



Hanze
University of Applied Sciences
Groningen

Responsive Region

dr. E.A.M. (Elles) Bulder

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Pioneering with Demographic Transition in the Northern Netherlands

Inaugural speech

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You must be the change you wish
to see in the world

Mahatma Gandhi

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1 Introduction

Esteemed Board and Management of the Hanze University of Groningen, dear students and teachers, colleagues from the Research Centre NoorderRuimte, fellow professors and teacher-researchers, members of the Expertise Network Population Decline of the Northern Netherlands, directors, policy makers and other professionals from the work field, representatives of the University of Groningen and other knowledge institutes, dear family and friends, I would like to welcome you all to my inaugural speech.

On November 29, 2010, commissioned by the three northern provinces, the Research Network Population Decline Northern Netherlands (KKNN) was founded by the Research Centre for Built Environment NoorderRuimte of the Hanze University Groningen and the Faculty of Spatial Sciences (FRW) of the University of Groningen. This network's aim was, and still is, networking in general and sharing and developing knowledge. It has provided an important step in the gradually more widely recognized notion that a, for Dutch standards, new demographic process was taking place that was having a deep impact on many fronts. In 2012, the professorship Demographic Transition & Environment was established at Hanze University Groningen. In the period 2012-2015, dr. ir. Sabine Meier focused the applied research in her professorship on the daily life in areas characterized by population decline. In 2015 the fundament of the debate on population decline in the Northern Netherlands was completed with the establishment of the special Chair on Population Decline and Liveability. On September 1 of that year, Prof. dr. ir. Bettina Bock was appointed to that Chair.

Within this three-step process I am honoured to receive the opportunity to give new substance to this professorship at the Hanze University Groningen, and to adapt it to the current issues within education and the professional field. The fact that I myself live in a transitional region where I have been an active entrepreneur for 25 years, also plays an important role. I concluded that the professorship is in need of a redefinition and a reallocation. In line with this reasoning the title 'Responsive Region' was chosen. It mirrors not only the transitional process the region is deeply involved in, it also holds the promises that there is an answer to the challenges it is facing. This answer lies, no doubt, within the region itself. In 'Responsive Region. Pioneering with Demographic Transition in the Northern Netherlands,' I am happy to share with you the way in which I - together with teacher-researchers, students, field partners and partners of other knowledge institutes - will give meaning to this professorship.

2 Changes in the population structure

2.1 Not one, but two demographic transitions ...

So much has been said and written about population decline that I can safely assume here that you are somewhat familiar with the term population decline and the regions within the Netherlands where this is taking place. For this reason I am not going to elaborate on this matter. However, I do want to talk to you about the different social aspects relevant for guiding and utilising population decline. Moreover, further knowledge and insight in how these aspects operate and interact can be useful for current and future professionals, studying Built Environment, Facility Management, Human Technology, Real Estate Management, Pop culture, Art and Design, and those present-day professionals who are active in the field as policy advisor or in real estate management.

First, I want to comment briefly on the demographic developments at macro level, which form the backdrop for the population decline in the Northern Netherlands. In 1953, Frank Notestein presented the first consistent theory about the relationship between economic and demographic trends, leading to a historic decline in mortality and fertility in Western Europe since the eighteenth century. The end point of this transition was a steadily growing population, with an average life expectancy of 70-plus. Despite the criticism of this theory over the years - because it was considered too static and lacked sufficient explanatory process variables - the transition itself as well as the resulting ageing of the population of the Western world, were not at issue (Bulder, 1993).

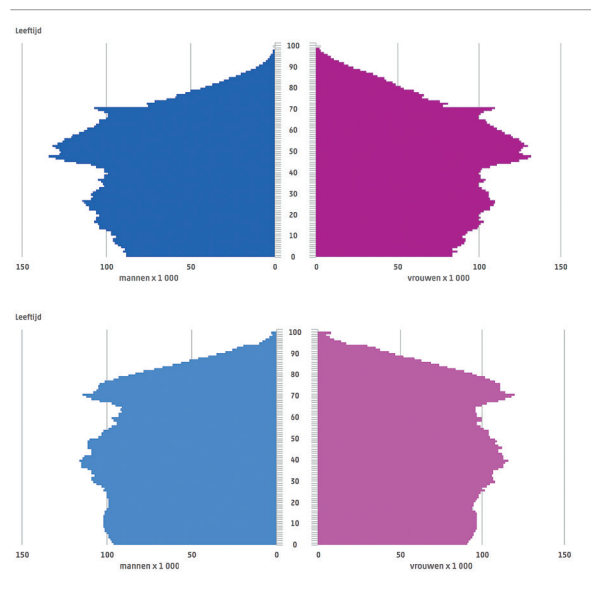


More than thirty years later, Lesthaeghe and Van der Kaa launched their theory on what they called the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe and Van der Kaa, 1986). This transition, which surfaced in the sixties of the twentieth century in Western Europe and North America, happened, amongst others, because of a significant change in the pattern of norms and values. This resulted in a delayed fertility, in a declining population, when there was no replenishment through “replacement migration,” and in an increasing variety of household structures. The rise in life expectancy coupled with a declining fertility, evolved into a gradual ageing of the population.

The demographic trends currently seen and predicted in the Netherlands fit into this picture presented by Lesthaeghe and van der Kaa (see Figure 1). Fertility has gradually declined to below the level of replacement (an average of 2.1 children per woman) since the late sixties due to the introduction of contraceptives, the rising prosperity and to changing values. The population is ageing and the number of very old people (80-plus) within the population is growing disproportionately. Moreover, the structure of households is changing too.

According to the latest projections by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), the Dutch population, in addition to these structural changes, will decline as a whole as of 2038, provided that immigration does not compensate for the decline (Stoeldraijer et al, 2016, Van Duin and Stoeldraijer, 2014). Already in 2016, the population of the Netherlands has grown mainly through immigration (CBS b).

Figure 1: The age structure of the Dutch population in 1969 and 2040

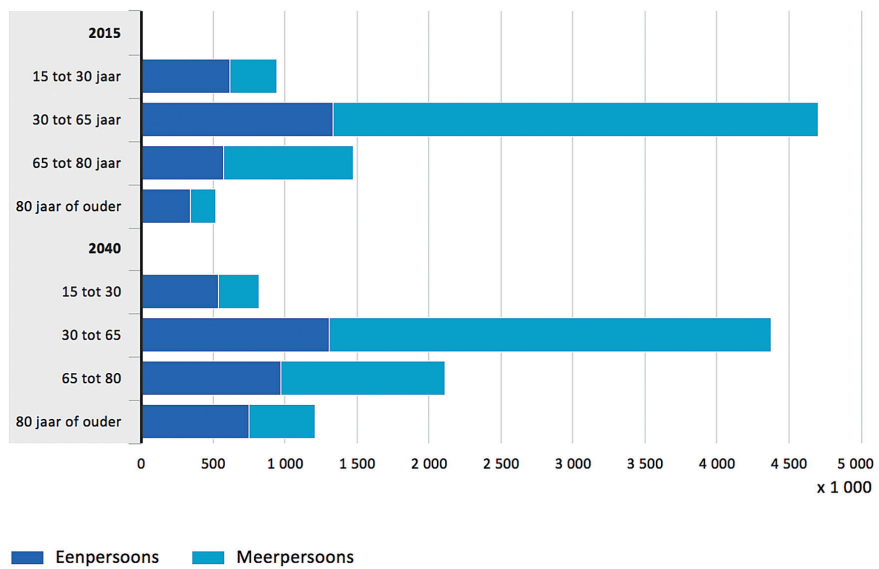


Source: CBS

The household structure in the Netherlands is changing. In the next decade, a substantial increase of the number of singles in the Netherlands can be expected. Overall, there are three phases during the life course where people live a single life:

- At a young age; young adults live alone for a couple of years after leaving their parental home. These single person households are concentrated in the larger cities that attract young people for study and work.
- During middle age, when people break up a relationship and go back to living alone. This type of household can be found everywhere in the Netherlands.
- At advanced age, after the death of the partner. This type of household is relatively more common in regions with population decline.

Figure 2: Single and multi-person households in 2015 (perception) and 2040 (prognosis)



Source: CBS

Figure 2 shows that the expected growth of single households mainly applies to the age groups 65 and over, and that for those aged 80 and older, the number even doubles. (CBS c). For the other age groups a significant limitation in growth is expected, or the number is expected to remain constant.

It goes without saying that these structural changes within the demographic composition have implications on many fronts (Lesthaeghe 2014).

I will mention some of the societal challenges:

- the challenges of a rapidly ageing population;
- when the size of the population and its structure should remain stable, society has to take care of migrants' integration;
- coping with greater diversity in household structures;
- overcoming poverty in certain types of households such as singles and single parent families and their subsequent exclusion.

Later in my speech I will comment on which challenges I will focus on within my professorship.

2.2 ... and unbalanced population decline

The demographic trends described above apply to the Netherlands as a whole. However, regionally, there is a tempo difference, partly because of the simultaneous occurrence of different demographic processes. One of them is the unbalanced population decline now taking place in some rural parts and smaller towns in the Northern Netherlands. The population is declining, but is not evenly distributed amongst all age categories.

The decline of the natural increase first occurred in Delfzijl in 1996. In the 20 years that have passed since then, we have gathered much more knowledge about population decline (see also Table 1). In 2009, Nico van Nimwegen launched the



concept of ‘unbalanced population decline’ (Van Nimwegen and Heering 2009). This concept enables us, while studying population decline, to take into account different motives underlying the decision to migrate during the life course, for example, young people migrating from the region in search of higher education, families leaving town in search for more living space, and elderly basing their decision on the presence or absence of facilities.

Table 1: Population decline in declining and anticipating regions in the Northern Netherlands since the peak year

Region	Type	Peak year Inhabitants in	Inhabitants in peak year (n)	Inhabitants per 1/1/15 (n)	Total population decline since peak (%)***
NO Groningen*	Region with population decline ****	2003**	236,000	222,000	5.9
Friesland	Province	2011	647,000	646,000	0.2
NW Friesland	Anticipating region *****	2004	83,000	81,000	2.6
NO Friesland	Region with population decline	2006	127,000	124,000	2
Friese Waddeneilanden	Anticipating region	2001	11,000	10,000	0.5
ZW Friesland	COROP-region	2014	135,000	135,000	0.2
ZO Friesland	Anticipating region	2015	187,000	187,000	0.03
Drenthe	Province	2011	491,000	489,000	0.6
Oost-Drenthe	Anticipating region	2010	197,000	194,000	1.8
Noord-Drenthe	COROP-region	2012	190,000	190,000	0.2

Source: Derks, W. Barometer krimp. Actuele bevolkingontwikkeling in regio's met structurele bevolkingsdaling. 7 januari 2016. P. 8

www.vanmeernaarbeter.nl/sites/vanmeernaarbeter.nl/files/BAROMETER%20KRIMP%20jan%202016.pdf

* Municipality of De Marne, the DEAL municipalities and East Groningen are combined in this table because of the availability of data, and therefore fall under the heading NE Groningen.

** NE Groningen had a previous peak in 1981.

*** Calculated in unrounded numbers.

**** Peak declining region: the population is expected to decrease up to 16% by 2040.

***** Anticipating regions: regions where the population is not yet declining, but will decline in the future. Here the number of inhabitants is expected to drop to 4% in 2040. (<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/bevolkingskrimp/inhoud/krimpgebieden-en-anticipeergebieden>).

The moving of young families out of the cities, or in other words suburbanisation, is currently hardly relevant in the Netherlands. But young people relocating for higher education is, and the relocation of the elderly to communities with more facilities as well. Especially these last two migration flows determine the structure of the population and the housing and employment market in the villages and cities in areas with a declining population and the, what are called, 'anticipating' areas.

The migration to cities for reasons of finding better prospects is certainly not a new phenomenon. Based on his observations in Britain, Ernest George Ravenstein formulated – as early as 1885 – his seven laws for migration. Commercialisation and proletarianisation were the main causes for migration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Lucassen and Lucassen 2011). As a result, many single young men and families moved from the countryside to the cities, where the emerging industry was in need of low-skilled workers. The current internal migration shows a different pattern though.

Therefore, Tony Fielding launched the metaphor of the escalator, whereby specifically young people migrate to cities in pursuit of higher education and career options, thus improving their socio-economic position (Fielding 1992). More recent research has shown that – also for the Northern Netherlands and the Netherlands as a whole – large cities act as magnets for young people who want to pursue higher education and subsequently want to move on to a better paying job (PBL a, Venhorst, 2012, Huisman 2013 Latten et al 2006). In urban areas the service sector offers the better paid jobs, and, because of the agglomeration benefits¹, cities offer a more differentiated set of facilities (Glaeser 2011, Storper and Manville 2006 Storper and Scott 2009). It goes without saying that when population growth occurs somewhere due to internal migration, a population decline will take place somewhere else. This is also called the waterbed effect (Hospers 2010). Whether the recently observed decline in younger people migrating towards centres of learning is a temporary result of the introduction of the new student loan system or a trend deviation, remains to be seen (CBS d).

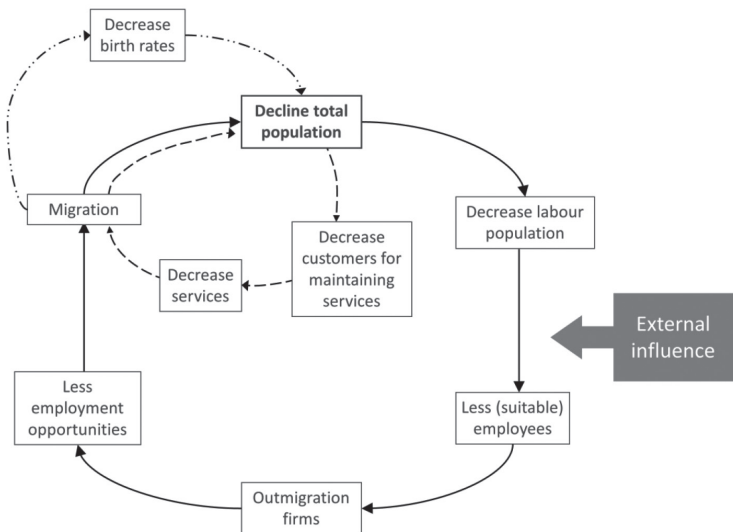
As mentioned before, regionally a different pace in the effects of the Second Demographic Transition can be seen for the Netherlands. The unbalanced population decline resulting from the moving away of young people in areas in the Northern Netherlands does have an important side effect, and that is that the ageing of the population is increasing more strongly in these areas. Not just the percentage of older people, but also the percentage of very old people, is growing much faster than in the

¹ Joint access to, for example, the local infrastructure (such as roads and airports) and to high-quality intermediate products and services from suppliers and specialists in the regional labor market. The larger internal market activates companies and institutions to respond better to the different consumer preferences. Subsequently consumers can enjoy a wider range of shops, restaurants, recreation, culture and education.

areas with a non-declining population. Partly for this reason, more than 50% of the single households in these regions are currently of state pension age (PBL b).

Not only the presence or absence of higher education and better paying jobs determine internal migration. Many studies have been devoted to (regionally determined) migration patterns. Factors that are discussed within these studies are: the general socio-economic structure of a region, the location of a region in relation to the national border, the character of neighbouring areas, the spatial structures developed through time, the proximity to a growing region, the (quality of the) housing stock and how it corresponds to the desires of (future) residents, local (political and administrative) actors and the quality of an area in terms of environment and nature (Hoekveld 2012, Hoekveld 2014). On the other hand, there are also factors that explicitly 'bind' people to their region: social and environmental factors such as proximity to parents, partner and friends and the (self-assigned) characteristics of the home region, turn out to be of great importance for the 'stayers' (Thissen et al 2010, Haartsen and Thissen 2014). From this can be concluded that likely there are many different factors, exclusively or in various combinations, that play an important role when weighing whether or not to relocate at intraregional or interregional level. Some of these factors are more general, some are determined at regional level.

Figure 3: Population trends and their influencing factors: a circular process.



Source: J.J. Hoekveld. *Urban Decline within the Region. Understanding the Intra-regional Differentiation in Urban Population Development in the Regions Declining Saarland and Southern Limburg*. P.44.

The nature of the relationship between population decline and some of the previously mentioned factors is not always clear. This has led to Josje Hoekveld's hypothesis to consider population decline as a circular process in which population development, developments on the labour market, migration and employment levels influence each other over time. Eventually this process will lead to a new equilibrium, which can either be rapidly brought closer as a result of external influences, or be disturbed (again) by external factors. Investigating the relationship between social, economic and cultural factors and population decline in the Northern Netherlands, in analogy of Hoekveld's visualized circular process (Figure 3), will be my contribution in building up scientific knowledge concerning population decline in this professorship's coming period.

3 Guiding and utilising, but what do we need to make that happen?

In his book *Krimpl* from 2010, Gert-Jan Hospers distinguishes four phases in population decline-policy: belittle, contest, guide and utilise. That same year the Dutch Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) released its report *Van bestrijden naar begeleiden: demografische krimp in Nederland* (From confrontation to utilisation: demographic decline in the Netherlands). And in March 2011, the SER presented its advice *Bevolgingskrimp benoemen en benutten* (Discussing and utilising population decline). Apart from the challenges for society as a whole, potential opportunities in this transitional process are presented in these writings as well. However, the SER emphasises the importance of tailor-fit policy in order for transition policy to be effective, given the number of factors influencing developments (SER 2011). Yet, how can we as citizens, governments, organisations and knowledge institutes together create a customised framework, using the already available knowledge and experience, which will enable us to start up this assignment? It starts by defining a number of concepts that are used in the debate on population decline in relation to its opportunities and threats. After having clarified in what context they are used here, we can proceed to the next step: deciding what we can do while estimating the effects of these actions. Here I would like to make a start.

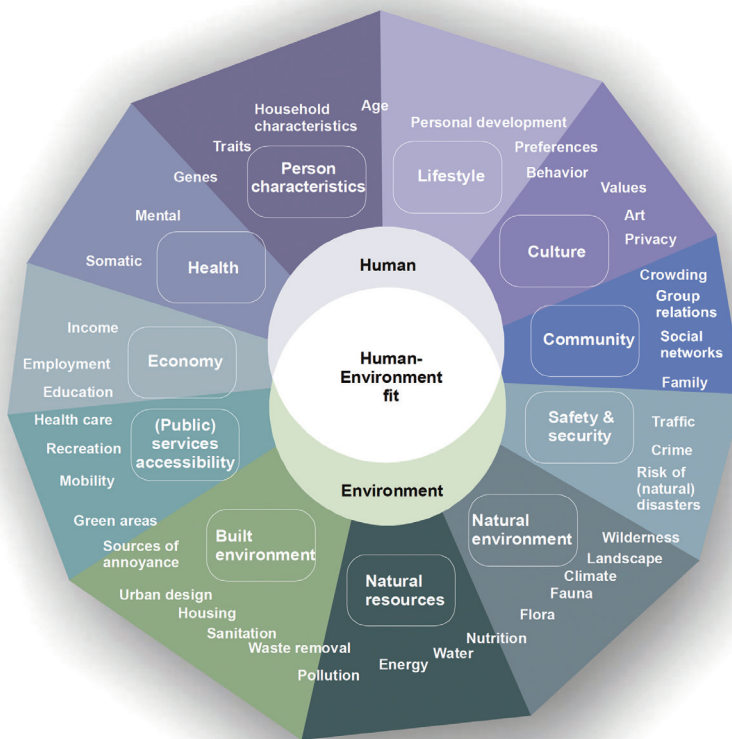
3.1 Who decides what liveability is?

Demographic transition and unbalanced population decline both have an undeniable impact on our environment. But does it have an effect on its perceived liveability as well? Central to this living environment is the human habitat, in other words the space in which people engage in activities such as housing, employment, making social contacts, receiving care, travelling and recreation. Although the way to define this space is still under discussion, there is agreement on the fact that the environment can be defined in concrete terms once it is delimited.

Unlike the concept of environment, ‘liveability’ is a more normatively charged concept (Thissen 2008). It reflects the quality of the relationship between man and his environment in which the subjective experience of the individual is paramount (Van Dorst 2007). However, that does not mean a dilution of the concept or it merely becoming a political slogan. In that respect, Veenhoven rightly warns that the term liveability lends itself well for rhetorical use. The word suggests both comprehensiveness and objective necessity and leaves much room for interpretation. In the long run such suggestive wording can become jaded. If there is no effort made to define the concept more precisely, it will soon become obsolete, according to the writer (Veenhoven 2000).

Often, the actual discipline determines which domains are involved when liveability is under consideration; an environmentalist has a different view on defining liveability than a spatial scientist, a health scientist or a social psychologist. In 2004 Leidelmeijer and Van Kamp constructed a graphical overview (Figure 4) of the different dimensions of liveability that they had found in the literature (Leidelmeijer and Van Kamp 2004). This overview clearly illustrates the many dimensions and sub-dimensions that are being used now.

Figure 4: Domains of liveability and quality of life



Source: Leidelmeijer, K. and I. Van Kamp. *Kwaliteit van de leefomgeving en leefbaarheid*. RIVM-rapport, Bilthoven, 2004. P.63. (Quality of environment and liveability, RIVM report, Bilthoven, 2004. P.63)

For more knowledge concerning the relationship between population development and perceived liveability in various regions in the Northern Netherlands, I particularly want to focus on the following dimensions of liveability:

- Community (social relationships, social networks, family)
- Economy (income, employment, education)
- (Public) services accessibility (health care, mobility, recreation)
- Culture (art, heritage, values)
- Built environment (design, historically developed spatial structures, infrastructure)

Interactions between the dimensions and interactions with other dimensions (for instance nature, environment, health and security) will also be addressed while cooperating with partners in general and with the professors and their research groups active in NoorderRuimte in particular.

As these intentions are practically developed into actual projects, the latest insights for the Northern Netherlands will be included. For example, recent research carried out by CMO STAMM demonstrated a decrease of the perceived liveability in regions in Groningen confronted with population decline as compared to other regions in the province ([www. sociaalplanbureau Groningen.nl](http://www.sociaalplanbureau Groningen.nl)). Reasons for this reduction of liveability mentioned in the context of this research are the closing down of facilities, vacant buildings, poor maintenance on buildings and gardens, public inconvenience and lack of social contacts. An improvement in liveability is mainly attributed to new initiatives, such as the construction of a new playground, the redevelopment of a village centre, the construction of new homes and more activity in the streets. In addition, in the context of the report *Woningmarkt- en Leefbaarheidsonderzoek Aardbevingsgebied Groningen* (Housing market and liveability research in earthquake region Groningen) by Boelhouwer et al, it is concluded that when liveability is evaluated between an earthquake area with and an earthquake zone without population decline, the impression now is that the level of dissatisfaction with liveability is higher in the earthquake areas with population decline (Boelhouwer et al 2016).

3.2 Resilience

Apart from external factors, such as government policies concerning the redistribution of governmental departments (Rijksoverheid b), there are also qualities within society or community that may affect population decline and therefore the perceived quality of life. Examples are the presence or absence of social capital and resilience. ‘Resilience’ is a concept that has found its way in various social sciences.

Rebecca Rolfe (Rolfe, 2006) argues that resilience is the ability of individuals, families, organisations and communities to respond effectively to major adversity and danger. Heike Delfmann (Delfmann et al 2013), in agreement with Ed Wilding, mentions four dimensions that are important to 'build' a resilient community, namely:

- (1) Healthy people;
- (2) An inclusive, creative culture;
- (3) Local economy;
- (4) Relationships between communities.

According to Wilding, building resilience begins by making the most efficient use of the existing assets in the community for purposes of wellbeing and social and economic development. This approach accords well with research results showing that regional factors are also contributory to the onset of population decline. It is essential, precisely for this reason, to have the right knowledge on the strengths and weaknesses of a region.

Looking at the earlier mentioned dimensions of liveability combined with the aforementioned four aspects that are important for building up a resilient community, one cannot but conclude that it is inevitable to approach liveability from a multitude of angles. Moreover, the four dimensions that are important to build a resilient community underline the validity of the choice of dimensions I will focus on while researching liveability; community, economics, (public) services accessibility, culture and built environment. In doing so the connection between the four themes of NoorderRuimte being 'Earthquakes', 'Population decline', 'Health and Wellbeing' and 'Sustainability and Abundance' is intrinsically made.

3.3 Value attribution and value creation; one example

Precisely because the term liveability has a normative connotation, the way in which we attribute value or create value in our environment in relation to liveability is intriguing. Especially in recent years there is a growing interest in less traditional forms of value creation, and in non-monetary values, as not every added value can be expressed in terms of money. In this regard the governmental guideline on Social Costs Benefit Analysis (SCBA) for policymakers admits that SCBA can put the different aspects of a project in order, but shows as well that it is often impossible to monetise every effect (Rijksoverheid c). However, these non-monetizing effects are of specific interest as well when it comes to establishing the effect of interventions on perceived liveability.

Generally speaking, with regard to some of the liveability dimensions I selected for research and discussion, values that are difficult to monetise can yet be of great importance. Apart from achieving economic value, social value (level of participation, inclusion, regional pride and social cohesion) and cultural value (level and value of cultural heritage use, aesthetic value, identity and participation) can be realised. These values, sometimes pinpointed as “by-catch”, could help us in strengthening regional liveability. To gain insight in which social values are relevant for a region, the method of John Benington and Mark Moore (Benington and Moore, 2011) seems suitable. In this method the inhabitants themselves determine which values are relevant. This enables them to connect to larger social issues and smaller regional challenges while it at the same time fits perfectly into the template of the current participatory society. In doing so, it also creates support for socio-economic and cultural innovations.



Many examples of social value creation can be mentioned. I will briefly address the possible role that cultural heritage and the arts can play. In 2016 Thuur Caris stated in his thesis *The art of interruption* that public administration should not only see the arts as a creative industry sector or public entertainment, but also as an arena for active citizenship, which helps develop and perpetuate society.

Hans Renes argues that cultural heritage hold traces from the past with relevance for presentday society (Renes 2011). He indicates that in the last few years a shift in the value assessment of these traces can be detected towards more (immaterial) significance.

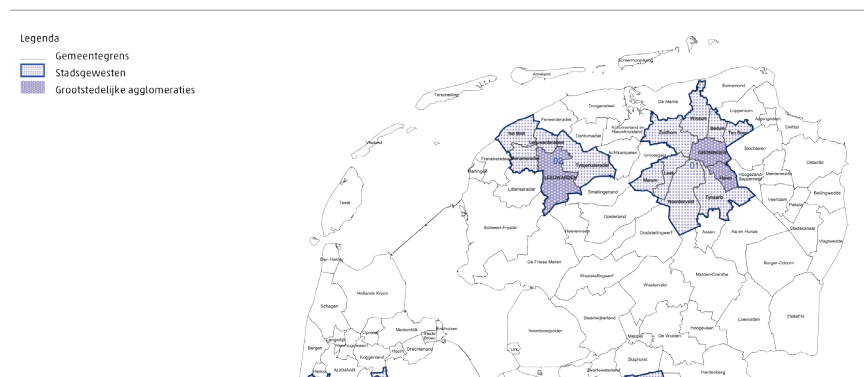


Renes argues that heritage can be used to increase the environmental quality and can therefore be a means for retaining residents and businesses. Subsequently, De Graaf et al assign four functions to the presence of cultural heritage in areas with population decline: that of signboard, meeting place, totem pole and breeding ground (De Graaf et al 2014). Heritage as 'signboard' is said to create a regional identity while, through recreational and touristic revenues, it also generates financial and economic value. Heritage as 'totem pole' lends identity, support and pride to the regional population and therefore becomes an identity carrier. These values are of the greatest importance for a region with population decline, but at the same time are difficult to monetise. Heritage as 'meeting point' is important from the perspective defined by Hospers and Reverda, as counterpart in the process of 'disintegration by population decline' (Hospers and Reverda 2012). Finally, heritage can act as 'breeding ground' for, for example, cultural entrepreneurs. Van Duijn and Rouwendal state that cultural heritage used by creative entrepreneurs may well affect the economic dynamics in a city with population decline. Furthermore, they argue that heritage can have a positive impact on, for example, house prices in a radius of 10 km (Van Duijn and Rouwendaal 2013).

3.4 A complete region

Finally, I would like to make a plea for a different view on, or maybe even a different way of dealing with, the hard line between regions facing population decline on the one hand and the Dutch and German areas or centres in the vicinity of these regions that do grow, on the other. The applied boundary does hinder thinking in larger spatial and administrative structures. Decline and growth not only deserve a place in the comparison between Randstad and ‘randland’ (Meier et al 2015), but form the two sides of the same ‘waterbed’ at a shorter distance as well (Hospers 2010).

Figure 5: Two of the 22 metropolitan areas / urban regions in the Netherlands (Municipal division of the Netherlands on January 1, 2015)



Source: CBS

Nico van Nimwegen et al asked themselves the question if the observed population decline could form a threat leading to unacceptable large regional differences and a rural exodus, as could be seen in countries such as France and Germany (Van Nimwegen and Heering 2009). Their conclusion was that this was not going to happen in the Netherlands. Apart from the moderate pace of the population decline, the small scale of the Netherlands plays an important role in this as well. Regions where the population is prone to decline are not an insurmountable distance away, making spatial isolation, also because of the good connections, largely absent (Van Nimwegen and Heering 2009). Precisely because the Netherlands is a country of ‘short distances,’ it seems logical to focus on larger areas when thinking about population development. This means areas in which both population decline and growth occur, amenities complement each other and the existing social capital is more substantial and colourful. During her inaugural lecture Bettina Bock also wondered why policy is not focussing on population decline and urbanization in a joint and integral approach (Bock 2016).

Citizens and businesses usually do not take administrative perimeters into account and automatically look beyond the municipal boundaries. More and more facilities have a supralocal function: it is increasingly difficult to be a complete town. Medium-sized towns can therefore better seek cooperation with towns and villages within the region and therefore commit to a development from a complete town towards a complete region.

Van Dam et al (van Dam et al 2009) have indicated that they see a gradual concentration of facilities with also a number of facilities relocating to the city of Groningen over time. They name facilities such as theatres, medical facilities such as hospitals, specialized medical facilities and specialized nursing homes, the sub-top of education and commercial goods and services such as clothing and furniture. The urban districts² of Groningen and Leeuwarden can develop in conjunction with the surrounding rural area and smaller towns. Within this joint development, (financial) space can be created to effectively connect nature, landscape, economy and the residents. The construction between the UMCG (academic hospital) and the Ommelander Hospital, the role that Groningen and Leeuwarden both have been assigned the status of concentration cities (2011), and the implementation of a future-proof broadband network, are just a few steps in this direction.

Based on the four dimensions of Ed Wilding that are important for 'building' a resilient society, this means a regional development for the two dimensions 'Local economy' and 'Relationship between communities.' In doing so it is essential to use assets available in the region for stimulating wellbeing and social and economic development.

²An urban district - the urban area in the functional sense - consists of a larger metropolitan agglomeration and its surrounding area including smaller centres (towns, villages, hamlets) connected through multiple relationships with that agglomeration. These relationships relate to the daily traffic between home and workplace, relocation of households and businesses and the use of urban facilities. As such, the urban district can therefore be considered as a combination of regional labour-, residential and service area. Source: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/onze-diensten/methoden/begrippen?tab=s#id=metropolitan>

4 Pioneering with demographic transition and selective population decline in the Northern Netherlands

This afternoon I have taken you on a journey along different concepts and ideas that are, in my view, relevant for guiding and utilising population development in the Northern Netherlands. Earlier on I mentioned that I would reveal in a later stage of this speech which challenges I hope to take on during my professorship, in collaboration with residents, field partners and students. Having arrived at the final part of this inauguration, I must now put my money where my mouth is.

4.1 Age friendly environments

As a result of the Second Demographic Transition we are now experiencing, and through the effects of the unbalanced population decline, some regions are now confronted earlier and more urgently with the challenges that a rapidly ageing society entails. Because the developments are pushing through faster here and consequences are therefore more serious, the SER suggested in 2011 that regions facing population decline should serve as an example for regions that will experience population decline in the near future. For this reason, I would like to focus on this challenge within the research programme ‘Age-friendly environments.

The WHO states in relation to age-friendly environments that:

“An age-friendly world enables people of all ages to actively participate in community activities and treats everyone with respect, regardless of their age. It is a place that makes it easy for older people to stay connected to people that are important to them. And it helps people stay healthy and active even at the oldest ages and provides appropriate support to those who can no longer look after themselves.”

Based on this, we can define the following challenges:

- starting up design studies with professionals in the field in order to develop new housing units in which each stage of the life course can be accommodated, and which are inviting for inhabitants to start and maintain social contacts;
- finding ways, in co-creation with local users, students and professionals, in which the physical environment can be designed in such a way that, regardless of age, it can be used in a safe way, fits the needs of different target groups and

- invites healthy behaviour, for example by including blue spots³;
- searching, in consultation with residents, students and professionals, for the characteristics and the conditions for a social and physical environment in which appropriate support can be realized when it is needed.

The results of these searches can contribute to at least two of the four dimensions that Ed Wilding discerns for the construction of a resilient community, namely 'Healthy people' and an 'Inclusive, creative culture.' It goes without saying that inspiration will be sought through collaboration and coordination with existing organisations. Making connections with the NoorderRuimte theme 'Health and Wellbeing,' is obviously part of this process.

Within this research programme, research is already being carried out by a number of teacher-researchers in collaboration with field partners and students. Gert ter Haar for instance, is doing research into the possibilities of design study to be able to respond flexibly to changing housing needs, and as a method to connect spatial planning with regional or local identity. Wilma Wolf does research in collaboration with students from various schools and GPs working in the Northern Netherlands on the housing issues GPs there are struggling with. Given the importance of primary care in a declining and anticipating region this can facilitate them in making an informed choice. Joke Terlaak Poot is doing PhD research on homemaking by single households, currently the fastest growing household type, as you may know. Finally, Jaap Postma and his students are actively in search for the characteristics of age-friendly environments.

³ The Healthy Ageing Network Northern Netherlands (HANNN) has as one of its objectives the creation of the first 'manmade blue zone' in the Northern Netherlands. Within the manmade blue zone, HANNN distinguishes the so-called 'blue spots': locations that contribute to a blue zone because of their layout or character. <http://www.hannn.eu/bluezone/blue-spots>. The concept 'blue zone' was presented for the first time within the framework of research done by amongst others Michel Poulain and Gianni Pes focussing on inhabitants of the island of Sardinia. Poulain M.; Pes G.M.; Grasland C.; Carru C.; Ferucci L.; Baggio G.; Franceschi C.; Deiana L. (2004). "Identification of a Geographic Area Characterized by Extreme Longevity in the Sardinia Island: the AkEA study". *Experimental Gerontology*. 39 (9): 1423-1429. This outcome has made other researchers curious about the reasons for this development. In 2009, in Albert Lea, located in Minnesota, the project AARP/Blue Zones was launched. The aim of the project was to help people age healthy through small changes in their daily lives. Resources that were used for this purpose were: stimulating an active lifestyle (participating in organized walks, a community garden, etc), healthier eating habits (including eating more regional products) and social interaction.

4.2 Socio-economic vitality

The way in which population decline and its effects manifest themselves are place and time-related. The same applies to the way in which unbalanced population decline should be guided and utilised. In 2011 the SER stated that entrepreneurship and engaged citizenship are of crucial importance for building vitality (translated into English from: SER, 2011 p.106). This SER statement is translated into my research programme ‘Centres of socio-economic vitality.’ Based on the previously mentioned four dimensions important for ‘building’ a resilient community, ‘Inclusive, creative culture,’ ‘Local economy’ and ‘Relations between communities’ are especially relevant within the framework of this program. Furthermore the connection to ‘Age-friendly environments’ is made through the fourth dimension ‘Healthy people’. Questions relevant for this research program are:

- What are the centres of socio-economic vitality in the Northern Netherlands?
- How do these centres of socio-economic vitality contribute to the resilience and liveability of the region and what role can culture play in this?
- What is needed for facilitating, and if possible, strengthening the resiliency and liveability in areas facing or anticipating population decline in the Northern Netherlands?
- What role can transboundary (region and nation) thinking play in these matters?
- Is it possible to develop new centres of socio-economic vitality in areas facing or anticipating declining population in the Northern Netherlands, using social capital and other regionally and locally available assets?

Again for these research questions, are ample opportunities for collaboration, again clustering around the NoorderRuimte themes ‘Earthquakes’, ‘Health and Wellbeing’ and ‘Sustainability and Abundance’.



Within the research program ‘Centres of socio-economic vitality’, research is currently being carried out by several teacher-researchers and students. For instance, Jannie Rozema and her students evaluate the values within the Cittaslow-concept and their impact on liveability and resilience in the future municipality of Westerwolde. Erzsi de Haan is doing her PHD research into success and failure factors of citizen initiatives in the Northern Netherlands, and Marielle Bovenhoff is – together with her students and residents of the Paddepoel neighbourhood – looking into the concept of creating value in construction and renovation projects. Furthermore, a large group of students from different schools and study years are researching how abandoned farmhouses as part of the regions cultural heritage can contribute to building a local identity, and evaluate the advisability and potential for reuse and redevelopment of that heritage.

4.3 EDRiT and ‘Create Change’; the innovation workshop as method and intervention

Residents, organisations and governments are already involved in many inspirational projects focussing on liveability, and in the meantime experimenting with the transfer of responsibilities. This makes it even more interesting for us to be able to see on the spot what works and why it works there.

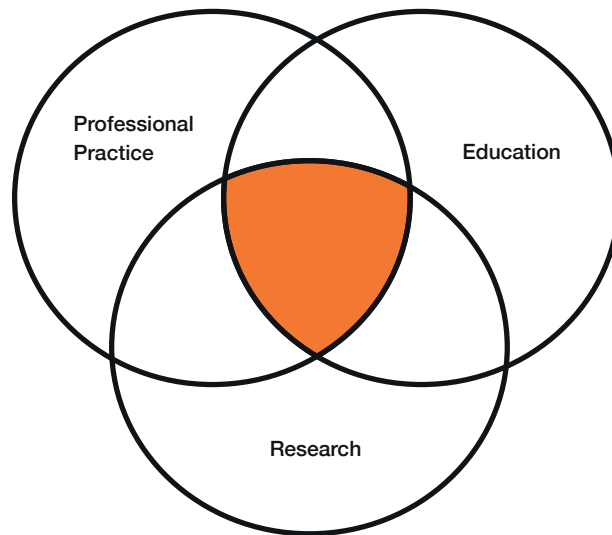
Albert Einstein once stated: *“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”* Here, I would like to use these words as a plea for a truly interdisciplinary, intersectional and international way of working and thinking through disciplines, through the structural layers of education and between stakeholder groups, and across borders. The most suitable instrument for this is the Innovation Workshop (Cremers, 2015). An IWP is a hybrid learning environment formed by three or more partners from different fields (partners from education/research, business, government and/or social organisations).

An Innovation Workshop is a place where innovation can develop at the interface of disciplines, visualized in orange in figure 6. I want to enrich this model by adding a fourth segment, i.e. the residents of a region. These residents can be volunteers, but also entrepreneurs or directors. Furthermore, I want the IWP to be transboundary from an international perspective. This way one can also benefit from the knowledge and experience built up elsewhere in Europe.

The emergence of an IWP stems from a social urgency, such as the one I have described above. The challenges and the questions formulated before, now act as the basic principles for setting up two IWPs called EDRiT (Eems Dollard Region in Transition) and ‘Create Change’; both working within an international context. For instance in EDRiT, collaboration takes place with researchers, education, social

organisations, businesses and governments from Ost-Friesland (Germany). For 'Create Change', collaboration is sought with educational institutes, residents and organisations in South Karelia (Finland), Dumfries and Galloway (Scotland) and the Harz (Germany).

Figure 6: Schematic representation of an Innovation Workshop (IWP)



Source: Cremers, P.H.M. *Handreiking Innovatiewerkplaatsen*. Groningen: Hanze Hogeschool Groningen, 2015.

For EDRiT it means that within the EDR-border region research, education and the working field are connected on location, focussing on questions that are brought forward by society itself. The fact that some developments at least in part are very similar on both sides of the border, but are anticipated and commented upon in their own specific context, creates an interesting comparison of situations and of good and bad practises. In addition, students can gain international experience at a short distance from their school, and in doing so can contribute to the creation of new social capital as well. As a result the IWP is, besides a new method, also a potentially valuable intervention in a region experiencing declining population, and in that capacity worthy for study and evaluation. In the context of EDRiT, research projects have emerged that study the characteristics of Age-friendly environments, the influence of Cittaslow on the perceived liveability and resilience in the region, and the potential use and function of abandoned agricultural buildings.

To form the basis of the innovation workshop ‘Create Change’, the professorships ‘Demographic Transition & Environment’ and ‘Image in Context’ of the Hanze University Groningen, have put their hands together, following a German example. The basic principle is that students from creative disciplines, coming from different European countries, start up projects with residents and regional organisations in regions with declining population through exchange trajectories during the last year of their studies. Based on for instance regional history and local stories, customs, opportunities and liveability issues in rural centres, students start working from the added perspective of their own cultural background. Inspired by the needs, questions, problems and concept solutions of regional residents and organisations in the country they are visiting, they start developing their own project, presentation or visualization. Preparing for the arrival of the students, guiding students and the processes of co-creation are, in addition to the tangible results of the process, a tool to advance regional cohesion and to strengthen social capital. Next to an inspiring method, this IWP to can become a potentially successful intervention.

As you can tell: guidelines have been set out, activities appointed and projects developed with and for residents, for the professional field and for the students. This is the way I would like to make my professorship work, with inhabitants, organisations and students building a responsive region together.

*I thank you for your attention.
No sooner said than done.*

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3 Illustrations

- Illustration on page 9: “Demographic Transition in Asia.” East Asia Forum V No.1 (January-March 2013)
- Illustration on page 12: Marmolejo, M. “The Global Demographic Opportunity of our Time.” Globalisation. Opportunities & Implications (November 2013) <http://www.understandglobalization.com/2013/11/19/the-global-demographic-opportunity-of-our-time/>
- Illustration on page 21: <http://www.taniaellis.com/blog/the-new-pioneers-case-of-the-month-social-return-on-investment/>
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