



BRANDTour
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European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

South-Limburg Regional Survey

Presented by

Tourist Board South-Limburg (VVV Zuid-Limburg)

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N°	Strengths	N°	Weaknesses
S1	Strong image leisure sector, strong membership system and reliable brand	W1	Innovation and quality of overnight accomodation
S2	Have won great awards: WTTC Awards, EDEN Award, Global Sustainability Top 100	W2	Employment in this sector: seasonal work, changing legislation (flex law), no growth in number of permanent jobs
S3	Leisure icons, attractions	W3	Many events: without theme or coherence, in the Heuvelland region
S4	Burgundish life style, hospitality, culinary	W4	No synergy between agriculture and hospitality businesses
S5	Traditions, culture and history	W5	No landmark nor international icon
S6	Nature, landscape, structure of trails, cycle tourism	W6	Too much motorized traffic
S7	Centrally positioned in and connected with Europe, where 3 countries meet	W7	Little activity around the three bordering countries
S8	Domestic tourism: the province visited most by Dutch guests	W8	Decline market share due to growth of capacity elsewhere: geographically capacity of South-Limburg cannot grow
N°	Opportunities	N°	Threats
O1	Strengthen entrepreneurship	T1	Decreasing number of overnight accommodation
O2	Develop new product-partner-market combinations	T2	Vitality is threatened
O3	Economy of experience, sharing is caring	T3	Zap behaviour
O4	Sustainable tourism, attention for local products	T4	Farmers receive less financing: upkeep of landscape is under pressure
O5	Spiritual tourism, wellness	T5	An ageing population: the cultural heritage of Limburg disappears
O6	Develop new infrastructure and natural environment	T6	Crowded Heuvelland: qualitative decline of landscape
O7	Ongoing focus on new working relationships	T7	Bad (train)connection from abroad
O8	Address new markets	T8	New destinations with a larger marketing budget

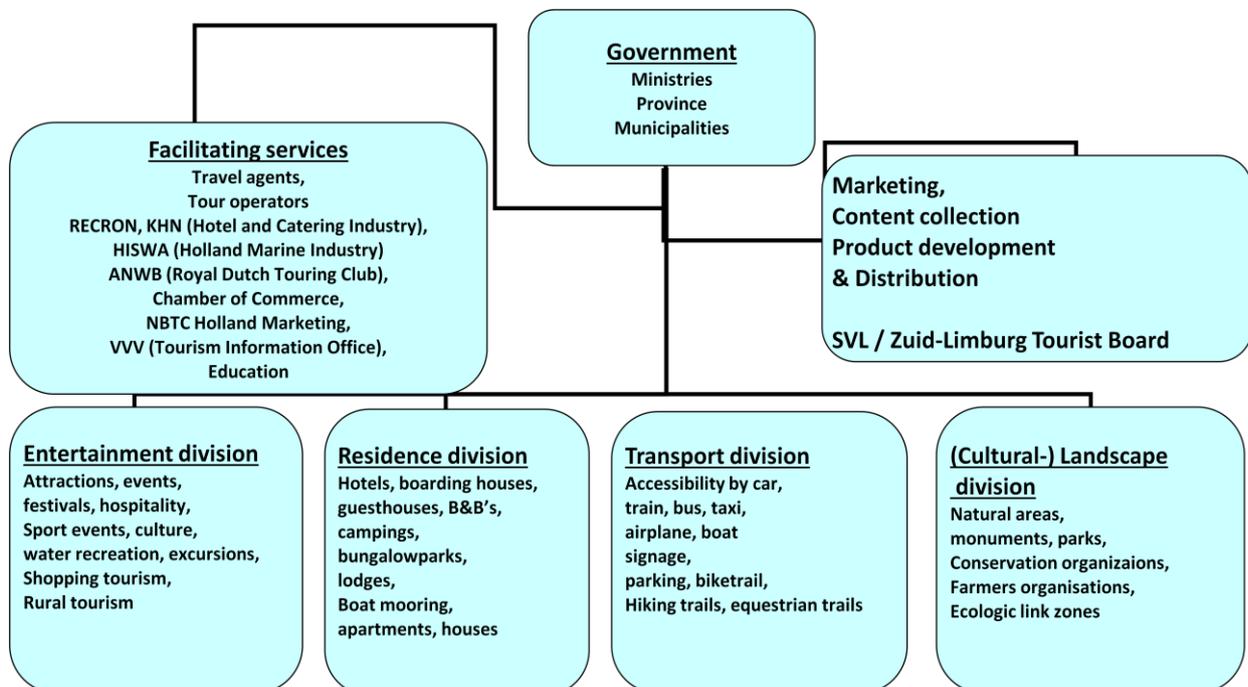
Policy themes	N°
The promotion of tourism products to enhance the visibility, image and market uptake of destinations	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
The valorisation of attractions through marketing, territorial branding and quality schemes	1, 2, 3, 7, 8
The innovation of the tourism offer through the clustering of SMEs and tourism products	1, 2
The innovation of the tourism offer through synergies between private and public stakeholders	2, 3, 7, 8
The diversification of tourism products and services to provide more customised packages	2, 7, 8
The development of experiential tourism in relation to local value chains and excellence	3, 4, 5

Policy theme	Strengths	Development priorities	Policy rate
The promotion of tourism products to enhance the visibility, image and market uptake of destinations	Tourist Board South-Limburg, Price winning awards, Strong national 'VVV' brand, Strong membership system, Routepunt	Supporting and promoting events, Tickli, Influencer Marketing,	2
The valorisation of attractions through marketing, territorial branding and quality schemes	Vitality scan, hospitality scan, Price winning awards	Innovation and quality of overnight accommodation, collecting data and knowledge	3
The innovation of the tourism offer through the clustering of SMEs and tourism products	Strong membership system, Investment program 'Tourism & Recreation'	Sustainable tourism products with high added value, develop new product-partner-market combinations, clustering	5
The innovation of the tourism offer through synergies between private and public stakeholders	Relation managers for each (4) subregion	Support synergy between the Provincial Council of Limburg, and between the 18 municipalities, support activity around the three bordering countries	4
The diversification of tourism products and services to provide more customised packages	Various motives to visit the region: landschape, culture, leisure, gastronomy, sport.	1:1 marketing, niche tourism products, review marketing, WIFI Hotspots	4
The development of experiential tourism in relation to local value chains and excellence	Routepunt, Customer Journey Model	Influencer marketing, Blogsabbatical, Address new markets	3

Socio-economic

In South-Limburg tourist spending remained stable between 2008 and 2015 at € 2.1 billion, with 20.253 jobs. Spending from domestic tourism declined (W8). Dutch guests spent 118 million euro. Which amounts to € 42,- a day and € 229,- per holiday. The international guest made sure that spending in South-Limburg remained at the same level thanks to an increase in the number of foreign daytrips (28%) and in the number of foreign overnight stays (51%). As to employment in tourism in South-Limburg, the number of permanent jobs has declined by about 6%, from 21.571 jobs to 20.253 jobs (W2). This is related to the Flex law that applies to the sector of tourism and hospitality. It seems that this latest legislation results in a lower carrier perspective, which, in its turn, can affect the level of hospitality service. The share in our regional employment is about 7,5%, half of which is generated by hotels, restaurants and bars, 20% by guest accommodation provisions and 10% by culture, recreation and amusement.

Tourism system



Government

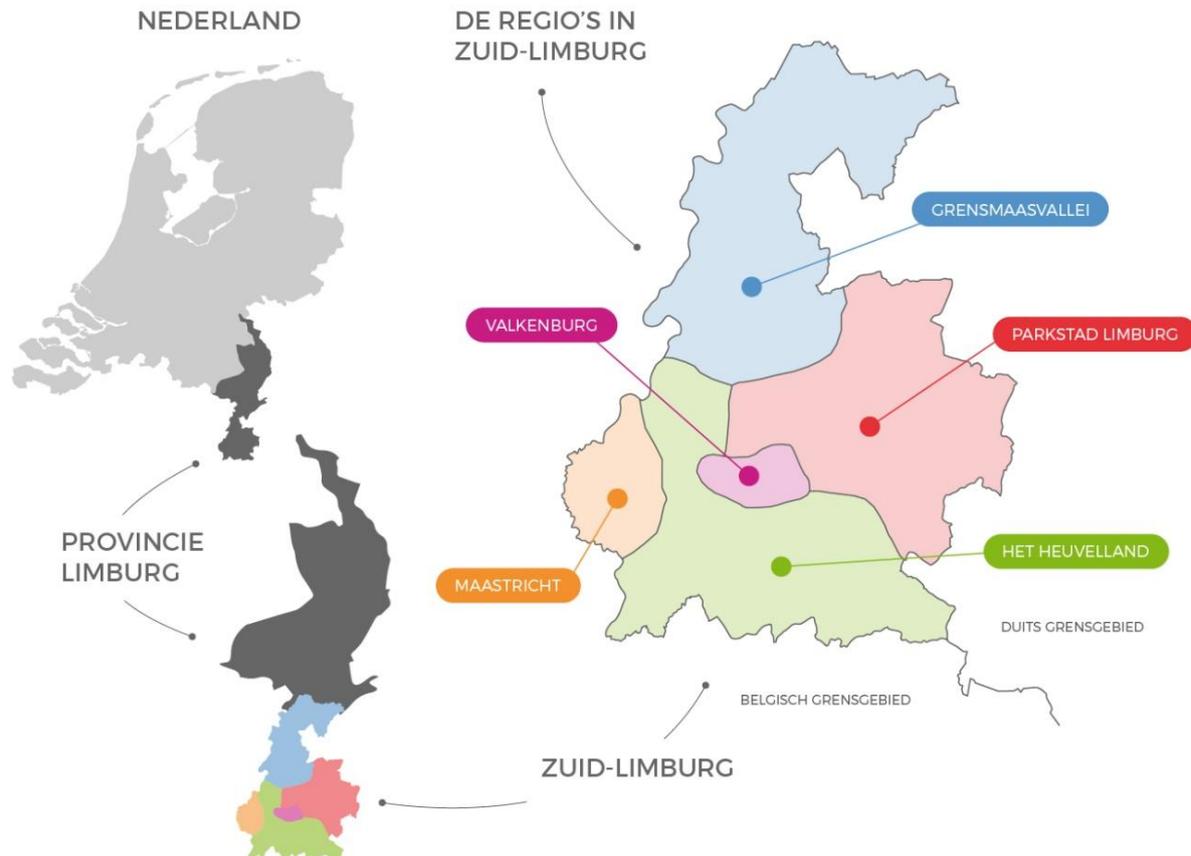
South-Limburg is a region in the province of Limburg which consists of 18 municipalities. The Province of Limburg and these 18 municipalities exert a great influence on regional tourism. A big part is also played by entrepreneurs in these municipalities that aim at recreational tourism. The Tourist Board South-Limburg operates with a strong and stable membership structure (S1). Entrepreneurs which are involved in recreational tourism can acquire a promotion deal. In order to be able to stimulate this to its fullest potential, we have opted for a subdivision into 4 areas within our region. On behalf of the Tourist Board South-Limburg a regional manager is responsible for and the point of contact for the following groups of clients:

- Public actors: municipalities in the area, tourism civil servants, the responsible aldermen and portfolio holders.
- Private actors: entrepreneurs within the field of recreational tourism (about 900 members).

The 4 areas are:

- Valkenburg (S3, S5)
- Het Heuvelland (S6)
- Parkstad (S2, S3)
- Grensmaasvallei

The city Maastricht does promotionally not belong to the region South-Limburg, because they have their own citymarketing organization and promote only the capital.



The 18 municipalities, together with the entrepreneurs, are represented on the board of the Tourist Board South-Limburg thereby being first and upfront when it comes to monitoring the development of the organization and the realization of activities. At this moment the Board of the Tourist Board consists of 14 members, 7 of which are representatives from the municipalities/areas, an impartial chairman, an impartial financial content expert and 5 representatives from the entrepreneurs (groups of).

The Provincial Council of Limburg has put together a multi-annual investment program Tourism & Recreation which sets out to invest in tourism and recreation during the next four years.

The next two lines from this report are being highlighted:

1. Strengthening entrepreneurship (O1)
2. Strengthening the infrastructure (O6)

1. Strengthening entrepreneurship (O1)

The action plan “strengthening entrepreneurship in the sector of recreational tourism” is one of the elaborations of the investment program Tourism & Recreation 2016-2019. The plan has been developed in conjunction with the stakeholders and aims at improving the quality of the tourism sector in South-Limburg. New and better supply has to result in an increasing number of visitors and increase in spending. The Provincial Council wants to stimulate that more entrepreneurs aim at fulfilling tomorrow’s demand by putting more innovative products into the market. And not only in collaboration with entrepreneurs that are active in sports, culture and nature but also by working together with entrepreneurs that are active in hospitality and day recreation, making it possible for innovating products to be developed in addition to the existing offer. The Provincial Council aims at entrepreneurs that are willing to look beyond their own limits, to work together and that are actually able and willing to exploit new ideas. New product-market-partner-combinations have to contribute to new experiences and thrills.

2. Strengthening the infrastructure (O6)

The biggest infrastructural project of the Provincial Council of Limburg is the *Outer Ring of Parkstad*. To many people Parkstad is a vague area and as an outsider you really never know exactly where you are. The Outer Ring has to change this. Through its Routepunt (Trail Hub) the Tourist Board South-Limburg is involved in connecting the recreational trails. The Outer Ring will also be developed from a tourist perspective as the “Internationale Bau Ausstellung” (the International Construction Exhibition) has plans to convert the Outer Ring to a Leisure Ring, making the extraordinary concentration of attractions already visible on the motorway. Consider for instance lights and colored crash barriers that show where special crossroads are, like a Roman road, findings of Neanderthals or the like. A different project is a *Leisure Lane* in this area. Soon many of these attractions can be visited by bicycle. The Tourist Board South-Limburg has an advisory role in this because of its tourism expertise. When realizing this project the Tourist Board will be coordinating the road signage.

Our capital city of Maastricht is also close to signing off on some major projects. The new landing of the Noorderbrug (Northern Bridge) will improve the east-west flow of traffic and will offer a direct connection with Belgium. By repositioning the bridge itself a beautiful green belt is being created: the Fronten Park. Plans also exist to restore the historic steam tram route that began in Maastricht and ended in Aachen. However, not as a tram track but as a bicycle track.

This new and flat bicycle route has to connect with village centers and pearls of cultural and historical beauty in the Heuvelland. Throughout the centuries the river Maas has modelled a varied and fascinating landscape in Limburg. A tangle of old flow channels, cut-off meanders, dikes and flood plains were created together with typical fauna and flora. A communication plan has been written for this nature reserve, called *Riverpark Maasvalley* in order to make this new nature, with its many new walking and cycling possibilities, known to the inhabitants and guests. This plan has been put in motion in 2016, with the financial contribution of municipalities. The realization of a cycling bridge in this nature reserve has to become an important link between Belgian and Dutch Limburg, connecting with all the major routes in both provinces. At the moment alternatives are being ironed out and discussions are taking place with all parties involved. Together with France and Belgium we coöperate in the development of the international Maas bicycle route. This route can be compared to the world famous bicycle route along the Danube. The Tourist Board South-Limburg is involved in the signage and promotion and is trying to obtain the “eurovelo status” for the Maas bicycle route: the European Quality Mark for elaborate bicycle routes. Another development is the Ligne Sittard. In the city of Sittard various new facilities of high-quality architecture have been realized which improve the connections with the historic center.

Facilities

Besides the provincial government there are multiple actors that influence tourism in the region such as the overall organizations on a national level. These organizations can be subdivided as follows:

1. Travel branch: General Dutch Society of Travel Enterprises, Dutch Organization for Traffic and Tourism, Dutch Office for Tourism & Congresses, Dutch Tourist Board
2. Recreation and hospitality business: Dutch branch organization for recreational enterprises, Dutch branch organization for hospitality enterprises
3. Nature and landscape: Institute for education about nature and sustainability, National Landscape, Natural Monuments, State Forestry Maintenance
4. Education on tourism

Residence

Hospitality recreational enterprises in South-Limburg are positioned as “a large homogeneous cluster without excellence”, as can be seen from the Vitality Scan. This could be result in the fact that the vitality of the entrepreneurs is being challenged (T2). The tourist value of the surrounding of South-Limburg is high (S3, S6). The attractions of Parkstad and the finely woven character of the Heuvelland complement each other. Together with Maastricht and the Euregion they stand for the identity of South-Limburg, with a high tourist value of its surrounding. The hotel sector is positioned in the middle segment in South-Limburg. The online travel agency's (OTA's) amongst others, assume that return on investment is suffering. At the moment a research is underway into the hotel market and based upon the outcome of this research we hope to be able to make further statements shortly. A typically South-Limburg phenomenon is the multitude of well-developed B&B's. This phenomenon, with its local contact, suits the current time. Between the B&B's we discern a difference in quality. Many B&B's possess a high level of luxury, others are of a simple nature. Part of the camping sites have come to a standstill and have run aground. (W1, T1). Camping on a farm, connecting with the trend towards authenticity and small scale tourism, far more suits the target groups. Accommodation recreation actually is a derived offer. People primarily come to visit the surroundings.



Connections and transport

An airport is situated in the region of South-Limburg. In 2014 the Province of Limburg has taken over the bankrupt Maastricht Aachen Airport (MAA) from a private owner. Besides MAA various airports are situated nearby, such as the rapidly expanding Airport Eindhoven and the airports near Brussels, Liège, Mönchengladbach, Düsseldorf and Weeze. From a regional perspective, South-Limburg has a great public transportation network of train and

bus connections. Furthermore, train connections from abroad are bad and could be improved (T7).

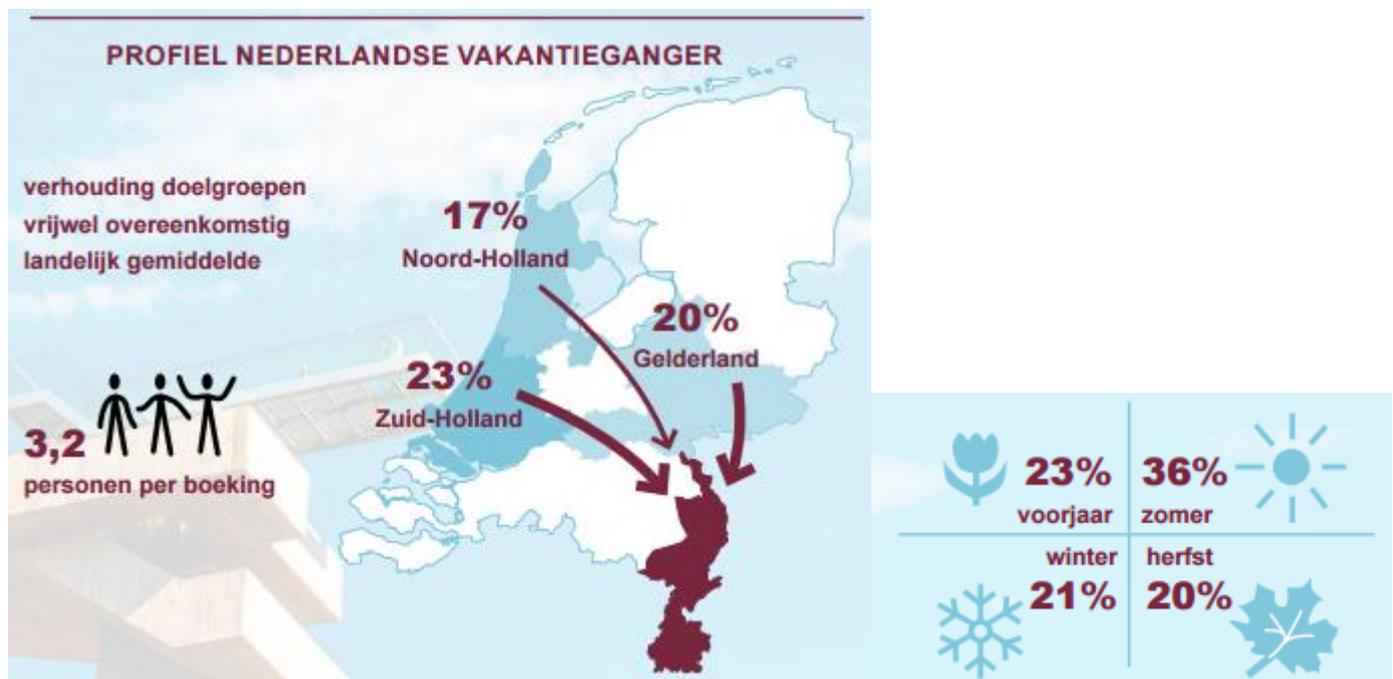
Tourism market

Location

South-Limburg has got a strong positioning within Western Europe, bordering three countries (S7). Together with its direct neighbouring regions in Belgian-Limburg, the Province of Liege, the regions Niederrhein, Eifel and the Region of Aachen, we are dealing with an area with a market potential of 6 million inhabitants. Of which 130,000 are employed as FTE in the recreational tourism sector, yielding an annual turnover of almost 9 billion euros, 25 million overnight stays and over 100 million visitors per year. Various initiatives and collaborations exist between these regions such as Heart of Europe (Hasselt, Liege and Aachen), *Riverpark Maasvalley* (Belgian Limburg) and *Grunmetropole (Green metropolis)* (Aachen) (O7). Despite the various existing projects there is little synergy between the regions. Not a lot is being organized around the three bordering countries (W4).

Composition

It is mostly domestic tourists that visit the region of South-Limburg (S8). South-Limburg is the region visited most by the Dutch. In 2015-2016 824,000 holidays were spent in South-Limburg, with 3.7 million overnight stays of Dutch guests, in contrast to 405,000 foreign guests with 1.1 million overnight stays. These foreign guests originate from Germany, Flanders and Great Britain. Germany with 404,000 guests and 1,284,000 overnight stays; Belgium: 303,000 guests with 859,000 overnight stays and Great Britain with 67,000 guests and 167,000 overnight stays¹. The distribution of the holidays over the seasons is fairly equal. In summer the region is visited most with 36%. Whereas in spring, autumn and winter 22% visit the region. This season extension must then be stimulated (O4).



¹ The figures of the origin of foreign guests apply throughout the province of Limburg (figures of only the region South Limburg are not available).



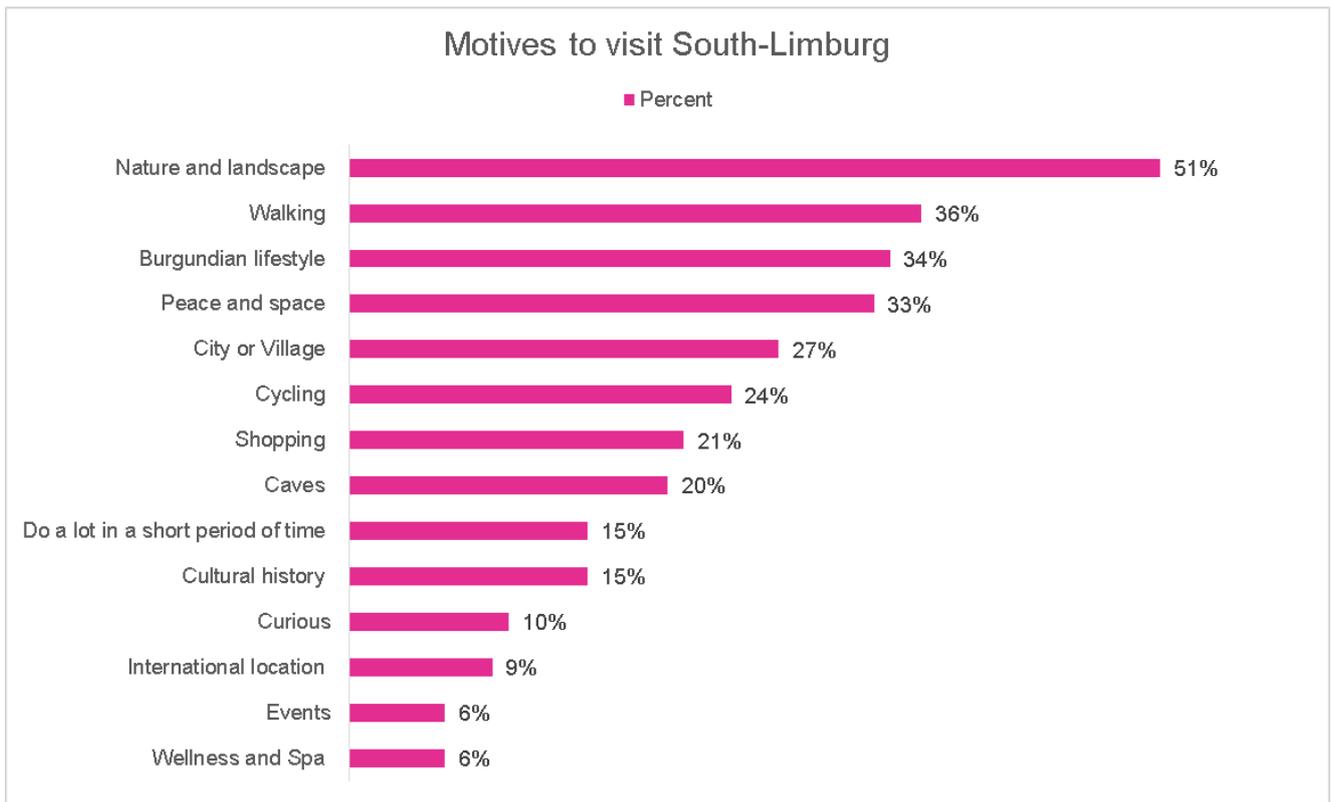
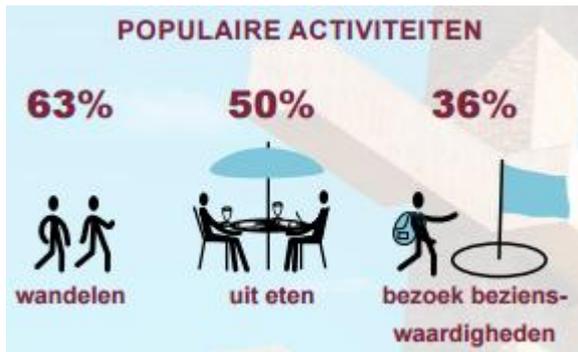
Targets

South-Limburg has got a traditional target group. Based on the segmentation model being used by the NBTC (Dutch Buro for Tourism and Congresses), consumers are not only categorized based upon socio-demographic variables but also upon lifestyles and travel needs: the region is primarily visited by “traditionals” and “mainstreamers”. Traditionals are people over fifty, focussed on closing off their active life, the so-called *babyboomers*. Key characteristics of this group are: composed, peaceful, nostalgic, sense of duty, companionship and security. Mainstreamers are families with children with a traditional role pattern. Key characteristics of this target group are: attached to a regular life, materialistic, sensitive to status, have fun with each other. It is of interest to reposition the traditional target groups and connect with new markets (O8). The Babyboomers are being replaced by the millennials and Generation X is being replaced by Generation Y. South-Limburg can focus on “postmoderns”. This group is open to renewal, change and is focussed on experiences (O3). Characteristics of this group are: tolerant, individualistic, internationally oriented and independent.

South-Limburg might be appealing to another target group, viz the Asian market (O8). At this moment various cities are looking at the Chinese market. Various letters of intent with Chinese sister cities have been signed over the recent year (town twinning) (O7). The Tourist Board of South-Limburg joins-in whenever it sees opportunities.

Attractions and assets

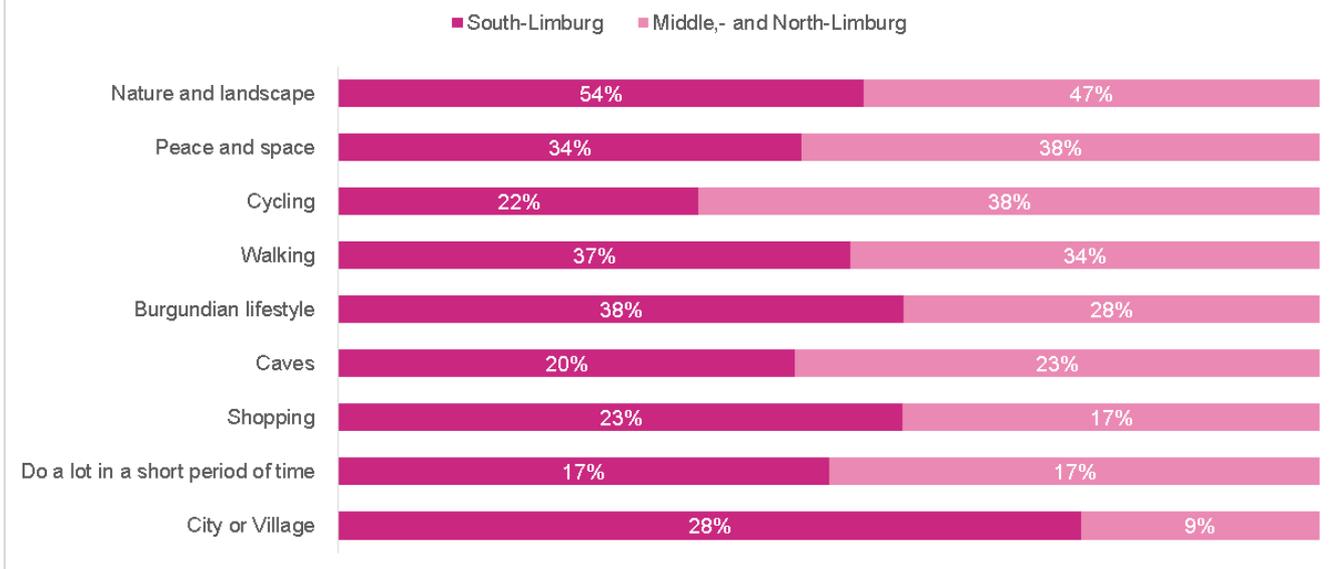
South-Limburg is known for its natural environment, great for its many sports activities and also seen as an excellent holiday destination for friends and family. Nature and landscape of South-Limburg are its most important pull factors. Over half of the visitors come to the region because of it (S6). People also come to the most southern province of the Netherlands because of the Burgundy character of the region (34%) and of its hiking potential. This Burgundy characteristic was in fourth place in 2008 but has now moved up into third place. “Peace and space” have now taken up position number four (W6).



At the same time we looked at the difference between the aficionados of Northern- and Middle-Limburg versus those of South-Limburg. Those visitors that have put Northern- and Middle-Limburg in their top three, would most likely return to this province for its beautiful nature, landscape, peacefulness and space, the cycling and hiking.

The aficionados of South-Limburg also name nature and landscape besides the Burgundy character as being pull factors. Others are the Heuvelland itself, caves, local produce and the tourist town of Valkenburg. Strong attractions are SnowWorld, GaiaZOO, wellness, Valkenburg.

Reasons for a future visit / Differences between South-Limburg and Middle-, and North-Limburg



South-Limburg has won many prizes (S2). In 2016 the region has been placed in the Top 100 of Green Destinations, amongst others because of an unrelenting investment of all parties involved into the preservation and use of monuments and because of its focus on the unique characteristics of this region as a tourist destination. In 2016 the region of Parkstad received the highest possible award in the world from the World Travel and Tourism Council. According to them Parkstad is a unique example of a transition from black to green. In twenty years time the region has developed itself from an industrial mining area into one of the greenest urban areas of the Netherlands. The offer in this region is endless (S3). Parkstad consists of numerous museums and unique monuments, Every year the region hosts many cultural and sports events. It participates in city beautification through street art and makes Dutch mining history come back to life.

The landscape of South-Limburg is characterized by a rich past (S5). Besides its mining history millions of sea creatures have set off their calcium skeletons in a prehistoric sea which transformed South-Limburg into what it has become: a unique marlstone landscape. Castles, farmsteads and cloisters were mostly erected using this beloved marlstone. This marlstone extraction resulted in an extensive system of corridors twisting through South-Limburg underground, century-old and over 250 kilometers long. This unique environment nowadays is the setting for many activities such as the world-rekknowned Christmas Markets (S3).

South-Limburg can pride itself on a unique culture, packed with ancient traditions, heavily influenced by the Roman-Catholic Church which is still clearly visible (S5). Authenticity and nostalgia play an important role in this. Research shows that expenditure on culture per activity has decreased in Limburg. However, because of its border location no complete and reliable survey exists as the expenditure of foreign guests has also been included in this survey. Focussing on our domestic guests we see that a large part of the spending is done by people from Limburg itself. Demographically Limburg is ageing and its purchasing power is low. This has contributed to a decrease in spending on culture by the inhabitants of Limburg (T5). South-Limburg has got a multitude of events. However, they have got no coherence nor theme. This is a weakness (W3). Also Limburg does not possess an

international landmark like many other cities do (W5). A braggespot of South-Limburg shows the landscape with its hills, half-timbered cottages and sheep plus cows.

The landscape of South-Limburg is unique in the Netherlands (S6). Century-old hollow roads, open plateaus and wooded areas alternate with picturesque villages and authentic cities. Therefore the Heuvelland in South-Limburg has been given the name “National Landscape South-Limburg” (S2). Its unique character makes it one of just 20 Dutch National Landscapes, instigated in 2005 by the ministry of Housing, Planning and Environmental Control. In connection with the cities and its rural centres, this is a prosperous area, where people love to live, work and relax.

Nowhere in the Netherlands has so much international cycling history been written as on the tarmac of South-Limburg, thanks to its hilly landscape. South-Limburg is known for its many climbs and also for its cycling contests that are both notorious with and beloved by thousands of cycling aficionados (S6). Each year in April, South-Limburg provides the setting of the only Dutch cycling classic: the Amstel Gold Race.

The flip side of this success is that there are days and moments when the Heuvelland is being perceived as crowded (T6). Every year the South-Limburg natural reserves are visited 24 million times, most of the times by their own inhabitants from the Parkstad area or Maastricht. This means that a lot of motorized traffic from inhabitants frequents the roads between the cities and the rural areas. This is detrimental to the peacefulness, one of the most important motives for the overnight guests to visit the region (W6).

There is a possibility to create new (hiking)opportunities making inhabitants stay in their ‘own’ area and not take the car into the Heuvelland (O6). Examples of such projects are RiverPark MaasValley, the Outer Ring and LeisureLane in Parkstad and Buitengoed (Outdoor Area) Geul and Maas. These projects have been elaborated upon on page 3, under “*strengthening the infrastructure*”. Views differ about the crowding perception of the Heuvelland. Various entrepreneurs are inclined to think that it is not too crowded but that there are too many events in the Heuvelland resulting from bad communication between municipalities (W3). They urge for a better spread of the various events.

Finally South-Limburg is associated with a Burgundy lifestyle (S4). The gastronomy in this region has got a distinctive character as to the gastronomy in other provinces of the country. The inhabitants of South-Limburg have recently been nominated as the most hospitable people of the Netherlands by Dutch holiday makers. On average the Limburg people receive an 8.6 out of 10 when it comes to friendliness and hospitality. The distinctive power shows itself clearly in the Burgundy character and the regional gastronomy. Regional home-grown produce is known for its recognized quality by the gastronomy. Wines and beers from Limburg are on the rise. Hotel and restaurant owners are increasingly buying regional seasonal fruit and vegetables. Sustainable and honest regional production is increasingly appreciated by inhabitants and visitors. It is a calling card for the area, providing an extra dimension of quality to the culinary experience (O3). The Tourist Board of South-Limburg aims at cross-pollination between hospitality and agricultural businesses (W4, T4). After all, it is the farmers that decide what the Limburg landscape looks like. They determine what they sow on their fields, they take care of their cows in the meadows of their sheep on the moors. It is a calling card of the region, representing the quality of an added experience (O3).

Innovation

In 2016 South-Limburg has received its listing in the Top 100 of “Green Destinations”, amongst others by the continuous investment of all the participating parties in the strength and preservation of our landscape, the attention for the preservation and use of monuments

and for the focus on everything that makes this region unique as a tourist destination (S1, S2).

Competitors

It is beyond the scope of this paper to highlight all new European competitors (W8). However, a generic look at the Dutch market as well as the neighbouring countries, shows us that South-Limburg, in comparison to other Dutch destinations that can be seen as the most important competitors, carries in its DNA inimitable and positive elements:

- A Heuvelland that is beautiful, accessible, to be experienced and that feels foreign (S6)
- authentic (as to culture and history) and original, especially in the field of wellness, relaxing and reflection (S5)
- “Orlando” on the Maas: many attractions close to each other (S3)
- Burgundy profile, culinary, regional produce (S4)
- Internationally positioned, region of three countries (S7)

The two most important domestic competitors of the region of South-Limburg are *De Veluwe*, because of an identical visitors’ profile and motives for visiting it, and the province of *Zeeland*, because of its strategy and (online) promotional approach (T8).

1. De Veluwe (area in Province Gelderland)

Together with the Dutch Wadden Area, De Veluwe has been chosen by the Dutch public as the most beautiful natural reserve of the Netherlands in 2016. Of all overnight guests in this region over 72% are domestic. The most important motives to visit De Veluwe are cycling, the landscape, cultural history, interesting inner cities and its peacefulness and space. Just over 44% consist of ‘two-earners’ without children and 35% are families with young children. The number of overnight stays in the region remained stable over the past four years.

2. Zeeland

The Tourist Board Zeeland uses a Tourist Board concept which is completely new in the Netherlands. Inspiration, interaction and experience are crucial. Digitalisation is the key. They have created an entirely new digital platform.

Trends

The following trends are influential and touch tourism in general.

- *A completely digital life*: instant messaging, mobile hyper tasking, virtual reality experiences, a new kind of exhibitionism, social travelling, information overkill
- The transparent society: google knows everything. You carry your digital past with you “forever”, 1:1 marketing (O2)
- *Search for meaning and authenticity* (O5): making sense, personal development, spirituality, authenticity, volotourism.
- *Dichotomy and growing inequality in society*: the splitting up of western societies into universalists and particularists. Particularists cannot handle growing freedom and want security. They distance themselves from the ‘elite’ (universalists) that do find their way about (T3). But also social inequality between the digitals and non-digitals in the world. This can also be geographically, meaning countries that lag behind, but also demographically, so elderly people that cannot keep up with the latest technologies.

- *Save Our Society (SOS) & Zero Waste Society (ZWS)*: sustainable tourism (O4), people start to travel much more consciously which threatens aviation, nature's value is increasingly appreciated which leads to payed access, new transportation concepts.
- *Think Global, Act Global*: globalization, localization (S4, S5).
- *Geopolitical shifts*: The more "holistic" Asia becomes world leader and the culture of Asia will spread. Christian philosophy will be replaced by Buddhist philosophy. Europe will follow its own course as "middle earth", as Europe is connected to both worlds (O8).
- *The styled society*: is a result of the virtual world we live in where everything is being photoshopped. This leads to styled residential ares, offices and motorways (O3, O6).
- *The extreme society*: The aim is to achieve individual diversification. People are increasing exploring their limits in order to get a kick or to get more attention (O2).
- *The Zapping Society* (O3, T8): Growth of personal freedom in Western Society also has a flipside: loss of security. We move from hype to hype and are easily bored.

Tourism support actions based upon 6 policy themes

Promotion

The Tourist Board South-Limburg seduces guests to come and visit South-Limburg and shows them around on the spot. To tourists, seekers of leisure and inhabitants it provides relevant information on how to spend their leisure time, through the medium that the guest prefers to use; before, during and after their stay, should the guest wish this. In doing this the organization operates as cathalyst and connector for the retail, hospitality industry and sector itself of the local leisure industry, thereby using modern ways of communication, its network and knowledge and of the trust its brand holds with the consumer (S1).

The Tourist Board South-Limburg actively uses its network for:

- Looking after interests
- Market research
- Marketing Communication
- Exchange of knowledge
- Network gatherings
- Individual and collective promotion

As of April 2006 the Tourist Board South-Limburg is in charge of coordinating the maintenance of all signed hiking-, cycling- and mountainbike routes of the 19 municipalities (including Maastricht) in South-Limburg, called Routepunt (Trail Hub) (S6). Product development (route maps) and following up on new trends also belongs to this task (O2).

Supporting and promoting events is important for the promotion of the region and they help generate more revenu. As of 2015 the Tourist Board South-Limburg reinforces its financial position in the field of supporting events within the domain of marketing, promotion, organization, development, cooperation, spread, participation and ticket sales by way of three different event packages. Furthermore it has the availability of its own online ticket

reservation system which is used to buy tickets for events, packages, excursions and one-day-attraction enterprises. To this end event packages have been developed (O2).

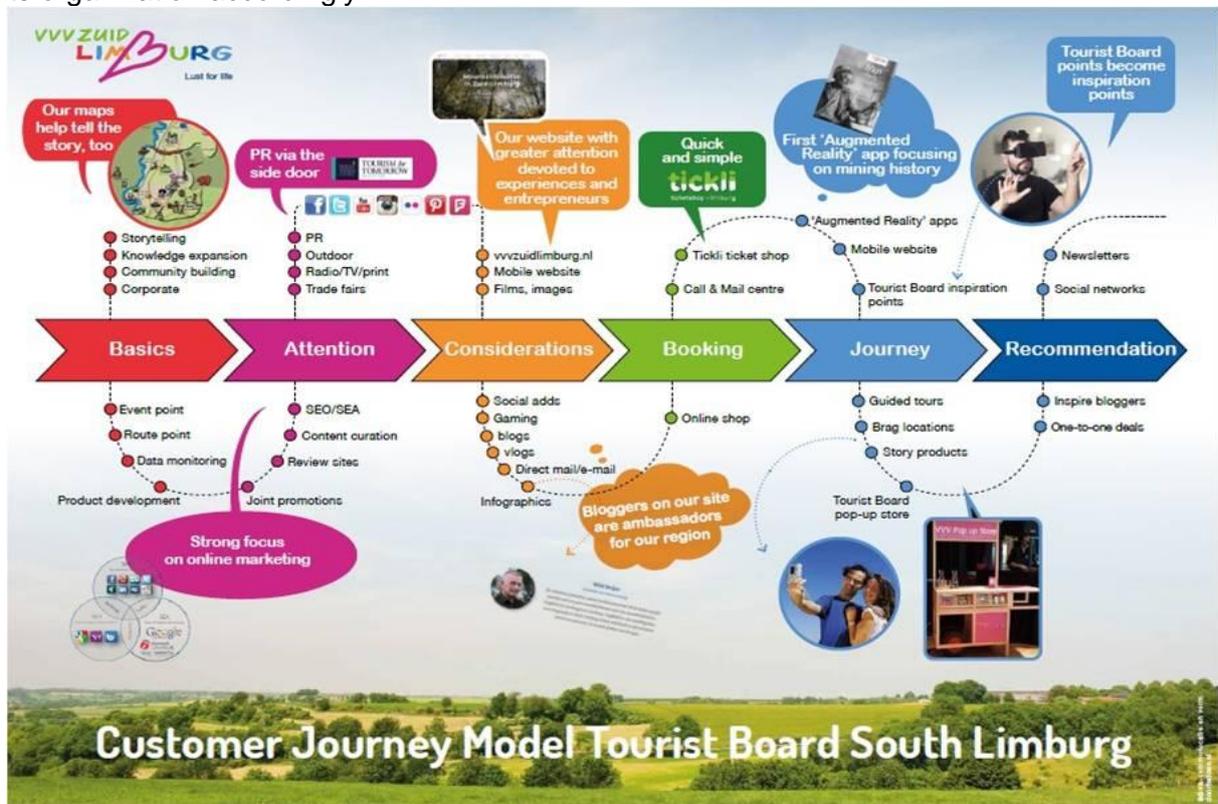
The Tourist Board South-Limburg runs 31 points of information. 5 of these are proper Tourist Board locations, staffed with our own employees, 9 Tourist Board service points run according to the shop-in-shop formula and 8 Tourist Board folderposts. The Tourist Board South-Limburg is a non-profit foundation.

The Tourist Board South-Limburg (VVV Zuid-Limburg) is a member of of the nationally coordinated Tourist Board Netherlands (VVV Nederland). The VVV brand is the best-known and most highly appreciated brand for consumers in the field of holidays and leisure in the Netherlands (S1). Again and again this is the result of independent researches by reknowned companies. Consumers appreciate the VVV especially well and also stakeholders strongly recognize the VVV as a reliable partner within destination marketing and admonish the VVV's contribution to the local and regional leisure economy.

And then there is the branding organization called Connect Limburg. This is an initiative from the Province of Limburg. Its goal is to increase the reputation and brand recognition of Limburg internationally in order to tie talent, investors and tourists to the region longterm (O7). Abroad Limburg is hardly known (W7). In order to make sure that Limburg stays a healthy, active, prosperous and livable region, Connect Limburg commits to putting Limburg on the map internationally as a unique region, where borders are being crossed, and to striving for sufficient activity in the region (S7).

Strategy

Towards the end of 2015 the Tourist Board of South-Limburg took over the “Customer Life Cycle Model”, well-known to the retail world, and transformed both its marketing strategy and its organization accordingly:



The Customer Journey Model assumes that the marketing instruments we use as Tourist Board change according to the phase in which the guest finds himself in the purchasing process. For instance, guests that you are trying to convince to visit South-Limburg are approached differently from guests that are already in our territory. This especially goes for your online performance. The regional Customer Journey Model consists of a phase unknown to retail, viz a pre-phase, being the “Basics”. After all, if you want to attract guests, the area itself needs to possess the best possible infrastructure, also relative to the communication through the various stakeholders (O6). In order to achieve this optimal infrastructure, the Tourist Board of South-Limburg amongst others introduces and aims at storytelling, broadening knowledge of entrepreneurs and community building of inhabitants (O1).

The valorisation of attractions through marketing

As we all know, big data and communication is an essential part of today's era. In Valkenburg and the rest of South-Limburg the need exists to increase our insight in the visitors of the municipality and region concerned and to use these data at the right time for the right target group using the exactly right and ultimate communication message (O2). Implementation of Wi-Fi hotspots, Narrow Casting and the Shopcard in the city Valkenburg aan de Geul is a unique opportunity to collect knowledge and big data and to use these. Subsequently the cities of Aachen and Liege can be approached in order to implement this concept for the purpose of Euregional Cooperation (O7).

Another example is Review Marketing. Review Marketing and Word of Mouth are important marketing tools. Online reviews are one of the most important decision making factors to Dutch consumers when acquiring a product or a service. As of April 2016 the Tourist Board South-Limburg has got an entirely new website with 1.6 million unique visitors annually. In order to create increasing interaction with (potential) visitors and show dynamic and reliable information, the Tourist Board South-Limburg wants to start with reviews (O3).

Diversification to provide more customised packages

An example of the above is 1:1 marketing whereby the Tourist Board South-Limburg can communicate 1:1 with South-Limburg aficionados on the basis of, for instance, preferences, interests and demographic data (O8). On the basis of the Customer Journey Model the Tourist Board South-Limburg is able to better tune in on tourists that are interested in South-Limburg. For this purpose data and valorisation are necessary. Nowadays lots of customer data are available online. There are sufficient tools that provide an insight into the behaviour and needs of the visitor, user or client. To be able to interpret these you need the right skills, means and capacity. The Tourist Board aims at a completely data driven approach to its clients in order to improve the efficiency of its interaction with the client. The complete “lifecycle” of how and when the client is in touch with the organization is being analyzed. In doing this various platforms are inter-connected. This way, even more attention is given to user experience and customer experience (O3).

The development of experiential tourism

To attract more visitors to the region and to extend their stay, Maastricht Marketing and the Tourist Board South-Limburg are collaborating more closely to make the region as attractive as possible for tourists (O7). The city of Maastricht and the region of South Limburg are perfect places to enjoy the moment and discover what makes you truly happy; to experience what life is all about in terms of fun, freedom, surprising experiences, and quality (O3). Through the eyes of a blogger, we will show people that there is plenty to do during a three-month stay in Maastricht and the South-Limburg region (O3).

They are doing this by creating an appealing new PR campaign to communicate our message on a more personal level. They are also working with 'influencers', people with their own online audience who blog, vlog, and post on Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat about the experiences they have. An influential blogger will therefore tell their story. This is advertising in the twenty-first century. This autumn (starting in summer), Maastricht Marketing and Tourist Board South-Limburg will launch a slow travel blog campaign (blogsabbatical) – an entirely new concept in the Netherlands. Many bloggers often find themselves overwhelmed by a flood of activities they are expected to complete within just a few short days. The city of Maastricht and the region of South Limburg are taking a very different approach with this campaign: a slow, stress-free program away from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

Another example is the NECSTouR (Network of European Regions for Competitive and Sustainable Tourism) project Spirit Youth: Free Your Mind (O7). The aim of this project is to create a European travel itinerary based on spirituality. This is a product which is being marketed through various European Cultural Routes (O4). The aims of these routes are to promote European Cultural heritage and identity, to strengthen democratic dimensions of cultural exchange and tourism, the development of SME's through the involvement of local and regional authorities, local networks, associations, universities and professional organizations. In the rush of today's modern life, where things move at lightning pace, you can never stop to sit down and draw breath for fear of being left behind, "Spirit Youth: Free Your Mind" allows you to escape from daily stresses and demands that threaten to overwhelm you.