help to promote the Region Marburger Land to tourists following these trails elsewhere and will make them come to visit the region. As, according to theory, tourism products are usually consumed in a package, this means that, for example, accommodations, food and beverage suppliers, and retailers in the region will be able to increase their sales as more tourists visit (cf. Kolb, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hugenotten- und Waldenserpfad e.V., n.d; Hugenotten und Waldenserpfad e.V., 2009; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2012; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2013; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2014; Romão et al., 2012).

Funding

As stated previously, the LAG implemented a checklist, based on the region's development strategy and the focus points. Only the projects supporting these and corresponding to the criteria of the lead projects were assessed and ranked according to their degree of benefiting the overall strategy. This shows that only projects supporting the developments of the region according to policies were funded. This can be interpreted as a way to make sure that funds are used in accordance with the regional development strategy. This is supported by the fact that LEADER funds were partly used for conducting feasibility studies in order to first find out if big projects were financially feasible. This was the case, for example, when a biogas fermentation plant was implemented or the open air museum "Zeitinsel" was planned (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Genossenschaft Zeitinsel, 2014; Hall & Williams, 2008; Munasinghe, 2007; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

In general, there was not much information found on the funding of projects. Documents, mainly newspapers, were just mentioning that the projects were realized through the help of LEADER funds (cf. Bambey, 2011; Becker, 2013; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2010; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2011; Kreisausschuss Marburg Biedenkopf, 2015; Schaub, 2012; Schubert 2013). Only with regard to the tourism project of the Lahn hiking and cycling path and the implementation of a new parking lot for canoeists it was reported that in the course of the project investors were searched (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Turek, 2009). However, the outcome is not discussed anywhere. Due to the successful implementation it can be concluded that investors had been found. As already discussed in the previous analysis, this RIS is depending on complementary funds provided by the German Government and the EU (cf. European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008).

Innovation

The implementation of the LEADER programme, and therewith the founding of the Region Marburger Land, can be understood as an innovation of its own. This was partly discussed above, because the policies that came along with the implementation can also be understood as innovative. Moreover, the use of feedback in order to improve the organizational structure over time is a way to incrementally innovate management and organization (cf. Beckmann, 2008; Hall & Williams 2008; Hjalager 2010a; Hjalager, 2014; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2014).

In general, all projects implemented resulted in innovations. Some of them were small improvements in terms of quality of life, such as the implementation of the hiking trails or the support to founding SMEs (cf. George & Mair, 2009; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Peña et al., 2012; Rosas, 2014). Others, such as the networking activities and the merging of the tourism associations, were innovations in terms of new ways to manage and organize activities. Others included small changes such as the establishment of the parking lot at the canoeing access point or the refurbishment of the old baking house (cf. Backhausgemeinschaft Ebsdorf, 2014; Bambey, 2011; Hugenotten und Waldenserpfad e.V., 2009; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2012; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2013; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2014; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; TOuR GmbH Marburg–Biedenkopf, n.d; Verein Region Marburger Land, 2012a).

However, all projects in general and the tourism related projects in particular can be understood to add up to support the branding activities that took place in the Region Marburger Land. They all added up to support the packaging of the Region Marburger Land as a destination for reasons which will be discussed later on under the heading of sustainability (cf. Colomb, 2012; Kolb, 2006). This means that in terms of newness all of them are innovations according to the definition discussed in the theory chapter (cf. Alsos et al., 2014).

In addition, by forming the Region Marburger Land as a precondition for participating in the LEADER programme, the promotion of the regional identity and image to locals and foreign audiences was newly implemented. This leads to the conclusion that branding itself was an innovation. Branding, however, is strongly related to tourism and aims at promoting a package of services and products, namely the destination as such. In the case of the Region Marburger Land, services mainly concerned the way information was made accessible, but with that access to hospitality businesses and cultural events was given. Moreover, infrastructure was improved by making particularities of the natural environment and sights better accessible by creating paths and parking lots or putting up information signs, for example. This, combined with the offer of regional food and beverage products, a high quality of life, and the beautifying of the environment of lookouts and sights, for example, adds to the package of the region as a whole and makes it more attractive (cf. Agricola, 2013; Alsos et al., 2014; Kolb, 2006; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, 2014; MTM, 2014; MTM, 2015; Novelli et al., 2006; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012a; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012b; Weidenfeld, 2013).

When analysing these innovations under the premises of the sub-categories of sustaining and disruptive innovation (Hjalager, 2014) (Appendix 4), it can be said that on the whole, the projects are based on traditional rural foundations, because the intention is to preserve the original environment, culture, traditions, and lifestyle of the region and to satisfy the values and product demands of RT.

This is done, for example, by offering outdoor activities and possibilities to learn and participate in local culture (cf. Chan & Baum, 2007a, b; Florida, 2002; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Peña et al., 2012; Zografos & Allcroft, 2007). The improvements are rather incremental and the project implementation relied on the know-how and participation of local actors (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014). However, although showing new collaborative modes, the projects did not overarch industrial sectors. All in all, it can be said that in the case of the Region Marburger Land sustaining innovation took place. This also corresponds to the previous analysis, which concluded that the LEADER project aims at sustaining innovation at the regional level (cf. European Commission, 2006; Hjalager, 2014; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

Sustainability

The regional development strategy of the Region Marburger Land (cf. Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014) is expressed by the slogan of “natürlich daheim”, which can be translated into “at home in nature” or also “naturally at home”. This points to the aim of environmental friendliness and to the focus on the natural environment in the region.

When analysing the projects carried out under the headings of the four lead projects, it becomes evident, that in general the focus was on funding projects only if they would support the economic development of the region in the long run. Therefore it can be said that financial sustainability was given importance. Moreover, the focus on implementing tourism projects, which resulted in tourism projects being the most implemented ones, shows the attempt to attract tourists in order to support the local economy in the long run. As previously discussed, tourists do not only consume directly tourism related products, but their consumption concerns all kinds of products and suppliers (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Colomb, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Kolb, 2006; Munasinghe, 2007; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Romão et al., 2012).

The project "Marburger Land with Energy" is directly environmentally sustainable as renewable energy was made accessible to local consumers and the biogas fermentation plant produces energy by using waste products from local farming and gardening. Furthermore, the communities connected to this plant became less dependent on the big national energy providers. In this way they became able to offer lower prices to connected households, which is understood to result in an increase of quality of life for the inhabitants (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Munasinghe, 2007; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

The lead project "Our Villages – Living Environment with Future" seeks to revive the old centres of the villages. Refurbishing and marketing old and empty facilities means that less new buildings need to be built at the edges of the villages.

This, in turn, contributes to the preservation of the natural environment. These activities are also a way to bring back the focus of social life into the village centres, for example through festivals, such as the baking house festivals, and through the use of empty facilities for stores and offices. The latter, together with the support of start-ups and SMEs by funding, also creates a wider variety of products on the (local) market and jobs. These effects contribute to prevent migration to urban areas, as they increase the quality of life in the villages after all. In addition, social cohesion is supported by all the measures previously discussed, as they bring inhabitants together and strengthen the ties between locals and their traditions and culture. This is understood as social sustainability (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bossel, 1998; Cavagnaro, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Munasinghe, 2007; Novelli et al., 2006; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Salaña Rosas, 2014). Social sustainability is also linked to the project "Regional Networks ... Which Connect". The activities that took place under this heading were used to promote the region as an entity to the locals, in order to exploit the pool of knowledge and to support creativity and therewith innovation.

It can be said that the projects "Our Villages – Living Environment with Future" and "Regional Networks ... Which Connect" are complementing each other in terms of social sustainability and creation of a shared regional identity (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Ching, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Kisiel & Gierwiatowska, 2013; Kolb, 2006; Munasinghe, 2007; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Schrempf et al, 2012; Sorensen, 2007).

Social, financial, and environmental sustainability, supported by the projects previously discussed, indirectly support tourism. They aim at exploiting and supporting the soft factors of the region, which leads to an increased quality of life which, in turn, can be expected to positively influence the experience of visitors from outside the region. Therefore it helps to increase or at least maintain the number of visitors to the region. The projects accomplished under the heading of "Cultural Experience Marburger Land" are all tourism related and therefore can be said to benefit from developments related to other issues (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Kisiel & Gierwiatowska, 2013; Kolb, 2006; Munasinghe, 2007; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Schrempf et al, 2012; Sorensen, 2007). At the same time, the implementation of hiking and cycling trails, the improvements made in the natural environment, the accessibility of those, the establishment of museums, and the offer of cultural events were promoted by the local media (cf. Agricola, 2013; Arbeitskreis Dorfentwicklung, 2012; Backhausgemeinschaft Ebsdorf, 2014; Bambey, 2011; Becker, 2011; Beckmann, 2008; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2010-2012b; Gemeinde Weimar, n.d.; Verein Region Marbruger Land e.V., 2008).

The purpose was to raise the awareness of locals within the region in order to make them visit also events and attractions outside their own community. This can be understood as an improvement in terms of quality of life, because locals now have the opportunity for recreational activities and participation in events rather close by, instead of having to travel far to other regions or urban areas. The cultural events can be understood furthermore as a way to preserve and actively live the cultural and traditional heritage, and with that as a way to create togetherness, not only in one community, but in the region as a whole. This too can be understood as contributing to social sustainability. Also putting up information signs along trails, providing information about the museums, and about cultural activities in the Region Marburger Land, supported by LEADER funds, can be understood as having an educational function in terms of raising the awareness not only of local culture and history, but also of the natural environment. The latter is important, as it can influence the importance given by locals to protecting the environment. Therefore putting up informative signs can be considered to contribute indirectly to environmental sustainability (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall &

Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Kolb, 2006; Munasinghe, 2007; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Schrempf et al., 2012; Peña et al., 2012).

Concluding, it can be said that all of the tourism projects can be interpreted as supporting branding activities, because they add up to the package of the Region Marburger Land as an attractive tourism destination (cf. Kolb, 2006).

4.2.2 LEADER Region Marburger Land - Layout Analysis

The layout analysis of documents used for the content analysis of the Region Marburger Land did not result in new or additional findings. Except for the fact that most of the documents originate from local media and local communal publishing, which indicates the practice of achieving transparency by publishing even evaluation reports and making them accessible to the public.

Most of the newspaper articles, and also the touristic flyers, promote the beauty of the region by displaying pictures of the natural environment and embedded touristic attractions during summer or spring season, when nature is green and blossoming. Two of them show the synergistic effects of the promotional activities carried out by the tourism agencies, which resulted in the merging of both associations. When comparing the logos (Appendix 9, Fig.11) of the parties involved, the change of the logos can be seen (cf. Agricola, 2013; Arbeitskreis Dorfentwicklung, 2012; Backhausgemeinschaft Ebsdorf, 2014; Bambey, 2011; Becker, 2011; Beckmann, 2008; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2010-2012b; Gemeinde Weimar, n.d.; MTM, 2014; MTM, 2015a; MTM, 2015b; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, 2007; TOuR GmbH Marburg–Biedenkopf, n.d.; Verein Region Marbruger Land e.V., 2012b; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012c).

Apart from this, documents telling about the founding of the region and promoting initial networking activities often display the faces of the five LEADER representatives and the mayors of the five member communities (cf. Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2010-2012b; Gemeinde Weimar, n.d.; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Verein Region Marbruger Land e.V., 2012a). This is understood to raise awareness amongst the inhabitants, as it can be expected that they recognize the mayor and the LEADER representative belonging to their community. This might support the identification of local individuals with the LEADER project, and therewith participation and awareness (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk–Wolf et al., 2013; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b).

Most interesting in this analysis is probably the analysis of the logo of the region (Appendix 9, Fig.10) together with its slogan. It shows that the Region Marburger Land has indeed included the most important elements of its regional development strategy, which is mainly based on the rural environment and which aims at sustainability. This supports the concept of how the regional development strategy should guide policy-making at the regional level (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Munasinghe, 2007; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

4.2.3 LEADER Region Marburger Land - Conclusion

All in all, it can be said that due to the fact that all the LEADER guidelines (European Commission, 2006) were followed in the case of the Region Marburger Land and quite a number of projects was completed, the RIS was implemented successfully. This is underlined by the evaluation of the LAG itself, stating that the funding period 2007-2013 finished successfully, because many projects were carried out and completed (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). Therefore it can be said that the aim of implementing a RIS in order to develop a region, according to theory, (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b) was reached indeed. However, it remains unclear from documents what this means in terms of numbers of visitors, for example. It is assumed here, that the region has made a good start in terms of development, especially with regard to tourism, but the effects might not be very visible yet or have not been monitored yet. Moreover, it is assumed that the region needs to follow up with further innovative activities in the coming years in order to further improve. The results might become visible more clearly in the long run.

The documents never mentioned the term of RT, but they did refer to tourism. However, the use of regional preconditions, the offer of outdoor activities, and the focus on regional landmarks and nature, culture, history and traditions reflect all characteristics of RT (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008; Peña et al., 2012). It is assumed that it was easier to refer simply to tourism rather than to explain the specific features of what RT is, since the documents are mainly addressing a wide audience, mainly focusing on inhabitants, who do not have a tourism related background. Also the author, originating from the same region, understands that in German language the various types of tourism are not distinguished in everyday language nor do many people know about them. For all these reasons it is concluded that in the case of the Region Marburger Land it is indeed RT, what is dealt with, although the wording refers just to "tourism".

It is striking that most projects were successfully implemented in the field of tourism, and it is understood that this is due to the fact that the Region Marburger Land has excellent preconditions in terms of geographic features, such as the Lahn River and the landmark of Amöneburg, for example, an old town with ruins of a fortress on top of an extinct volcano. Moreover, the existing infrastructure was used and improved, for example by developing the

hiking and cycling paths. All of these, as well as the synergistic effects of the geographic proximity to the city of Marburg, were smartly used for promotion and branding (cf. Colomb, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Kolb, 2006; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2012; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2013; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2014; MTM, 2014; MTM, 2015a; MTM, 2015b; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, 2007; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; TOuR GmbH Marburg–Biedenkopf, n.d.).

Although start-ups of SMEs were supported, these activities were mainly related to the service industry in terms of retailing. Only one of them, a café, might be considered to form part of the tourism industry, as it is a hospitality business. It is assumed that maybe the focus on tourism was first of all on the attractions and existing infrastructure rather than on founding SMEs in that field, since this funding period was the first one for the Region Marburger Land. However, this could be a great opportunity in the future that should not be missed, as according to theory SMEs are considered to play a vital role in innovations in RT (cf. George & Mair, 2009; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Peña et al., 2012; Rosas, 2014).

With regard to policies, the analysis of the case of the Marburger Land showed, that innovative policies were made and also adjusted, if necessary. Moreover, the guidelines provided by the LEADER policies were followed, as this ensured the participation of the Region Marburger Land in the programme and access to funding. Particular examples of how this was done are the networking activities and the public management, relying on the bottom-up approach and the notions of transparency and inclusion. Based on that, the projects carried out by cooperating with extra-regional partners became examples how know—how and knowledge from outside the region was used to implement tourism projects. This shows how extra-regional collaboration prevents lock-ins.

Moreover, regional networking activities and collaboration took place not only because they were facilitated by the LAG, but also because, according to documents, the population showed interest and supported innovative activities by participating actively. This can be seen as an example of how important human resources are for innovation and how important inclusion is in order to gain access to their knowledge (cf. Asheim et al; 2003; Ching, 2014; Bialk–Wolf et al., 2013; Chang & Chen, 2004; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Hjalager, 2010b; Schrempf et al. 2012; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

With regard to extra-regional networking the documents were not clear about how exactly this collaboration took place. More precise information was found about networking and collaboration within the region, and a variety of stakeholders from public and private sectors was mentioned.

However, educational institutions and farmers in particular are not mentioned, when it comes to stakeholders participating in innovative activities of the Region Marburger Land (cf. Ching, 2014; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Romão et al, 2012; Peña et al., 2012; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). It is not clear yet, if they are not mentioned because they did not play a role or if they might have been active only in the background of activities. These gaps in the information are expected to be closed by analysing the content of the semi-structured interviews, which were conducted.

With regard to funding, it can only be concluded that the Region Marburger Land relied on state funding, and that due to the fact that projects were carried out, it can be assumed that there were sufficient local investors who supported the projects (cf. Hall & Williams, 2006; Hjalager, 2010b). This assumption is also based on the knowledge gained about LEADER policies, which permit access to LEADER funds only if there is a certain amount of money invested from stakeholders in the first place (cf. European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

With regard to sustainability, it turned out that the projects implemented in the Region Marburger Land, were directly or indirectly aiming at sustainability, and, on the whole, all three areas of sustainability were covered. However, when analysing the projects in detail, it became visible that, except for implementing the use of renewable energies, none of them was designed to directly promote environmental sustainability. This is striking, as according to theory, the LEADER philosophy, and the regional development strategy of the Region Marburger Land this should have been promoted indeed (cf. Cavagnaro, 2011; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Munasinghe, 2007; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Novelli et al., 2006). Environmental sustainability is not only understood to be important for the environment in order to protect natural resources in the long run, but it could also support the development of RT in the region. According to theory this is one of the features demanded by rural tourists. Therefore the implementation of a nature reserve or a stronger promotion of sustainable, regional food and beverage or eco-farming are opportunities which were apparently not taken advantage of in the case of the Region Marburger Land (cf. Chan & Baum, 2007a, b; Florida, 2002; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Hjalager, 2014; Peña et al. 2012; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Zografos & Allcroft, 2007). However, all activities analysed and all projects implemented add up to the result of sustaining innovation in the region. This corresponds to the aim of the LEADER programme. Together with the fact that the region relies to a great extent on LEADER funds, this supports also the identification of the LEADER project at the regional level as a RIS with characteristics of an Adapter (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2014).

Concluding, it can be said that the three driving forces policies, public management, and funding were present (cf. Hjalager, 2010b). Analysing their relationships, it shows that funding and policy-making both have components which are subject to regional matters and others which are directed and influenced by external matters, such as the policy-making of the EU and the German (state) government. This reveals the embeddedness of the RIS in the NIS (cf. Fuchs–Heinritz et al., 1994; Hall & Williams, 2008). Furthermore, the activities in the Region Marburger Land at the regional level resulted in sustainable innovations in general and in RT in particular.

This corresponds to the aim of the regional development strategy and to what the LEADER policies promote (cf. European Commission, 2006). In this sense, the implementation, use, and outcome of the RIS in the Region Marburger Land were successful to a rather high degree, which also corresponds to theory (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b). The analysis shows that sustainable innovations in the Region Marburger Land were indeed subject to policies, public management, and funding in the first place, because without those driving forces the projects would not have been developed and implemented successfully to such an extent (cf. Hjalager, 2010b). The reason found for this, is, that the policies helped to guide and organize the activities within the region, whereas public management helped to include and organize regional stakeholders to a great extent (cf. Kolb, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b). Money was necessary, of course, to implement projects, and the region's stakeholders would not have had sufficient funds themselves in order to invest enough in the projects which were carried out after all. Moreover, it can be assumed that the financial support provided by state funding might also have helped to motivate investors, as the framework of the LEADER programme and the involvement of public authorities along with the State Government may have added financial security, so that financial returns were probably expected to be more likely because of their involvement.

4.3.1 Interviews - Close Reading Analysis

The contents of the interviews will be summarized in the following. While comparing the different answers given in the interviews, their contents in general will also be analysed in terms of congruency with the findings of the document analysis presented in the previous chapter and according to theory. With regard to the answers given in the interviews, first of all it can be noted that the answers of the LEADER Administrator generally differ from the ones given by 5 LEADER Representatives. It is understood, that this is due to the difference in positions and differences in the work with the LEADER programme. Due to his position, the LEADER Administrator had a more general view on the Region Marburger Land and explained some issues more from a bird's eye view.

Policies

The LEADER Administrator clarified, that in organizational terms there is no administrative superstructure in the LEADER programme, as the guidelines and the setup aim at enabling and implementing the bottom-up approach. In order to get organized, in the case of the State of Hesse, the regional forum was founded in order to enable networking and cooperation for all participating Hessian LEADER regions.

The LEADER Administrator also pointed out, that in order to become a LEADER region, an appropriate geographic area has to be found, organizational structures have to be set up, and a regional development strategy needs to be outlined. The interview with the LEADER Administrator revealed, that the first LEADER regions in the administrative district of Marburg-Biedenkopf were founded in 1995 during the LEADER 2 period. After that, bit by bit, other LEADER regions were formed. Some of those regions do not belong to one single administrative district geographically, but cross the borders of two administrative districts. LEADER Representative 1 also mentioned, that in the State of Hesse there has been a tradition of LEADER regions for more than 20 years.

The same course of action of how to found a LEADER region is also described in the documents, especially in the LEADER guideline and the toolkit (European Commission, 2006; European Union, 2015; Wade & Rinne, 2008). Moreover, the organizational structure of LEADER regions is apparently only a loose one, and in this way permits management to be quite flexible and to adapt organizational structures within a LEADER region according to its specific characteristics and needs (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf et al., 2003; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b). However, when analysing the critiques of the interviewees, which will be discussed later on, it becomes evident that the loose structuring, which is a way to reinforce the bottom-up approach (cf. European Commission, 2006), can also be inconvenient, especially for those dealing with administrative matters.

This was underlined by the comment made by the LEADER Representative 4, that personal communication channels are not always clearly structured either. Furthermore, the fact mentioned that some LEADER regions, geographically, cross the borders of two different administrative districts, underlines the loose organizational structure of the LEADER programme. At the same time it points to what was previously discussed in the theory chapter, that it is most important to implement a RIS in a geographic area with a shared cultural and historical identity and shared resources. This does not necessarily correspond to a geographic area defined by administrative or political borders (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Chang & Chen, 2004; Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Cooke et al., 1997; D'Allura et al., 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a; Saldaña Rosas 2014; Ronningen & Lien, 2014; Schrempf et al., 2012).

In the case of the Region Marburger Land this was stipulated by the LEADER policies, which are apparently not strictly bound to the way governmental policy-making is organized. This loose organization based on general LEADER policies also ensures the flexibility of the RIS. It ensures that general guidelines provided by the European Commission are followed on the one hand, but on the other hand they leave space to the regional management at the same time to flexibly implement policies and guidelines at the regional level.

Policies based on the region's features and supporting the innovative activities lead to the desired outcome, as stated in the regional development strategy (cf. Region Marburger Land e.V., & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). According to theory, the flexibility of a RIS ensures that policy-making and actions related to it can be easily adjusted in order to respond to changes in the environment as discussed previously.

The LEADER Administrator concluded, that the structural change of integrating the LEADER programme into state policies resulted in a very complete geographic coverage of The State of Hesse with LEADER regions. This was pointed out during the interview by showing a map of LEADER regions in Hesse during the funding period 2007 to 2013. This also became evident, when analysing the map in Appendix 8 (Fig. 5). Furthermore, the documents also revealed the change in policies at the beginning of the LEADER period 2007 to 2013, explaining that the European LEADER programme was incorporated into national and state funding by making it part of the ELER funds (cf. DVS, n.d; European Commission, 2006; The European Network for Rural Development 2015). This is an example of the embeddedness of the RIS (cf. Fuchs–Heinritz et al., 1994; Hall & Williams, 2008).

The LEADER Administrator explained that the LAG, apart from making sure that the project applied for would help to set the regional development strategy into action, had a checklist in order to classify applications and to rank them. The purpose was to prioritize projects and in that way to make sure that the most important ones would get funding. The others would get funding as soon as the region would get more funds or if one of the projects with a higher priority would drop out for some reason.

This shows how the LAG worked in order to strictly enforce the development of its regional strategy. The LAG first focused on projects which would contribute most to the strategy when put into practice. However, other projects would not be dismissed completely, if they fulfilled the requirements to a smaller extent. This is an example of policies in practice, which reinforce inclusion and financial sustainability. As long as the region as a whole benefits, everyone is welcome to share ideas and to try to implement them (cf. Bialk-Wolf et al., 2013; Cavagnaro, 2012; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010a; Munasinghe, 2005; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Rubach, 2013).

LEADER Representative 1 explained his tasks with regard to the Region Marburger Land as being the link between community members and the LAG Marburger Land. He explained that his task was mainly to provide supervision and advice to the interested applicants on how to start the application for LEADER funding and also to provide the contact with the administrator. Moreover, he stated that he was in charge of introducing during official meetings project proposals to the board of the LAG, that were considered as generally eligible for funding. Similar descriptions were also given by LEADER Representatives 2, 4 and 5, who explained that every representative had his own special field of focus such as tourism or, as mentioned by LEADER Representative 4, the administration of the Association Region Marburger Land. LEADER Representative 4 added, that all the representatives were working for one of the member municipalities on a regular basis and had the additional job of representing the LEADER region. LEADER Representative 4 commented that the decisions concerning the LAG or the region were made in general by the whole team of representatives.

This was not explicitly found to be stated anywhere in the documents reviewed. However, brochures and magazines giving basic information about the Region Marburger Land made references to the LEADER representatives and provided the reader with addresses and telephone numbers of the respective offices (cf. DVS, 2008; European Union, 2015; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Gemeinde Ebsdordefgrund, 2010; Gemeinde Weimar; n.d.; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, 2007; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012a). Through the interviews it became very clear, that all representatives and also the administrator considered themselves in a support function, which confirms the previously discussed notion of the LAG as an organizational policy-making body serving the stakeholders at the regional level.

LEADER Representative 2 criticised, that there was no rule for applicants whom to approach first. This means, an applicant could choose to approach the administrator before contacting the representative or vice versa. Apart from that, the representative is not allowed to be present, when the applicant has a meeting with the administrator. According to LEADER Representative 2 this wastes time, because the LEADER Representative might have good arguments but can share them only with the applicant, who in turn is sent back and forth. The LEADER Representatives 4 and 5 also criticised, that due to the fact that the work for the Region Marburger Land was an additional job only, there was not much time left for any creative work by the representatives.

Partly these critiques had been mentioned before already, with regard to personal communication channels. It was pointed out, that a loose structure can make procedures more confusing and also prolong them.

With regard to the working hours of the LEADER representatives, it can be said that the interviews showed that sufficient time is needed in order to be creative and to get properly involved. This was changed by providing the representatives with a fulltime position for the upcoming LEADER period. It can be assumed that the reason behind this change was, at least partly, the feedback given by the parties involved. This would correspond to the LEADER procedures outlined in the LEADER guidelines, which aim at continuous improvement of the LEADER programme, which, in general, should be based on feedback. Moreover, it is once again an example of how the bottom-up approach is implemented in practice. Additionally, it can be understood as an example of systemic self-renewal based on learning and feedback, which, according to theory, is of major importance to ensure the flexibility of a RIS (cf. Cook & Memedovic, 2003; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Senge, 1990; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

The LEADER Administrator evaluated the collaboration between the LAG of the Region Marburger Land and the other LEADER representatives of the administrative district Marburg-Biedenkopf as very positive. According to his opinion, both parties had clearly defined tasks and were focusing on their own roles while at the same time communicating well. He pointed out that the EU guidelines and policies are not always easy to understand and to be followed. With regard to that he saw it as his duty to help the LAGs of all the LEADER regions, but in particular of the Region Marburger Land, as it was newly founded. He tried to do so by sharing knowledge and giving advice and also by attending the invitations to the official meetings of the Association Region Marburger Land. He stated furthermore, that he thought that all LAGs felt well supported by the administrators. This was confirmed in the interview with the LEADER Representative 4, who said:

“(...) we were very lucky with the LEADER administrator, who supported us incredibly. He was always there and always supported us very well. That was fantastic!”

This shows how important networking and personal communication was. As in this case experience, expertise, and knowledge were needed and appreciated by the representatives.

The Administrator also made very clear, that, although structuring in the LEADER programme is loose, tasks need to be distributed clearly in order to collaborate successfully and in order to be highly efficient. In the present case, this was ensured through the policies. Moreover, it becomes clear that the LEADER administrator was in charge of ensuring that the LEADER policies were followed by the LAG, whereas the LAG, based on those policies, developed its own policies at the regional level. By communicating with stakeholders, the LAG made sure that policies and guidelines were followed within the region. This is another example for the embeddedness of the RIS as it is conceived by the theory (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf

et al., 2013; Chang & Chen, 2004; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a; Hjalager 2010b; Schrempf et al. 2012).

LEADER Representatives 1, 2, 3 and 5 found, that the LAG of the Region Marburger Land was special and different from the LAGs of other LEADER regions. It did not have a full time regional manager but 5 representatives, one from each of the five communities involved. LEADER Representative 1 pointed out, that this way of organizing the LAG was helpful and facilitated that community members approached LEADER in order to ask for funding possibilities. This was the case because the representatives could be found right in the local municipalities, so community members did not have to talk to somebody totally unfamiliar. As explained by LEADER Representatives 1, 2 and 5, this kind of organization will not exist anymore in the future, as there are new guidelines for the upcoming funding period prescribing that there has to be a regional manager who is in charge of project work full-time.

This was also found when reviewing documents. Moreover, as previously discussed, this way of organizing shows, that short ways and personal communication were ensured by policies and organization. This is an important matter, as, according to theory, geographic proximity makes communication more efficient and with that the inclusion of stakeholders and innovative activities are supported (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf et al., 2013; Chang & Chen, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b).

The interviews show that the LEADER programme itself went through an evolutionary process of learning and change so far, but also that its implementation alone already resulted in changes in the region. Also the RIS, which was implemented underwent change which can be interpreted as change towards more specific and more well-defined structures and procedures, that is, towards a better organized learning system. The loose organization, which was reported, was apparently advantageous for such a development of the RIS itself, but also had its disadvantages which may have been, among others, reasons for this development

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LEADER Representative 1 reported that he had been new in his job at the municipality and also completely unexperienced with the LEADER approach when he got picked for his position as a representative. When asked about how he found out which role to play and what to do in his position, he reported, that he had the written LEADER guidelines, the regional development plan, and rules of internal procedures for orientation. The answer of LEADER Representative 2 contained the same elements, but he added, that the decentralised organisation was helpful for the representatives as they were a team. Everyone, although lacking experience with LEADER, had a different background and different qualifications, so that team members could complement each other's skills.

Apart from that, he found that this way of organizing the LAG ensured that there was always someone accessible to be approached by the citizens, even if the own representative might not be available, due to illness for example. LEADER Representative 3 explained that he already had had many years of experience with European funding programs. Therefore he did not need to introduce himself newly to the work. While, according to LEADER Representative 1, few members of the LAG already had had some experiences with the LEADER programme, one or two other regional representatives were visiting workshops and meetings with regional managers from other regions in order to obtain knowledge about other people's experiences and ways of working. These members of the LAG would then help and support the whole team with the knowledge and information gained through this kind of networking. LEADER Representative 2 specified, that the meetings with the other regional managers were meetings of the Hessian Regional Forum, which were for him:

"... distance study, because there were all these regional managers with a lot of experience and in the end I learned the most from them and I got all benefits from that. ... Whenever I had a question, I would pick up the phone and get the answer..."

A similar statement was also made by LEADER Representative 4, who added that he and his colleagues had been attending workshops related to the LEADER programme which had been provided by the DVS, the German Networking Association.

These advantages and disadvantages of the decentralized regional management of the Region Marburger Land were also found in the final evaluation report of the Association Region Marburger Land (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). Therefore they are congruent and therefore reliable information. Moreover, as previously discussed, this shows how LEADER policies, also in form of written guidelines, were enforced in the case of the Region Marburger Land. Most importantly the feature of learning-by-doing is mentioned. The interviewee describes how in his case learning was supported by his social network. This is backed up by the explanation that the diversity of members from various backgrounds helped to create knowledge, something also mentioned by theory. Furthermore, the answers given by the interviewees show the importance of extra-regional networking in order to exchange knowledge, experiences, and ideas which will foster innovation in the own region and will help to prevent lock-ins (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Cooke, 2004; Chang & Chen, 2004; Ching, 2014; Doloreux & Parto, 2005; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hajalager, 2014; Romão et al., 2012; Sorensen, 2007; Schrempf et al. 2012; Weidenfeld, 2013).

LEADER Representative 2 emphasized, that instead of competing with each other, the LAGs of the LEADER regions tried to help each other with experiences and knowledge. On the whole, Representative 1 evaluated the teamwork and collaboration in the LEADER programme as successful, criticizing, however, the fact that most team members did not know what to do in the beginning. This confirms what was found in the documents reviewed (cf. European Commission, 2006; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Wade & Rinne, 2008). Moreover, brochures showing evidence of promotion were found (cf. MTM, 2014, 2015b; Verein Region Marburger Land 2012b, c). Again, this is evidence for extra-regional networking. However, the expression of competition used, should be treated carefully. It is understood that competition between the neighbouring regions is not very tense and therefore does permit collaboration with other regions.

At the same time, as discussed in the document analysis and by theory, the LEADER programme is designed to match with the individual features of each region. Therefore it is concluded, that each region is individual and should therefore follow a different individual strategy. As mentioned before, some LEADER regions already exist for a longer period of time, which points towards a different stage of development as compared to the Region Marburger Land (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Florida, 1995; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a; Kolb, 2006; Rubach, 2013).

With regard to promoting the region externally, especially by marketing tourism products, LEADER Representatives 3 and 4 reported, that the development of the official website of the region and the presence and presentation of promotional tourism brochures of the Region Marburger Land at the bigger state fairs were used to promote the region externally.

LEADER Representative 1 reported, that he had witnessed that people from outside the region became more aware of the Region Marburger Land and its touristic attractions. According to his feeling, there are meanwhile more people asking about what to do and where to stay when visiting the region. According to LEADER Representative 1, visitors refer to word of mouth promotion and to information published in newspapers, brochures, and the Internet. LEADER Representative 1 concluded, that this was only his first LEADER period. He expects that, as time passes and as the LAG gains more experience, the region as a whole will become more successful. This statement was also made by LEADER Representative 2. He also emphasized the differences in LEADER regions with regard to their development, and that successful development of a region depends very much on how long a region has been part of the LEADER programme. LEADER Representative 2 pointed out, that regions with a longer LEADER history have developed a name which is known in the outside world. He says that

“... everyone has an idea what the Black Forest is ... but the Region Marburger Land?”

However, LEADER Representative 2 believed that this is a development which is yet to come for the Region Marburger Land. On the whole, LEADER Representative 2 expressed, that he himself had witnessed by passing by or talking to a gastronome, that there are more and more people on the relevant hiking and cycling trails in the region.

The latter was not found in the contents of the documents. However, these statements and observations are of major importance as they lead to the conclusion that projects, in particular tourism projects, which were implemented seem to be rather successful. This confirms the overall evaluation found in the documents (cf. Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). However, one needs to keep in mind that the projects were completed only recently and will need more time to become better known and still better integrated into the offers of the region, as stated by the interviewees. This points to the aim of the LEADER programme to contribute to sustainability in terms of longevity as discussed in previous chapters. Furthermore, these answers show that regional branding has been done in accordance with theory, although it still needs further efforts and improvement. At any rate, an image has been created already, which can be used for further promotional activities (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Colomb, 2012; Hall & Williams 2008; Kolb, 2006; Munasinghe, 2007; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

LEADER Representative 1 mentioned that one of the most important tasks of the representatives was to promote the region and the LEADER programme within the region. This meant to raise the awareness of the population in order to make them approach the LAG with ideas and to join in development activities in the region. This concept of including the citizens was explained by LEADER Representative 2, saying that

“... we tried to take the citizen along. Of what use is it, if I come up with a project and in the end nobody wants it? It needs to come from the population!”

At the end of the interview also the LEADER Administrator pointed out, that, according to his experience, the local inhabitants have good project ideas as they know well their resources and as they have developed a feeling for what could be feasible and what would be supported and asked for in the community they live in.

These comments underline, how the bottom-up approach was put into action through facilitating inclusion. Indirectly this already had become evident when analysing documents (cf. European Commission, 2006; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Wade & Rinne, 2008). The interviewees, however, made it explicit and also showed that they were very aware of the importance of including the citizens. This issue fits with the theory which states that local people know best their local resources and preconditions and are, therefore, the ones who know best what needs to be improved and developed.

This way of integrating locals and making use of their (tacit) knowledge can furthermore be considered of importance for the longevity of the innovations made. At the same time this can be understood as a way to support the collective regional identity, as inhabitants are more likely to identify with projects and changes proposed by themselves or one of their own group. Creating a shared regional identity is of major importance for the region in order to carry out branding activities successfully and to promote the region effectively, as was discussed in previous chapters (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bialk-Wolf et al., 2013; Cavagnaro, 2012; Chang & Chen, 2004; Colomb, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a; Kolb, 2006; Munasinghe 2007; Schrempf et al. 2012).

With regard to approaching the population, LEADER Representatives 1 and 4 mentioned the Marketplace Project and explained, that members of associations, business people, and interested members of the community had been invited to meet in order to network and exchange services and products. Both representatives evaluated this activity as very helpful to support regional networking, because the setting had been informal and easy going. LEADER Representative 1 expressed the opinion, that this had been very helpful to promote the LEADER programme in general and to enhance the feeling of belonging together in terms of a region rather than as inhabitants sticking to their own villages and communities. According to LEADER Representative 1, this was of major importance in order to promote a shared identity, which is crucial for the development of the region.

This shows that the awareness amongst citizens was indeed raised through informing them about projects that were implemented and about how the work was progressing. But, when looking at the events used for promotional activities, it becomes also clear, that, while promoting the Region Marburger Land, networking was facilitated in order to provide platforms for working together and sharing information and experience at the level of the regional LEADER programme. The promotion of the Marburger Land as a region, via offering the possibility of networking, also did help to create a shared identity. This, according to theory, is crucial for branding activities. Only if citizens identify themselves with the region as a whole, the image of the region as a whole can come true and effective (cf. Colomb, 2012; Kolb, 2006; George & Mair, 2009; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Rosas, 2014).

When asked about the communication tools used for marketing the region to the inhabitants, LEADER Representative 1 clarified, that information about the LAG's activities and the projects implemented was usually published in the local, communal newspapers. Some of them are free of charge and are distributed to all households. Also he explained that events and the municipal websites helped to raise awareness and to provide information, including the reference to the region's official website, which contains detailed information. This statement was supported by LEADER Representatives 2 and 3.

The latter added, that in the course of the programme citizens were asked to share opinions through surveys. Also an open council was held. LEADER Representative 2 added details, saying that the mayors of the municipalities organized information meetings to which mainly the local associations were invited. In addition, LEADER Representative 2 informed that workshops dealing with different topics, e.g. tourism, were organized for interested citizens. Finally the round table project was implemented in order to bring people together. The round table would take place every now and then in different locations of the region. Everyone who was interested could join in order to discuss ideas of how to develop the region, talking about new project ideas.

This project was also mentioned by LEADER Representative 4, when asked how the citizens were made aware of LEADER and how they were encouraged to participate. LEADER Representative 1 pointed out, that he thinks there had been a problem with promoting tourism and cultural offers within the region, but that due to becoming a LEADER region, inhabitants started to become more aware of what the region has to offer and what can be done:

“I think, this is also a problem, marketing per se was not good with people here before, and through that (The LEADER Programme) many things became better known.”

He concluded, that it is one of the major problems, that even though people may have good ideas, they do not know how to develop them in order to make potential visitors or customers in general aware of the offer. LEADER Representative 4 added, that he felt there was no interest in participating in the programme from the farmers' side:

“We had points in the concept which were meant to be for the farmers, because they also have the right to get LEADER funds. But they were the clientele we could not access at all. We tried but...”

He pointed out, that the reason might have been the fact that the farmers have access to a different funding program provided by the state, which is aiming specifically at supporting agriculture and farmers. This seemed to be sufficient for the farmers' demands.

This is striking, because theory promotes not only the involvement of all stakeholders, but when it comes to innovation in RT, according to theory especially the farmers should get involved. The farmers are considered to have the background and the resources to contribute substantially to the offer of RT products. Not only in terms of regional food and beverage products and accommodation, but also by offering outdoor activities such as horseback riding, for example. The statement about access to funds other than LEADER funds points to an incompatibility between state policies and LEADER policies, because apparently in this case LEADER policies are not sufficiently integrated into state policies.

It is assumed that otherwise the farmers would perhaps see the necessity of accessing LEADER funds, which would reinforce their contribution to the programme (cf. Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Cooke, 2004; Chan & Baum 2007a, b; European Commission, 2006; Florida, 1995; Hall & Williams, 2008; Kolb, 2006; Novelli et al., 2006; Peña et al., 2012; Schrempf et al., 2012; Zografos & Allcroft, 2007).

Most of the information mentioned was published in print documents or in texts and articles on relevant websites, such as the municipality websites. These documents were also accessed and analysed earlier in this research. They were found to present important information for anyone interested in participating. The documents were clearly presenting projects implemented as achievements supported by the LEADER funds (cf. Eidam, 2015; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2011; Gemeinde Weimar, n.d.; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, n.d.). This provides evidence that, in fact, the LEADER programme and the regional achievements were promoted with regard to the inhabitants in order to raise awareness and support participation of the inhabitants. In this way the building of a regional shared identity was to be supported in order to accomplish branding. Moreover, it shows how inclusion was practiced. The communication tools which had been used were considered very helpful for reaching the majority of the locals, regardless of their backgrounds. According to theory, including all stakeholders is of major importance in order to promote local support and innovative activities. Apart from the events, which might require more effort, funds, and planning, the promotion via the Internet and the local press is an effective, efficient, and low cost solution (cf. Colomb, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hajalger, 2014; Kolb, 2006).

Moreover, the events mentioned, such as the round table, are understood as examples for supporting collaboration by offering possibilities for social networking, not only in one community but across the entire region (cf. Alsos et al., 2014; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010a; Kisiel & Gierwiatowska, 2013; Schrempf et al. 2012; Sorensen, 2007).

With regard to internal communication and communication channels the LEADER Administrator and LEADER Representatives 2 and 4 agreed, that these were organized loosely and according to needs. The LEADER Administrator also pointed out, that there were the official meetings of the Association Region Marburger Land, which were mainly used to exchange information and to make decisions. Other information was mainly communicated via phone and e-mails. Whenever necessary, e.g. when a particular person saw the need for a personal meeting, the respective person would take initiative to make appointments according to the needs and the situation. The Administrator could not tell definitely how often the official meetings were held, but he estimated about five times per year. This number was confirmed by LEADER Representative 4, who stated that he thought that about 37 meetings had been held during that funding period.

The LEADER Administrator underlined, that according to his opinion the communication had worked very well. This corresponds with the notions of loose organizational structures, flexibility, and networking, as the persons involved have to rely on their network and have to take initiative themselves according to their needs. All of these notions are promoted by LEADER policies following the learning-by-doing approach and the theoretical approach of flexibility of the RIS in general as discussed previously.

The focus on personal meetings, especially with regard to decision-making, supports the idea of personal communication being more effective and enhanced under conditions of geographic proximity, as discussed by theory. The documents reviewed, however, did not show much evidence of these arrangements, although they stated that the official meetings of the LAG should be used for decision-making (cf. Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Cooke, 2004; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Schrempf et al., 2012).

All the interviewees agreed that there was no support or involvement of any kind of educational institutions, for example of the Universities of Marburg and Gießen or the University of Applied Sciences of Middle Hessa. The LEADER Administrator stated:

„No...I mean, it is always talked about it, right? But with regard to colleges and university... I mean; Gießen is also not far and offers the according faculties. But that there was something with regard to this in that funding period? ...not that I can remember.”

He acknowledged that in theory it is always talked about including scientists and students from educational institutions, and that the Universities of Marburg and Gießen indeed have faculties dealing with relevant topics like agriculture and ecology. This can be understood as evidence that he is indeed an expert with regard to the topic and knows well about the theoretical, academic background in general.

The documents reviewed did not reveal any evidence of an involvement of educational institutions either. However, according to the literature reviewed, educational institutions should form an essential part of a RIS in order to promote innovation. According to theory, this would be beneficial for innovative activities, as those institutions could provide well-founded, reliable, and advanced knowledge and could educate the citizens of the region, which then might contribute their own, more practical, expertise in turn. On the other hand, the involvement of these institution was apparently not considered necessary by the LAG, nor is it directly requested by LEADER policies (cf. European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Schrempf et al., 2012; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

It can be assumed, that in fact there are citizens of the Region Marburger Land who had been attending one of those institutions and who also participated actively in the LEADER programme. Apart from these, educational infrastructure in form of pre-school institutions, primary, and also secondary schools is available in the region as well, that is, also outside the urban centres of Marburg and Gießen. However, due to the fact that no evidence was found, neither in the documents nor in the interviews, this aspect must remain subject to assumptions, pointing possibly at an indirect involvement of the educational institutions.

LEADER Representative 2 explained that the programme promotes synergistic effects. In general, the region benefits from synergies with the City of Marburg, which is illustrated already by the name of the region. Apart from that, LEADER Representative 2 explained, that tourists staying in Marburg for a longer time or visiting repeatedly are often eager to make a day trip into the surrounding Region Marburger Land. This means that a common marketing is very helpful.

The use of such synergistic effects in order to promote the Region Marburger Land was made explicit in the documents. Analysing tourism brochures of Marburg and the Region Marburger Land also showed that the tourism agencies mentioned were merged. This is a good example of extra-regional collaboration, leading to innovative outcomes, as described by theory (cf. Agricola, 2013; Alsos et al., 2014; Florida, 1995; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, 2014; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Rubach, 2013; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2014).

LEADER Representative 2 remarked that these synergistic effects manifested themselves, according to his observation, also in people's perceptions and in partnerships and collaborations in which every participant was treated equally.

"There is a high willingness to collaborate, you can feel that."

LEADER Representative 2 concludes, that this helps to promote the region as a whole to the outside world and that these activities can be understood as part of the regional branding. Almost all LEADER Representatives agreed with the LEADER Administrator, that with regard to external collaboration the project of making the Region Marburger Land part of the Huguenot and Waldensian Hiking Trail was most essential. The interviewees explained, that the LAG Region Marburger Land collaborated with the association of the Huguenot and Waldensian Hiking Trail. However, some respondents were not sure whether and how the LAG collaborated with other, neighbouring LEADER regions. LEADER Representative 4, however, pointed out, that the implementation of the Lahn River Hiking and Cycling Trail was a collaboration with the Lahn Valley Association as well as with neighbouring LEADER regions.

The LEADER Administrator evaluated the LEADER period on the whole as positive and successful. This was also supported by most of the LEADER Representatives.

Similar evaluations were found in the documents. One of them was the final evaluation report of the Region Marburger Land (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). Others were newspaper articles and press releases reporting the successful implementation of the different projects (cf. Hugenotten und Waldenserpfad e.V., n.d; Hugenotten und Waldenserpfad e.V., 2009; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2012; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2013; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2014). Also here it can be seen that especially the hiking and cycling trails have synergistic effects. They lead visitors and tourists into the Region Marburger Land, where they will find attractions, restaurants, accommodation, and possibilities for recreation and nature based activities along the trails.

As these trails are part of larger trails crossing other regions, if not countries, the Region Marburger Land gets promoted in a much wider context to which it is connected by the trails. This corresponds to the theoretical notion of European integration and globalization as well as to the need for extra-regional networks in order to avoid the danger of a lock-in of a single RIS. Moreover, the citation above points out, that the human resources are important for innovation. If inhabitants are not participating and supporting the LEADER programme, innovation will not take place or at least to a much smaller extent (cf. Asheim et al, 2003; Agricola, 2013; Chan & Baum, 2007a, b; Chang & Chen. 2004; Bialk-Wolf et al, 2013; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Hjalager, 2010a; Kolb, 2006; Peña et al., 2012; Schremppf et al. 2012; Zografos & Allcroft, 2007).

Also at the level of public management similar feature show up as in the previous discussion of policies. Decentral organization clearly had advantages, in particular with regard to the inclusion of stakeholders and the general population, but also disadvantages with regard to efficiency and professionalization. Self-organization, in particular in networks, and learning effects after all did result in an efficient and effective RIS, but the way up to that point took time and resources. It remains to be seen, whether further professionalization, which will be also supported by the new policy of fulltime administrators, will manage to keep the advantages of close contacts to the stakeholders while avoiding the disadvantages of having to learn and to organize before having a fully operational RIS and LAG.

Funding

The LEADER Administrator, according to his own explanations, was in charge of approving the general possibility of LEADER funding for a project proposed to participate. His main task, apart from verifying the possibility of funding in general and compliance of the proposal with EU guidelines, was to give advice with regard to funding, and to deal with

“... questions of budget law, subvention law, and questions of what to put into a funding application, what are the costs ...”.

He commented, however, that the administrative board would never approve funding of a project, if the LAG Marburger Land did not approve it. He furthermore remarked, that in the end it was up to the LAG to verify and decide whether a project would be useful in the context of the regional development strategy.

This shows how funding is subject to the policies made by the EU, and how the RIS is embedded in the NIS, with the characteristics of the Adapter type of innovation as previously discussed. Moreover, this reveals once more the collaboration between the different hierarchical system levels, as specified by theory (Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Chang & Chen, 2004; Francois, 2004; Hall & Williams, 2008; Senge, 1990).

According to the LEADER Administrator, before the LEADER funding period 2007 to 2013 municipalities could apply for funding by the State of Hesse, even if they were not part of a LEADER region. When the LEADER period 2007 to 2013 started, this was not possible anymore. Therefore, the municipalities which had not yet signed up for the LEADER programme were informed about these new formal requirements. In the course of these structural changes the municipalities Fronhausen, Weimar, Ebsdorfergrund, Amöneburg, and Marburg decided to apply to become the LEADER region Marburger Land. This shows very clearly, how the participation in the LEADER programme was stipulated by policy-making of the national and the state government.

It supports the previous analysis of the documents. It also indicates the acknowledgement of the problems of rural areas and the use of the implementation of RISs by German authorities in order to cope with them (cf. Doloreux & Parto, 2005; European Commission, 2006; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010b; Hjalager, 2014; Novelli et al, 2006; Ronningen & Lien, 2014).

The LEADER Administrator first explained briefly that the funds are, theoretically, available to everyone applying for them, as these funds are not meant to be saved but to be invested. He emphasized that it is part of his job to support the access to the funds and to support their distribution, but for the right purposes. Later on in the interview, when he was asked about funding criteria, he described in detail that in the relevant funding period the administrator had had a list of 10 criteria. He would check that the project asked for would match at least one of them. After that, the petition would be handed over to the LAG of the Region Marburger Land, which was then in charge of assigning priorities to the implementation of the projects.

This points towards the aim of financial sustainability and longevity as discussed by theory. The theoretical possibility for everyone to access the funds, can also be understood as a way to facilitate the inclusion of all stakeholders through funding policies (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012;

Chang & Chen, 2004; Doloreux & Parto, 2005; Hjalager, 2014; Munasinghe, 2007; Weidenfeld, 2013). This particular procedure was not found in any of the documents reviewed. However, the general administrative organization with regard to the LEADER programme and political institutions in Germany became evident in the course of the analysis of documents provided by the EU, the German ministries, and the State Government of Hesse (cf. DVS, 2015; European Commission, 2006; Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz, 2013; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

The LEADER Administrator pointed out, that the LAG always made sure that applicants could show that their projects would be financially feasible. He gave examples which demonstrated that feasibility was not only assessed according to returns but also in terms of costs, as there was always a private investment involved which got complemented by a certain amount from the LEADER funds. Therefore applicants had to prove that they were able to invest sufficient resources themselves. According to the LEADER Administrator, a clear concept and project plan had to be developed in order to show who will be in charge of which task and in order to make sure that the project would not only be completed but also that financial independence would be guaranteed in the long run.

The fact that an applicant had to make own financial investments did not become very clear from the documents, although investors were mentioned (cf. Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). However, this can be considered as necessary in order to ensure that funds are not wasted but that the applicants would have an own interest in the financial success of their projects, especially if they come from the private sector. This can be linked to financial sustainability according to theory (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Munasinghe, 2005).

LEADER Representative 1 also pointed out that, apart from private petitioners and associations, sometimes the municipalities had project ideas which unfortunately were often not eligible for funding or the municipality could not provide sufficient financial investment of its own for getting funded by LEADER. He argued, that the municipalities often lacked financial funds themselves and that money available was mostly invested in much more urgent matters.

This fact, along with the comment that municipal projects eligible for LEADER funding cannot include measures which would be taken anyway, shows that only additional measures which support the general strategy of LEADER and the overall well-being of the region, were implemented. The lack of financial funds of the municipalities has been very common and a very big problem in Germany since quite a number of years already. However, if a region becomes more successful and wealthier economically, after hopefully developing well during some LEADER funding periods, it can be assumed that the municipality and its financial funds also benefit positively from these developments.

Then, in turn, there will be more own funds the municipalities could use for investments. This can be seen as a positive reinforcement cycle. But the big problem nowadays, like in other areas too, is to be able to finance the initial investment in order to get the positive feedback cycle started. Here LEADER can help, even if only by a partial funding (cf. Alsos et al., 2014; Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager 2010b; OECD, 2013; Senge, 1990; Wade & Rinne, 2008). The findings indicate, however, that also the funding rules and policies may need to undergo a process of learning and evolution, as it became visible, that the present rules tend to have some effects which do not correspond to the goals of LEADER or which are even counter-productive by blocking certain projects, which otherwise would be highly desirable.

Innovation

After asking if he could say what the innovative outcome of the funding period was, LEADER Representative 1 remarked:

“Oh...I don't really know....there was so much going on over the years...I'm sure there was a lot but ... I really can't tell...”

When asked about what they thought had been innovative during the funding period 2007 to 2013, most respondents did not have an answer or asked for clarification. This was done by giving the definition stated in the theory (cf. Alsos et al, 2014). Nevertheless, answers remained scarce, as in the case of LEADER Representative 1. It is assumed that the interviewees were not very familiar with this theoretical concept.

LEADER Representative 1 explained later on with regard to this question, that in general mainly the municipality of Fronhausen offers a good infrastructure for SMEs and especially start-ups, as its geographic location is conveniently close to the cities of Marburg and Gießen. Therefore no developments in tourism were made. He explained that Weimar, however, is located conveniently close to the Lahn River, whereas the municipality of Ebsdorfergrund already offers good accommodation. Moreover, Amöneburg, being located on top of an extinct ancient volcano, offers natural and historical highlights of the region with regard to sights and landmarks. Therefore, the promotion of these parts of the region was the consequence and according to him the innovation. Amöneburg was also described as a major touristic attraction of the region by LEADER Representative 2. LEADER Representative 2 expressed, that he thinks that the connection of the Region Marburger Land to the Lahn River Cycling and Hiking Trails and to the Huguenot and Waldensian Hiking Trail is a convenient and very important asset to the infrastructure. He said, that due to these and other hiking trails, visitors from outside the region are more likely to pass through and also to visit the touristic attractions along the way. In this sense strategically well located is the village of Mardorf, where the old life stock scale was refurbished with LEADER funds.

It became part of the information path through the village. Representative 2 considered the projects previously mentioned as innovative and mentioned the "Zeitinsel" open air museum in addition.

Both statements, about Amöneburg as the main touristic attraction in the region and about the importance of the hiking and cycling trails, are backed by evidence from the documents analysed, mainly the touristic brochures. Their principal emphasis is on promoting the hiking and cycling trails or sights and landmarks located in the municipality of Amöneburg. It has to be mentioned, however, that the Lahn River, which crosses the region, also provides opportunities for boating to some extent. All of the features and products mentioned can be related to innovation in RT. It became evident that the interviewees were aware of the regional preconditions and resources which supported the implementation of these innovative projects in RT (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Chan & Baum, 2007a, b; Doloreux & Parto, 2005; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010a; Peña et al., 2012; Rubach 2013; Schrempf et al., 2012; Sundbo, 2009).

LEADER Representative 2 also emphasized, that the positive effects of the trails are indirect. However, everyone in the region can benefit from those effects, as the trails increase the demand for accommodation, food and beverages, and tourism related products in general. This is supported by the statement of LEADER Representative 4, who referred to the installation of a parking lot for canoeists at the Lahn River in Weimar as an innovation. This is convenient also for hikers and cyclists, as this spot is located at the same time on the Lahn River Cycling and Hiking Trail.

Other projects which were often mentioned as innovative by the interviewees were the hiking and cycling trails, the feasibility study of the open air museum "Zeitinsel", the round table and the market place project with regard to regional promotion, the start-ups, and the lead project for supporting the internal development of villages. The smaller projects or the fermentation plants were mentioned only once or twice.

These statements show that for the interviewees the concept of innovation is mainly linked to something new, but it is also considered important for contributing to the economic wealth of the region in general. This view is also expressed by theory, stating that innovation leads to economic wealth as it contributes to the competitive advantage of a region or firm (cf. Alsos et al, 2014; Cook & Memedovic, 2003; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010 (A, B)). However, the interviewees seemed insecure about this concept, as even after explaining they did only mention a few single projects that were realized, rather than trying to provide a full overview or even to refer to the implementation of the LEADER programme as a whole and the formation of the Region Marburger Land.

With regard to the success of innovations, it can be summarized that quite a number of projects was implemented successfully, but the question can be raised, to what extent they brought indeed something new. A bicycle trail, a log cabin or a parking lot are not things which are new in the sense that they have never been seen before, like the first computers or the Internet, when it was first established. They were new, however, in the respective communities and the region, and they also enabled or facilitated new or more activities of an already existing kind. In this respect the theoretical concept of innovation needs further discussion and elaboration with regard to distinguishing and differentiating between genuinely new innovations, innovations just for a community or the region, and innovations which just bring more of something already existing. To follow up on this theoretical issue, however, would go far beyond the scope of the present research report.

Sustainability

The interviews revealed an insecurity about the meaning of sustainability. Usually the interviewer had to clarify the concept to some extent by giving further explanations. Nevertheless, most of the interviewees did not make the connection to sustainability, or only by referring to environmental sustainability. This might be due to the fact that sustainable effects cannot be identified readily, become visible only in the long run, and are mostly indirect. The latter was well made clear by the interviewees who did make the connection (cf. Bossel, 1998, Cavagnaro, 2012; Munasinghe, 2005).

The way of assessing the financial feasibility of a project in the long run mentioned before was again referred to by the LEADER Administrator, when he was asked about sustainability with regard to the projects funded. He claimed that this particular way of funding is a way of ensuring that projects are financially sustainable. According to him, this is an absolutely essential condition for a project to be eligible. This comment can be linked to the way financial sustainability is stipulated by LEADER policies and funding, as previous discussions in this chapter have shown (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Munasinghe, 2005).

The LEADER Administrator gave examples of how the internal development of villages was assessed by the LAG Region Marburger Land, in order to make an inventory of demographic and building developments. The aim of this was to develop strategies and projects which would help to overcome or at least slow down migration into cities and to avoid the existence of empty buildings in the centres of the villages. In order to overcome demographic change, which in many villages includes the ageing of the population, cultural and social initiatives were supported with LEADER funds.

This was also stated by LEADER Representative 1. According to the LEADER Administrator and LEADER Representative 3, focusing on reviving the old centres of the villages was not only meant to focus on bringing back social life into the centres but also on avoiding or at least reducing the building of more houses at the outskirts of the villages. The LEADER Administrator summed up these aspects as examples of social and environmental sustainability. He stated that the measures taken had been successful, as, for example, empty buildings, available for office rooms or new businesses, were announced throughout the region and not only in the municipality they were located in. Therefore the information was spread and interested persons had greater possibilities to find facilities that matched their needs.

This demonstrates the attempt to increase the quality of life in the villages in order to prevent migration into cities and in order to provide an attractive environment also for young and well-educated people. This is understood to be crucial in order to attract tourists, also by preserving local traditions, culture, and history, which are features that make the region attractive for RT. By the way the LEADER Administrator referred to sustainability, it became clear that he referred to the same definition as stated by theory. It is assumed that this was due to the fact that his position is a very administrative one and that he has a lot of experience in the field as described previously. Therefore he can be considered a real expert in the field (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bossel, 1998; Cavagnaro, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Munasinghe, 2005; Peña et al., 2012; Schrempf et al., 2012; Weidenfeld, 2013). With regard to the environmental sustainability of projects implemented in the Region Marburger Land, the LEADER Representative 1 talked about the example of establishing fermentation plants for the production of biogas and the intention and activities of one of the communities (Ebsdorfergrund) to become self-sustaining and self-sufficient with regard to energy.

According to the documents analysed, this is the only project which is directly linked to environmental friendliness, as it establishes sources of renewable energy. The benefit of fermentation plants is also financial in the long term. The region can save money as it is not dependent on the big external energy providers anymore. Households connected have lower costs, which makes living in the region more attractive and therefore increases the quality of life. In addition, providing the plants with the necessary raw materials is a good business for the local farmers. The income generated by the farmers, the fermentation plants, the households, and small and medium sized companies using this energy remains in the region (cf. Bossel, 1998, Cavagnaro, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Munasinghe, 2005; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

With regard to projects aiming at conserving natural habitats or protecting the environment directly, LEADER Representative 4 informed that there had been in fact project ideas, but they had not been eligible for funding. He argued that,

“This is a programme, which leaves little space for the environment. (...) The guidelines do not aim at environmental sustainable projects, or just to a very small degree. Okay, we had this project with the renewable energy. But our regional development strategy, for example, had foreseen to implement a blue ribbon, that means to implement a network of biotopes in the region (...) but there was no way to get funding for it.”

This was not mentioned in any of the documents reviewed. However, it might be true and might be a general point for improvement with regard to the general policies and LEADER guidelines. According to theory, this should not only benefit locals in terms of preserving the natural environment but also by increasing the offer of recreational areas, for example, which would add to the quality of life in general. Moreover, this could add to the touristic offers to rural tourists. The latter is important for branding activities. Products need to be offered according to the demands and values of rural tourist, who value (environmental) sustainability highly (cf. Asheim et al., 2003; Bossel, 1998; Cavagnaro, 2012; European Commission, 2006; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Munasinghe, 2005; Peña et al., 2012; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Peña et al., 2012; Schrempf et al., 2012; Weidenfeld, 2013).

The activities to maintain old structures in the centres of the villages were reported by LEADER Representative 1, when asked if and how the LEADER programme enhanced sustainability of any kind. He explained that, apart from reviving old centres, there were projects to encourage the use of old farm names, refurbishing old stables, life stock scales, and traditional baking houses which are very typical for this region of HESSIA. Also cultural events were organized such as evenings in the local dialect in order to make living in the villages more interesting and attractive again. LEADER Representative 1 expressed that he thinks that these activities were very important to increase the quality of life and the solidarity in the villages. These projects and activities can be considered examples of social sustainability and the careful and sustainable use of resources. This in turn leads to financial sustainability as well. Cultivating old traditions can be considered useful in order to raise the awareness and to increase the appreciation of the own cultural and historical heritage. According to theory, this enhances the identification of citizens with the place they live in and it is considered helpful in order to support the image and promotion of the region as a whole (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Colomb, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Kolb, 2006; Munasinghe, 2005; Peña et al., 2012; Schrempf et al., 2012; Weidenfeld, 2013).

With regard to social sustainability, the specific example of the log cabin in the municipality of Weimar was reported by the LEADER Administrator. He said, that this was a way to make camping more attractive and to support the municipality's effort of educating teenagers to understand nature by means of the municipality's educational holiday program for teenagers.

A similar remark was made by LEADER Representative 2, commenting that many of the touristic and cultural projects carried out aimed at educating visitors, especially with regard to nature and the natural environment. According to LEADER Representative 2 this is a way to raise awareness for the beauty of the region and therewith for the necessity of protecting the environment.

According to theory, educational tourism activities help to raise awareness of the environment, culture, and history. This is of importance in order to provide protection and cultivation of them in the long run, as they are important features of the regions which can be used for branding activities (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Colomb, 2012; Kolb, 2006; Munasinghe, 2005; Peña et al., 2012).

LEADER Representative 1 remarked that the support of start-ups and the sale of regional products in shops in the urban areas are considered to contribute to sustainability too. They support the trend towards regional products and also raise the awareness of consumers with regard to the Region Marburger Land. Sustainability can result from the reduction of transportation by the purchase of regional products, regional income generation, and the maintenance or creation of a viable socio-economic structure of the region including inhabitable village centres and reduced migration to urban regions. Moreover, the support of start-ups helps to promote social sustainability in terms of increasing the quality of life, as they offer job opportunities and as at the same time customers have better access to products or services for which they would have to travel far otherwise.

With regard to reduced CO₂ emissions this can be considered to enhance environmental sustainability. Also the socially sustainable component of increasing the quality of life in the region, which makes the latter more attractive both for locals and for tourists, becomes evident once more. Apart from that, if products are promoted as regional and sustainable, it is considered that they can significantly contribute to the consumption of rural tourists, as the tourists usually have these values (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Colomb, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2008; Kolb, 2006; Novelli et al, 2006; Munasinghe, 2005; Peña et al., 2012).

Another example the LEADER Administrator talked about in this respect, was the feasibility study for the archaeological open air museum "Zeitinsel" ("Island in Time"), which was funded by LEADER in order to make sure that resources, time, and effort for implementing this big project were not wasted. This project was also mentioned by LEADER Representative 1 in relation to feasibility and own investments of the applicants. This supports the conclusion drawn from the document analysis that the LEADER policies aim at accomplishing financial sustainability. In this case the funds for an in-depth financial analysis were provided by LEADER. This can be understood as a smaller financial loss, if the project turns out not to be feasible.

Whereas otherwise a failure after attempting to carry out the project would have been a major loss. The project itself, when implemented, is an example of educational activities linked to the preservation of local history and traditions, as it raises awareness amongst locals and answers the demand of rural tourists for educational activities (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Colomb, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Kolb, 2006; Novelli et al., 2006; Munasinghe, 2005; Peña et al., 2012).

LEADER Representative 2 evaluated the LEADER program in the region as in general sustainable in terms of longevity. He gave the example of the merging of the tourism agency of the city of Marburg and the one of the administrative district Marburg-Biedenkopf.

This is also one feature of sustainability which is mentioned in the theory (cf. Cavagnaro, 2012; Munasinghe, 2005). It also supports the conclusion drawn previously, that the innovations implemented in the Region Marburger Land are of sustaining nature like in the study of Hjalager (2014).

These findings show that it is crucial to work with a sound definition of sustainability and not just refer to a wide variety of areas where this concept should and could be applied. The combination of the theoretical concepts proposed by Cavagnaro (2012) and Munasinghe (2007) with the concept of Bossel (1998) seems to be a promising approach, as the present research indicates. The present applications of these concepts also indicates, however, that they need to be specified and adapted to the particular object or areas of application. Just like innovation, the concept of sustainability includes a long-term effect which cannot be observed in any short-term study like the present one, but just assessed by informed guesses.

4.3.2 Interviews - Conclusion

All projects mentioned are also reported in the documents analysed previously. Their benefits for the region and their positive impacts on various parts of the population were already discussed in detail, when analysing the corresponding documents. In addition, the indirect benefits with regard to financial, environmental, and social sustainability were also mentioned when analysing the documents. With regard to these issues, the contents of the interviews and the documents support each other. Furthermore, it can be concluded that sustainability is understood in the LEADER programme according to the theory discussed in the beginning of this study (cf. Bossel, 1998; Cavagnaro, 2012; Munasinghe, 2005).

The RIS, it can be said, was put into practice in the way intended by the LEADER programme, which aims at promoting sustainable development in rural areas, according to the documents reviewed and more or less in correspondence with the theory as well. It can be concluded that the five features according to Hjalager (2010b) were taken into account and acknowledged by the interviewees.

However, it seems that the 3 driving forces, although not explicitly asked about in the interviews, were also acknowledged by the interviewees, whereas the concepts referring to the outcomes in terms of sustainability and innovation were not so easily explained. As discussed previously, it is assumed that this is due to the fact that, except for the LEADER Administrator, all interviewees were more involved at the managerial level, had to learn their skills by doing and by reading the documents provided by the European Commission (2006) and by relying on their social network. The latter points towards a way of informal learning. This, together with the fact that most of the LEADER representatives were not academic experts with regard to the subject nor had much experience, could be an explanation for the problems with using these theoretical concepts.

Nevertheless, all concepts were mentioned at least indirectly. Therefore it is understood that the importance of these factors was acknowledged.

The interviews were also used to look for information which had not been found in the documents but seemed important. With regard to that, the interviews revealed that neither farmers nor educational institutions were (directly) participating in the development of the Region Marburger Land. Moreover, the interviews confirmed that only one project was realized aiming directly at environmental sustainability. Most interesting is the fact that one interviewee explained this to be caused by the funding policies of the EU.

Similarly to that explanation, the lack of involvement of farmers and organizational institutions, was previously explained as being possibly a consequence of a gap in policy-making, not only from the side of the German state and government but also from the side of the European Commission. This points to the importance of policy-making as a driving force of the RIS. But this issue will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter (cf. Hjalager, 2010b).

5 Discussion

Based on the findings of the analysis it becomes visible, that in general there are three levels of information on which this research is based. First of all, there is the theory, showing the academic approach towards the topic of RISs and related concepts and outcomes. Second, analysing the documents dealing with the European LEADER programme in general, it became evident that these contain information of managerial and organizational nature, as they aim at explaining how to set up the programme and how to work with it. These documents reflect the theoretical approach strongly. Third, the documents and the interviews concerning the case of the Region Marburger Land, reflect the actual real-life implementation of the theoretical and managerial propositions. It has to be acknowledged that the interviews play a special role in this, as they were mainly used to back up information about the real life practices on the one hand and on the other hand to close knowledge gaps.

This helped to find gaps between the theoretical, ideal approach and the real life practice. It became evident that in the case of the Region Marburger Land neither the farmers nor educational institutions were participating in the development process of the region, and that tourism innovations did not aim at environmental sustainability in particular. However, in order to provide an overview and a summary of the findings the table below was designed.

Table 1: Findings

| Driving Forces | RIS as Platform | Outcome | Key Feature |
|--------------------------------|--|---|-----------------------|
| <i>Internal & External</i> | <i>Projects</i> | <i>Innovation</i> | <i>Sustainability</i> |
| Public Management | <u>Branding:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Networks - Which Connect | Brand awareness Image | Social |
| Policies | <u>RT:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Experience Marburger Land | Accessibility Outdoor Activities Information Education | Environmental |
| Funding | <u>Others:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marburger Land with Energy Our Villages – Living Environment with Future | Quality of Life | Financial |

(Source: Own, based on Theory and Findings)

Based on the data analysis three, very strong, driving forces can be identified. These are public management, policies, and funding. They can be understood as driving forces with both external and internal components (cf. Bürgi et al., 2004; Hajalager, 2010b; Ronningen & Lien, 2014). Data analysis showed, that especially funding and policies are, on the one hand, subject to German national and state authorities and the EU, due to the systemic embeddedness of the LEADER programme in the NIS and the European IS (cf. Francois, 2004; Hall & Williams, 2008). On the other hand, however, the LAG organizes and manages policies and funding at the regional level according to the region's needs and resources. Moreover, funding in particular first requires the use of financial resources provided by local stakeholders, which is also regulated by internal policies.

Public management as driving force appears to be mainly internal on first sight, as it deals with raising awareness, fostering participation and support, and creating a shared regional identity amongst regional stakeholders, in order to include them in the innovative activities.

However, all the features mentioned previously add up to support the promotion of the region towards an extra-regional audience as well. In this sense the driving force public management is an internal one but with an external effect.

Apart from this, public management turned out to be stipulated and supported by guidelines and policies provided by the European Commission (2006). The possibility to access external funds can stimulate participation amongst local stakeholders (cf. Colomb, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2008; Kolb, 2006). These interrelationships between the three driving forces indicate that not only every single one but also the combination of the three of them is very supportive to the innovative outcomes of the RIS. All of them have a major influence on the activities within the RIS and therefore lead to the successful implementation of the projects and the innovative outcomes. It can, however, be argued that there are other forces of external and internal nature which influence the innovative activities, such as the general trend towards environmental friendliness, which is related to the increasing demands of rural tourists, for example (cf. Chan & Baum, 2007a, b; Hjalager, 2010b; Zografos & Allcroft, 2007). Other forces behind innovative developments are the problems faced by rural areas, such as the Region Marburger Land. One example is the migration from rural areas to urban centres (cf. European Commission, 2006). In the case of the Region Marburger Land, these are examples of minor forces, as they do not support the interaction of the features comprised in the RIS as directly and strongly as the three driving forces. The latter supported, for example, the branding activities. They enhanced social networking within the Region Marburger Land and outside. Branding activities were supported mainly by the projects implemented in RT, because RT in the Region Marburger Land is marketed to external visitors which will contribute to the regional economic wealth through their consumptions during their stay (cf. Colomb, 2012; Kolb, 2006).

The driving force public management led to making use of the synergistic effects of the close geographic proximity of the region to the city of Marburg and it led to the merging of the two tourism associations in order to facilitate branding activities. Both RT and branding activities benefit from the shared regional identity and a high quality of life, as these help to create a safe and authentic environment within the region which will please and attract tourists from outside (cf. Colomb, 2012; Florida, 2002; Kolb, 2006). The projects "Regional Networks - Which Connect" and "Cultural Experience Marburger Land" contributed to both, but they also benefited from these, as the quality of life in the Region Marburger Land was also increased through the implementation of other projects such as "Marburger Land with Energy" and "Our Villages – Living Environment with Future".

Summarizing, it can be concluded that in terms of innovative outcomes the main outcome was the establishment of the brand of the Region Marburger Land. With that, to a certain degree, an image and brand awareness was created (cf. Colomb, 2012; Kolb, 2006).

However, as derived from the data analysis, this is also still subject to further future developments over a longer time period.

The Region Marburger Land as a tourism destination is understood as a package of services and products according to theory (cf. Kolb, 2006; Romão et al., 2012). Therefore it can be said that other innovative outcomes were the implementation and improvements made with regard to accessibility and offer of tourism attractions, outdoor and educational activities, and information. These are main features valued by rural tourists and helping to attract them. All of the innovations are directly or indirectly contributing to social, environmental, and financial sustainability, as described in the analysis. Sustainability in general is understood as a desirable feature in an outcome, as it should support the long-term developments of the Region Marburger Land, by preserving the regional resources and promoting a careful use of them (cf. Bossel, 1998; Cavagnaro, 2012; Munasinghe, 2005). The data revealed, however, that the notion of environmental sustainability in particular is not taken into account strongly throughout the developments made in the Region Marburger Land. The reason found for this were the funding policies which made it hard to implement projects, and in particular tourism projects, which contribute directly to environmental sustainability (see Ch. 4.3.1).

Although a variety of stakeholders was found to have taken part in the developments, it became evident that farmers were not included, although their inclusion was intended by public management (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2014; Kisiel & Gierwiatowska, 2013; Novelli et al., 2006). Again, the reason found were funding policies. Here it turned out that the farmers had access to state funds other than LEADER and they did not seem to be interested in joining regional LEADER activities. In the case of the Region Marburger Land, the data showed that educational institutions were also not participating, although the contributions they could have made in terms of knowledge were somewhat acknowledged (cf. Hall & Williams). Although there was not much information to be found on this matter, it can be concluded that their participation could have been possible, if public management activities would have aimed more seriously at including them. This leaves the question why this did not happen. It is assumed here, that perhaps it was not acknowledged by the regional management that including educational institutions, e.g. also institutions for adult education, could have added value to the developments and innovations in the region. Therefore it can be suggested that LEADER policies should promote this approach more.

In all three cases the real-life practices deviate from the theoretical ideal, and the reasons behind this point are the three driving forces. The driving forces of funding and policies are first of all matters of the political and organizational systems higher up in the hierarchy, in which the RIS of the Region Marburger Land is embedded.

Therefore, imperfections in policy-making and providing funds by the government or the EU are obviously passed on to the regional level and are reflected in the activities and outcomes of the RIS (cf. Francois, 2004).

On the contrary, public management strategies are more subject to the regional management. Although they are also affected by the state or national government or the EU designing funding procedures and making policies, the regional management decides whom to target and how. In the case of the Region Marburger Land it would have been possible in general and theoretically, to better include educational institutions. However, the awareness of the usefulness and the possibility to include educational institutions has to be created amongst the regional management. This, in fact, could be done by changing LEADER policies and guidelines or by making them more explicit with regard to this issue.

6 Conclusion

At the regional level, the LEADER programme is identified as a RIS, which shows the characteristics of an Adapter (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008). The Region Marburger Land did not only benefit from funds provided and distributed by the national state and the EU, but also from the structure and policies of the LEADER programme, which led to strong social networks within the region and outside. Changes made were mainly incremental and added up to sustaining innovations based on the regional agricultural and rural traditions, culture, history, and life-style (cf. Hjalager, 2014). Therefore it is concluded that outcomes, and innovations, in RT in particular, were sustainable to a large extent (cf. Bossel, 1998; Cavagnaro, 2011; Munasinghe, 2005).

The tourism sector has an enabling function (cf. Hall & Williams, 2008) in this case, because the preconditions and characteristics of the region were combined or connected to extra-regional systems in order to create a new and better infrastructure, like, for example, the implementation of the Lahn River Hiking and Cycling Trails and the Huguenot and Waldensian Hiking Path. This new infrastructure serves as a vehicle to boost the local economy and to promote the region as a destination for RT activities. Also opportunities for nature based activities such as hiking, cycling, and canoeing, for example, are offered (Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2010a). This answers the demands of rural tourists (cf. Peña et al, 2012). However, there is still room for further improvement. For example, horseback riding or climbing or angling might be activities which could be included. In addition, the sustainability of all of these tourism products could be promoted and improved. Further improvements seem to be possible, especially with regard to food and beverages. Although there are pubs and restaurants offering regional and seasonal specialities, this could be made much more visible by means of suitable promotional activities.

SMEs, in the tourism sector in particular, should be founded and supported through funding in order to increase innovative activities (cf. Alsos et al., 2014; George & Mair, 2009; Hall & Williams, 2008; Rosas, 2014). These possibilities should be considered by the management of the Region Marburger Land. They can be expected to become easier to be exploited and developed in the long run, as the innovative outcomes of the first funding period still need to unfold and show their effects in the future. Also farmers and educational institutions should get involved and possibilities to implement more environmentally sustainable projects, especially in RT, should be found in order to exploit the full potential of the region.

From the previous discussion it can be concluded that these issues can be resolved, or at least be improved, through changes in the use and the making of policies, funding, and regional management, which were identified as the driving forces of the RIS, which is the LEADER programme at regional level in the case of the Region Marburger Land. It remains subject to further evaluation and research to find out how to implement improvements in the use of driving forces, by improving and changing policies, funding, and public management with regard to previously discussed features. However, the driving forces identified above answer the initial research question:

“Which are the driving forces within a Regional Innovation System fostering sustainable products in rural tourism?”

In the case of the Region Marburger Land implementing the LEADER project, the driving forces of policies, funding, and regional management fostering sustainable products in RT, were found to be the same as the ones identified by Hjalager (2010b). Moreover, in the case of the Region Marburger Land it can be seen that the driving forces that were identified do not only foster sustainable innovations in tourism but also innovations with regard to retail, social and public life, and energy supply. This, together with the findings of Hjalager (2010b), could hint towards a more general rule of these three driving forces fostering sustainable innovations in RISs. However, this remains subject to further investigation and research, also because it is the nature of a case study to provide valid findings only for the specific setting chosen.

However, with regard to the data collected, it could be argued that more extensive data, especially with regard to the interviews, should have been gathered in order to further explore the relationships and features of the RIS implemented in the Region Marburger Land, and also in order to draw an even more detailed picture. Unfortunately this was not possible due to the rather limited time frame which was available for this study. Nevertheless, the present research adds to the number of case studies about driving forces in RISs in general and contributes to the academic understanding of RISs in their environments (cf. Cresswell, 2007; Hjalager 2010b; Yin, 2009).

Finally, understanding a RIS and its driving forces may also contribute to improvements in (public) management and organization, policy-making in general, and the formulation of funding policies in particular. All of this would benefit the real-life implementation of a RIS and increase the ability to fully exploit the potential of a rural area which constitutes a region in the sense defined in this study. In other words, adding knowledge supports sustainable innovations and therefore it benefits the inhabitants and policy-makers, as it helps to increase the economic development and the quality of life (cf. Florida, 2002) in rural areas.

Moreover, this research intends to contribute to the theoretical bedrock, which is needed to understand RISs, their driving forces, and related concepts in a theoretical context applicable to empirical research, apart from practical project management as stated above. In terms of driving forces the focus is on the activities which foster sustainable innovations in RT, a concept which here was explicitly integrated into the wider systemic framework of ISs and regions conceived as systems. . However, it has to be acknowledged that driving forces, could, in other cases, also be conceived as actors such as institutions, policy-makers, investors and the regional managers for example. In the present research this perspective was consciously not taken, but the importance of personal relations, which was found, indicates that it might be fruitful to include an actor-oriented perspective more explicitly and more systematically in a theoretical conceptual framework. It is assumed that, actors might change over time and their role as driving force might vary from case to case, whereas general processes can be assumed to stay more consistent and stable over time. Investigating further into this theoretical topic could be subject for further research as it would help to understand how exactly to differentiate between the roles of general processes and actors and how these could be better integrated into a RIS, if needed. Such a more encompassing theoretical framework also might turn out valuable to guide empirical research.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates the importance of understanding sustainability not only as an underlying general concept but also the importance of understanding it as a differentiated concept, including, e.g., the three areas of economy, ecology and society (cf. Cacvagnaro, 2012; Munasinghe, 2007). This helps to understand better the issues, problems, and interrelationships affecting the RIS and successful innovation in different parts and at different levels. Future research could aim at using such a differentiated concept of sustainability to further investigate how it affects or is affected by the driving forces of a RIS for example.

Moreover, sustainability has proven important, especially with regard to RISs such as those created under the LEADER programme. In this case the intention is to develop rural areas. Since rural areas are more or less depending on expanding their service sector, but also on maintaining their agriculture and natural environment, the solution is in fact to focus on offering RT products.

This goes hand in hand with the demand for sustainable products of rural tourists and thus permits to take advantage of synergies (cf. European Commission, 2006; George, 2009; Hajalager, 2014; Novelli et al., 2009). The present research, however, showed that in German language both the use of the words and the concepts of RT and sustainability remain blurry to many people, whereas the theoretical concepts turned out to be useful in the present study. Further research aiming at a German speaking audience, dealing with these issues and their relation to RISs, might help to increase general knowledge and to improve general practices in the field by better clarifying the relationships between scientific concepts and the use of corresponding terms in everyday language.

Moreover, this study showed that the concept of destination branding is a key concept for innovation in tourism which helps to focus on a specific development strategy and to focus all the innovative activities on packaging and presenting a destination as a whole. With that it confirms what is already emphasized in related literature (cf. Colomb, 2012; Kolb, 2006). Further research, could contribute to theory building, by, for example, investigating how exactly RISs are depending on or fostering branding activities, possibly in a feedback circle, or which driving forces within the RIS can support branding activities and how.

This research furthermore, focuses on describing concrete features of the region and RIS investigated and their interrelationships by explicitly using a differentiated systemic concept, in order to give an encompassing view of the hierarchic levels, from the village to global society, and by demonstrating at some points the importance of positive and negative feedback loops, for example.

By outlining an encompassing conceptual map as a theoretical framework with the focus on driving forces, which in the following was empirically informed and confirmed by the case study, this research could inspire and enhance both future theoretical developments and their empirical application for research on innovation systems.

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Appendix

1 Typology of Regional Innovation Systems

Table 6.2 A typology of RISs

| <i>Characterization of region</i> | <i>Regional competitiveness strategies</i> | <i>Sectoral diversity</i> | <i>Sectoral specialization</i> |
|--|---|---|--|
| Genuine innovators (best practice regions) | HIGH ROAD – network enhancing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing internal and external (non-regional) networks • Benchmarking assessments • Investing in superstructure and infrastructure • Scanning globally for new knowledge • Development of information and communication networks • Development of external transport links, especially airline and airfreight links, and good intra-regional links • Tourism as enabler | STARS Location of leading-edge innovations. The RIS is maintained by the multiple relations among diverse industries. Close links are also maintained with other stars. i.e. Silicon Valley, Stockholm. | SHOOTING STARS Survive as long as they are able to on the strength of an innovation or a set of inter-related sectoral specific innovations. In production terms an example would be Detroit. In tourism terms historical examples would be Atlantic City (casinos), Las Vegas (casinos and entertainment) or Margate (seabathing). Contemporary examples include Queenstown, New Zealand (adventure tourism) and the Napa Valley (wine and food tourism). |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>Adapters (regions of relatively high levels of diverse competences)</p> | <p>MIDDLE PATH – growth enhancing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State funded programmes for training and fostering entrepreneurs intellectual property • Structures to help and mentor new firms and entrepreneurs in the form of business advice and the reduction of uncertainty • Local state as coordinator and an investor in infrastructure • Tourism as enabler and to give visibility to region | <p>LIVING ROOM LAMPS/RISING STARS</p> <p>Host actors maintain close links with non-local sources of innovation as well as local connections so as to improve local production conditions, for example, Hong Kong, or Manchester. These regions may also be rising stars, particularly with the input of government assistance, that may lead to genuine innovation, for example, Singapore.</p> | <p>SPOTLIGHTS</p> <p>Engage in mainly incremental innovation through strong external connections. Able to respond to relatively advanced R&D-related improvements. In tourism terms an example would be Macau (casinos and heritage tourism) which has strong connections to Las Vegas and Portugal. In some cases sectoral innovation systems may provide sufficient non-tradable environmental assets to attract other industries and increase sectoral diversity. Las Vegas in the US or the Gold Coast in Australia provide examples of sectoral diversification while still retaining a strong tourism focus.</p> |
|--|---|--|---|

Adopters (regions with production-oriented competences)

LOW ROAD – zero sum and imitative

- Place marketing and promotion. High emphasis on visibility
- Focus on capturing mobile investment, firms and capital
- Focus on tourism (visitors) on the basis of numbers
- Subsidised investment and means of production, e.g. sites and premises

CHANDELIERS

Regions where many sectors are co-located but are not strongly linked with each other. They are, in effect, islands of isolated industrial activity. Such co-location may even have been supported by government funds

as well as improvements to the innovative milieu with respect to education, finance and infrastructure, that is, Auckland, New Zealand; Bangkok, Thailand.

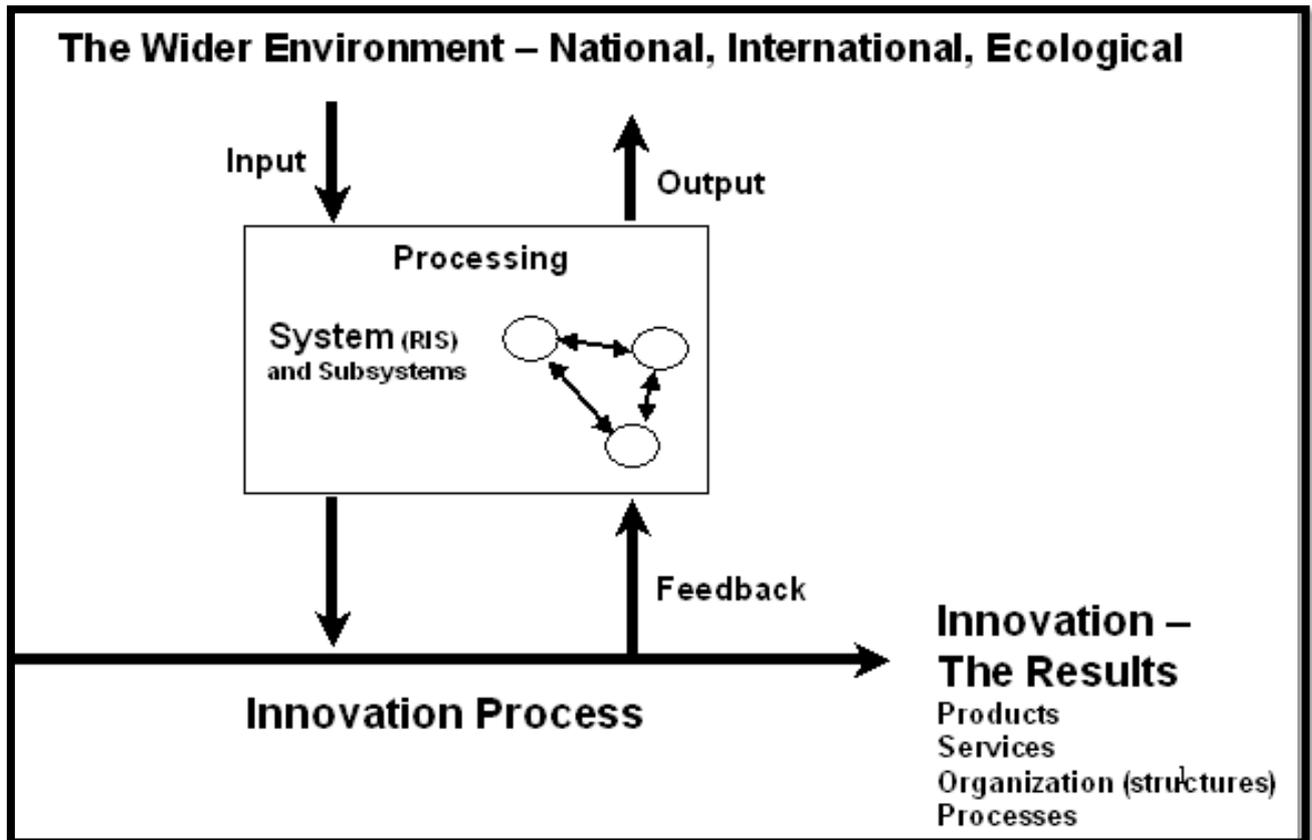
CANDLES

Survive as long as their relatively simple production-oriented competences are supported, in production terms, by externally-based customers or corporate structures, or in service terms, a

regional market that has no consumption alternative.

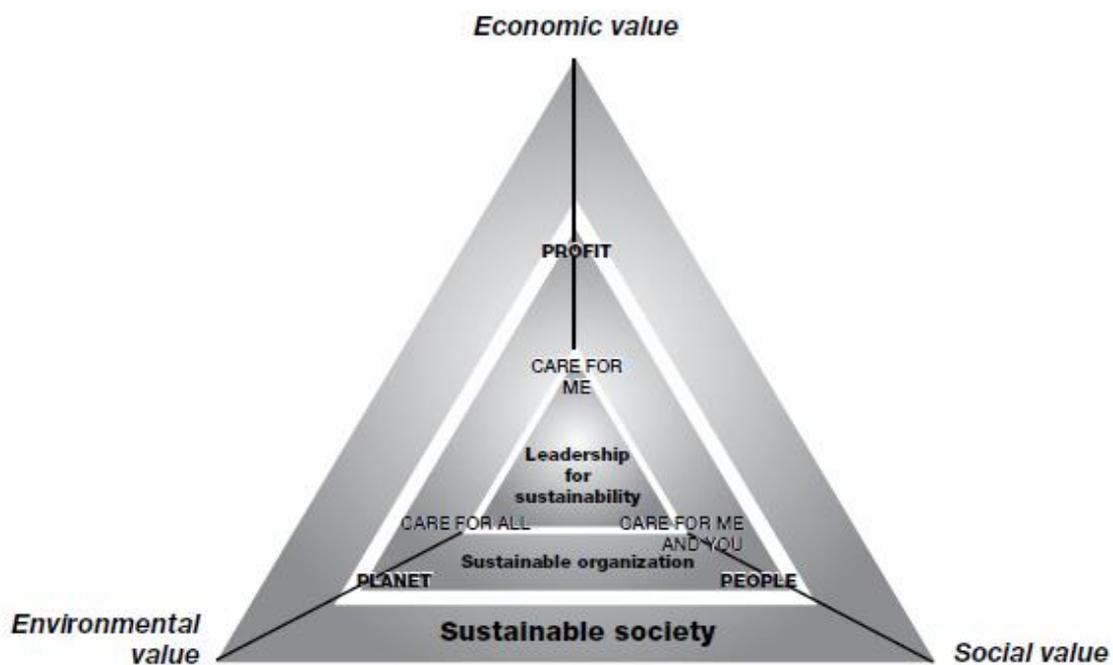
Source: Hall & Williams, 2008, Ch. 6, p.158-160

2 Innovation - The Basic Concept



Source: Own, adapted from the definition of "System" in
FRANCOIS, Charles (ed.):
International Encyclopedia of Systems and Cybernetics,
2nd ed., 2. vols., K.G. Saur Verlag, München 2004,
Part II, no. 3322, p. 580

3 Three Levels of Sustainability



(Cavagnaro, 2012, p. 2)

4 Sub-Indexes of Sustaining and Disruptive Innovations

| Variable | Sustaining | Disruptive |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Scale | 1.....5 | |
| Resource profile | Mainly activities based on traditional agricultural/rural foundations | Importing new resources (physical, knowledge) to replace traditional ones or to transform the interpretation or value of them |
| Value for the customers | Standard values, expected products for rural tourism | Surprise, excitement, ‘wow’ |
| Production and provision | Same gear, small improvements or upscaling based on existing knowledge and technology | Major productivity gains due to new types of organizations, technology or delivery methods |
| Cross-sector | One-sector logic, one enterprise projects | Overarching sectors, new collaborative structures |

(Source: Hjalager in Alsos et al., 2014, Ch. 3, p. 69)

5 The Five Analytical Features of Regional Innovation Systems

1. Complex institutional set-ups and collaborations in the development process that go beyond the single tourism enterprise and integrate suppliers, consumer organizations, voluntary bodies, etc.;
2. Determining links to specific national/regional policies, not necessarily tourism related policies but also environmental, cultural, and labour market policies etc.;
3. Spreading and expansion mechanisms for innovation systems, which indicate dynamic development potentials, where new collaborative modes are introduced on a regular basis;
4. Innovative products or services – something new, challenging, enhancing, useful and scope-widening, seen from the point of view of the customers;
5. A permanence, where the system and main actors are in operation for a considerable length of time. A long history is an indicator of the emergence of institutional competitiveness, regarded as important for persistent innovative activity.

(Hjalager, 2010b, pp. 196 – 197)

6 Case Description – The European LEADER Programme

The LEADER programme was founded in 1990 by officials of the European Commission (EU) in order to support the development of rural areas by fostering innovation through cooperation and collaboration between the private, the public, and the civil sector. “LEADER” is a French acronym for “Liaison entre actions de développement de l’économie rurale” which translates to “Liaison amongst Actors in Rural Economic Development” (DVS, 2015; European Commission, 2006; European Network for Rural Development 2015; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

There have been changes in terms of structure and institutions throughout Europe, which have led to long-term unemployment and depopulation in the agricultural sector. This, in turn, resulted in a weak infrastructure and a decrease of the service industry in rural areas. LEADER was founded in order to overcome these problems on the one hand by not only focusing on agriculture but on a rural area as a whole, and on the other hand by giving room for the individual needs and characteristics of different regions by implementing the bottom-up approach. This is considered important, as most European citizens live in rural areas which represent almost 90% of Europe’s entire surface (DVS, 2008; European Commission, 2006; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

Since the rural areas form such a big part of the total surface of Europe and at the same time are subject to agriculture and forestry, it is of major importance to raise awareness and implement sustainable and environmentally friendly procedures, such as power production through ecological resources, in order to protect the environment and fight the global warming (DVS, 2008). The following statement explains why the LEADER approach is suitable to solve the before-mentioned problems:

“Although the scope of the problem may be different, the issues facing rural areas in developed and lesser developed countries are pretty similar: basically, how to retain a viable countryside by providing jobs and offering a decent quality of life to its inhabitants. For this reason, transfer of the know-how acquired since the inception of LEADER ...”

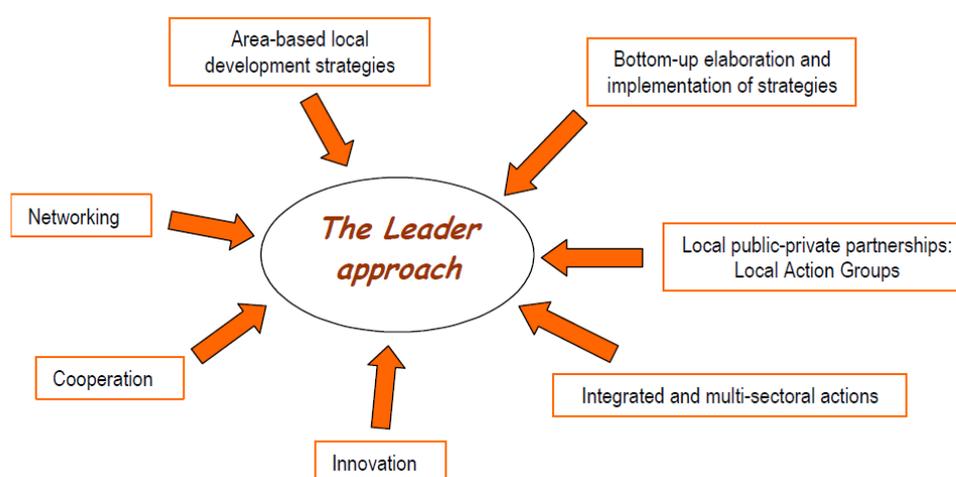
(Wade & Rinne, 2008, Introduction, p. 5).

This is further underlined by the concept of the LEADER programme intending to keep development strategies and their implementation at the local level and leaving decisions and ideas to local people. This is to be achieved by providing a bottom-up structure and keeping procedures simple and transparent in order to give relevant information to everyone who needs it (DVS, 2015; European Commission, 2006; European Network for Rural Development 2015; Falkowski, 2013; Wade & Rinne, 2008).

6.1 The Seven Key Features

The before-mentioned statement leads to the seven key features of the LEADER approach as found in “The LEADER Approach: A basic guide” by the European Commission (2006). However, a similar picture as the one shown below and explanations of the essentials of the seven key features are also given by Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz (2013) in German language. Moreover, they are also introduced and explained extensively on the website of The European Network for Rural Development (2015), arguing that the seven features make LEADER a programme which is quite particular.

Fig.2: The 7 Key Features of LEADER



(European Commission, 2006)

1 Local Development Strategies

According to the European Commission (2006), the first feature of area-based local development strategies refers to the notion of an area which shares the same culture, traditions, and tangible and intangible resources but not necessarily the same administrative borders. The reason given is, that within such an area there is common shared (tacit) knowledge. Therefore sustainable development strategies and innovations can be custom-made to fit the area’s needs and its resources. A common culture can also result in a greater competitive advantage, as locals know what are the area’s strengths and weaknesses.

The European Commission (2006) furthermore states that the boundaries of a local area can fluctuate. However, it is also defined that for the purposes of the LEADER programme a local area should host 10,000 to 1000,000 inhabitants.

2 Bottom-up Approach

The second feature of the LEADER programme is the bottom–up approach. As stated by the European Commission (2006), it is the most distinctive feature, as it focuses on involving local actors in the decision-making process and is supposed to be integrated and interacting with the top-down approach of local policy-making institutions in order to create a dialogue and to design policies which will help local actors to keep-up with the development strategies they have designed.

Moreover, local actors are defined as inhabitants in general who may have different economic and social interests. They should be directly included in a project to a great extent, already at the very beginning of the project. But it should always stay a goal to involve even more local actors. This procedure of involving ever more local actors is defined as “capacity building” through raising awareness, learning, and participation of human resources, facilitating participation through establishing clear criteria for selecting sustainable projects, and through making procedures transparent and understandable.

3 The Local Action Group (LAG)

The third feature is establishing public-private partnerships, facilitated by an LAG, which manages all the projects and related activities and facilitates cooperation and collaboration of private and public sectors, including non-profit organizations (European Commission, 2006; Kisiel & Gierwiatsowska, 2013). The latter is thought to enhance learning from each other by sharing resources and experiences in order to create new solutions. In this way it will foster innovation and competitive advantage as well as reduce possible conflicts by communicating and finding compromises if necessary. Moreover, these practices aim at integrating environmental concerns, especially when it comes to agricultural practices, a diverse rural economy, and quality of life.

Different types of LAGs can be found all over Europe. Their power, role, and responsibilities may vary according to the countries’ policies as well. However, an LAG is defined as consisting of a balanced mixture of members representing the local interest groups. At the decision-making level half of the representatives should be representing private partners and associations. Often payment and funding of projects are a matter of public authorities which are in charge of public funding. The LAGs, however, are in charge of choosing which projects proposed by stakeholders, public or private, will be implemented. (European Commission, 2006).

4 Innovation

The fourth feature is to promote innovation. The European Commission (2006) defines innovation in a wide sense, which may also be applicable to an urban area. It includes product, service, process, organizational, and market innovation. It is argued, however, that rural areas are more depending on support provided by the LEADER programme than urban areas, because their resources are more limited and the links with R&D centres are rather weak. The LAGs can help to strengthen such linkages, also between other actors of the region. This is due to a rather large amount of freedom and because they can facilitate networking by improving traditional forms of know-how and by fostering innovation (European Commission, 2006).

5 Integrated, Multi-sectoral Actions

The fifth feature concerns integrated and multi-sectoral actions. This means that the general development strategy of a LEADER region should involve various sectors. In addition, the various sub-projects and actions linked to it should be in line with the overall strategy. This is a matter of involving as far as possible all interest groups and of connecting these with the economic, social, cultural, and environmental actors involved (European Commission, 2006).

6 Networking

The sixth feature is networking, which serves to build links between people, projects, and rural areas in order to overcome isolation and in order to enhance the exchange of information, knowledge, and experiences, which will help the region to conduct its own projects and to comply with development strategies successfully. Networks can be institutional, funded by the European Commission at the European or national level, or they can be national, regional, and local networks. This refers to networks of LAGs which have emerged from former informal networks at a national, regional or local basis (European Commission, 2006).

7 Cooperation

The seventh feature is cooperation, which, according to the European Commission (2006), is designed to go even further than the approach of networking. The idea implies that an LAG cooperates with other LAGs or other, non-LEADER, project groups and associations working with a similar strategy in other areas, states or countries.

The European Commission distinguishes between inter-territorial cooperation and transnational cooperation. The first refers to cooperation between different regions of the same country, whereas the second refers to the cooperation of LEADER groups of at least two different EU countries.

6.2 Implementing the European LEADER Programme

The European Commission (2006) specifies how to put the seven distinctive key features presented above into action by indicating what would be the first basic steps in order to implement LEADER at the local level.

The first step is identified as capacity building, which is mainly allocating the human resources and organizing activities and financial skills in order to determine how and who manages what. The European Commission (2006) states that this process used to involve mainly “learning by doing”. Due to the fact that LEADER got more and better established in the course of time, experiences started to accumulate. Therefore networking and communication became increasingly important in order to learn about LEADER. Moreover, raising awareness amongst local stakeholders is an integral part, as only if they know about LEADER, stakeholders are likely to participate.

The second step is to bring together the local actors by organizing meetings, seminars, fairs, workshops, and so on. This helps to make local actors meet and enhances the exchange of ideas as well as the discussions of what is needed in or wanted for the region (European Commission, 2006).

According to the European Commission (2006), the third step is to analyse the territory. This means to analyse the rural territory in order to find out what its capital, resources, and assets are. The results can then be used in order to define key features which can be helpful to develop lead projects, which will result in further new ideas and visions.

The fourth step is closely related to the territory analysis. In this step existing activities and initiatives are identified. Only after such a step local actors can decide, if these activities and initiatives are to be followed up and supported or not (European Commission, 2006).

The fifth step serves to create partnerships. Already the previous steps include raising awareness amongst stakeholders and promoting their active participation. However, now it is time to forge ties between the public and the private sector and to manage implementation. Often this is the stage when the LAGs are formed (European Commission, 2006).

The sixth and last step towards implementing LEADER at a local level is to make the participation formal by creating an official document containing the development strategy for the area.

This implies to state objectives, define strategic priorities, and rank the actions planned. Based on this, successful LAGs are chosen to receive funds from the state or the region (European Commission, 2006).

When it comes to funding, it has to be kept in mind that funding is not only provided by the state or the EU, but that a considerable part of the funds has to come from the own local, public or even private financial resources of the region (Wade & Rinne 2008).

The Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz (2013), a Hessian State Ministry, furthermore gives a clear overview of the structure the official development strategy document should follow. The document should first state prior experience with the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) or LEADER. Then the geographic location, boundaries and identity of the region should be discussed, leading to the explanation of how the regional development concept was designed. Moreover, the document should provide an analysis of the region itself and a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) and requirements analysis. Based on this, the regional development strategy should be discussed, cooperations should be outlined, and an action plan should be developed. The report should conclude with propositions how the development strategy will be put into action.

The structure of this report shows many parallels with the six steps of implementing LEADER at a regional level. It is a detailed specification of what an LAG is expected to hand in when accomplishing the final step of implementing LEADER at the local level. The purpose is to show that the applicants have thoroughly prepared to become a LEADER region if accepted by the authorities. Moreover, providing a structure and requesting this type of report points towards the philosophy of establishing guidelines. These, on the one hand, will help the applicants to find out how to organize things, and, on the other hand, they help as tools in order to reflect, monitor, and evaluate the progress of the programme at a regional level.

The steps to implement LEADER, as described by the European Commission, are very similar to the theoretical approach by the OECD (2013, p. 2) of setting regional innovation strategies into practice. The OECD (2013) also defines six steps of implementation. The first step is to initiate a regional dialogue on innovation, the second to analyse regional innovation needs and capacities, and the third to shape an innovation strategy with direct involvement of all relevant stakeholders. The fourth step is to select priorities for innovation support, the fifth to implement the strategy, and the sixth step is to establish a monitoring and evaluation system for the strategy.

6.3 History and Structure

LEADER started with the LEADER I programme in the period from 1991 to 1994. This was followed by the LEADER II programme (1994–1999), LEADER+ programme (2000–2006), LEADER programme (2007–2013) and the current LEADER programme which started last year (2014) and will finish in 2020.

The latter, however, is not part of the analysis in this research, as the period just started and developments and outcomes are expected to be more visible in the last years of the programme (The European Network for Rural Development, 2015). Therefore the latest LEADER funding period will not be considered here.

Evaluations are also made at the end of each LEADER period which lasts seven years. After finishing one period, every region has to apply again for the next funding period by handing in a development strategy report and waiting to get accepted again (Kreisausschuss Landkreis Marburg-Biedenkopf, 2015).

What had started as a pilot programme in the first period expanded in its geographic scope during the second period and resulted in simplified policies during the LEADER+ period. Until 2007, the LEADER programme was a single support programme directly managed by the European Commission. From 2007 onward it was changed into an integral part of the national policies and support programmes for rural areas of the EU countries, in order to get LEADER implemented in many more cases and with a broader range of activities. This is referred to in the documents as “mainstreaming” or “mainstream–support” (DVS, 2015; Canever et al., 2011; European Commission, 2006; The European Network for Rural Development, 2015). Mainstreaming integrates the regional programme into a national and supranational system and also integrates it into policy-making. Together with the feedback loops, which are enhanced by integrating the bottom-up approach of LEADER into the top-down approach of European and German policy-making, the notion arises that, at least at the local level, policy-makers can more easily react to the needs of the region. However, in a broad picture it could be expected that the LEADER system as a whole becomes slower in reacting and innovating itself due to its dependency on national and European policies and laws.

According to the DVS (2015) and the European Commission (2006), LEADER is meant to complement other European or national programmes by assisting and supporting otherwise weakly supported sectors or interest groups at a local level. This means, that LEADER can strengthen the ties and support projects of other project-operators in a rural area.

The European Commission (2006) mentions amongst others the following examples: Cultural activities, RT, environment, and links between producers and customers. The aim is to add value to the local area by “encouraging socio-economic players to work together” (European Commission, 2006, p. 5).

In Germany the integrated organisation of the LEADER programme, as from 2007 on, is roofed by the EU Commission, who also established the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD). ENRD works as a network for all European countries and their LEADER representatives.

However, within Germany there are LEADER representatives at the various political levels (DVS, 2015). At the national level, a subsidiary of the Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (BMLE), which translates as the Ministry for Food and Agriculture, is in charge of running the Deutsche Vernetzungsstelle Ländlicher Räume (DVS) (Navigation und Service, 2015). The latter translates as German Network for Rural Areas and also forms part of the ENRD at the transnational level.

At the national level, the DVS promotes sustainable development in rural areas and intends to provide a platform where different actors can meet and network. It is in charge of communicating with and supporting activities of the 13 German states related to the Europäischer Landwirtschaftsfonds für die Entwicklung des ländlichen Raumes (ELER), which translates as European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and constitutes the legislative foundation for the development of communities in rural areas (DVS, 2015; Kreisausschuss Landkreis Marburg-Biedenkopf, 2015). Moreover, the DVS, apart from promoting ELER, promotes LEADER as a useful tool to develop rural areas (DVS, 2015; DVS, n.d.). Since 2007, however, EAFRD integrated the practical component of the LEADER programme into each of the 13 states' political approach to developing rural areas. In addition, this means that the LEADER programme is also subject to the EAFRD funds of each German state. Within each German state there are administrative districts which comprise several communities. At each one of these administrative levels LEADER representatives can be found (DVS, 2015; Communication Department of the European Commission, 2015).

7 The European LEADER Programme - Layout Analysis

One of the main web sources used has been the website of the European Commission (The European Network for Rural Development, 2015). It was complemented by the print version of "The Leader Approach: A Basic Guide" (2006), also published by the European Commission. The latter can also be found on the website. The guide is clearly structured, straight to the point, and explains everything necessary in easy to understand language.

The website of the European Commission is easy to find with the Google search engine. However, since it is very rich in information, it takes a while to find the way to the "LEADER Gateway" which is shown below. Once at the "LEADER Gateway", it is quite easy to find the way to different topics. The LEADER Toolkit provides the user with all relevant basic information about what LEADER is, how it works, and how it can be implemented. Information found there is congruent with what can be found in the basic guide. However, there are more possibilities to follow up on extra information, as reports, PDF-files, movies, and interviews are provided, if the user wants additional explanations and information.

Fig. 3: European Commission Website



<https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/leader>

The LAG database helps to find contacts of other registered LAGs Europe-wide, the LEADER analysis guides the user to the work and reports of four focus groups set up by the European Commission in order to analyse the implementation of LEADER throughout Europe. Furthermore, the LEADER library is organized like an archive where the user finds information regarding all LEADER periods including the current one. LEADER Events informs about events, such as trainings, conferences, and meetings related to LEADER, whereas the transnational cooperation button leads to information and contacts relevant for transnational projects. In each section there is a wide variety of information, clearly and logically structured, understandable in layout and language. Also visual and audio-visual content is provided. This not only with regard to information but also with regard to materials and tools, such as for example a PDF-file containing a layout for conducting a SWOT analysis of the region.

Furthermore, a lot of examples and reports about projects conducted by the various regions can be found. In terms of the LEADER philosophy, which includes learning by doing, networking, education, experience exchange, transparency, and the bottom-up practice, the website and also the guide book are in accordance. Both of them make information accessible and also ensure understanding, no matter if the reader is academic or not.

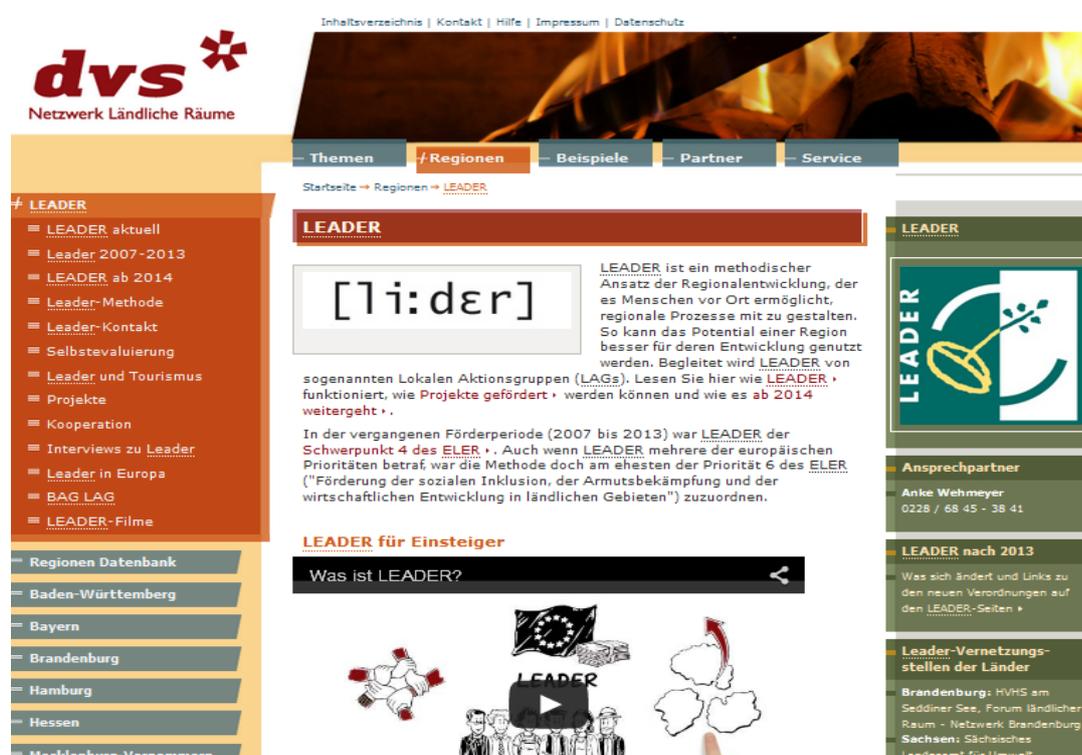
Moreover, a variety of information and the possibility to dig into details is given, but at the same time logically structured, so that the user finds his way around and has access to the information he wants and needs.

The website of DVS (2015) is providing information about LEADER in a similar way and according to the spirit of LEADER. However, finding the way to LEADER from the start page, it also becomes clear that the DVS is part of the German government. In the first place it promotes development in rural areas and projects fostering agriculture through national policies, mainly ELER, of which LEADER became a part since the funding period 2007–2013.

In contrast to the European Commission, which provides information in all European languages and especially in English, the DVS focuses on information in German. Although generally well-structured, some parts explaining policies and political structures related to ELER and LEADER are not easy to understand due to a rather complicated language. Moreover, a reader who is not familiar with the structure of German and European policies will not easily understand the organization, when reading the information the first time.

Unlike the European Commission, the DVS provides a very clearly structured overview of the different LEADER funding periods and their different names. It allocates information accordingly as can be seen in Fig. 4.

Fig. 4: DVS Website



(<http://www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de/>)

In order to raise awareness, the DVS has also published the flyer “Aktiv im Netzwerk”, which promotes networking amongst rural areas and briefly explains why rural areas are so important, why their development is dependent on networking, and that the aim is to develop attractive rural areas. Moreover, it explains briefly which tools can be used to take actions and it introduces LEADER to the reader. It is very short and easy to understand. It does not give many details yet, but its content and design awake curiosity to look further into the issue.

The DVS furthermore published a small booklet “Zukunft auf dem Land gestalten” (DVS, 2008), which explains in straight to the point texts why the rural area is important in general, which problems it faces, and why it should be developed. The booklet goes more into detail than the flyer, as it explains the work of the DVS briefly. It also introduces ELER and LEADER as a part of ELER. Moreover, it shows pie charts in order to explain how the funding works and what it is used for in the different German states. All in all, it is more concretely introducing the reader to the positive attributes of developing rural areas in general and using the LEADER approach for that in particular.

At the state level, the Hessian Ministry for Environment, Sustainability, Agriculture and Consumer Protection published the journal „LEADER bewegt Regionen: Ländliche Regionalentwicklung in Hessen“ (Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz, 2013) which does not only give insights into the basic set-up of LEADER but also provides short guidelines on how to become a LEADER region and which are the steps that need to be taken in order to apply for becoming a LEADER region.

The main content, however, reports examples of very successful LEADER projects throughout Germany and gives specific information on how much money was funded, how much was invested, and what the aims were. Moreover, the reports are attractive to read, as they are not overly long and supported by visual material in form of fotos. This is very helpful in terms of communicating experience, and it might help others to get inspiration for new projects.

The website of the Hessian Ministry for Environment, Sustainability, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz, n.d.) is easy to find with the Google search engine. However, its layout and the way the content is presented is not easy to follow. Direct information about LEADER can be found in the text under the heading “Regional Development”. However, in the first place ELER is introduced and later on LEADER. But LEADER is not even briefly explained in its basic features nor is its relation to ELER made clear. In the end, a list of all participating LEADER regions within the State of Hessia is presented. Similar aspects were observed when it comes to the website of the administrative district of Marburg-Biedenkopf (Kreisausschuss Landkreis Marburg-Biedenkopf, 2015).

This leaves room for interpreting that LEADER has not yet been integrated into German policies for so long, and that German authorities might not yet have adapted to providing more extensive and clearly structured information at the state level or lower levels.

The LEADER Dissemination Guide Book by Wade and Rinne (2008) is an academic research comparing the performance of different European countries participating in the LEADER programme. Apart from the academic approach of comparing cases in order to encourage non-European countries to take advantage and implement LEADER as well, the study gives valuable and detailed insights into what LEADER is, how it works, and how its structures are set up.

The explanations on regional innovation strategies, as given by OECD in their handbook (OECD, 2013), which was analysed in print, provide short but sufficient insights into how regional innovation strategies are to be put into practice. However, compared to the European Commission or the German authorities, the approach by OECD is more theoretical.

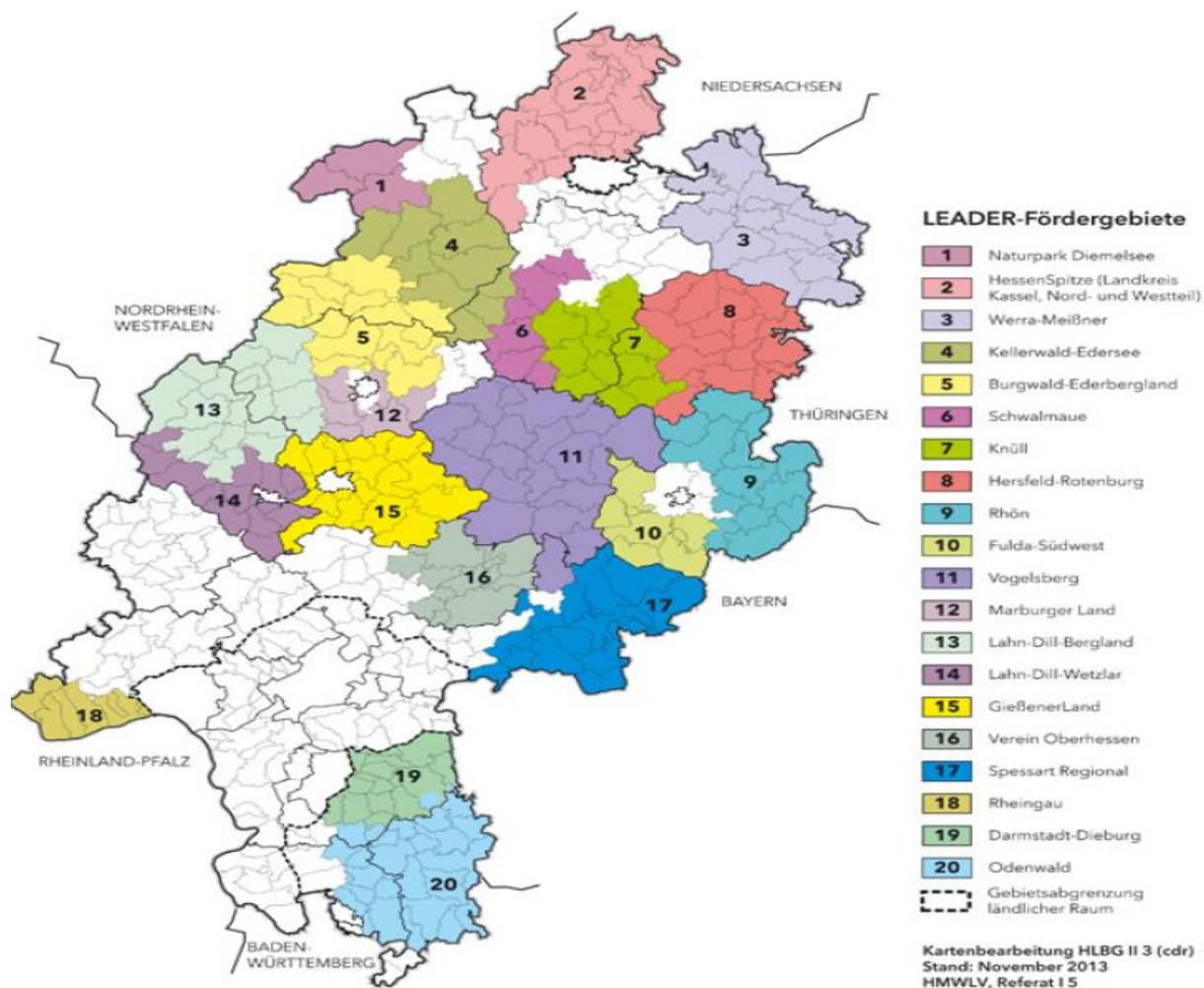
When it comes to the academic research papers of Falkowski (2013), Canever et al. (2011), and Kisiel and Gierwiatowska (2013), the basic features and structures of the LEADER approach are only mentioned very shortly and rather superficially. However, at an academic level their studies and findings support education and create new knowledge without doubt.

All in all, it can be concluded that there is a rich and varying amount of documents which not only provide basic and practical information but almost all of them have also in common that they illustrate manifold cases of the LEADER programme implemented in various regions in order to provide readers with ideas and examples.

8 The LEADER Region Marburger Land - Case Description

Examining the map of LEADER regions in the German State of Hesse during the funding period 2007 to 2013 (Fig. 5) shows, that the State of Hesse has been strongly committed to the LEADER programme, as the coloured parts of the map indicate very clearly. The large white part in the lower left corner of the map is the urban agglomeration of the Rhine-Main region, in which Frankfurt/Main is located. Therefore it is, of course, excluded from the funding for developing rural areas. This is confirmed by Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz. (n.d), which translates as the Hessian Ministry for Environment, Climate Protection, Agriculture and Consumer Protection, which states that almost the entire rural area of the State of Hesse took part in the LEADER programme during the funding period 2007-2013.

Fig. 5: LEADER Regions in Hessaia - Funding Period 2007-2013



(Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz, 2013, p. 7)

There were four LEADER regions within the Hessian district of Marburg-Biedenkopf taking part in the LEADER funding period 2007-2013. These were: Region Ederbergwald, Region Herrenwald, Region Lahn-Dill-Bergland, and Region Marburger Land (DVS, 2015; European Union, 2015; Kreisausschuss Landkreis Marburg-Biedenkopf, 2015).

The present study deals with the case of the Region Marburger Land during the funding period 2007 to 2013. This region was founded in December 2007 and officially admitted to the LEADER programme in January 2008. At this time the Region Marburger Land comprised 5 communities, which were Marburg, Weimar, Amöneburg, Fronhausen, and Ebsdorfergrund (Beckmann, 2008; DVS - Deutsche Vernetzungsstelle, 2015; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Gemeinde Weimar - Wirtschaft: Region Marburger Land, n.d.; Kreisausschuss Landkreis Marburg-Biedenkopf, 2015; Oberbürgermeister Egon Vaupel, 2006; Schmidt, 2008; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2008; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012a).

Fig. 6 shows the administrative district of Marburg-Biedenkopf with Marburg as the capital and biggest urban area. Located within this district are the five rural communities, the geographic borders, location, and size of which are shown in Fig. 7.

All member communities were of the same importance within the LEADER region. However, Marburg, being the capital, had a special status. Since the LEADER programme focuses on developing rural areas, Marburg, the central town, was considered as urban space and was not part of the development strategy. Only its outskirts are considered, when talking about Marburg as a community forming part of the Region Marburger Land. (DVS - Deutsche Vernetzungsstelle, 2015; Gemeinde Weimar - Wirtschaft: Region Marburger Land, n. d.; Oberbürgermeister Egon Vaupel, 2006; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2014; Region Marburger Land e.V., & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

Fig. 6: Administrative District Marburg-Biedenkopf



(Source: Google, 2009)

Fig. 7: Region Marburger Land



(Source: Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, n.d.)

8.1 Resources and Infrastructure

All five communities of the Region Marburger Land share similar geographic characteristics, and their locations are connected with each other through cultural and historical attributes (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). The region includes 50 localities and 38,500 inhabitants (Bambey, 2011; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012a).

The city of Marburg itself and its historic, picturesque, medieval city centre, the castle, and Marburg's important role in German history and culture in general as well as its university are well known outside the regional boundaries. It is located rather centrally in the rural area of the Region Marburger Land. The developments of the region are expected to benefit from the synergistic effects of the close proximity to the city of Marburg (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). The area around Marburg is rural and many villages can be found. This already points towards the fact that, although there is infrastructure, a rather high employment rate, and an attractive living environment, the area is subject to changes in structure and demography. This means that, although there is a good infrastructure in general, many inhabitants need to travel to the city of Marburg or even further to other urban areas, like Frankfurt/Main, in order to work (Bambey, 2011; Landkreis Marburg-Biedenkopf, 2007b; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, n.d.; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). Many inhabitants travel up to 1 hour or even more in order to attend their jobs in Gießen, Kassel or even Frankfurt and other places in the Rhine-Main area. In terms of demographic changes, young people often leave the rural area in order to live close to where they work in the urban centres. For those working in the Frankfurt area, this is barely possible, however, because of exorbitant prices for housing. Elderly people stay in the villages but become fewer and fewer as death takes its toll (DVS, 2015; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, n.d.; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2014).

The rural area of Marburg presents itself as vital and attractive with its green landscape, which shows special features such as the basalt cone of Amöneburg, the Lahn valley and the Lahn river. It disposes of many historical buildings and sights, such as the ruins of Amöneburg or the picturesque half-timbered houses in a multitude of localities. Apart from the cultural and historical attractions and over 800 years of shared culture and traditions, the region's natural environment, classified as low mountain range, offers recreational activities such as hiking, cycling, and canoeing (Bambey, 2011; DVS - Deutsche Vernetzungsstelle, 2015; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2014).

Although the region is confronted with demographic change, migration into cities, and an economic focus on few big companies, a chance for the region could be to focus on ecological farming.

Eco-farms already exist, but marketing and collaboration to support marketing activities are still lacking. Furthermore, there are conflicts in terms of how to use land and how to protect the environment in order to become more sustainable. However, apart from eco-farming, a restaging of the environment in order to protect and foster biodiversity should result in even more possibilities to increase the offer of touristic products and services. With that, the aim is also to shape regional awareness in order to create a regional identity (Bambey, 2011; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2014).

8.2 LAG Marburger Land

The Region Marburger Land was founded in 2007 and then started to apply for admission to the European LEADER programme. (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). The first step in order to do so was to outline a regional development concept, which included an analysis of the current situation and a SWOT analysis. Moreover, it included developing a mission statement and a logo, finding lead projects, and developing an action plan (Landkreis Marburg-Biedenkopf, 2007a).

In February 2008 the region officially became an association, called Verein Region Marburger Land e.V. According to German Law "Verein ... e.V." means a non-profit organization with legal capacities (Bambey, 2011; Beckmann, 2008; Der Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, 2007; Peffer & Krüger, 2015; Schmidt, 2008).

The Association Region Marburger Land e.V. officially started working as an LAG in 2008 in accordance to the LEADER programme. The association had 86 members, 10 of which were allowed to vote for or against decisions and measures that had to be taken. Five of these members were the mayors of the five member communities, whereas the other five were civil members from the region. The latter represented the sectors of agriculture, energy, history, tourism, and clubs and associations. These five representatives were working in different positions at the city council, at the regional transportation office, and in tourism. Moreover, one of them was a student and another one a farmer (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Schmidt, 2008).

The unique feature of the organizational structure of the LAG Marburger Land was the decentralized regional management. This consisted of five representatives, one from each of the five member communities. All of them together built a team in which they were working together very closely and supported each other. They were not allowed to give votes in the decision-making process, but they would take part in the association's meetings, together with two consultants which were also not allowed to vote. However, the decentralized organization had the consequence that each community had one representative of the Region Marburger Land working at the municipality office. The result was that applicants from each community

had their own direct contact person in their own community (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

In 2012 the association's policies were changed. From that time on, the number of members which were legally allowed to vote and make decisions was increased to 15 members. This resulted in a greater variety of backgrounds of members involved in the decision-making process, as the new members that joined belonged to public associations and to the field of natural science. The number of members of the Association Marburger Land e.V. increased in the course of the funding period. In the end, in 2013, the association consisted of 117 members in total (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

Apart from that, five working groups were built around the different strategic topics, which will be discussed in more detail below. Moreover, project groups were established and meetings and workshops were held according to the needs and related to relevant topics and projects. In total, more than 300 persons were involved – not all of them members of the Association Region Marburger Land (Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2012a; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

In 2011 information events were held in order to intensify the communication with the population. These events resulted in the meetings of the “round table”, where inhabitants of the region were brought together with representatives of businesses and institutions, local farmers, caterers, and other interested persons. The “round table” was created in order to provide a communication and networking platform where ideas for new projects could be discussed. Furthermore, the public press was always invited to all meetings and events which took place, and whoever was interested was welcome to join at the round tables (Bambey, 2011; Beckmann, 2008; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2012a; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Schmidt, 2008).

8.3 Project Selection and Funding

According to the evaluation report (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014), the applicant for a new project would contact the LAG of the Region Marburger Land, which would refer the applicant to a contact at the administrative district of Marburg-Biedenkof. This contact person would examine whether the project proposal was eligible for LEADER funding in general. If that was the case, it was the LAG's task to join the proposal with other proposals and to evaluate it according to a priority checklist. If the LAG approved the project for funding, the project could be initiated (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

The priority checklist of the LAG Marburger Land was developed in the beginning of the funding period 2007 to 2013. However, it was adjusted in summer 2013 in order to better differentiate to which degree applications fit with the regional development.

In any case, the checklist dealt with criteria such as support of regional quality, degree of innovation, sustainability, creation or maintenance of jobs, support in dealing with demographic change, and degree of support of engagement and cooperation of citizens (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

The projects were carried out by communal project executing organisations (59%), private project executing organisations (34%), and other project executing organisations (7%). It has to be acknowledged here, that the rather high percentage of private project executing organizations was a result of the decentralised organization, which provided applicants with short communication channels and good counselling. Apart from that, the projects carried out were distributed more or less equally among all participating communities. Therefore it can be said the all communities equally benefited from funding and innovative projects (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

8.4 The Four Focus Points

When the Region Marburger Land was founded, a regional development strategy had to be set up for the first time. Based on that regional development strategy, which aims at sustainable development of the region in general, four main goals were formulated which are described below (Bambey, 2011; DVS - Deutsche Vernetzungsstelle, 2015; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2014).

(1) Developing an outstanding “bio-energy-region”, in order to support the growth and farming of the raw material, which is needed for producing bio-energy. Moreover, the goal was to reinforce the use of alternative sources of energy and to increase the ability of the region to supply itself with its own energy.

(2) Modernizing and improving agricultural structures in order to create new sources of income in order to increase the region’s productivity and in order to increase the production of regional sustainable food and beverages. Furthermore, the goal was to reach agreements on the goals of the agricultural sector, especially with regard to protecting the environment.

(3) Bundling the regional forces of all parts of society and all sectors, in order to build a network which efficiently contributes to strengthening and maintaining the villages and their structures.

(4) Adding value to the region’s products by supporting developments in the sectors of tourism, agriculture, retail, hand craft, and service by focusing especially on broadening the offers of RT products.

8.5 Projects Implemented

Based on the four main goals which were formulated in order to put the development strategy for the Region Marburger Land into practice, four main project areas were defined more precisely. In the following, they are discussed in more detail and the projects carried out will be outlined for each area. However, as the main focus of this research is to analyse developments in RT with regard to innovative and sustainable products in the Region Marburger Land, the projects related to RT will be analysed more closely than others.

The general aim was to complete 65 projects successfully during the funding period 2007 to 2013. The outcome were 29 projects completed and funding adding up to a sum total of 796,409 €. Six extra projects contributed to an increased use of biological raw materials. These got funded with 445,600 € (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

Apart from the six extra projects carried out with regard to biological raw material, the 29 projects can be broken down into: One other project concerning biological raw material, ten projects to help start-up businesses, four projects related to networking and social benefits for the society, five projects concerning tourism, six projects related to cultural information, and three more projects related to marketing. On the whole, the main focus of the projects carried out lies upon tourism developments (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

According to Bambey (2011), these lead projects were introduced to the public in 2011 during an official information event. To this event the press and all interested persons were invited. During the event, Birgit Groß, Carina Zimmermann, Sabine Becker, and Wolfgang Liprecht, the regional LEADER representatives, were presenting the four lead projects.

1 Marburger Land with Energy

This goal focused on renewable energy by using biological and sustainable resources. In the specific case of the Region Marburger Land, the aim was to link the sectors of agriculture, energy, and nature in order to follow the strategy of becoming more sustainable in the future (Bambey, 2011; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

There were several projects taking place. The main project, however, was a feasibility study for implementing a biogas fermentation plant by using LEADER funding. This study did not only lay out the implementation of the fermentation plant but also combined it with the implementation of a wood chip heating plant. The implementation of this project was started by finding a bio-energy cooperation, which then took care of building the biogas plant and the wood chip heating plant.

In 2013, the end of the funding period, the home for the elderly, 50 private households, the primary school, the bank, and the teacher's house at Fronhausen received heating from the biogas plant and formed part of what is now called the "Bioenergy Village Fronhausen". The aim is to supply in the future the entire village of Fronhausen at all times with heating energy from that plant (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

In addition, a biogas plant and a local heat distribution network were established in the villages of Mardorf and Erfurtshausen, which are part of the community of Amöneburg (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

According to the evaluation report (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014), developing these projects also had a great impact on increasing the public awareness and support of renewable energies and sustainability, not only in the administrative district of the Region Marburger Land, but also outside of the region and administrative district.

2 Our Villages – Living Environment with Future

The aim, of the lead project "Our Villages", was to develop the rural area and the structures of its villages further in order to create an attractive living and working environment. Putting this strategy into practice was meant to be supported by the use of the advantage of the local proximity of the region to the urban centre of Marburg, in order to promote the region. Moreover, the aim was to improve the local infrastructure further, to market the region as an attractive site for SMEs to settle, and to provide an attractive living environment by increasing the quality of life. This may also help to cope with the demographic changes and the migration to urban places (Bambey, 2011; Gemeinde Weimar – Wirtschaft, 2014; Region Marburger Land, n.d.; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

This strategy was put into practice by creating work places and supporting innovative entrepreneurs such as those who set up a business centre specialized in treating hail damages, a service which was not yet offered in the region. Other businesses, that were newly founded, were a photovoltaic service, a sales and distribution business for pet food, a dental laboratory, a natural health practice, a hairdresser business, a pharmacy, a café, and a garage. In addition, the village shop in the village of Michelbach was refurbished and enlarged (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). The development strategy was further enhanced by networking projects which served to foster collaborations which may also result in a sense of corporate identity (Bambey, 2011; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014). With regard to public utilities, a log cabin for youth work was built and an annex to existing buildings for the work with children, teenagers, and elderly people was constructed (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

3 Regional Networks ... Which Connect

The lead project "Regional Networks...Which Connect" aimed at establishing and facilitating decentralized and regional networks which would help to develop the Region Marburger Land with regard to culture, social offers, tourism, economy, urban development, and infrastructure (Der Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg 2007; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

Under this heading a project especially focusing on regional networking was brought forward. It was named the "Market Place Project". It was implemented as an event taking place in 2012. In the course of this event 24 businesses and 21 associations were present and were exchanging services and projects. A total of 48 cooperation agreements was concluded. Also interested private participants were welcomed. One example for the exchange of goods and services at this "Market Place" was the agreement between an organic farmer and an association for youth work. The association offered to paint the gate and fence of the farm and would in return receive catering for their open day (Bambey, 2011; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2012; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012a).

According to the mayor of Ebsdorfergrund, Mr. Schulz, who was the chair of the Association Marburger Land e.V., the idea of the market place project was developed in order to practice a way of economy which fosters solidarity and innovation. Moreover, it was meant to build networks and cooperation, which, otherwise, would not have taken place. In addition, it offers a possibility for businesses to show their responsibility towards society.

Furthermore, geographic boundaries within the region are set aside, and collective support, help, and development are enhanced. Apart from that the project led to a high response in terms of participants. It also received attention from the local press and media, which helped to raise awareness (Bambey, 2011; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012a).

Public relations, especially with regard to the local press and press releases, were an important part of not only raising awareness but also of practicing inclusion. This according to the slogan "Region Marburger Land – A Region for Everyone!". These activities resulted in the emergence of social networks, a professional website, and the institutionalization of the round table which was mentioned above (Bambey, 2011; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2012b; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014; Webseite der Region Marburger Land, 2008).

4 Cultural Experience Marburger Land

The aim was to develop a unique variety of cultural and experience products in the tourism sector. This was designed to be put into action by developing and linking cultural and touristic attractions to each other (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

The lead project in this case was named “KulTourErlebnis Maburger Land”. The first word in this slogan combines the German word “Kultur” standing for culture, with “Tour” signifying the word tour or tourism, and “Erlebnis” meaning experience. In order to create a shared regional identity and awareness amongst inhabitants it was considered important to enhance collaboration between various villages in order to find a common way to promote the region. This was done through information events and meetings which were used to collectively develop ideas for hiking maps, flyers, cultural event calendars, and travel guides (Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2012a; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

Based on the slogan of “Achieve More Together”, two flyers were developed in order to promote the Region Marburger Land as whole to the touristic market. One of them was named “KulTour Erlebnis Marburg”, translating into “CulTour Experience Marburg”, highlighting the most important cultural events in the region. The brochure presents information arranged according to dates throughout the whole year. It displays a variety of events such as concerts, readings, drama plays, cultural, historical, and nature guided tours, festivals, exhibitions, and project works (Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2012a; Schwalm, 2012; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012c).

The other brochure was named “KulTour Schätze”, translating into “CulTour Treasures”, providing information about regional sights, for example the castle of Rauschholzhausen, and regional museums about local history and life-styles. It also informs about the Elisabeth Well in Schröck and the open-air museum “Zeitinsel” in Argenstein. Both were supported by LEADER funds and will be discussed in some more detail later on (Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2012a; MTM - Marburg Tourismus und Marketing GmbH, 2015a; Schwalm, 2012; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012b). The reasoning behind this project was, that there are less and less big events because the financial risk and the number of volunteers needed are too big in a time of general economic problems. Therefore there is a trend towards smaller events and festivities. However, the number of visitors from one single village is still too small to cover the expenses. Also to promote an event or sight alone by itself would be a high, if not unaffordable, expense for one of the small communities or associations alone. But some bigger events and festivities are considered worth to be maintained as well, especially those with tradition. (Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2012a; Schwalm, 2012).

The collective brochures were presented first at one of the big state fairs and were designed to promote the Region Marburger Land as a whole, both internally and externally, in order to emphasize the collective identity, and at the same time create the possibility of marketing and networking outside the region. The brochures were available at tourism offices and other fairs and events outside of the region as well (Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2012a; Schwalm, 2012).

To give a general overview, five projects can be listed, which were directly related to tourism (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014):

1. The refurbishment of the old baking house of the village of Ebsdorf.
2. The development and restructuring of the surroundings of the Elisabeth Well in the village of Schröck.
3. The development of area of the “Kirchberg” (which translates literally into the “Hill of the Church”) in the village of Wittelsberg.
4. The construction of a parking lot for canoeists in the village of Roth.
5. The culture projects in the villages of Roth and Niederweimar.

The old baking houses in the villages constitute an integral part of the local culture. In former times these small houses with a wood fired oven inside were used by all the families of the village in order to bake bread and cakes. Nowadays there is usually an association maintaining and using the oven every now and then, just to keep up old traditions and to socialize. This is done especially during the annual baking house festivals. The baking house at Ebsdorf could be refurbished with the help of LEADER funds (Backhausgemeinschaft Ebsdorf, 2014; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2010).

The Elisabeth Well is located close to the village of Schröck. The name Elisabeth refers to a former countess, wife of the ruler of Marburg and daughter of the King of Hungary. The well is next to the ruins of a small chapel. Both were built in 1596 and were well hidden in the forest, trees blocking the beautiful view into the valley of Amöneburg. With the help of LEADER funds the surroundings were restructured. Now, the well is surrounded by a glade which was designed according to a former historical example. Some of the trees were cut in order to regain the original view of the valley (Schubert, 2013).

The project of developing the area of the Kirchberg in the village of Wittelsberg has a similar background. On top of the hill the look-out of Wittelsberg is located, which is rather famous in the region. It dates back to 1431. Close by is a church and the old graveyard. In order to create a friendlier environment for visitors, a panoramic trail was constructed. Next to very old plants and trees, new plants were arranged and seating was accommodated with the help of LEADER funds (Becker, 2013).

Both sights were considered to be important to be highlighted through the measures that were taken, as they are located along the Lahn Valley Hiking and Cycling Trail. Therefore they are often visited by tourists. (Becker, 2013; Schubert, 2013; TOuR GmbH Marburg–Biedenkopf, n.d; Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012b)

A smaller project was the construction of a parking lot for canoeists in the community of Roth. The parking lot is 2200 square meters large and provides sufficient space for 59 normal cars and three spaces for cars with trailers carrying canoes. In addition, a comfortable access to the water is provided for canoeists (Turek, 2009).

The culture project in the villages of Roth and Niederweimar was a project work and exhibition organised to inform about the history of the religious reformation in the area of the communities of Roth and Niederweimar. Documents and reports from contemporary witnesses were exhibited, illustrating how in former times each village was an entity by itself and politically and economically strongly competing with neighbouring villages (Schaub, 2012; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

Seven other projects related to culture and information were also carried out (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014):

1. Signs for tourists of the “Lange-Hessen-Radwanderweg” were set up. “Lange Hessen-Radwanderweg” translates into "Long Hessian Cycling Path". What is called "The Long Hessians" corresponds to a medieval trading route passing through this area. Participating communities were Amöneburg, Ebsdorfergrund, and Fronhausen.
2. The first phase of developing the Lahn Hiking Trail, which passes through the region, the infrastructure of which was created.
3. The marketing activities for the Lahn Hiking Trail were launched.
4. Investors for the Lahn Hiking Trail were searched.
5. The corresponding part of the Huguenot Hiking Trail was developed and connected to the already existing part of that trail.
6. The old live-stock scale was refurbished, and the information point and the loop trail in the village of Mardorf were established.
7. The feasibility study “Zeitinsel” in the village of Argenstein was carried out. The project proposal was to establish an archeological open air museum, the name of which translates into “Island of Time”.

As can be seen in the map below (Fig. 8), the Lahn Hiking Trail starts in the mountains of the Rothaargebirge, where the spring of the Lahn River is located. It ends close to Koblenz, where the Lahn River flows into the Rhine River. The main hiking trail is 290 kms long.

Along the way it passes through small, picturesque towns and by historical sights, viewpoints, and landmarks. Along the main route, shorter side trails with different topics can be found. These include, amongst others, a romantic trail, a castle and ruin trail, and a culture or a Celtic and Roman trail. Marburg and its surrounding area form part of the first half of the trail (Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2012; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2013).

Fig. 8: Lahn Hiking Trail



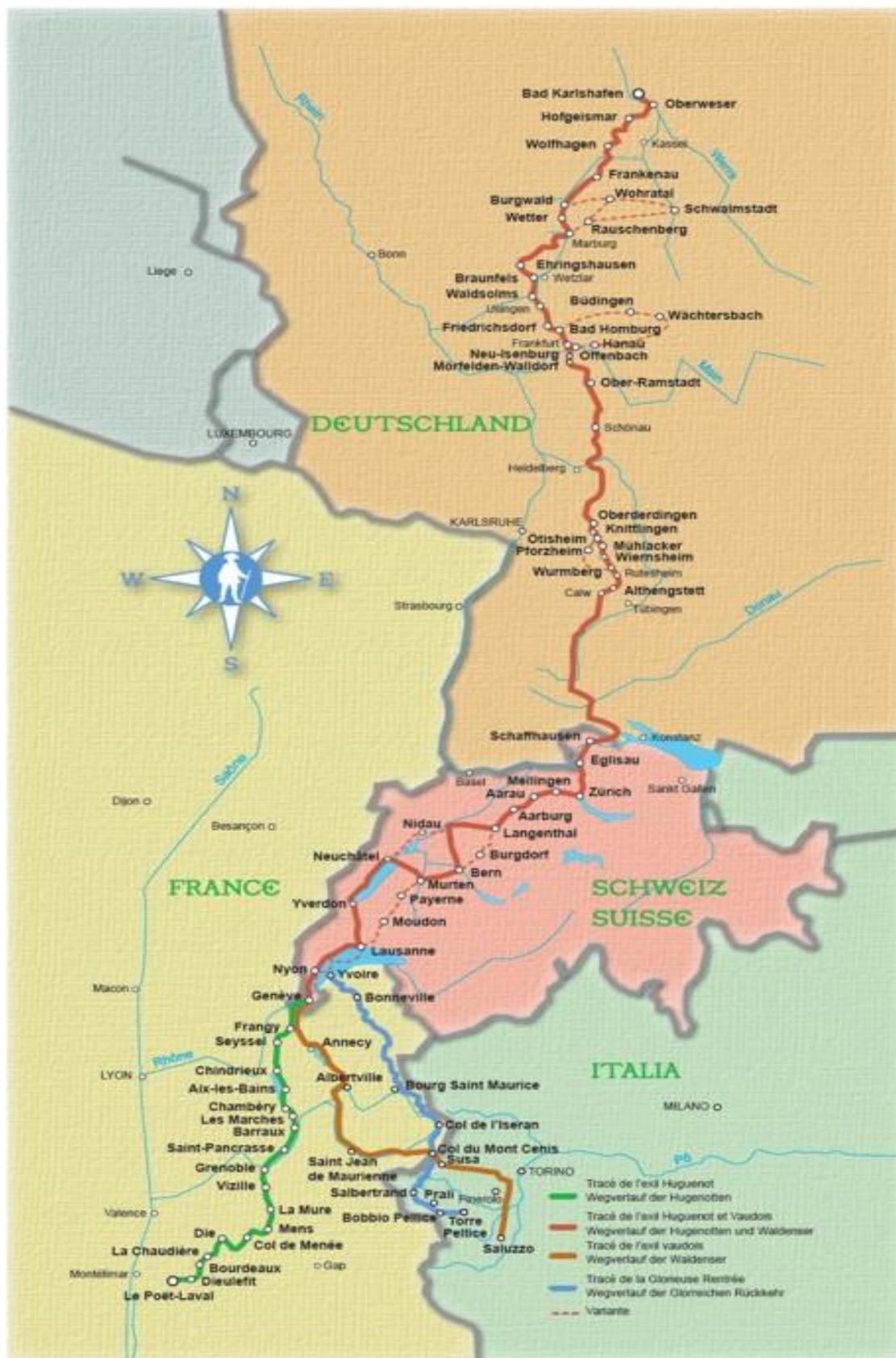
(Source: Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2013)

The pocket guide and the map of the Lahn Hiking Trail (Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2012; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2013) also refer to cycling paths, which are outlined in detail in the Lahn Valley Cycling Map (Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2014). This map displays the Lahn Hiking Trail too, but additionally shows round trips and side trails which are especially designed for cyclists and mostly avoid car traffic. Moreover, cyclists have the possibility to book a package for a historical biking tour through Marburg. The package includes an overnight stay, mid-night snack, and bike rental. There are also various references to topographical maps and regional events related to cycling.

The cycling route in the Region Marburger Land, which is referred to in the Lahn Valley Cycling Map (Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2014) is described in particular by the brochure “Long Hessian Cycling Path” (TOuR GmbH Marburg–Biedenkopf, n.d.). Here again we find the reference to the medieval trading route. The Long Hessian Cycling Path starts in Fronhausen and ends in Amöneburg. In total it is 26.5 kms long and invites cyclists to visit some of the historical sights, landmarks, and museums of the region Marbruger Land, which can be found along the way. Restaurants and local village shops offering local products and traditional food and beverages are also located along the way (TOuR GmbH Marburg–Biedenkopf, n.d.).

The Huguenot and Waldensian Trail (Fig. 9) follows the historical trail of the Huguenots and Waldensians, who were persecuted for religious reasons times ago. Its route passes from France and even Italy through Switzerland to Germany. It is in total 1.800 kms long. A small part of it passes through the Region Marburger Land and the city of Marburg, where some of the persecuted had found new homes. Marburg was one of the towns where the refugees were safe, thanks to Landgrave Phillip of Marburg, who was a supporter of the reformation. A few of these refugees got to settle at the Waldensian colony at Frauenberg at the outskirts of Marburg. The hiking route passes there when coming from Marburg. The trail is designated a European cultural route and is a collaborative project supported by the European Council. In the specific case of the Region Marbruger Land it is supported by the State of Hestia and LEADER funds (Hugenotten- und Waldenserpfad e.V., n.d; Hugenotten und Waldenserpfad e.V., 2009).

Fig. 9: Huguenot and Waldensian Trail



(Source: Hugenotten- und Waldenserpfad e.V., 2009)

The old live-stock scale, that was refurbished, and the information point for tourists, which was established at Mardorf, are part of the loop trail leading through the village. This trail leads the visitor along all the important historical sights which are pointed out by signs and tables giving explanations. Moreover, tourists can book guided tours in order to gain even more insights into the historical, traditional life-style of the villagers, both now and back in the days (Arbeitskreis Dorfentwicklung, 2012; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015).

The project of establishing the archaeological open air museum was kicked off after completing the feasibility study, but it has not been completed entirely yet. However, in order to build the museum, a supporting association and cooperative was founded, in which members of the Association Region Marburger Land take part. The museum exhibits archaeological excavations and reconstructions of the settlements during the last 11 000 years. Visitors can experience local history and life-style of different periods of time (Genossenschaft Zeiteninsel - Archäologisches Freilichtmuseum Marburger Land eG., 2014).

8.6 Regional Management and Marketing

With regard to regional management and marketing, three projects were carried out, which were used to identify the basic conditions for regional management and marketing. These were first of all the development of the regional development concept, then the internal development of projects and the organization of the LAG of the Region Marburger Land. Finally there was a project for the internal marketing, which meant promoting the region and the LEADER programme within the region and amongst its inhabitants. However, projects related to marketing were found hard to allocate (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

In terms of regional branding and marketing, the local proximity to the city of Marburg was considered to be very useful, as the rural area can be promoted by linking it to the public profile of Marburg (Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2014). It has to be understood furthermore, that the touristic promotion in the State of Hesse is organized at four levels. The entire state is promoted by the Hessian state agency. The state itself, however, is divided into various destinations, which are promoted by respective agencies. The destination in which the Region Marburger Land is located, is promoted by the Lahn Valley Tourism Association (Agricola, 2013; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, 2014).

At the next lower level, promotional tasks are carried out by the TOuR GmbH, promoting all regions in the administrative district of Marburg-Biedenkopf. At the lowest level there are local associations. In the case of the Region Marbruger Land, the Marburg Tourism and Marketing GmbH (MTM) took this responsibility.

However, due to the touristic developments in the LEADER region Marburger Land, the TOuR GmbH and the MTM GmbH decided to merge in 2014. The reasons given for that were, that collaboration would be made easier due to then similar internal structures. The marketing activities of the region and the city would be merged at the various levels, promotional activities would gain strength, and the whole destination could be promoted and sold according to common strategies and quality assessments. Also cooperation in joint tourism projects of different regions could be facilitated more easily. (Agricola, 2013; Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg, 2014).

8.7 Evaluation by Participants

According to the evaluation report (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014) for the funding period 2007 to 2013 of the Region Marburger Land, the main advantage of the decentralized organization of the LAG was, that the teamwork between the five representatives worked very well and they could help and learn from each other. Moreover, the communication between the LAG and the municipalities was easy due to this arrangement and also made networking easier. Furthermore, project executing organizations and individual persons involved or interested had their own local LEADER counsellor within their community. This facilitated communication also because many of the people involved already knew each other personally. In addition it was easy for other representatives to take over work if one of them was ill, for example.

Disadvantages, that were described, concerned the fact that every representative had first to learn through self-study how to organize and manage work, as everyone had to find himself his role. Last not least, that was the reason why the start of the funding period was rather slow (Beckmann, 2008; Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

Furthermore, it was not easy to coordinate all five representatives in order to attend common meetings. When employees in the municipal offices changed, this had a negative impact on the consistency of the LAG's work. Furthermore, the personal and professional engagement of each individual differed, what led to tensions every once in a while. This was also a consequence of the fact that the LEADER representatives were working in the communal offices in the first place and as LEADER representatives in the second place only. Therefore available time was short and priority was often given to communal tasks. This also resulted in a lack of creativity and innovation. However, it has to be noted that in future the regional management will be provided by the State of Hesse (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

The evaluation report (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014) concludes that the LEADER funding period 2007-2013 was successful in general, as many projects were carried out which did help to make the region more attractive with regard to the living environment, economy, and recreation. Moreover, it concludes that the region grew together in the sense that the notion of the region was successfully promoted to the inhabitants and supported by the latter. Apart from that, the regional network was strengthened. Conflicts were discussed by means of the network, cooperation was fostered, and innovative and new ideas arose (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

The projects carried out helped in general to achieve, at least partly, the goals of the five lead projects, which were established with the help of the regional development strategy. Examining the results, it becomes evident that the most successful lead project was the “Culture Experience Marburger Land” project, which focused on developing infrastructure and touristic products in the region (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014).

9 The LEADER Region Marburger Land - Layout Analysis

The concluding evaluation report (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014) is very clearly structured and includes a lot of information about the organization, setup and management of the LAG and the Region Marburger Land in general. Moreover, it gives valuable insights into how members assessed the work and the completion of projects at the end of the funding period. It also points out needs and possibilities for improvement according to feedback given during the evaluation process. This might add a more subjective feature to it, which, in the present study, will be investigated further through conducting interviews. It is, in conformity with the notion of transparency of the LEADER programme, available to the public on the Internet and in print. It furthermore shows, how especially the representatives had to teach themselves a lot through self-study and how they had to gain experience and knowledge through learning by doing processes and through their networks which provided necessary information.

The admission report for the following funding period (Region Marburger Land e.V. & ELER Region Herrenwald, 2014) is also structured according to the LEADER guidelines and covers all necessary topics. Although the main part of this document is not taken into account for this research, it has been considered as useful in terms of gaining insights into the resources of the region. It is argued, that the region's features have not changed so much although other communities are now joining to become part of the Region Marburger Land. Again, the paper can be found on the official website and through Google search. Therefore it is accessible to the public. This corresponds to the feature of the LEADER project to promote transparency.

The official website of the Region Marburger Land (Webseite der Region Marburger Land, 2008) was not available at the time of the research due to reconstruction. It has to be noted, that at the time this research was conducted, the following LEADER funding period was just starting and the official website of the region was still under construction.

Only the evaluation report of the funding period 2007-2013 and the report for requesting admission for the funding period 2015–2020 were available on the website. Information about the Region Marburger Land was, however, accessible through newspaper articles and the municipal websites.

The magazine “Marburger Land eine geschäftige Region: Marktplatz 2012” (Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012a), shows colourful illustrations and photos of the market place event. It contains an interview with the chair of the association, explaining what the thoughts behind the event were. Moreover, the LEADER programme as a European funding programme is explained, and also the Region Marburger Land is introduced briefly. The magazine gives a detailed overview of the participants and supporters of the event. It also provides a table which displays all collaborations which were agreed upon.

The “Beschlussvorlage der Stadtverordnetenversammlung” (Oberbürgermeister Egon Vaupel, 2006) der Universitätsstadt Marburg is the document of the resolution proposed to the city parliament of Marburg to join the Region Marburger Land. It was made public in the online archives of the municipality of Marburg. It is short to the point and gives a clear reasoning why Marburgs should be part of the region and why only the cities´ outskirts are included. Moreover, it explains why the region was formed and that the LEADER funds are important for the development of the region.

All the community websites (Der Magistrat der Universitätsstadt Marburg 2007, n.d, and 2014; Gemeinde Amöneburg, 2015; Gemeinde Weimar, n.d; Region Marburger Land, n.d.) of the member communities not only explain briefly the participation in the LEADER project, but at the end they always encourage the public to attend upcoming meetings, search for more information, and to keep going with projects and ideas found in the LEADER period 2007-2013. Special attention was given to the municipal website Ebsdorfergrund (Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2010, 2011 and 2012 (A&B)). This website is well developed and offers extensive information. It presents newspaper articles, invitations and protocols of official meetings of associations and political committees, pictures, movies, and links. Most useful is the online press archive. All other communities have well developed websites too, but they do not display as much information as this one. However, the structure of the online archive is not always very clear.

Many documents dealing with the matters of the Region Marburger Land show the logo of the region, which in this case was obtained from the municipal website of Ebsdorfergrund.

Fig. 10: Logo of the Region Marburger Land



(Source: Eidam, 2015)

The logo (Fig. 10) displays the name and the geographic shape of the Region Marburger Land. This shape is halfway embedded in a blue square, the other half is not. This could be interpreted as a symbol for, on the one hand, being embedded and rooted in the own region with the internal actors, and, on the other hand, forming part of extra-regional collaborations and networks. According to theory, the latter is of major importance in order to prevent lock-ins and in order to strengthen the regional infrastructure (Hall & Williams, 2008). Especially in times of globalization there should be a focus and a role of the region as an entity towards the outside world. The latter imposes trends, developments, and information upon the region, which may help to develop innovations. But it also may create new problems which need to be coped with.

Furthermore, the inside of the geographic shape of the region is filled with a green landscape, grey hill, and a windmill. The green landscape could stand for the picturesque landscapes and the healthy natural environment of the region, whereas the grey hill could symbolize the dead volcano mountain of Amöneburg, which is one of the most characteristic landmarks in the Region Marburger Land.

The modern shape of the windmill can be interpreted to represent renewable natural energy, which together with the green landscapes signifies environmental friendliness. The latter is further enhanced by the slogan “natürlich daheim”, which translates into two meanings: “at home in nature” and “naturally at home”. The slogan therefore implies environmental

friendliness on the one hand but also the feeling of being at home on the other hand. This points to the notion of inclusiveness. Including all inhabitants and making the living environment attractive, even for marginal groups, is an important goal.

The Marburg Online Magazine (Bambey, 2011) presents very detailed general information and belongs to the local media. Just like the community websites, it also often refers to the official website of the region

The biggest and only daily regional newspaper, which is read by plenty of people, is the OP (Oberhessische Presse) (Agricola, 2013; Becker, 2013; Beckmann, 2008; Schubert, 2013, Schwalm, 2012). This newspaper was found to report frequently and in detail about the activities of the LAG of the Region Marburger Land. It is accessible in print and online. The website provides a large archive of online articles. The magazine "Burg Blick", published in Amöneburg, (Schmidt, 2008) is a local magazine which is published monthly in print and can be found also in online archives of the community and the publisher. It provides the reader with information, pictures, and contact information relevant for the municipality Amöneburg. Similar magazines are also published in the other municipalities of the Region Marburger Land.

The NRZ online journal (Turek, 2009) gave insights into the kick-off of the parking lot project. However, in general it was hard to find information about the process of building it. This may be due to the fact that this project was quite small and even in local media not very much discussed. This journal originates from the neighbouring LEADER region Burgwald-Ederbergland.

Also the websites informing about the baking house in Ebsdorf (Backhausgemeinschaft Ebsdorf, 2014; Gemeinde Ebsdorfergrund, 2010) provide rather scarce information about the use and refurbishment. However this might be explained by the fact that these websites mainly aim at informing inhabitants. These are mostly familiar with local traditions and life-style. However, it is mentioned that LEADER funds were used.

The brochures CulTour Treasures (Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012b) and CulTour Experience (Verein Region Marburger Land e.V., 2012c), look similar. They are both easily folded leaflets the front display of which shows the logo of the region, the brochure's title and the name of the region along with some appealing pictures. Inside, the reader finds a small picture of each sight or of the biggest events, together with a short description of the sight or event. It is easy to read and understand. Due to this structure, the reader is also able to scan and just read whatever he considers important or interesting. Moreover, the merging of these two tourism associations is visible in the layout of the promotional tourism brochures displayed below. The first brochure from 2014 promotes sights and excursion destinations in the Region Marburger Land. In this brochure the Touristic Service Marburger Land appears already.

However, in the second brochure from 2015, which promotes events and festivities in Marburg and the region, there is already a proper logo (Fig.11).

Fig. 11: Logo Touristic Service Marburger Land



(Based on: MTM - Marburg Tourismus und Marketing GmbH, 2014)

The brochure about sights in the city of Marburg (MTM - Marburg Tourismus und Marketing GmbH, 2015) is more extensive and mainly deals with sights and activities directly located in Marburg city. However, at the end of the brochure the reader also finds useful information about what to do and which sights to visit in the rural area surrounding the city of Marburg. Here the header also refers to the “Region Marburger Land”.

The map and the pocket guide of the Lahn Hiking Trail (Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2012; Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2013) share a similar front page, displaying the sponsorship of the EU and the State of Hesse through the programmes of ELER and LEADER. Moreover, the layout of the map of the entire trail, found in the pocket guide, is almost the same as the one in the official map. However, the official map displays more details in terms of including a detailed height profile but less information about sights along the way. The pocket guide is very detailed in its information on proposing stages of a possible hiking trip. Apart from sights and land marks, it points out possibilities of where to stay the night and where to eat. However, the maps are rather small and therefore not so easy to read. It can be concluded that both complement each other.

The Lahn Valley Cycling Map (Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V., 2014) promotes the touristic sights of the Region Marburger Land as part of a bigger hiking and cycling trail. The Lahntal Tourismus Verband e.V. refers the reader, like in the other published brochures, to tourism offices along the way and to its own contact addresses on social media platforms such as Facebook. Moreover, the brochure provides a scan code for users of smart phones.

The brochure of the Long Hessian Cycling Path (TOuR GmbH Marburg–Biedenkopf, n.d.) focuses on providing information about local sights and businesses related to cycling, food and beverage, and touristic sights. Its layout, especially the pictures, show the richness and beauty of the natural environment and the cultural heritage sites.

The website of the Huguenot and Waldensian trail provides very extensive and well-structured information for tourists, whereas the leaflet of the Region Marburger Land mainly provides a short insight into the historical background of the Region Marburger Land with regard to the topic. Although it displays maps, those are rather small and not easy to read. However, the leaflet refers to tourism offices which can be contacted in order to get more information (Hugenotten und Waldenserpfad e.V., n.d; Hugenotten und Waldenserpfad e.V., 2009).

The brochure of the round trail of the village of Mardorf (Arbeitskreis Dorfentwicklung, 2012) unfolds into an extensive map of the village, displaying the walking route, pictures, and detailed information of each sight. It also provides contact information for guided tours and acknowledges the support of the State of Hesse, the administrative district of Marburg-Biedenkopf, the Association Region Marburger Land, and the municipality of Amöneburg. However it does not display any of the logos of the supporters mentioned.

10 Interview - Introduction



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Interview - Introduction

As you know already, I am a student of Service Management, Tourism at Lund University in Sweden, and I am writing currently my Master Thesis on regional innovation systems. My general question reads:

"Which are the driving forces within a Regional Innovation System fostering sustainable products in rural tourism?"

In order to answer this question, I am conducting a case study on the region Marburger Land during the LEADER funding period 2007 to 2013. On the one hand I want to obtain information specifically on tourism projects which originated in the framework of the LEADER program during the period mentioned. On the other hand, in the course of the following interview and with this background I would like to find out more about your personal experiences and your work with the LEADER program in the region Marburger Land.

The case study I am conducting is situated in a larger scientific context of case studies on innovation systems and rural tourism, which have been carried out also in other countries. In this way it will hopefully also provide a contribution to the further development of scientific theory in this subject area and, by means of experiences drawn from different case studies, also contribute to improve practical project work.

I thank you very much for your help and want, to conclude, to assure you that your data will be dealt with confidentially. I shall send you a transcript of your interview and shall not use it without your consent. The transcript itself will be accessible only to myself and my academic thesis supervisors. In the text of my Master Thesis only summarized information will be published. Moreover, the voice recording of this interview will be accessible only to myself and will be properly deleted after one year.

In case you have any questions after the interview, please feel free to contact me and to ask me.

Date:

Place:

Name:

Signature of Interviewee:

Name: *Monika Hornung*

Signature Interviewer:

11 Interviewer Guideline

Date:

Name:

Position/Community:

Background:

1. How did you become part of the LEADER Project?
2. What were your tasks?
3. Which (sub-)projects were implemented?
4. Which ones did you support personally?
5. Which subprojects were related to tourism or dealt with tourism directly?
Which kind of tourism? Participation?
6. Who had the idea for this/these project(s)?
7. Who/which organisations promoted this/these project(s) in particular? In which way?
8. (How) Were non-communal organisations involved (companies, associations, private citizens etc.)?
9. Were efforts made to involve the general population? Which efforts? (e.g. information assemblies, interrogations etc.)
10. Did the regional centers Marburg and Gießen play any role (e.g. by events)?
Which role?
11. Was there any substantial support from outside the region? (Apart from the EU-support)
12. Were the Universities of Marburg, Gießen, Frankfurt or the THM Mittelhessen (University of Applied Science) in Gießen somehow involved in the LEADER-project? How?

Work Experience:

13. How was your work organized?
14. How was/functioned your cooperation with colleagues/project groups?
15. Did you establish many new contacts in the course of your work for LEADER?
How did you do this?
16. Was cooperation and networking with other persons/companies a central issue? How did this enhance your own knowledge?
17. What were the effects of such cooperation on the implementation of the project?

Looking Back/Evaluation:

18. Looking back, how do you assess the work accomplished in the LEADER program? Successful or not? Why?
19. Looking back, would you prefer another procedure or design and run the project differently? Which changes would you implement? (Why?)
20. Which problems/unexpected events did you encounter? How were they handled? Could they be resolved/handled successfully?
21. Which were, in the end, the most important (positive/negative) results for the region Marburger Land? Why?
22. In your opinion, did the LEADER project have any effects on the region with regard to a sustainable development? What effects? Why (not)?
23. According to your opinion, what was truly innovative?
24. In which way did the regional economy profit from the LEADER project or its subprojects?
25. What were the reactions of the inhabitants of the communities involved?
26. Feedbacks from external sources, visitors to the region?