Rural population decline in the Dutch planning system

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A.M van Maarschalkerweerd
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University: Blekinge Institute of Technology – Karlskrona

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Author: A.M. (Anne) van Maarschalkerweerd

Student number: Anvf10

P-Number: 880503 – T161

Supervisor: J.E. Nilsson
Abstract

Rural areas are characterized by changing developments including population decline. Therefore population decline is adopted within several planning documents to respond on the population decline in the affected areas. This Master thesis sets out to analyze how population decline is addressed in planning documents in the declining rural areas of the Netherlands. Population decline is analyzed by examining official statistics of the case study of the rural region Zeeuws Vlaanderen. On the basis of these results a qualitative content analysis of the planning documents is conducted to examine to what extent the planning documents are connected to the regional development. According to the statistical analyses, there is a need for a local response on population decline, while within the planning documents a regional strategy is chosen. Therefore it is concluded that a discrepancy exists between the current population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen and the displayed population decline according to the planning documents. Moreover, based on the analysis of the planning documents the Dutch planning system is elaborated and criticized.
Summary

Rural areas are characterized by changing developments rather caused by processes or trends that occur in society (urban as well as rural environment). The mobility of people is increasing, including commuting, migration, tourism and recreation. Moreover, rural areas are characterized by a more and more urban character. This change in the rural landscape in turn affects out-migration and immigration. Young people are migrating out of the rural areas; whereas a new group of (pre-) retirees are moving in some rural areas. Nevertheless, there is an implicit recognition by researchers that rural outmigration continuous and that depopulation will remain in the rural areas.

Population decline entails a lot of new developments; the changing age structure and migration has direct consequences for the labour supply, education and facilities. Due to decrease in the demand for facilities, e.g. shops and hospitals close down. Moreover, due to the ageing population, the housing demand is changing. Therefore, several action plans are formulated by governments to respond on the population decline in the affected areas.

This thesis is an elaboration of population decline in the rural areas of the Netherlands by a case study analysis of Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Within the thesis the characteristics of population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen are examined by analysing the current situation within the region and an analysis of the planning documents. The next question therefore is central in the thesis:

How is population decline addressed in planning documents in the declining rural areas of the Netherlands?

On a regional level Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by a stagnating population with an ageing population and young adults moving out of the region. While on a municipal level, the municipalities of Sluis and Terneuzen are characterized by a decline, the municipality of Hulst is characterized by stagnation.

In order to understand how population decline is addressed in the planning documents. The planning documents regarding population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen are elaborated by a qualitative content analysis. The main findings of the analysis of the planning documents are that population decline is addressed on a regional level and therefore the differences between the municipalities and thus the current situation are not taken into account in the planning documents. Moreover, the documents are focused on prognoses instead the current situation (planners’ approach).

The conclusion of the thesis therefore is that although consequences and measures of population decline are addressed in the planning documents, there is a discrepancy between the current population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen and the population decline addressed in the planning documents.

Furthermore, this discrepancy between the planning documents and the current situation can be explained, by the Dutch planning system. This planning system is based on providing guidelines in a top down system and therefore suggests that the local level is waiting for guidelines on provincial level and the provincial level is waiting for the guidelines from the national level.
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Zeeuws Vlaanderen is the area where I originally come from. Until my 8th I grew up in Philippine. Unfortunately, we moved to a more central located municipality in the Netherlands due to better employment opportunities, education, facilities, etc. Therefore I am familiar with and attracted to the phenomenon of population decline in rural areas and decided to use this interest for my Master thesis. Moreover, a lot of attention is given lately to population decline by the Dutch government and the media.

This thesis examines how population decline is addressed in planning documents in the declining rural areas of the Netherlands. This research is therefore based on a case study of Zeeuws Vlaanderen. With my thesis I hope to contribute to a further understanding of population decline in combination with Dutch planning on the basis of the results of Zeeuws Vlaanderen.

Let me express my gratefulness to my supervisor Prof. Jan-Evert Nilsson for his directions, assistance, and guidance. And besides, I would like to thank my tutor Olof Woltil for his enthusiasm and feedback during my research. Their inspiration helped me a lot during the process of developing the thesis.
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Acronyms

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

CEC: Commission of the European Communities

Ministerie VROM: Ministerie van Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieu (Ministry of Housing, Planning and Environment)
1. Introduction

Most European countries are characterized, as the backside of the urbanisation, by a longstanding migration flow of people from the rural areas to urban areas. Although migration flows are visible since the existence of rural and urban areas, the industrialization and the subsequent economic growth had a major influence on the rural exodus. The first transformation from agriculture to an industrial industry took place from the mid 18th to early 19th century in Western Europe. The United Kingdom was the first country in the world to industrialize. The second industrialization took place in the mid 19th century and stemmed from the invention of the steam engine, internal combustion engine, electricity and the construction of canals, railways and electric power lines. Cities expanded enormously because of the two industrialization periods and attracted a large labour force from rural areas. The innovation in manufacturing processes and therefore the increased productivity in agriculture reduced the employment opportunities in agriculture. Due to the limited amount of arable land and the increase in productivity, young people moved to the cities (Bowler et al., 1992).

The role of agriculture as an economic base in the rural areas gradually turned into more service sector based rural area. The de-industrialization (e.g. UK 1960) caused a shift from manufacturing to the personal service sectors. This also marks the beginning of the transformation of the rural areas. The rural area seemed suitable for a local personal service market. The region policies enhanced this creation of job opportunity in non-urban areas. Moreover, the mobility of people increased, including commuting, migration, tourism and recreation. Lifestyles started to change, people became wealthier and a growing number of people wanted to ‘escape’ from the chaotic full with smog and crime city life (Bowler et al., 1992). Also the retirement migration contributed to the increase in the number of people living in rural areas. The development spill over from the urban areas to the rural hinterlands, created demands for housing, changing the type of service provision, and having environmental and social impacts (rural lifestyle). Many rural areas benefited from the urban areas due reductions in transportation and communication costs. This increased the accessibility of rural areas with high-valued natural amenities still located near the larger cities. The areas located close to towns and cities faced a population increase due to net inward migration (Van Dam, 1995).

Moreover, the urbanization process is characterized by decline and growth of the urban centre in different phases. The first urbanization phase is during the industrialization mid 19th century. This phase is characterized by an expanding city centre in terms of population as in the geographical size of the area. Second is the suburbanization phase. This phase shows a growing population in new settlements in the periphery of the cities and a loss of population in the inner city. The third phase consists of a counter-urbanization, with a small decrease in the population in the urban city and fringe, and a growth in the rural areas. The fourth re-urbanization phase shows a recovering of the population in the city centre and fringe zone. In short, the development of the rural area is inseparable from the development of the urban area and is even becoming more and more urbanized. Although these cycles show an inflow of population in the rural areas, the population growth is generally decreasing. Nevertheless, there is an implicit recognition by researchers that rural outmigration continuous and that depopulation will remain in the rural areas. As Weekley (1988, p.127) mentioned already ‘rural depopulation is no longer an easily recognisable part of the landscape... [but] it does exist.’ Between 80 and 90 percent of the population lives in urban places.
and cities and towns are still slightly growing. Over whole Europe, a annual loss of 1.5% is expected in these more developed rural areas (Frey & Zimmer, 2001).

Population decline in rural areas have to face its consequences on for example health care, the education system, and private systems (Stockdale, 2002). Therefore, several action plans are formulated by governments to respond on the population decline in the affected areas.

On June 18, 2009, Minister Van der Laan appointed population decline to be a Dutch national phenomenon and therewith put it on the political agenda. Zuid-Limburg was the first region affected by population decline, resulting in empty houses, schools and shops closing down and delocalisation. The regions eastern-Groningen and Zeeuws Vlaanderen also have to deal with this development. According to the prognosis of CBS, up to 2025 especially the suburbs of the Netherlands are expected to deal with population decline. These municipalities are characterized by a weak housing market and are economically and socially vulnerable. Population decline further erodes this vulnerability of the poor neighbourhoods, districts and cities (CBS, 2011). This thesis examines how the causes and consequences of the population decline in the Netherlands are related to the published policy documents regarding decline. The following research question will be answered within this thesis:

*How is population decline addressed in planning documents in the declining rural areas of the Netherlands?*

The aim of this thesis is to examine how population decline is addressed in planning documents in the declining Dutch rural areas. Therefore a case study of a declining rural area in the Netherlands is chosen. This research will give insight in and a better understanding of the development of a declining rural area. Moreover, it is possible to examine to what degree the planning documents actual reflects the existing population decline. Conclusions can be drawn which causes and measures are outlined within the planning documents and if there is a discrepancy between the rural development and the planning documents.

In order to investigate, the chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the thesis are based on a literature review to get a better understanding of rural development and population decline. This theoretical framework is an eclectic approach because of the amount of theories. The following questions will be answered: ‘What are the theories of rural development in the modern welfare state (chapter 3)? What is demographic population decline (chapter 4) and what are the consequences (chapter 5)?’ With the basis of this theoretical part, it is possible to focus on the development of the case study. Chapter 6 contains an introduction of the case study. To examine the development of the rural area an analysis based on official statistics is conducted in chapter 7. By using population statistic the characteristics of the regions can be examined and backed up with research finding. In order to understand how population decline has been addressed, a qualitative content analysis of the planning documents is made to compare this to the outcome of the statistical analysis. Chapter 8 therefore provides an introduction of the planning documents used in the thesis and chapter 9 contains the analysis of the planning documents along with a critical discussion. In chapter 10 the conclusion is drawn on the basis of the research question.

Due to the character of the case study and the use of the planning documents, this research contributes to a further understanding of population decline in the Dutch planning system in relation to the planning documents.
2. Methodology

Most of the EU countries are facing population decline caused by demographic changes and migration patterns. Relatively the amount of people above the 55 years-old is growing as a share of the population, while there is a decline in the amount of young adults (20-39). Population decline entails a lot of new developments; it has consequences for the health care, pension system and economic development. Besides, the changing age structure and migration has direct consequences for the labour supply. Especially rural areas are characterized by population decline and have to face these consequences (Bucher & Mai, 2005). Therefore, several action plans are formulated by governments to respond on the population decline in the affected areas. Within this thesis the characteristics of a declining region are observed. Besides, this thesis examines how those characteristics are related to the different policy documents within the region. The next research question therefore is central in the thesis:

How is population decline addressed in planning documents in the declining rural areas of the Netherlands?

In the first part of the thesis a literature review was conducted to get a better understanding of rural development. Moreover, the theoretical framework is based on an eclectic approach instead of one ground theory because of the amount of theories existing in the field of rural planning. This method was chosen, because it fitted best to the purpose of this examination. Moreover, main statements of relevance for the review topic are identified and analyzed critically.

In the second part an analysis of a rural area within the Netherlands is conducted. Within this chapter, the development of Zeeuws Vlaanderen is examined regarding to an analysis of formal statistics. The analysis of the rural area is based on interpretation of statistics within the documents and the collected statistics from the CBS (Bureau of Statistics Netherlands). By using population statistics the characteristics of the regions can be examined. During the analysis besides the statistics of population, also the several processes of migration (ageing, out-migration young adults, retirement transition etc) examined in the theoretical framework are taking into account.

On the basis of these statistics, in the third part of the thesis, a qualitative content analysis of the planning documents is conducted to examine to what degree the planning documents reflect the population decline. The analysis of the planning documents is based on the propositions raised during the analysis of the statistics of the rural area. Due to the propositions the analysis of the planning documents is defined. Which consequences are addressed and what measures are proposed. The planning documents of the local, provincial and national level are examined to investigate if there is a discrepancy between the rural development and the planning documents. It is assumed that these documents illustrate how to look upon the problem and how this is managed by the government.

The region which will be examined is Zeeuws Vlaanderen (the Netherlands). The region is further elaborated in chapter 6. The region of Zeeuws Vlaanderen is chosen because of the remote location in relation to the centre of the Netherlands and the growing attention for the population decline in the media and among the governments. The case study is also chosen because of the planning system in the Netherlands. The planning system may influence how governments deal with
The planning system of the Netherlands (the Nordic Model)

According to the Committee of the European Communities (CEC, 1997), the Dutch planning system is one of the most elaborate examples of the comprehensive integrated approach to planning in which ‘plans are more concerned with the coordination of spatial than economic developments’. The Dutch national planning is working with indicative national policy documents, rather than working with master plans. Statutory plans are the responsibility of the provinces and municipalities and only municipalities have the power to make plans that provide grounds for the refusal of planning permits (Faludi, 2005 & CEC, 1997). To integrate policies of higher levels of government into the plans and policies of lower level of government, a lot of consultation and persuasion takes place. Due to funding for planning at all levels, the central government retains influence. Dutch planning is planned which means that nothing can be developed if it is not in accordance with the local land-use plan. Therefore, planning is strongly influenced by informal ways of using formal rules in practice (administrative pragmatism).

Local authorities, particularly the provinces, play a key role in planning. On the one hand the National Spatial Strategy gives a stronger role to the lower levels of government and reduces the number of regulation imposed by central government on others. There is broader scope for local and regional governments, social organizations, private actors and citizens in the planning process. On the other hand, according to the National Spatial Strategy, national and provincial governments are able to intervene more forcefully when national or international interests are at stake (e.g. biodiversity, national landscapes). Therefore Dutch planning is characterized by an alternation between a top-down and a bottom-up approach (Vink & Van der Burg, 2006) (Zonneveld, 2006) (Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment, 2006) (Nadin & Stead, 2008).

The development analysis of the case study is primarily based on statistics. Due to different migration and birth rate flows and changes in people their preferences and lifestyles (which are examined in the theoretical chapter), statistics covering a long time period are necessary (e.g. more than 30 years). However, due to a merge in 2003 of several municipalities in the case study, data on migration is not always available for a long time period. However, the data available provides a clear overview of the migration patterns of the region.

Moreover, this research is based on an elaboration of one case study in the Netherlands, while several case studies within the Netherlands would have strengthened the results. However, although the research on a specific region, some conclusions based on the development in rural areas can be made for rural areas within the Netherlands. Moreover, it is even possible to make assumptions about rural population decline in Europe. It is assumed that migration patterns, birth and dead rates and changing preferences and lifestyles of people in rural areas are similar within the European Union.

Moreover, the Dutch planning system is elaborated on the occasion of population decline. It is not possible to come up with generalisation about the planning system. Therefore research in the direction of the Dutch planning system in combination with planning documents is suggested.
This research is based on the empirical analysis of official statistics and the qualitative content analysis of the different planning documents. Therefore the following hypotheses are assumed:

- There is a discrepancy between the ongoing development and the focus in the planning document.
- Planning documents are more focused on future possibilities instead of taking into account the present situation and consequences.
- The planning documents are based on the existing differences within Zeeuws Vlaanderen.

The research question will be answered by an analysis consisting of three steps. First of all there will be a description of rural development and the definition of population decline, which will be defined out of relevant literature on population decline. This is followed by a description of the development case study based on official statistics and corresponding literature about the rural area. The last part of the thesis will examine the planning documents and how population decline is addressed in these documents. This research gives insight in and a better understanding of the development of a declining rural area. Therefore the results of this thesis will contribute to a general understanding how challenges like population decline are addressed in Dutch planning, due to a further understanding of the implementation of challenges in planning documents. This research is based on the perspective of an actual situation in the rural area to the examination of the planning documents. This is in contrast to the focus of the impact of a planning document and thus the planning system on the development of a rural area. Therefore it is possible to examine if the planning document responds on the existing situation and the development and how population decline is addressed within the planning documents. Moreover, the results of the research will give inside if there is a discrepancy between the rural development and the planning document. Due to the analysis of the planning documents, assumptions are made in the direction of the Dutch planning system.

Within this research two different approaches are taken into consideration to analyse the planning documents. In case of the approach of a researcher a problem is described and a description of the current situation is provided. This approach is problem oriented and is not based on solutions. Moreover, the approach is often based on raising awareness for the topic and does not provide solutions because it is unclear what will happen in the future.

Contrasting with the researcher perspective is a planner’s approach. A planner approach is based on solutions and is mostly focused on pro-active government intervention. With pro-active governing the government tries plan ahead of the actual event, to be prepared for it (in this case to reduce the impact of population decline). Therefore the planning is often based on prognosis instead of taken into account the actual development of for example the region. Moreover, the two approaches are expressed as follows:

**Approach research:** The situation in the real world \(\rightarrow\) action plan

**A planner’s approach:** Action plan \(\rightarrow\) impact on the real world
3. Rural Development

Within this chapter rural development is elaborated regarding the theories of several researchers to provide an overall framework of rural development. This chapter elaborates the process of urbanization of the rural areas in conjunction with rural outmigration of the youth and in-migration of the (pre-) retirees. The chapter ends by a discussion on rural diversity.

3.1 Urbanization of rural areas

The clear distinction between rural and urban began to blur during the twentieth century. The present and emerging situation in peripheral rural regions is more and more characterized as ‘urbanized rural areas’. This urbanization process of the rural area has several components. The urban characteristics of the economy and the labour market are becoming more obvious in the rural areas, while at the same time rural characteristics are still important when it comes to the lifestyle of the population and the housing conditions. The urban labour characteristic for example is employment in non-agricultural activities and services. Besides, the preferences of the new rural inhabitants are focused on the more urbanized or suburbanized housing standard.

This urbanisation of rural areas is of influence on the migration between rural and urban areas and the demographic change of the rural or peripheral areas. Wehrwein already suggested in 1942, that ‘the rural–urban fringe was the area of transition between well recognised urban land uses and the area devoted to agriculture (p.53).’ The urban landscape has a spill-over effect on the peri-urban and rural areas, which replace the rural culture with urban culture. This confirms the blur distinction between rural and urban (Cloke and Goodwin, 1992).

According to Lars Olof Persson (1990, p.439), the definition of an urbanized rural area is: ‘a type of region where there is an acceptable population base for most types of daily basic services and an ordered – even if limited – wage labour market, although at the same time conditions are poor for advanced services for both households and businesses.’ This definition is based on Swedish conditions of smaller places or other population centres (2000 – 10.000 inhabitants) with a commuting area which is located relatively far (>30 km) from bigger settlements. These remote areas with scattered elements and households are completely dependent on their own natural resources, or sometimes own enterprise. This is in contrast with the urbanized rural areas, which are based on large local labour markets.

In the international literature, the modern Western urbanized rural areas are not only described as postmodern, but also as a post-productive countryside (e.g. Boyle & Halfacree 1998; Ilbery & Bowler 1998). This post-productive countryside lost some of its traditional dominant economic functions (especially agriculture) to a more consuming and protection space e.g. nature, landscape, recreation and tourism, other non-agriculture businesses and housing (Huigen, 1996). There are three economic relative important sectors in rural areas; first, the rise of the ‘rural’ industry. The Anglo-Saxon literature speaks of an urban-rural shift of industrial activity and employment from urban to rural areas. The second area is the employment in the recreational and tourism sector. The development towards a leisure society has not gone unnoticed in the countryside and increased the amount of jobs in this sector. Finally, the third area contains the service sector. Even in rural communities the commercial services are by far the most important economic sector for employment. The growth of
the service sector has a spill over effect on the surrounding rural areas, which can be explained by a combination of trends: increased mobility, increased telecommunications opportunities, in the increased number of small businesses (especially single companies) and the increased importance of ‘soft’ location factors (such as the quality of the residence). Research in the United States and Great Britain shows, that especially the outlying rural areas constitutes an attractive business location for small businesses in the service sector. The living and working are often combined in the premises (Clark, 2000).

Holmes distinguished three driving forces behind the recent transition to a multifunctional countryside; first, the agriculture capacity, second, the growing importance of amenity values and thirdly the increased societal pressure for sustainability and conservation. Holmes (2006) describes this transition as: *at its core, the multifunctional transition involves a radical re-ordering in the three basic purposes underlying human use of rural space, namely production, consumption and protection. The transition can be characterized by a shift from formerly dominant production goals towards a more complex, contested, variable mix of production, consumption and protection goals* (Holmes 2006, p. 142 – 143). However, this development in the rural areas can have a different nature. The regional diversity is a characteristic of the postmodern countryside (Huigen, 1996).

### 3.2 Rural outmigration

Although research is done on the impacts of out-migration, according to some authors there is an over-emphasis on counter-urbanisation. Stockdale (2004, p167) outlines that *‘Out-migration, as a research topic, has been obfuscated by the counter-urbanisation trend, which has become virtually hegemonic in the literature as an explanation of rural change.’* Equivalently, Buller et al. (2003) argues that less attention has been paid to trends such as rural out-migration, migration between different rural areas and population replacement. Nevertheless, rural outmigration continuous and depopulation will remain in the rural areas.

In 1997, Ford et al came up with four categories of young people based on their preferences and expectations for staying or leaving rural England. The first category is the committed leavers. This category is characterized by the highly educated who move to further their studies. The reluctant stayers (the second group) are the less educated and less qualified individuals. Their lack of skills and employment experience constrains the desire to leave the rural area. The group of the reluctant leavers prefer staying home because of their close network with family and friends. However, they are forced to migrate because of the absence of suitable local employment opportunities. And the last category is the committed stayers. This group has a strong sense of belonging to the rural community and will not migrate (Ford, 1997, Stockdale 2002).

There are several different migration approaches in the research field which have focussed on the deterministic or humanistic aspect of the migration process. The deterministic approach is focussed on migration as a response to particular circumstances, while in the humanistic approach the migrant is an active decision-maker. However, even more important seems to be the focus on life-course migration rather than the single migration. Ni Laoire (2000), for example, came up with evidence for the use of a biographical approach. Following Ni Laoire, migration is part of long-term biography formation. Life-course migration is based on the life trajectories of individuals or families with the aim to explain their movements between various statuses and roles. Moreover, migration choices
are linked to an individual’s life course. Therefore, according to Ni Laoire, life-course should be adopted in the research field (Ni Laoire, 2000).

However, the literature within this chapter is mostly based on Stockdale’s research. First of all her research is based on description of formal researches in the field of rural out-migration. Second of all, Stockdale has added value to the previous research.

The research of Stockdale (2004) is based on the in-flows and counter-urbanisation and explores the consequences for rural communities of outmigration. Moreover, Stockdale was besides the humanistic approach, also focused on the life-course migration. In her research Stockdale distinguishes different types of rural areas, because of the variation in the nature of contemporary outmigration. The selection of the Scottish case areas were based on ‘remote rural’ (North Lewis are of the western Isles) and ‘less remote rural’ (Roxburgh district of the Scottish Borders region). These regions were chosen because of the long history of out-migration and depopulation. To examine the outmigration in this area, household surveys and a database of school leavers from the local authority was used and letters were sent to national and regional newspapers (Stockdale, 2004).

Stockale (2002) presents a typology of contemporary rural out-migration by identifying seven categories of out-migrants; employment, housing, education, training, quality of life, personal and others. By using the data relating to the migrant’s motivations for leaving, their age at the time of departure, and their choice of first destination, it is possible to construct a migrant typology (Stockdale, 2002). The category with the highest score was the category to migrate for education. This category involves young adults or the ‘career aspirers’. According to Stockdale (2002, p.355) this are ‘school leavers progressing to further and higher education, which by necessity sees them relocate to urban centres’. Moreover, Stockdale (2002) argues that to acquire the human capital, young adults need to migrate from the rural area (because of the low opportunities). More often this group does not return to their rural area because of the lack of suitable job opportunities or because of the lower paid work that was not commensurate with their enhanced levels of human capital. Figure 1 shows the result of this development. The location of further education opportunities (in this case in Scotland) is located in the larger towns and cities. Therefore it is necessary for rural students to migrate. This school leavers group equates to the ‘committed leavers’ in Ford’s research. Moreover, Stockdale notes that the mean characteristics of this group are that they fulfilled the educational potential and expectations. Even the ones who found it difficult to leave the rural area migrated out in the end (Stockdale, 2002).

Figure 1: comparison between development rural areas and metro areas (Source: ESPON 1.1.4)
The second high score group are the people who want to migrate for better employment opportunities. According to Stockdale there is generally low incidence of employment opportunities in rural areas. Adults are leaving the peripheral areas to move in the ‘escalator region’. An escalator region is an attractive location for the youth, which provides the opportunities to develop the own career faster than in other regions (Fielding, 1992, p. 10). Important to notice is the fact that according to Stockdale, people migrate for better employment opportunities. The results of Stockdale show that these leavers are often older males. According to Stockdale, the people in this group have been employed in the rural area. Changes in their employment were a reason to move out the rural area. This group fits the ‘labour market forcees’.

However, within this typology several variations are noticeable. The ‘single labour market force’ is the group that leaves school with few qualifications and starts to work in a local shop nearby but not in the same rural region. This last change will force him to leave the rural area and to live on its own. After a couple years the person will join larger firms and work his way up with the result that the person will move to the urban centre. Some within this group even decide to go to university at the age around 30 (Stockdale, 2002). Another variation visible in the ‘labour market forcees’ is the group of the ‘family labour market force’. In this group migration decision are even harder because a whole family is involved. In this case often one of the partners commute weekly to the urban area, until the employment of both partners (if both are employed) and the educational considerations of the children are favourable and they decide to migrate out of the rural area. The group of the ‘temporary labour market force’ are characterized by a group that in contrast returns home after a while. This group often lacks academic qualifications and seek for manual and semi-manual employment. They are characterized by temporary migration until they secure a permanent position or set up home with a partner (Stockdale, 2002).

The personal motivations for people to migrate generally comprise females under the age of 25. The new region is characterized by a better local labour market and the opportunity to climb up the social ladder. This has had the effect of leaving rural and peripheral regions devoid of valuable human capital. Also this group can be divided in two different variations. The first variation is the ‘home community escapees’. This group feels claustrophobic in their rural region and tend the move out. The second group is characterized as the ‘escapees through education’. This group differs from the home community escapees because this group wants to explore the wider world instead of the surrounding areas. Also migration for education includes this group. The combination of both makes the differences between the other groups. The link to the Ford’s research in this case is that this group would fit his typology of the ‘committed leaver’ (Stockdale, 2002).

Moreover, the last group Stockdale identifies is the group of ‘non-decision-makers’. Mostly this group leaves the area because their family moves out when they were a child, or older migrants who moved as a family unit. However, this group, unlike the other groups, likely to relocate to another rural area (in this case in Scotland) instead of the urban area. This group ‘the quality of life seekers’ is often characterized by persons migrating as a household unit as a response to changing housing needs, specific facilities and services needs, or general quality-of-life aspirations (Stockdale, 2002).

This broad classification of out-migration from rural areas provides a clear typology which characterizes the rural out-migration flows. Especially the outline of the personal negotiations between different influencing factors for different migrations groups in rural areas is suitable for the
overall picture of rural migration. Figure 1 outlines this outmigration and elaborates the increasing regional polarisation. Although the research of Stockdale took place in Scotland, it is suitable for rural migration patterns in other parts of Europe. However, Stockdale didn’t take into consideration the long-distance migrants and the return migration. Moreover, new employment often is a prerequisite for migration, but cannot been seen as a cause for people to migrate. In this case it can be said that Stockdale overemphasize employment and does not take the personal reasons into account.

3.3 Counter Urbanisation

Since the early 1970s there is an identification of the non–metropolitan population turnaround. This population growth in the more rural areas appears throughout western countries, although there is variety in intensity and scale. During the 1990s research suggested the challenge of a ‘new’ turnaround. This new turnaround is not only focused on the in-migration into the direct situated peri-urban areas but indicates also the more distant peri-urban/rural areas due to the increased ‘urbanization’ of the rural area. (Lewis & Maund, 1976 p. 17, Ford, 1999).

Davis et al. (1994, p. 45) stated that ‘it is the fastest growing component of the continental landscape, with nearly 60 million people residing there’. Many of the explanations of rural growth are based on the premise that the migrants to the rural areas are searching for a more pleasant residential environment (Boyle, 1994). The 1990s is characterized by a widespread rejection of urban life by middle-class professional and service sections of the population. This resulted in preferences for the rural living and personal investment strategies. However, there is no satisfactory explanation why some locations are more attractive than others (Boyle, 1994).

According to Rees et al. (1996) there has been a consistent net out-migration of the 16-29 age cohorts from the rural areas, while those groups between the 45 and the pensionable age have had the highest levels of net migration into those same low density areas. Moreover, the demographic change in this case also needs to taken into consideration. People around the age of 60 now a day, form a larger part of the population in the western countries than children under the age of 16. An increase of the group with the age between 45 and 60 is expected, while the 30-44 age groups are decreasing. This prospect is in line with the migration at different ages to the rural areas.

The peri-urban region can be conceptualised as a ring-shaped zone in which growth processes generate net in-migration from the inner and outer sides (figure 2).
The explanation of the turnaround has become increasingly difficult as there are two shifts in the population turnaround. The ‘new’ turnaround of the 1990s is unlike the turnaround in the 1970’s, characterized by population growth becoming spatially concentrated in specific non-metropolitan locations. According to Ford (1999) there is a distinction in the growth processes of the peri-urban area; suburbanisation, counter-urbanisation, population retention and centripetal migration. Each of these growth processes act differently on population groups. Ford (1999) distinguished six key indicators regarding migration patterns to the peri-urban areas. The first indicator is the origin of migrants and shows that **Suburbanisation** is characterized by the in-migration from the metropolitan area to adjacent, accessible peri-urban locations. Within this area it is still possible to commute and have social linkages with the urban area. The ‘daily urban system’ still exists for the migrants in the suburban area and the nature of the area is similar to those of the nearby city (Maher & Stimson, 1994). Stillwell et al. defined this suburbanisation process as *'the movement of population from the densely populated urban cores into the immediately surrounding areas, where housing is built’* (1992, p. 120).

The **counter-urbanisation**, in contrast, is characterized by the migration to the smaller centres and localities beyond the existing metropolitan boundaries (Flowerdew and Boyle, 1992). This area does not experience that spill-over effect from the urban area and is based on longer-distance migration from larger centres (Champion & Atkins, 1996). The link with the city is reduced and often people shift in both their residence and employment location. People are attracted by these places because of the rural idyll. The migrants replace their urban lifestyle with a more rural one.

Moreover, in-migration from outlying rural areas to the more rural areas is also a characteristic of this area (**centripetal migration**). Moreover, the connectivity with the city, as already said, is in the case of suburbanisation more visible than in with the counter-urbanisation. *The motivation of the migrant is* essential in research to understand the population growth in the rural area. According to Ford, the replace of an urban lifestyle for a better quality living environment is characteristic for the counter-urbanisation (**amenity value**) (Ford, 1999). Moreover, the counter-urbanites place is less focuses on rapid and frequent travel and the accessibility to the urban area is not a necessity.
Counter-urbanites also are more likely to move to well-established but unspoiled country towns for the rural lifestyle in contrast to the suburbanites who like to live in the more prosperous areas (residential development) (Ford, 1999).

3.4 Retirement Transition
Especially the migration of the retirees receives much attention in the literature, e.g. the retirement transition of Bures (1997). According to Bures, the pre–elderly migration patterns are significantly different from those of other age groups. The driving forces and the way of life of middle aged people and above cohort are significant different from those in the 20-30 age cohort. Adults in the middle age and above are becoming more aware of the daily problems of urban areas, crime, overcrowding and competition with ethnic and minority groups for housing. This problems cause them to move to more rural areas, while recreational opportunities attract them to specific destinations in rural areas (Stockdale, 2006).

Stockdale makes a distinction between the retired and the group before retiring. The retirement group is free of labour market considerations and more able to choose in line with their environmental and place preferences. Retirement migrants tend to move to warmer climates, smaller towns (rural areas) and from areas with higher to areas with lower living costs (Rees et al., 1996). The migration to warmer climates in western part of Europe is particularly visible from the northern European countries to small coastal municipalities along the Spanish and French coast.

The pre-retired group is longer bound to their working environment, although it is becoming easier to work at home (Stockdale, 2006).

The retirement transition concept is based on the behavioural changes affecting (pre-) retired age groups (Hayward et al., 1994). In the (pre-) retirement phase, attitudes to work, health, lifestyle and marital relations change (Lehr et al., 1998). According to Lewis & Maund (1976) the population process often is characterized by relatively wealthy people with middle-class lifestyle who wants to live in the rural area but continue working in the urban area (bridge jobs) before retiring. Especially after the children have left home, the middle aged and above are more open to change their old residence for a new residence in the rural area. Because of the personal mobility increase and the growing number of early retiring people (in combination with the decrease in children under the age of 16), the counter-urbanisation process goes beyond the ‘daily commuting range’. The more remote rural areas are also part of this in-migration of retired people (Lewis & Maund, 1976).

3.5 Rural diversity
The urbanisation of the rural areas has changed the rural landscape. Moreover, some rural areas are involved in the counter-urbanisation process while others remain declining. This spatial selectivity cannot only be explained by distance of the rural areas in relation to the urban centres. Especially the remote areas are characterized by an uneven rural development. According to the Commission of the European Communities it is an assumption that the location to urban areas and urban influences is an important explanation of the diversity of rural areas. However, according to Clark et al. (1989) and Huigen et al. (1992), the diversity of rural areas cannot only be explained by the proximity to urban centres, but different factors have to take into account. Cloke and Goodwin (1992), points this combination of factors and came up with three main groups of interrelated explanatory components:
1. Elements of economic restructuring: how attractive is the area to capital accumulation, under contemporary modes of regulation?

2. Elements of socio-cultural re-composition: how attractive is the area to those seeking the ‘rural experience’?

3. The role of the state: how and why should the state intervene to make rural places more attractive?

Those that are ‘seeking for the rural experience’ are attracted by typical characteristics that people relate with rurality. According to Cloke and Goodwin (1992) this are the ‘cultural issues of attractiveness and idyll’.

Features that might attract new residential activities are:

- The presence of an amenity rich environment with natural and scenic amenities
- Space
- Relatively low housing and land costs
- Openness
- Peace and quiet
- Clean and healthy air
- Traditional rural community atmosphere
- Safety, low crime rates (Cloke & Goodwin, 1992, p.321-336)

However, although different people are attracted by the rural area, this does not necessarily imply that these people will move permanently to rural locations. Some people want to combine the rural-urban lifestyle. Second homes in attractive rural areas are becoming more and more popular. Unfortunately a lack of comprehensive data in many western countries, and in the case studies, makes it hard to make generalisations about this topic. However, in general those second homes are located in presence of specific physical features such as sea, rivers, lake and mountains (Gallent & Tewdwr, 2001) (Person, 2011). Moreover, to examine a rural area, it is important to take into account the several features which attract people to the region and therefore makes the area for example more attractive than other surrounding areas.
4. Demographic change and rural areas

The consequence of out-migration can result in a depopulation of the rural area if also the natural change variation is declining. Therefore, it is also important to consider the natural change in the rural areas. Population change is the result of natural changes (the balance between births and deaths), and migratory movements (number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants to a specific region in a given period) (Van Dalen, 2008). This three are changing over time and shape the rural demographic pattern (Buller et al., 2003).

Figure 3: Demographic Transition (Source: Bucher & Mai, 2005)

In order to maintain a constant level of population (without taken into consideration migration), a fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman is necessary. However, in most European countries, the average birth rate is stabilized around the level of 1.8 to 2 children per woman (De Graaf, 2007). Moreover, the last century infant mortality fell and the average life expectancy has increased. In 2050 the life expectancy is expected to be around the 83 years (in comparison to 75 around 2005). The years after the Second World War are characterized by high birth rates than ever before. After this ‘baby boom’ the birth rate dropped dramatically which caused a decrease in the bottom of the population pyramid. This decrease can be explained by the fact that the number of women of reproductive age are increasingly diminishing. In contrast, the percentage of elderly started to grow (De Graaf, 2007). Moreover, both the number of young people aged 0-19 and 20-64 year olds significantly is reducing and will continue to decline in the future, while the proportion of over-65s is increasing (ageing) (Lutz, 2005). Therefore, Europe has entered a period of negative population momentum. This means that even if fertility would increase, the population (without migration and mortality change) would continue to shrink because of the ever decreasing number of young women will enter reproductive age (Lutz et al., 2003a).

Ageing is inextricably linked within the literature to population decline. Ageing can be seen as both cause and effect. Together with the declining fertility rate and the ageing population, the population structure in the rural area is changing. Therefore, demographic changes are of greater influence in the rural areas because of a change in the population pyramid.

Within the literature a distinction is made between population decline by the number of households and population decline of persons/groups. According to Van Dam et al. (2006) population decline is not only marked by a falling population, but there is also a decline if the number of households in the region decreases or if components of the population are declining. In this case there is a broader
The decrease in birth rate and the net migration is influenced by socio-cultural (individualisation, emancipation, etc.), economic development and planning. Due to state intervention (planning) places can be made more attractive. Therefore, besides the economic and social —cultural components, the planning component also influence the decrease in birth rate and the net migration. This is in line with the third of the three factors of rural attractiveness of Cloke and Goodwin (1992) (p. 18). In particular the socio-cultural developments affect population trends while economic development and planning influence migration (Van Dam et al., 2006).

Countermeasures to turn the population decline and ageing are on the one hand to establish a family friendly policy that encourages young couples to have more children. People have a hard time finding a balance between work and family life, this should be reduced. On the other hand, population development can be changed by migration. Therefore the national or regional level should attract
more migrants. However, it is very difficult to control the extent and structure of immigration in a favourable way. Moreover, demographic change cannot be reversed within a short time span; however it can be reduced using demographic instruments.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 5: Factors influencing demographic change
(Source: ESPON 1.1.4)
5. Consequences of rural population decline

According to the theoretical framework, especially migration plays an extremely important role in determining the demographic structure in the rural areas. As has been illustrated in the previous chapters, rural areas are characterized by the exodus of young adults in combination with the arrival of retirees. These processes have certain consequences for the development of the rural area which has to be taken into account. One of the main consequences is the increase in regional disparity with economic developments in particular.

Moreover, the spatial implications of population decline cannot be dissociated from the causes and appearances of demographic decline (Van Dam et al., 2006). This chapter provides the implications of population decline by examining the effects of population decline in the housing, the environment, the level of amenities, mobility, the regional economy, environmental and spatial management. Likewise, this chapter takes into consideration the impact on the demand of space and the use of space. Not only the negative implications are discussed, but also the positive effects of population decline are examined.

5.1 Housing

The changing age structure of the population, a falling number of households and the changing size of the households affect the demand side of the housing market. A change in the housing takes place, in quantitative terms (number of dwellings) as in qualitative terms (housing type and size), when the households are becoming smaller and the number of households is decreasing in the region. Therefore the housing must be adapted to the future housing demand (Van Dam et al., 2006). Decline is only a small part due to the decrease in the amount of households, but mainly by household dilution (the career expires and retiree migration). In this case a very tight housing market (excess demand) will slowly turn into a market demand and make it easier for housing consumers to buy the properties of their choice. The pressure on the housing market reduces and lowers the prices of the dwellings and shorter the waiting list for rental housing. Regions suffering from serious housing shortage, a decrease in households will be welcomed, while regions with a housing surplus the decrease in households will be a problem (Van Dam et al., 2006).

However, due to the change in demand and supply side, falling household numbers may push up housing vacancy rates linked to deprivation (Van der Wag & Boon, 2006) The danger of long-term vacancy and increasing segregation of population groups is that especially the ‘low-skilled’ and ‘low income groups’ are left behind in certain districts. Moreover, the quality of living can be negatively affected by local reduction in the number of households. Housing corporations suffer from this high vacancy rates and experience financial difficulties (Knol, 2005).

Besides the decline in the number of households (quantity) it is also important to examine the household composition (quality). An ageing of the population in the rural areas implies specific requirements for the elderly. Moreover, the suburbanization of middle and high income groups and families also implies other requirements. The existing dwellings need to be adjusted, replaced or removed to meet future demand (Van Dam et al., 2006).

In the case of several declining municipalities the consequences are of greater impact. If neighbouring municipalities keep on building and the housing schemes do not match, the outcome
can be vacancy rates, longer sales times, and stagnation in the housing flow and loss in the land development. Moreover, the region is therefore less attractive for developers because of the marketing risk (Visser & Van Dam, 2006).

However, demographic decline does not just have negative impact for housing. It will also generate opportunities. The reducing pressure on the housing market makes it possible to upgrade the quality of the housing (Van Dam et al., 2006). Moreover, oversupply can be an advantageous because of the reduction in price of the house. Larger groups are now eligible to the housing market. On the other hand, intervening in the housing market would distort the market and vacancy can be a good indication of more and less valued housing types and residential environments (Visser & Van Dam, 2006). In case of high vacancy rates, the demolishing of the least attractive dwellings or a restructuring of the existing residential area can take place to improve the quality of housing and living environment to better align the consumers demand.

However, vacancy also leads to friction in the housing market. Even very low housing prices do not guarantee that the houses will be sold and occupied. Moreover, vacancy provides many welfare losses and capital losses because of the negative image of empty house for the rest of the neighbourhood or district of empty houses (Visser & Van Dam, 2006).

Another development in the housing market in rural areas is the demand for more second homes. As already mentioned, the demand for second homes increased the last couple years. The demand for second homes puts pressure on the local housing submarkets. Second home hunters increase the competition among buyers which in turn will contribute to rising prices. Moreover, because of the second home owner, dwellings will be occupied at least a part of the year (Persson, 2011) (Reijen et al., 2003).

5.2 Environment
Coupled with the housing, demographic decline also affect the environment and vice versa the environment also affects demographic decline. Environment can be divided into the social environment and the physical environment. The physical environment refers to the dwellings and other buildings but also the presence and quality of the facilities. Social environment can be divided into the social status of the neighbourhood, social cohesion and social security. These aspects will be discussed below (Van Dam et al., 2006).

5.2.1 Physical environment
A decreasing number of households can lead to vacancy which especially occurs in the unattractive housing stock. Vacancy itself affects the physical appearance and image of the neighbourhood negatively. People tend to leave the area more rapidly and inflows are expected to remain low. The number of empty houses is expected to lead to a downward spiral in housing value, image, etc (Van Dam et al., 2006).

The impact of demographic decline on the physical environment is also determined by the number of relocations. People who are tend to move quickly and en masse are less focused on their physical environment, in contrast to people who contribute to a more stable housing environment (Knol, 2005). Moreover, demographic decline will mostly affect the physical environment in neighbourhoods consisting of rental properties. People who own a property tend to care more about the quality of the surrounding environment. According to Campbell & Lee (1992), this group feels
more responsible for their neighbourhood than residents of rental properties. Therefore, further segregation of mainly lower-status groups, because of the demographic decline in the area, affects the physical environment. Homogenization of higher status groups in turn improves the physical environment. Due to demographic decline, differences in the social status are expected to increase which deteriorate the living environment in the ‘worse’ neighbourhoods considerably. According to Van der Wouden et al. (2006) due to the segregation, differences between the neighbourhoods and districts are increasing. However, segregation is especially visible in the bigger settlements although population decline can influence segregation within rural areas (further explanation under the heading social environment).

However, besides negative consequences on the physical environment there are also positive consequences. According to Bontje (2004) demographic decline is for many municipalities a new opportunity to develop qualities in the city such as a lower density rate and improvement of environmental quality.

5.2.2 Social Environment

Within this chapter, three aspects of the social environment are examined which have an impact on demographic decline. These are the social (in) stability, the degree of homogeneity in the area and ownership of the property (renting vs. buying). The population composition in the district changes if the social status of those leaving the district differs from the social status of the entrants. This has implications for the social cohesion in neighbourhoods. The image of the area for example can change when more people with a higher social status leave the neighbourhood and people with a lower social status settle in the neighbourhood (Knol, 2005). On the one hand, this homogeneity can enhance social cohesion because of the greater equality in the district. On the other hand the homogeneity can also lower the social cohesion because generally lower status groups pay more attention to their own existence instead of others. Hence there is less need for cohesion. Research shows that homeownership has a positive impact on social cohesion in the district. In case of a demographic decline, the population composition changes and this affects the district negatively (Van Dam et al., 2006).

Demographic decline can ensure that rural areas are lagging behind due to a steadily decrease of the social security in the area (Van der Laan et al., 2006). Changes in population composition can lead to disparities between different regions within a country. It can increase the disparities between the rural areas and the more innovative urban regions, but also between the different municipalities within the same region. On a smaller scale, the differences between growth and decline at the municipal level are visible due to vacancy and demolition in districts and neighbourhoods.

5.3 Facilities

Demographic decline causes a reduction in support of facilities and therefore the disappearance of facilities in certain places. Especially the exodus is expected to decrease the level of services, resulting in a downward spiral of development and more people moving out of the region. The market development of the supply and demand influences the disappearance of facilities.

Moreover, differences in living conditions and quality of life are of great influence on the regional development. Ageing is expected to change the course of private consumption. Growing demand from older people affects branches such as tourism, health and wellness, and culture. In addition,
services which enhance the quality of life and living for older people are expected to grow (Van Dam et al., 2006).

The scale of both commercial and non-commercial facilities has increased over the years due to cheaper production or service provision. Due to an increase in the geographical scale, there are fewer sites with commercial activities. To avoid these undesirable effects, the size of the organization is increasing while the number of sites remains the same. Therefore, the increase in scale has less impact on the accessibility of facilities (Van Dam et al., 2006).

The retail sector is characterized by an enormous increase in scale and concentration. The smaller retails businesses independently owned are replaced by the grocery stores. Large shopping malls, DIY stores, garden centres and furniture stores are located in purpose built boulevards on the edge of the city (Van Dam, 1995). These dynamics in the retail sector are caused by changes in consumer behaviour on the demand side and factors in business economics on the supply side. While the accessibility of the shops is generally high, shops in the declining regions nevertheless start to disappear. However, according to Evers et al, 2005 it is fair to expect that ageing will increase the demand for shops on walking distance. Moreover, expansion in the retail sector occurs independently for a stagnant of declining population (Evers et al., 2005).

There has also been an expansion in scale of the health sector. For example in the Netherlands between 1960 and 2000 the amount of hospitals fell from 276 to 137 due to mergers between small hospitals. This results in increased travel time for the patient to the facility. Moreover, another example in the Netherlands of the expansion in scale is the decrease in general practitioners. In sum, there is a decline in the geographic distribution of the health sector (NIVEL, 2010).

Especially in the secondary education sector there is a decline in the amount of school (merges) and an increase in the amount of students per school. The decline in the amount of school is mainly due to efficiency considerations but also because of a decline in young adults in the rural area (according to theoretical framework). Not only in the secondary education sector decline takes place, also in the primary education merges or closure of schools take place. Schools are disappearing and therefore the accessibility of school decreases. Parents have to travel long distances to bring their kids to school, which affects parents’ decision to live in rural areas (Van Dam, 1995).

5.4 Mobility
The supply of public transport services is affected by changes in demand. Increased car ownership due to individualisation of lifestyles, mobility styles and time use patterns, is an example of the large impact on the supply of public transport (Harms, 2006). The amount of frequency and the connections especially in the rural areas decreased. In areas with already a low supply of public transport, population decline enhance a decrease in the quality of public transport (Van Dam et al., 2006). A growing population contributes to increased mobility; therefore it is assumed that a shrinking population also decreases mobility in the area. However, according to Van Dam et al (2006), the decrease in mobility is little. The most important factor of mobility growth is the fact that people move more often and longer than the amount of people who are moving. The increase in number of small household also increases mobility. Due to more households, more people tend to move and the journey increases (Van Dam et al., 2006).
Another factor influencing mobility is ageing. The amount of elderly is expected to increase and expected is a decrease in mobility. However, in the future older people are increasingly mobile and their behaviour in mobility is changing. Expected, at least, is that traffic congestion around rush hours will decrease as the size of the potential working population in rural areas continues to decline. The number of trips and travel patterns of elderly are expected to change and thus rush hour is expected to change (Van Dam et al., 2006).

5.5 Economy

There is a link between demographic trends and economic development in a region. With an ageing and declining population, the composition and size of labour is changing in the region. Ageing may intensify inter-generational income disparities, and thus exacerbate existing social inequalities within countries. Ultimately, a labour shortage is created (Derks et al., 2006).

By assuming that people live where houses are built, indirectly the supply of housing also controls the spatial distribution of employment. If jobs are adapting with the regional population, this also has consequences for the economy in the area and adjacent areas. Particularly in rural areas it is difficult to maintain employment. Long-term employment is disappearing due to demographic decline. The working-age population would reduce economical growth.

If economic contraction will occur, it has to do with the location of the region as compared to the location of other regions. The risk of contraction in declining regions is less severe than if the region is surrounded by growing regions. In declining region commuter traffic is of great influence. In the less urbanized regions or peripheral regions where employment rates are low and unemployment high, an economic problem may occur (Van Imhoff & Wissen, 2001).

When a labour market is tightening, unemployment will in the end cause a structural deficit in the labour market. In areas where the potential working population and the labour supply decreases, the deficit on the labour market increases. Moreover, declining regions often face an outflow of high educated young people. This makes it even more difficult to increase the economic situation in the area.

Additionally, population decline also increases the opportunities for the economy. Space-intensive productions which cannot increase in densely populated areas anymore can develop new dynamics in the declining regions. These are for example the horticulture, organic garden and framing.

Demographic decline is likely a disadvantage for the economy. When a region loses its economic base it can cause a downward spiral:
Economic downturn leads to job losses
Young people and skilled workers leave the region
High income people are leaving
Long term vacancy of dwellings
Declining rental income
Prolonged vacancy of institutions and organization (schools, health care, etc.)
Increasing poverty
Ageing
Declining purchasing power
Declining tax revenues
Rising costs of social benefits (assistance, unemployment, pension)
Bad image
not willing to invest
strengthening the economic slowdown

(Figure: own elaboration on basis literature of Van Dam et al., 2006)
6. Introduction case study

This historical introduction of the case study refers to the historical development of the rural areas in the Netherlands. The historical development is based on a long term development around 50 years.

6.1 History rural areas in the Netherlands

Before looking at the population development of the rural areas in the Netherlands, it is important to take into consideration that municipalities can shift from rural to an urban category within the period. This can influence the interpretation of the data. Moreover, population flows to and from rural areas are usually smaller than population flows within and between urban areas. According to Van der Aa & Huigen (2000) 74% of the Dutch population lives in urban areas while only 36% of the population lives in rural areas. Moreover, Van der Aa & Huigen (2000) also showed that 40% of the movements consist of urban-rural and rural-urban movements and show the largest variation in population flows. A rural area in this case is described as municipalities with an address density of less than 1500 addresses per km².

![Figure 6: Rural development in the Netherlands (Source: Van Dam, 1996)](image)

Based on the theoretical framework, the development of the Netherlands can be divided into several processes of migration; the ageing process and young people leaving the rural areas, counter urbanisation, and the growth of multiple home owners.

The Netherlands is characterized by one of the earliest ‘turn-around’ in the beginning of the 1960s. This rural repopulation was particularly visible in the western part of the Netherlands around the bigger cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Den Haag and Utrecht) and resulted in a de-concentration of the central zone of the Netherlands (The Randstad) (Atzema, 1991).

In the beginning of 1970 a migration flow to the more remote rural areas took place. The population loss from the 1960 turned into a population surplus. However, this surplus was short-lived (see figure) and since the middle of the 1980s population growth in the rural areas lagged behind the national average again (Atzema, 1991 & Van Dam, 1996). This corresponds with the fact that there is an implicit recognition by researchers that rural outmigration continuous and that depopulation will...
remain in the rural areas (Stockdale, 2002). Corresponding to the literature, this depopulation process in the Netherlands went together with a selective out-migration which implied that the younger, usually higher educated people migrated to the more urban areas and left the older people behind in the more remote areas. In the second place, de-population led to a population concentration in the larger rural villages (Atzema, 1991).

Moreover, the development of the Dutch rural areas in the 1990s is characterized by a continuation of the population development, which already started in the 1980s with a limited but positive average growth in rural areas but with local variations in the patterns. This can be explained by the increased diversification of the rural areas and the social change processes which led to a plurality in the household types and residential preferences. This is consistent with the rural diversity (previous chapter) which makes some rural areas more attractive than others. According to Van Dam (1996) during the 1980s the peripheral areas show a larger net migration loss than the rural areas in and around the Randstad. In times of an increasing welfare, the migration from rural to urban was even bigger than the rural to urban migration flow. The rural to urban migration in contrast seem to be more constant in character. According to Van Huigen (1986) the rural migration loss during the 1980s was strongly age-specific, with an increase in the older population in most rural areas.

In short, it can be said that the 1990s is characterized by the second ‘turnaround’. However, this ‘turnaround’ was not as convincing as the one in the 1970s. Overall, the demand for residential rural environments increased through the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century (Van Dam, 1996).

Parallel with this changes there has been another process going on; the growing number of second homes. Ypma (1997) in his research showed that the amount of permanent habitation of second homes in the Netherlands increased in many rural areas. This can be connected to the urbanization of the rural landscape process (previous chapter – urbanization of the rural area). Second homes therefore have to be taken into account in the development of the rural area. It is not easy to give a clear indication of the importance of the development of the second homes in the Netherlands since few data is available. According to CBS (2011), second homes are homes that are temporarily occupied. Permanent recreational residences in allotments and mobile recreational accommodations are excluded. In the period between 1992 and 2002 the number of recreational homes almost doubled in absolute terms (Reijden et al., 2003). However, the number of households in this period also doubled. The reasons for this growth could be the increasing pressure on rural housing markets and it is financial more attractive in the Netherlands to live in a recreational dwelling with an official second home status than in a dwelling with a permanent residence status. Municipality councils often forget about the permanent use of recreational dwellings in the countryside (Thissen, 1978).
6.2 Zeeuws Vlaanderen

Zeeuws Vlaanderen is one of the three shrinking regions, together with northeast Groningen and Parkstad Limburg, which will experience the greatest population decline in the Netherlands and therefore elaborated as case study within the research. The three regions are adopted in the ‘Interbestuurlijk Actieplan’ of the Ministry of Environment (Dijkstal & Mans, 2009). Despite the fact that the province Zeeland is expected to increase by 3.3 percent to 2025, this situation must be nuanced according to different areas. In particular Zeeuws Vlaanderen – the municipalities Terneuzen and Sluis – have to deal with a declining population in this period (CBS, 2010 & province of Zeeland, 2009).

Zeeuws Vlaanderen is the southern part of the Dutch province of Zeeland, situated in the Netherlands. It is located south of the Westerschelde and bordering Belgium. Zeeuws Vlaanderen can be divided into an eastern and a western part. These parts are separated by the Braakman and by the Gent-Terneuzen channel. This channel is important for the industry of Zeeuws Vlaanderen and Belgium (Gent and Zelzate). Along this channel the industry is situated in Terneuzen and Sas van Gent. Moreover, Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by two important nature reserves: The Swin (west) and the drowned land of Saeftinge (east).

Figure 7: Zeeuws Vlaanderen within the Netherlands and Provinces (Source: Beachcomber Pete, 2011)

Figure 8: Zeeuws Vlaanderen (Source: Stamboomforum, 2011)

Zeeuws Vlaanderen is one of the biggest rural areas (surface of 732 km2) and the most sparsely populated region of the Netherlands with a population density of 147 inhabitants per km2. In January 2011 Zeeuws Vlaanderen contains 107.379 inhabitants. The largest settlements within Zeeuws Vlaanderen are Hulst, including Absdale (not the municipality) with 10.819 inhabitants and...
Terneuzen with 24,819 inhabitants. Other larger settlements in Zeeuws Vlaanderen are Axel (7,900) and Sas van Gent (3,688).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(at 1-1-2011)</th>
<th>Surface</th>
<th>Inhabitants</th>
<th>Density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terneuzen</td>
<td>251 km²</td>
<td>55,268</td>
<td>222 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hulst</td>
<td>201 km²</td>
<td>28,013</td>
<td>139 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sluis</td>
<td>280 km²</td>
<td>24,325</td>
<td>87 km²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Description municipalities Zeeuws Vlaanderen (Source: based on statistics Provincie Zeeland, 2009)


Sluis is located in the west of Zeeuws Vlaanderen and is mainly aimed at attracting tourists for beach vacations. Cadzand is an important seaside resort. Moreover, the old establishment towns Sluis and Aardenburg are well known villages in this municipality.

The city of Terneuzen (within the municipality Terneuzen) is located in the centre of Zeeuws Vlaanderen. It is particularly characterized by its industry in the area due to the construction of the Gent-Terneuzen channel. The company Dow Chemical has significant influence on the economy of the area. Moreover, a well known settlement in this area is the mussel village Philippine.

The municipality of Hulst is located in the east of Zeeuws Vlaanderen and is the most ‘Flemish’ one. The municipality of Hulst is characterized by an exuberant lifestyle and has a great appeal on many Belgian tourists.

Before 2003, Zeeuws Vlaanderen was only accessible via ferry or a detour via Belgium. Since March 2003 Zeeuws Vlaanderen is also accessible via the Westerschelde tunnel. The ferry Kruiningen-Perkpolder and Vlissingen-Breskens are therefore removed and the Vlissingen-Breskens is replaced by a bicycle and pedestrian ferry. Moreover, public transport in Zeeuws Vlaanderen consists of bus lines. These lines are also connected with Belgium, although these lines, unlike in the past, are of little use.
7. Population development of Zeeuws Vlaanderen according to the statistics

Within this chapter, the development of Zeeuws Vlaanderen is examined regarding to an analysis of formal statistics. The analysis of Zeeuws Vlaanderen is based on interpretation of statistics within the documents and the collected statistics from the CBS (Bureau of Statistics Netherlands). During the analysis besides the statistics of population, also the several processes of migration (ageing, out-migration young adults, retirement transition etc) examined in the theoretical framework are taking into account.

According to the CBS (2009) in the period 1980 to 2008 the Netherlands was to the utmost extent characterized by a population growth (orange blocks) (Figure 10). However, according to the national statistics within this period, some regions are also characterized by a decrease in population. Figure 10 shows that Zeeuws Vlaanderen (bleu block) is one of the regions which is characterized by a small population decline in this period. However, this decrease in population is expected to fluctuate around zero due to hardly significant decline (around the 250-1000) (Ministerie van VROM, 2009).

Figure 10: Population growth Netherlands 1980-2008
(Source: Ministerie van VROM, 2009)

Figure 9: Population growth in percentages 1980-2008
(Source: Ministerie van VROM, 2009)

This population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen is confirmed by another figure of the CBS (2009) based on the population growth in percentages. Figure 11 shows that Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by a slight decrease in population (0-5%) in the period 1980-2008 (Ministerie van VROM, 2009).

Moreover, statistics based on the population in Zeeuws Vlaanderen show that between 1970 and 1980 (figure 11) there was an exponential growth in the region of 7173 persons. However, remarkable is that this growth turned into a decline of 1392 persons in the next decade (figure 11). This development corresponds with the theoretical background based on the Netherlands. According to this theoretical background the beginning of 1970 a migration flow to the more remote rural areas took place. After 1990 the population development became more stable and there was even a slight increase in population until 2008.
Although the population in Zeeuws Vlaanderen at the year 2000 increases with 546, the population in 2008 and 2009 show a decrease to a higher extent (figure 12). Moreover, the development after the 1990 can be better described as a stagnation process. According to the data in figure 12, there is an alternation in population growth and decline. This alternation is not comparable to the alternations in the years before 1990. However, the last two years, Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by a decline to a higher extent. Moreover, the stagnating process is enhanced by a decrease in births in the same period (figure 14: 1970: 1744, 1990: 1204 and in 2009: 875). The number of deaths, in contrast, show a stagnating process; in 1970 997 deaths, 1990 1091 deaths and in 2009 1034 deaths (figure 13). This development can be explained by the development of women getting less children and the ageing process. This can be of great influence on the population structure in Zeeuws Vlaanderen.

![Population Development Graph](image)

Figure 11: Population Development Zeeuws Vlaanderen (Source: Own figure on basis statistics CBS 2011)

![Population Growth Table]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>-146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>-364</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12: Population Growth Zeeuws Vlaanderen (Source: Own figure on basis statistics CBS 2011)

However, despite the fact that it may not be clear if there is an ongoing stagnation or decline in the region, both challenges have negative consequences. To get a better understanding of the ongoing situation, it is important to further observe the demographic structure.
According to the theoretical framework, rural areas as a consequence of population decline are often characterized by an ageing population. This phenomenon is enhanced by a consistent net out-migration of the young adults. Moreover, an increase of the group with the age between 40 and 59 is expected, while the group within the age of 20-39 is expected to decrease. To get an overview of the population age structure before 2003, data of the three municipalities is used.

According to figure 15 about the development of the age structure in Zeeuws Vlaanderen, there is a decrease in the group of the 0-19 years from 2003 until 2010. However, it is also arguable that the age group 0-19 years is stagnating (24163 in 2003 and 22494 in 2010). This stagnation or decrease can be connected to the decrease in the amount of births (figure 14). The same is visible for the group 20-39 years. The group 40-59 is characterized by a different development. Between the years 2003 and 2006 there is an increase in the amount of inhabitants (from 32479 in 2003 to 33126 in 2006). Moreover, according to figure 15, the age group 40 to 59 years is the biggest age group in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. After the year 2006 this number seems to stagnate. Both groups 60-79 and 80 and older are characterized by an increase. This can indicate that Zeeuws Vlaanderen seems to become an attractive area for people in the age group 60-79 and 80 and older. According to the
statistics this increase is pronounced with a growth of 4956 between the years 2003 and 2010. This development can also be explained by the ageing population and therefore the growing amount of elderly within Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Overall it can be said that the population is changing within Zeeuws Vlaanderen, due to an increase in the population above 40. This can be explained by the fact that Zeeuws Vlaanderen is attractive for people in the pre-retirement phase. Moreover, this development is enhanced by the migration patterns in the region.

Migration is of great importance for Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Since there is no natural growth in Zeeuws Vlaanderen anymore, the development is dependent on migration. According to the data of the province of Zeeland (2009), the growth of the whole province of Zeeland population is largely determined by a migration surplus. This mainly stems from a positive foreign migration.

However, figure 16 shows that the amount of people migrating in Zeeuws Vlaanderen is decreasing since 1988. In 1988 the total migration was estimated at 7101 while in 2009 only 4431 people are migrating to Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Moreover, Zeeuws Vlaanderen does not seem to be an attractive region for in-migration. This can partly be explained by the location of Zeeuws Vlaanderen in the Netherlands. The disclosure of Zeeuws Vlaanderen with the rest the Netherlands contributes to a population decline. Zeeuws Vlaanderen is a sparsely populated and isolated area. Although the in-migration is based on a decrease, this decrease is continuing steadily. Important to mention is the gap from 2000 to 2007 with a decrease in in-migration of 883 persons. However, out-migration shows the same pattern of development with the same gap between 2000 and 2007 of 1087 persons. This development can probably be explained by the construction of the Westerschelde tunnel in 2003. This tunnel increased the accessibility with the northern part of the province Zeeland and Zeeuws Vlaanderen and therefore the area became more attractive for commuters and less for migration.

![Figure 16: Migration Zeeuws Vlaanderen 1988-2009](Source: Own figure on basis statistics CBS 2011)

However, based on these statistics it can be said that migration is not of great influence on the population growth or decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen due to an almost equal amount of in-migration as out-migration.
Table 2 shows for the age groups 15-20, 20-25 and 25-30 the relocations in 2009 as a percentage of the population. The largest proportion of movers, in both relative and absolute, are the 20 to 25 year olds (2540 people within this age group moved out of Zeeland in 2009), followed by 15 to 24 year olds (1863) (Province of Zeeland, 2009). Young people in particular move out of Zeeuws Vlaanderen to other parts of the province or neighbouring provinces and the bigger cities located there. This group leaves the area for study or career. This is in line with the theoretical background, as mentioned before. Remarkable is that the moves within Zeeland, 2654, (of the age group 20 to 25) is even bigger than the moves out of Zeeland (2540).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Population Size</th>
<th>Moves within Zeeland</th>
<th>Moves to Zeeland</th>
<th>Moves out of Zeeland</th>
<th>Residential Mobility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 to 20</td>
<td>22.237</td>
<td>1.315</td>
<td>1.172</td>
<td>1.863</td>
<td>2.833 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 25</td>
<td>19.097</td>
<td>2.654</td>
<td>2.316</td>
<td>2.540</td>
<td>5.082 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 30</td>
<td>19.057</td>
<td>2.555</td>
<td>1.510</td>
<td>1.507</td>
<td>4.064 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60.391</td>
<td>6.524</td>
<td>4.998</td>
<td>5.910</td>
<td>11.979</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Migration statistics Zeeland (Source: Provincie Zeeland, 2008)

According to table 3 there is a correlation between the type of household and migration in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Family migration in Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by an out-migration (-126 and -40), while the migration of singles is characterized by an in-migration (+100 and +72).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Migration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-26</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Family</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-126</td>
<td>-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singles</td>
<td>-100</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Men and Women</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-26</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>-39</td>
<td>-29</td>
<td>-25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Statistics migration based on household composition (Source: Provincie Zeeland, 2009)

Scoop conducted a research on the residential mobility and the motives of young adults to leave Zeeland. According to their results:

- Young people continue to live in Zeeland for friends, family and having a job in the province.
- The main reason for departing from Zeeland is education and job opportunities.
- There are few people who leave the province of Zeeland in later life.
- Work and study are the main reasons to move over long distances.

Moreover, besides young people moving out of the region, Zeeuws Vlaanderen also seems not to be very attractive for career aspires. The economic structure of Zeeuws Vlaanderen proved to be very vulnerable due to its one-sidedness. The labour market is particularly characterized by industry, recreation and agriculture. Moreover, the average household income of Zeeuws Vlaanderen is lower than the national average. Furthermore, there has been a decline in the establishment of the number of companies in recent years. Only Terneuzen can be described as an economic hub (Dow Chemicals) with the most job growth last year by 1.5 percent (Provincie Zeeland, 2008).

Meanwhile, the percentage of elderly, particularly in the western part of Zeeuws Vlaanderen scores high in comparison to the national average. The population growth in the groups 40-59, 60-79 and >
80 can partly be explained, according to the theoretical background, by the rise in second homes. Second homes are abundant in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. In this case the location and the characteristics of a sparsely populated area are attractive for second home buyers to recreate in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Moreover, second homes in Zeeuws Vlaanderen has grown through development in the ICT-sector and increased mobility. This makes it possible to live less close to work and work more at home. There are even people who change their second home for their permanent home over time. This has potential for an area to grow in their population, although it is mostly attractive for the retirees (Province of Zeeland, 2009).

As already said, there are some differences between the different municipalities within Zeeuws Vlaanderen (figure 17). To get a clear overview of the population decline in the region, it is important to examine the development on a more local level. The municipalities of Sluis, Aardenburg, Sas van Gent and Terneuzen are characterized by a slight decrease in population in the years 1988 until 2002. This is in contradiction to a slight increase in population in the municipalities of Hontenisse, Axel and Oostburg. However, the difference between growth and decline are barely visible and not of great influence. Therefore it can be said that the development within the municipalities of Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by a quit stable development until 2002.

![Figure 17: Population 1988 - 2010 Zeeuws Vlaanderen (Source: Own figure on basis statistics CBS 2011)](image)

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Rural population decline in the Dutch planning system

Anne van Maarschalkwererd
In the year 2002 to 2003 the municipalities of Terneuzen and Hulst are characterized by a change in border due to the merge of several municipalities within Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Since 2002 Zeeuws Vlaanderen consists of 3 municipalities: Sluis, Terneuzen and Hulst. The development after 2002 in the three municipalities is based on a decline in Terneuzen en Sluis and stagnation in Hulst. Since 2002 the municipality of Sluis is characterized by a decline of 739 persons until 2010. For the municipality of Terneuzen the statistics show a decrease of 642 in the same period. In contrast, the municipality of Hulst has a decrease of 30 persons within this period, but shows fluctuations between growth and decline in this period of 8 years. These differences between the three municipalities can be influenced by the change in administrative borders, due to the differences in size of the area. However, another reason can be found in the fact that Hulst is better accessible in comparison to Terneuzen and Sluis. The municipality of Hulst is more attractive for commuters due to the short distance to Brabant and the connection with the high way to the Randstad. However, this is remarkable due to fact that Terneuzen has a better economic structure.

The development of the municipalities differs, for instance between the different age groups in the municipality. Based on statistics of Terneuzen (figure 20), it can be concluded that there is a slight decrease in the group 0-19 years between the years 1988 until 2002 (from 27% to 21.7%). Moreover, there a clear decrease of inhabitants in the age of 20-39, while there is a slight increase in the groups 40-59, 60-79 and > 80. According to the statistics, the largest age group is the group 40-59 years (16331 in 2010) which is remarkable because until 1998 the largest group were the 20-39 years old. However, this is explainable due to the loss of young adults in rural areas. Moreover, both the 20-39 age group and the 0-19 age group are characterized by a continuing decline, while the other age groups show fluctuations.

Hontenisse (figure 18 and 19), on the other hand, is characterized by a more fluctuating development. This municipality is highlighted due the available statistics before 2003 (before the merge). The group in the age of 0-19 is characterized by an overall decline until 1994 (with sometimes years of growth). However, after 1994 until 2002 before the merge, this municipality had a growing group of 0-19 year (in contrast to Terneuzen). The same development in Hontenisse is analyzed for the 20-39 age group. This group is characterized by a more stable development between the years 1988 and 1997, but a decline after 1997 until 2002. The age groups 40-59, 60-79 and > 80 again are characterized by a slight increase. Remarkable is that, like in Terneuzen, according to the statistics the age group 40-59 years is the largest group (2423 in 2010) although until 1999 this was the 20-39 years group (figure 29). Moreover, this group (40-59) has a continuous growth in Hontenisse (23.9-30.2) until 2002, while Terneuzen is characterized with the same growth but a stagnating process after 2002. To provide a clear overview of the population development in age groups, the figure of Hulst is also presented. The development of the 0-19 year age group is characterized by an even more stagnation process than that of Terneuzen en Hontenisse. Moreover, also this figures shows a decline in the 20-39 year age group and an increase in the age groups 40-59, 60-79 and >80. Furthermore, Hulst is since 1998 characterized by the 40-59 year age groups as the largest group. This corresponds with the statistics of the other municipalities (figure 21).
Rural population decline in the Dutch planning system

Anne van Maarschalkerweerd

Figure 18: Population divided into age groups Hontenisse 1988-2002 (Source: Own figure on basis statistics CBS 2011)

Figure 19: Population structure Hontenisse 1988-2002 (Source: Own figure on basis statistics CBS 2011)
Figure 20: population structure Terneuzen 1988-2010 (Source: Own figure on basis statistics CBS 2011)
Figure 21: Population Structure Hulst 1988-2010 (Source: Own figure on basis statistics CBS 2011)
To sum up, the age structure development of Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized mostly by a decrease in the age groups 0-19 and 20-39. Especially the group 0-10 shows a significant decline, for instance, Hulst with 3114 children in the age group 0-10 in 2003 and only 2787 in 2010. Another example is Sluis with 2561 children in 2003 and only 2151 in 2010. This development can partly be explained by the decline in the birth-rate. In contrast, the groups 40-59, 60-79 and > 80 are characterized by a slight increase in population. This is in line with the ageing in rural areas (figure number of births 15 and deaths 14) and the increase in the population of the 40-59 due to pre-retirement migration. However, due to the differences between the municipalities in their development, it is also important to take into consideration the development of the municipalities. According to the statistics some municipalities are characterized by a bigger growth or decline than others. This can be explained by their accessibility, location and economic structure of the municipality.

Due to the merge in 2002, also for the category of migration a distinction is made between the municipalities of Zeeuws Vlaanderen. The best overview of migration (1988-2009) is given by the three still existing municipalities: Terneuzen, Sluis and Hulst. The municipality of Terneuzen is overall characterized by an outmigration, although there are some fluctuations within the years. On the other hand, Sluis is characterized by a more fluctuating outmigration (figure 25). It can be said that there a quite stable migration pattern with almost as much as in migrants as out migrations. For instance, Terneuzen is characterized by an in-migration of 1755 inhabitants in 2003 (this was 1433 in 2002) and an out-migration of 1876 inhabitants (this was 1470 in 2002). However, this extreme difference between the years can be explained due the merge in 2002/2003, although this gap is not as big as in Terneuzen for the municipalities Hulst and Sluis (figures 24, 25 and 26).

The same is visible for the municipality of Hulst, although remarkable is the establishment surplus in the years 1993-1997. Within this period, there is a migration surplus of more than 100 inhabitants (figure 26: 1993: 102, 1994: 109, 1995 235, 1996: 263, 1997: 133). This differs from the development of for instance Terneuzen in that period, with a migration deficit of -302 in 1994, -385 in 1995 and even -442 in 1996 (figure 24).

Based on the reasons for migration given by the available statistics, it can be said that over time the people who established into Zeeuws Vlaanderen by immigration out of another land, has slightly increased, although this is just a small amount. For instance, the amount of immigration increased in Terneuzen from an average of 300 in the years 1988-1999 to an average of approximately 350 in the years 2000-2009) (figure 24). The same is visible for the municipality of Hulst with an average of approximately 150 up to 220 (figure 26). However, the same is examined for emigration out of Zeeuws Vlaanderen to another country. Hulst for instance had an increase of emigration from 157 in 1988 up to 222 in 2009. Overall this is a probably a national trend instead of a development only within Zeeuws Vlaanderen.

According to the migration statistics of the municipalities from before the merge, it can be said that some municipalities are more popular than others and are characterized by an establishment surplus (for example Old Sluis, figure 22). While others, less popular, are characterized by higher out-migration then in-migration (for example Sas van Gent, figure 23). Moreover, after the merge especially Terneuzen is less favourable for migration due to the highest migration deficit. However,
the development of Zeeuws Vlaanderen according to migration does not show a significant outmigration out of the municipalities and this development has not changed over time.

To sum up the population development in Zeeuws Vlaanderen, it is arguable if Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by a stagnating population or a declining population. Based on the regional situation it can be said that Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by a stagnating population, however, the three municipalities in Zeeuws Vlaanderen show different situations. The municipality Hulst is characterized by stagnation while the municipalities Sluis and Terneuzen are characterized by a decline. For instance, it is arguable whether there is decrease or decline in the age group 0-19. Based on the statistics of Zeeuws Vlaanderen it is suggestive that this age group is characterized by stagnation, while again the situation within the municipalities differs from each other. Moreover, a concrete conclusion based on the statistics is the increase in the age group of 40-59, 60-79 and >80. This increase can be explained by attractiveness of Zeeuws Vlaanderen for the (pre-) retirement group.

Furthermore, differences also can be observed in migration between Zeeland and Zeeuws Vlaanderen and within the municipalities. Where Zeeland is talking about a migration surplus, Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by an equal migration pattern or even a deficit. According to the migration statistics of the municipalities, the municipality of Terneuzen is characterized by a migration deficit, while Sluis and Hulst are characterized by an equal migration development.

These differences in migration can for example be explained by the attractiveness of the municipalities. Some municipalities are more attractive than others and therefore it is questionable if it is possible to make a generalisation out of the statistics of the three municipalities in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. This combination of a quite equal migration pattern and the decrease in the numbers of
migration makes it questionable of how much influence migration is for the development of Zeeuws Vlaanderen and therefore how much affinity the government should have for planning for migration.

Moreover, based on these statistics, several propositions are formulated to answer the research question how the government is looking upon the characteristics of population decline. On the basis of these propositions the planning documents are examined. Due to the propositions the analysis of the planning documents is defined.

- The government is aware of the population decline according to the planning documents
- The planning documents provide an analysis of the current situation
- Population decline is defined as a local problem
- The government is looking upon the problem as an existing one
- The documents are based on the differences within the region
Figure 24: Development Terneuzen based on statistics migration (Source: Own figure on basis statistics CBS 2011)

Figure 25: Development Sluis based on statistics migration (Source: Own figure on basis statistics CBS 2011)
Figure 26: Development Hulst based on statistics migration (Source: Own figure on basis statistics CBS 2011)
8. Planning documents regarding population decline

To examine how population decline is addressed, planning documents on national, provincial and regional/local level are elaborated. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the planning documents used for the analysis.

To get a better understanding on which level the documents are published, the next figure outlines the Dutch planning system. The administrative levels of the Netherlands are: the national, provincial and municipal level. In line with this subdivision, the analysis focuses on planning documents provided on the national level, the planning document for the province of Zeeland, and local planning documents for the municipalities of Terneuzen, Sluis and Hulst. Furthermore, another level has been added here which is the region of Zeeuws Vlaanderen. The provincial level Zeeland is divided into several peninsulas and the region Zeeuws Vlaanderen is established for statistical functions, e.g. NUTS 3 without having an official administrative function (Spit & Zoete, 2006). However, planning documents covering population decline exists here. These planning documents are often commissioned by the three municipalities and performed by research institute Ecorys NL. Therefore the planning documents on local level and the commissioned documents on regional level are combined in the analysis.

8.1 Documents on National Level

On national level two different planning documents are examined. In the inter-governmental action plan for population decline in *Krimpen met Kwaliteit* (2009) (*decline with quality*), VNG, IPO and the national government focus on a joint approach to population decline. Besides the inter-governmental action plan for population decline in *Krimpen met Kwaliteit* (2009), the *Nota Ruimte 2006* (*national Spatial Strategy*) is an overarching national spatial policy document down to 2020. It contains the vision of the government on the spatial development of the Netherlands. The document serves as an overarching strategic document and takes into account e.g. the housing, education etc. Although population decline is not directly mentioned in the document, it takes into account the demographic development. This national spatial strategy provides direction for development on provincial and municipal level.

8.2 Documents on Provincial Level

Population decline is considered to be of great importance in the province of Zeeland and therefore several policy documents are published which take into account the population decline. The
documents can be divided in documents based on the regional development of the province and three documents which have been published to anticipate on population decline in Zeeland.

To get a clear overview of the provincial policy regarding population decline, the documents *Onverkende Paden 2008 (Unexplored Paths)*, *Op Pad 2009 (A path ahead)* and *Het Routepad 2010 (The Route)* are examined on how population decline is addressed in these documents. The report entitled *Onverkende Paden (Unexplored Paths: challenges facing Zeeland province due to the changing structure of the population)* outlines the expected development of the population in terms of size, composition and regional distribution. Based on this report, the Zeeland province published the policy document *Op Pad! (A path Ahead)*. This document is based on several themes regarding to population decline in Zeeland and the guiding principles for each theme. *Het Routepad (The Route)* is the sequel of the previous document and is published in November 2010. This document outlines a plan of action based on the conclusions of the previous studies on population decline of the province. This document is intended to further concretize the provided tools to anticipate population decline in the area. A distinction can be made between the document published in 2008 which is a more explorative document on the consequences of population decline and the documents which have been published last years. These documents provide a more action-based policy by formulating new guiding principles.

Moreover, also the documents with a more regional development focus are examined. The ‘*Omgevingsplan Zeeland*’ 2006-2012 (The environmental plan Zeeland) is an overall spatial strategy for the province Zeeland. The document contains the vision of the provincial government on the spatial development of the province Zeeland. Furthermore, in 2009 the province in Zeeland published the document entitled *Gebiedsagenda Zeeland 2009 (Regional Agenda Zeeland)*. This agenda is no articulation of new policies, but an inventory of existing policies (national as provincial) with a spatial impact. The document therefore gives insight into the interrelated aims to align the planning documents at provincial level.

Besides these more regional development documents, two other documents of the province of Zeeland are elaborated. Due to the importance of housing as a consequence of population decline, the document *Provinciale Woonvisie 2004 (Provincial vision on Housing)* is examined. The document was already published in 2004 and although it is the only document on housing, in comparison to the other documents, this document is lagging behind in the knowledge and awareness of population decline. The elaboration of the other document is the *Provinciaal Sociaal Economisch Beleidsplan ‘Versterken, Vernieuwen, Verbinden’ 2009-2012 (Provincial Social Economic Policy Plan ‘Strengthen, Refresh, Connect’)*. This policy document is mainly focused on the social economical context of Zeeland and is meant to strengthen the economical development. The demographic development is seen as a threat for the Zeeuwse economy and therefore a plan of action is provided. Furthermore, since the focus is on the social context in combination with the economic situation, it is worth examining if and how population decline is addressed in the document.

8.3 Documents on Regional and Local Level

Especially the documents published on regional and local level are of interest for the analysis how population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen is addressed in the planning documents. The *Gebiedsplan West Zeeuwsch- Vlaanderen Natuurlijk Vitaal 2004 (Area plan for West Zeeuwsch –Vlaanderen Natural Vitality)* outlines a comprehensive vision how a quality incentive for the economical pillar in
an attractive environment can be given, using spatial development, to the area of West Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Change in the area is essential to counteract a downward spiral of falling employment, migration of population, a lower provision of facilities and the degradation of landscape and nature.

Another regional document taken into account in the analysis is the document *Samenwerken aan Zeeuws Vlaanderen Toekomst Visie en Actieplan 2007* (collaborate for Zeeuws Vlaanderen Vision and plan of Action). This document is a vision document for whole Zeeuws Vlaanderen, including an action plan for a structured cooperation between the three municipalities of Zeeuws Vlaanderen and the water board Zeeland. Therefore it is expected that population decline is addressed in the document.

The planning document *LEADER Ontwikkelingsplan Zeeuws Vlaanderen 2007-2013* (LEADER development plan Zeeuws Vlaanderen) is published on the occasion of the LEADER programme fund for rural development. The document is besides the economical development, also focused on the demographic development of the rural area.

On a more local level, only the municipality of Terneuzen published two regional development plans which are analysed. The *Structuurvisie Terneuzen 2025* (Masterplan Terneuzen 2025) and *Gebiedsvisie Zeeuws Vlaamse Kanaalzone 2009* (Area plan Zeeuws Vlaamse Kanaalzone) are both focused on the social and economical regional development of Terneuzen and therefore focused on the demographic change within the area. The Masterplan Terneuzen is like the Nota on national level, an overarching planning document, taking into account all aspects which are contributing to the development of the area. The area plan for the Zeeuws Vlaamse Kanaalzone is an economical development plan for the harbour and industrial area Kanaalzone. However, this area plan also has to take into consideration the local demographic changes in the area. Therefore the documents can be used for the analysis.

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<th>Documents</th>
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<td><strong>National Level</strong></td>
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<td>• Krimpen met Kwaliteit 2009</td>
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<td>• Nota Ruimte 2006</td>
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<td><strong>Provincial Level</strong></td>
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<td>• Omgevingsplan Zeeland 2006-2012</td>
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<td>• Provinciale Woonvisie 2004</td>
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<td>• Onverkende Paden 2008</td>
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<td>• Op Pad 2009</td>
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<td>• Het Routepad 2010</td>
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<td><strong>Regional/ Municipal Level</strong></td>
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| • Gebiedsplan West Zeeuwsch -Vlaanderen  
  *Natuurlijk Vitaal* 2004   |
| • Samenwerken aan Zeeuws Vlaanderen  
  *Toekomst & Actieprogramma* 2007 |
| • LEADER Ontwikkelingsplan 2007-2013 |
| • Woonvisie Sluis 2004        |
| • Structuurvisie Terneuzen 2025 |
| • Zeeuws Vlaamse Kanaalzone 2009 |

Table 5: Overview planning documents (Source: own elaboration)
9. Analysis planning documents

Within this chapter an analysis of the (previous outlined) planning documents (overview table 4) is conducted to examine how population decline is addressed in the planning documents. The analysis of the planning documents is based on the propositions raised during the analysis of the statistics of Zeeuws Vlaanderen.

9.1 Analysis national documents

The analysis of the national documents are based on the documents Krimpen met Kwaliteit (2009) and the Nota Ruimte (2006).

According to the first proposition the government is aware of the population decline. The title of the document Krimpen met Kwaliteit (declining with quality) suggests that there is a great awareness on national level for the current situation of the declining regions. However, the documents are especially focused on the consequences of population decline instead of the causes.

The causes outlined in the documents are based on a short description of the ongoing situation within the Netherlands. Moreover, there is no theoretical background provided and therefore it can be said that the overall rural development is not taken into account. According to the document Krimpen met Kwaliteit (2009) population decline is visible at the borders of the Netherlands, while the Randstad (the whole region) is expected to grow up to 2040. The decrease in population mostly takes place in rural communities, while the surrounding larger towns have a continuing growth (e.g. Groningen and Leeuwarden). Based on the decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen the document addresses that like many areas without post-secondary education, especially the younger age groups are leaving the region. Moreover, this is expected to increase the differences between the population in urban and rural areas. This elaboration of the causes is only based on the out-migration of young adults, while according to the theoretical framework more rural trends are linked to population decline in the rural area.

In contrast, within the document Nota Ruimte the socio-cultural development (e.g. individualisation, ageing etc.) and migration patterns are named and population decline is seen as a threat for the national development. For instance: ‘Border regions in the northeast, east, southwest, and especially in the south of Limburg face population decline and a decline in households. Ageing as well as a brain drain in these regions is visible’. Population decline, accompanied by emigration of young and higher educated people, can lead do delocalization of facilities.

However, both documents are only based on a short elaboration of the causes in the introduction of the document. No further attention is given to the rural development while rural areas are characterized by more processes or trends regarding to the theoretical framework. For instance, the document does not elaborate the decreasing fertility rate and the ageing population in combination with the in-migration of a new group of retirees (counter-urbanisation).

The short term bottlenecks according to the documents are especially housing, environment and education. These consequences named in the documents correspond with the consequences based in the theoretical framework. However, the consequences of population decline are based on a general description instead of taken into consideration the already existing consequences of
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The consequences for Zeeuws Vlaanderen are named superficial and are elaborated in combination with the 3 regions of decline within the Netherlands. Noticeable is that in some parts whole the province of Zeeland is seen as a region dealing with the consequences of decline/stagnation, while in other parts the urgency is based on Zeeuws Vlaanderen.

According to the document *Krimpen met Kwaliteit*, the government choose not to fight population decline with measures to attract new residents to contracting areas. Such an approach leads to particularly intensification of competition between municipalities and regions. For instance, the growing municipalities are expected to help the declining municipalities. However, the current accumulation of (transition) problems in the contracting areas requires a comprehensive intergovernmental approach, with active involvement of the government. This can be seen as the overall goal to counteract the population decline.

Regarding the concrete measures, the document provides some clear points of action for the three declining regions in the Netherlands (Zeeuws Vlaanderen as one of the three). The overall advice is based on a regional cooperation between the municipalities. *Due to a decreasing population, there is decrease in the support of facilities. These facilities need to be organized differently and solutions must be found. This requires a cohesive, regional approach.* Therefore a steering group for the whole region is introduced, to coordinate and oversee the cooperation between the three municipalities and to involve private parties in the process. Moreover, the steering group is also responsible for further research on the consequences of population decline. It is the role of the province to control the steering group and the financing. This indicates that the municipalities should accept the population decline as such and focus on how to deal with the declining region in the future. Moreover, most attention in the document *‘Krimpen met Kwaliteit’* is given on to the three measures for the long term approach: *early local awareness, clear administrative role allocation and administrative management power, and an effective funding system*, instead of anticipating on decline in the current situation. It can be concluded that these measures are adopted for Zeeuws Vlaanderen.

On short term examples of a direct approach for Zeeuws Vlaanderen are:

- Set up a regional policy document regarding decline
- Set up a provincial policy document regarding decline
- Restructuring and transformation housing market Zeeuws Vlaanderen
- New housing schemes for the municipalities in Zeeuws Vlaanderen
- Developing of a vision (along with school and neighbouring municipalities) of the density of the number of schools in relation to the quality of education

This short term approach shows that there is not an existing policy regarding population decline on regional and provincial level. Moreover, the documents are focused on obtaining more information about the population decline in the region. These measures therefore elaborate the top-down structure in the Dutch planning system.

Notable is that in the document *Nota Ruimte* population decline is seen as a threat but there are no further recommendation on how to deal with the decline or for further examination of decline in the
affected regions. This can be explained by the fact that the document is published in 2006 (before the national document based on decline) and population decline is still a young phenomenon in the Netherlands. However, a further elaboration of the decline would have been appropriate since population decline is seen as a threat and it affects the development of regions within the Netherlands.

It can be said that more attention in both documents is given to the consequences and measures regarding population decline. There is a certain awareness of population decline within several regions within the Netherlands and the national government is well informed on the consequences of population decline. This can be explained by the fact that based on the consequences measures are provided to respond on the population decline and the consequences are based on previous research on the consequences of decline commissioned by the national government. Moreover, it can be said that the government responds on the decline by reducing the consequences of population decline instead of eliminating the causes because the consequences are more of political interest where the causes are seen as a phenomenon of theoretical interest.

However, it is questionable to what extent the government is aware of population decline if it does not provide an analysis of the current situation and the causes and the consequences and measures of population decline are generalized. Consequences of population decline can differ per region and therefore it is suggested that if the government wants to influence the development they should be aware of its causes in order to identify what can be done.

The few statistics provided by the national government show that whole Zeeuws Vlaanderen in comparison to the rest of the Netherlands is characterized by a population development around zero. However, the document does not provide any concrete figures based on the development of Zeeuws Vlaanderen and does not make a distinction between migration and birth and death rates. This is consistent to the results of the analysis of the statistics. However, these statistics are provided in the same graph with the prognoses on decline and therefore it is questionable to what extent these statistics can be taken for granted. The lack of an analysis of the current situation also suggests that the government is not looking upon the problem as an existing one (third proposition). Both documents are mainly based on the prognoses until 2040 and therefore based on the future decline. It is questionable to what extent a policy document can rely on prognoses, since it is unpredictable what is going to happen in the future. Furthermore, it is questionable how a government can come up with the right aims/goals and measures if it is focused on a forecast as starting point and not the existing situation.

According the fourth proposition the documents are based on the differences within the region. The national government is aware of the fact that due to growing centres in combination with declining smaller municipalities, major differences between municipalities can occur. For instance, the introduction of the inter-governmental action plan for population decline is based on a short sum up of the differences in population development in different regions. However, these differences are not elaborated for the situation within Zeeuws Vlaanderen. The only regional description within the document is a short description of Zeeuws Vlaanderen as a sparsely populated rural area with Terneuzen as the largest municipality based on industry.

Furthermore, the document Nota Ruimte is more focused on population decline in the core regions. An example out of the text shows: 'regions of the Netherlands have to deal with a population decline
in the future, while Zeeuws Vlaanderen, Limburg and Noord-Oost Groningen are already dealing with this decline at the moment’. This can be explained by the fact that the overall document does not really take into account the population decline and therefore no special attention is given to the situation in Zeeuws Vlaanderen.

Moreover, according to the national government, the regional level is responsible for responding on the population decline because population decline transcends the local level. According to the national government, collaboration and decision making on regional level is necessary to prevent individual municipal interests for the collective regional interest. Therefore, the focus in the document is mostly on the regional and provincial development, while there is no attention for the existing differences between the municipalities.

However, according to the analysis of the statistics, differences exist between the municipalities in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Therefore those differences should be outlined and the right measures need to be provided for the municipalities. For example, according to the statistics, Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by a stagnating population, while within Zeeuws Vlaanderen the municipalities Terneuzen and Sluis are declining and Hulst stagnating. Moreover, competition supports innovation and creativity. This can also raise new innovative ideas how to anticipate on population decline in the municipality. On the other hand, there is a certain need for regional cooperation to align the projects across the municipal borders, e.g. transportation issues. Therefore regional planning is recommended if it corresponds with the current declining development of the municipalities. The responsibility how to respond on population decline is in the hands of the municipalities.

9.2 Analysis provincial documents


There is great awareness for population decline within the provincial planning documents. This corresponds with the first proposition. The provincial documents are, in contrast to the national documents, more focused on demographic change and therefore the population decline is often mentioned in combination with ageing and young people moving out the region. The data provided in the documents regarding population decline are based on birth, death and migration rates. One of the outcomes of the prognosis in the document Onverkende Paden is the growing amount of elderly within the region (above national level). The document also outlines these data for the municipalities in Zeeland. Significant is the optimism in the document about the migration rates. According to the document, the migration into the region will increase due to migration of the pre-retired baby boomers. Expected is that this group will complement the vacancies.

Moreover, the document Gebiedsagenda Zeeland highlights that: ‘The amount of inhabitants of Zeeuws Vlaanderen is expected to decline due to a high death rate (in comparison to the birth rate).’ However, it is noteworthy that the document is based on what is going to happen in the future, while population decline already exists in Zeeuws Vlaanderen, or to be more precise the population decline in Sluis and Terneuzen.
The document *Provinciale Woonvisie 2004* provides an analysis of population decline in the region. Moreover, according to this analysis, the province is aware of the decrease in the number of young people and an ageing population. The document shows, based on results from another study, migration patterns in Zeeuws Vlaanderen (e.g. 1/3 comes from Randstad, ½ comes from rest of the Netherlands, 8% from Belgium). However, it is noticeable that within the documents the focus is especially on the in-migration instead of the out-migration. Out-migration is only mentioned in combination with the development of young adults leaving Zeeland. This is extraordinary since population decline is highly influenced by out-migration. This indicates that the causes of population decline are not elaborated, but more mentioned in combination with consequences.

Moreover, there is a higher awareness of the consequences regarding population decline. Especially due to concerns about the ageing population more elderly and singles are expected. Therefore the adjustments on the facilities, housing and education receive much attention in the documents. Especially the documents *Onverkende Paden*, *Op Pad* and *Het Routepad* provide the consequences of population decline. These consequences are based on several researches of Dutch institutes and therefore all the consequences elaborated in the theoretical framework are taken into account. However, a distinction can be made between the documents based on decline and the documents regarding the development of the province. Remarkable is that the consequences mentioned in the development documents are based, like in the national documents, on a general description instead of taken into account the existing consequences within the region.

Despite the differences between the documents, the aims of the documents regarding population decline reasonable correspond with each other. The overall aim is the turnaround from thinking in terms of growth to thinking in terms of decline. Instead of growth, it is necessary to pursue quality, with population decline taken as such. Therefore cooperation between the municipalities on a regional level is essential to offer sufficient quality on a higher scale. Strengths can be sought in rural setting, the cultural legacy of buildings of the landscape or social cohesion. Instead of outcompeting each other, the regional vision supports the cooperation between the municipalities. Due to the diversity between the municipalities this cooperation and coordination is required. However, the province does not take into account the diversity of the municipalities in their measures to respond on the population decline.

Especially due to the urgency of the ageing population and the young people moving out the region, the documents provide measures how to respond on this situation (instead of particularly on population decline). Therefore the focus within the provincial development documents is mostly on in-migration and the adjustment of the housing market. Especially due to the ageing population, adjustment of the houses is necessary to let people live as long as possible in their own houses before going to elderly homes. For instance, the document *Omgevingsplan Zeeland 2007* brings up several measures regarding housing; refurbishment, selective annexe and addressing public space. The overall aim is to focus on a pleasant living environment (space, environment, quietness, meeting places, activities) in combination with attractive housing (in order to attract more people to the region).

In the document *Gebiedsagenda Zeeland 2009* there is notion on provincial level of an implicit theory that people are leaving the region or not moving into the region due to a lack of an attractive living
environment. However, this cause is not elaborated within the planning documents, although the government is aware of the consequences and measures.

Furthermore, it is interesting to notice the contradicting between the planning document Provinciale Woonvisie 2004 and Omgevingsplan Zeeland 2007. In the document Woonvisie 2004 the province is already aware of the ‘moderate’ growth in Zeeuws Vlaanderen and therefore measures are provided to demolish part of the rental housing, adaptation of housing to the demand of elderly, young people and special target groups. However, in 2007 the document Omgevingsplan Zeeland is focused on expansion of the housing market due to an expected increase in the number of in-migration because of the attractiveness of the region. It is noticeable that according to the statistics, the number of migrants decreased between 2000 and 2007. This confirms the existing gap between the current situation and the situation taken into account in the planning document. Moreover, this also suggests that there is a discrepancy between the planning documents on provincial level.

The goals and measures mentioned in the development documents can be linked to the goals of Op Pad (provincial document regarding population decline) regarding the comprehensive intergovernmental approach. However, this link is not mentioned within the document. This indicates that there is certain awareness of elaborating guidelines in the documents regarding population decline for a regional cooperation.

The documents regarding population decline are providing even more measures to anticipate on the population decline. For instance, measures to maintain the labour participation, adjustment of education (due to aggregation), adjustment of facilities (and thus anticipating on quality of life), attracting people to the area, adjustment public transport, providing attractive housing etc. These measures are connected to the consequences of population decline. Measures to adjust the housing market are based on the differences between the regions to combat double planning. Moreover, all consequences are outlined and taken into consideration in the measures, although the document does not link for example mobility to accessibility for the growing commuters. Noticeable is that the provided consequences are based on general consequences instead of consequences of population decline in the region. Therefore it is questionable to what extent the consequences correspond to the actual situation in the region and especially the municipalities.

Noticeable are the differences between the three documents regarding population decline. The first and the second published documents are outlining the population decline and the consequences while the third document is more focused on providing the measures and the guidelines, and implementation of these measures. Moreover, the documents include special plans and analysis for Zeeuws Vlaanderen, however this is not consistent.

Moreover, interesting is the focus of almost all documents on the development of the second homes. The province sees an opportunity to expand the second homes due to a growth in second homes the last years. Second homes are introduced as the saver of the vacancy and impoverishment. The development of the second homes is therefore linked to a better ICT and physical accessibility. However, no data in this case is mentioned. Furthermore, the measure regarding second homes is not based on any theoretical part within the document or linked to the causes/demographic development regarding population decline. This is notable due the change to develop second homes to respond on population decline in the region. The attractiveness of the pre-retirees is not
mentioned and therefore measures regarding the attractiveness of the area are not elaborated. Therefore the government does not respond on the demand of this pre-retiree group.

The document *Het Routepad*, is one of the few documents which takes into account the important role of commuters. However, it is surprising that the link with commuters is not further elaborated, especially due to the importance of the (according to the theoretical framework) urbanisation of the rural area.

The provincial development documents, overall, do not provide a clear implementation and monitoring of the measures. This can be explained by the fact that population decline is an interwoven issue within the document and therefore not seen as a strategy. However, since measures regarding population decline are mentioned, also the implementation is expected. Moreover, in a few documents some of the measures regarding population decline are adopted in the instrumentation and implementation, while others are not. For instance, the document could have linked infrastructure and accessibility to increase the amount of commuters in the area.

The document *Het Routepad* (in contrast to the previous two) provides a clear monitoring and time planning and makes a distinction who is responsible for which measure. Extraordinary is that the time planning is based on a short period (2010-2014). Especially because demographic development is a process of decades and therefore it takes more than 4 years to examine the results of the provided measures, for instance by anticipating on migration flows.

Despite the fact that the documents outline consequences and measures, it is noteworthy that all the young documents (published after 2008) do not take into account the current situation of Zeeuws Vlaanderen or not even provide an analysis of the development within the province. Therefore this is in contrast with the second proposition. Moreover, the documents published after the year 2008 do provide references to *Onverkende Paden* and *Op Pad*, to their analysis. This indicates that several researches are done on population decline/stagnation within the municipalities and that this is probably outlined within the provincial documents based on decline.

Within most of the documents a difference is made between the regions and between the bigger cities within the province (fifth proposition). Therefore there is notion of the differences between the declining regions/municipalities and the ones stagnating. This outlines the awareness of the province regarding population decline/stagnation. However, although the documents are aware that there are differences between municipalities, these differences are not elaborated in the text. It is questionable whether these differences should be outlined, since the consequences of population decline differ between the regions. As already said, different measures and aims can be set to anticipate the decline in the different municipalities. Moreover, the documents based on the development of the province are more focused on the causes of population decline like ageing and the young people leaving the region and the resulting consequences, instead of addressing population decline or stagnation as such.

Moreover, no current data is presented in the documents except for the document *Provinciale Woonvisie 2004*. This document provides, in comparison to the other provincial documents, an analysis of the current situation in Zeeuws Vlaanderen, although this is based on the housing market. Moreover, due to the age of the document it does not provide the current declining/stagnating problem in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. For instance, the aim of this document is even focused on
maintaining the moderate growth, although there is an already existing population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen.

The documents, Onverkende Paden, Op pad and Het Routepad are published to give an indication of population decline in the province and to provide guidelines for the municipalities/region how to respond on population decline. Therefore an analysis of the current situation is expected and not prognoses (proposition 4). The document Onverkende Paden elaborates (for the first time in a document) the existing population decline in the municipalities Sluis and Terneuzen. The most important conclusion of the document is that the total population of Zeeland is expected to decrease and this differs between the regions within Zeeland. The population is expected to age considerably and population decline is expected to occur in more and more municipalities, although some municipalities will continue to grow. However, the documents Op Pad and Het Routepad do not provide a broad analysis of the current situation. This can be explained by the fact that the current situation is already outlined in the previous document Onverkende Paden. Although demographic changes occur over decades, population decline is a young phenomenon and situations within the municipality can be changed (e.g. due to measures etc). Moreover, the data provided in the documents is based on prognoses and it is questionable to what extent it is possible to rely on this data. Therefore it can be said that every document should provide an analysis of the current situation.

Remarkable is that especially the provincial documents regarding population decline with the aim to advice the regions and municipalities are based on prognoses up to 2040. According to the prognoses a further decline of whole Zeeuws Vlaanderen and other regions in Zeeland is expected. The documents regarding regional development are mentioning the population decline as future threat and therefore response in an early stage is necessary. This assumption is not based on the current situation in Zeeuws Vlaanderen (decline in Sluis and Terneuzen, stagnation in Hulst) but based on an overall assumption of the development of Zeeland. However, it is unpredictable how municipalities are developing over time and therefore it is not possible to make assumption about a decline for the whole region of Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Due to the unpredictable of the future, it is suggestive that policy-making should focus on the current situation instead of the expected future problems.

Moreover, population decline is addressed in the planning documents as a regional threat. This is in contrast with the proposition that population decline is a local problem. Within the planning documents the focus is on the regional cooperation regarding population decline. The Zeeland province has an important role in taking the initiative, bringing together parties and promoting all kinds of different types of cooperation and harmonisation. A shared vision with a goal aligned is therefore important between regions within the province. Notable is that there is less space for own completion for the municipalities. According to the documents population decline is a regional phenomenon and therefore this level needs coordination how to anticipate population decline. This is contradiction to the proposition that population decline is defined as a local problem. According the provincial government the regional level is the right level to anticipate on the population decline. However, as mentioned in the analysis of national planning documents, it is arguable that a municipal level approach would be more effective due to the different developments regarding population decline within the municipality (as outlined in the statistical analysis).
There is a clear top down system with guidelines from the (European) national to provincial, to regional, to the local level. For example, the documents based on population decline are aligned to the Interreg 4b project DC NOISE of the European Union. Although this DC NOISE project is mainly aimed to raise awareness and to provide information by using best practices on how to respond on population decline, this project also indicates that there is room for a transnational strategy (Implement strategies, transnational and demonstration pilots and concrete actions to deal with these consequences of demographic change) (DC NOISE, 2011).

However, this is remarkable since population decline occurs on a local level and the provincial level does not seem to take into account the current situation of every municipality within the province. Moreover, that the province is aware of the population decline is evidenced by the fact that several experiments regarding population decline are done in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. However, these experiments are mentioned to raise awareness and to encourage cooperation between the municipalities in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. These experiments also show the clear division of tasks between province, municipalities and other parties. Moreover, most of the documents are based on guidelines which have to be filled in by own ambition of the region and thus the three municipalities. This also indicates that although the three municipalities are responsible how to anticipate, there is certain coordination on provincial level.

Overall it can be said that the provincial development documents are aware of the causes and especially the consequences of population decline. However, there is a lack of presenting an analysis of the current situation (stagnation/decline) and a strategy in Zeeland, Zeeuws Vlaanderen and its municipalities. Moreover, the situation of population decline within the province is taken as one situation, while it is necessary to distinguish the situation between the different regions and especially the current declining situation in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Therefore aims and measures regarding population decline are not provided.

9.3 Analysis regional and local documents


Most of the regional and local documents do provide population decline as one of the core issues within the document. Population decline/stagnation is addressed as an already existing problem and the differences between the municipalities are elaborated. This is in contrast to national and provincial documents which do not take into account the current situation but are focused on the prognosis of the region. This can be explained by the fact that the regional/local planning documents are written commissioned by the three municipalities and therefore the already existing decline and stagnation is taken into consideration. This already indicates the awareness regarding population decline on the regional/local level.

However, it is incredible that within the documents population stagnation is just short elaborated without providing any data. This can be explained by the fact that the documents on regional and local level are development plans for the area and therefore not solely based on population decline. Moreover, most of the regional and local development plans do not provide any statistical data of...
the current situation (for example based on births, death and migration) in the document although the demographic development is taken into consideration.

The causes of population decline are not that explicit named in the documents but only used to introduce the topic of the demographic development in the area to anticipate on the consequences. Most documents do name the development of an ageing population and the decreasing number of births in the area. However, these developments are mentioned in combination with the measures how to respond on for example an ageing population. The planning document *Samenwerken aan Zeeuws Vlaanderen*, for instance, sets the aim to counter the development of young people moving out the region and the stagnation of the population and to make use of the ageing. In this case, the causes of population decline are elaborated in combination with the aim of the document. However, it is even more remarkable that although this document is published in 2007, the government (often combination of the three municipalities) still is outlining the countering the population stagnation, while the other documents elaborate the importance of accepting the decline.

In contrast to the causes of population decline, the consequences of population decline are often extensively appointed within the documents. Consequences named within the document are based on healthcare, education, facilities, economy, labour market and housing. Furthermore, it can be said that all documents are anticipating on consequences of population decline, although not all the consequences are always mentioned. It depends on the aim of the document which consequences are linked. For instance, the aim of the document *Samenwerken aan Zeeuws Vlaanderen* is to strengthen the economy and to maintain the facilities by exploiting the spatial qualities. The consequences and thus the measures regarding population decline mentioned in the text are therefore based on the labour market and facilities. Moreover, it is arguable that not all the consequences have to be provided in documents regarding the development of the region instead of solely based on population decline. On the other hand the document does not provide a description of all existing consequences of population decline.

Furthermore, it can be said that the documents on provincial level regarding population decline are addressing population decline or at least the consequences of population decline in a more precise way than the documents on regional and local level do. Therefore it can be said that according to the first proposition, the government is aware of population decline, although there is more awareness of the consequences. However, as already said, the documents on regional/local level are not solely based on the population decline, but just take into account the population decline regarding the development of the region. The consequences named on regional/local level correspond with the actual situation in the region, while the consequences named on provincial level are general and linked to previous research.

Moreover most documents on regional/local level are not providing goals regarding the population decline. However, a distinction can be made between the documents with the aim to counter the population decline and the documents which are accepting the decline. Especially the documents published before 2008 have the aim to increase the amount of residents by more attractive housing. According to an earlier research by Ecorys NL, adjustment of the housing market and providing more luxury houses would attract more people to Zeeuws Vlaanderen and thus counter the decline. For instance, the document *Samenwerken aan Zeeuws Vlaanderen (2007)* sets the aim to counter the development of young people leaving the region and the continuing stagnation in the area. The aims
of the documents which accepted the decline are based on anticipating on ageing, mobility etc by maintaining and increasing the quality of the housing stock and facilities. However, in most of the documents the aim regarding population decline is named in alignment with the economical development of the area. The adjustment of the housing market corresponds with the measures provided on provincial level regarding housing.

However, measures regarding housing are provided for whole Zeeuws Vlaanderen and not for the municipalities. Although the regional level can be seen as the arena, the housing market differs between the municipalities. One municipality is more attractive than the other. Therefore it is suggested that measures on local level are provided. Moreover, the document *Structuurvisie Terneuzen 2025* is the only document which presents, besides the existing analysis, the situation of the facilities and housing in the nuclei and sets the aim to restructure the housing stock to anticipate on the current situation in the municipality.

Noteworthy is that there is less attention for second homes and commuters on the regional/local level than exists on the provincial level. This can be explained by the fact that the documents are not solely based on population decline. However, the development of second homes in combination with the increase in commuters could contribute to the expanding of the quality and attractiveness of the area. However, it is questionable to what extent the area is attractive for commuters. Only Hulst seems to be an attractive municipality for commuters due to its location and accessibility. Terneuzen and Sluis are in comparison to Hulst less accessible. However, although it is necessary to make a distinction between the municipalities, it is necessary to provide opportunities for second home buyers and commuters.

Measures provided in the planning documents are concrete due to the development on regional/local level taken into account in the documents. For instance, the province of Zeeland sets up a campaign ‘Uw Nieuwe Toekomst’ (Your new future) to attract people to Zeeland. This Taks Force Uw Nieuwe Toekomst exists since 2008 and is a collaboration between the three municipalities in Zeeuws Vlaanderen and the business. The municipalities put together financial resources aimed at promoting living, working and housing. Zeeuws Vlaanderen receives European and provincial grants for this project. The objective of the organization is to positive influence the image of Zeeland on a medium and long term profile. This is done through a practical way of organizing cooperation and action in terms of regional promotion, employment promotion, population migration and positive attitudes. This indicates there is top down structure whereby the guidelines of the provincial level are taken into account. Moreover, this measure is based on a municipal cooperation to anticipate on the population decline by branding the region.

Overall, the documents do not provide an implementation and monitoring of measures regarding population decline. Although a plan of action is provided, no time lines are established or responsible actors are appointed. The only document providing an implementation and monitoring is the *Structuurvisie Terneuzen 2025*, with and implementation of every single project. However, also here a time stamp is missing.

However, as already said, according the statistical analysis, differences exist between the municipalities and therefore it is questionable why measures regarding population decline are addressed on regional level if they do not respond the current situation (this is thus in contrast to proposition 2 and 3). Most of the documents do not provide any analysis of the current situation. In
case of an analysis of the current situation, probably also the causes of population decline would have been elaborated.

The Leader Ontwikkelingsplan, does provide a description of the area with the notion of an already existing population decline in the region since 2005. However, also in this case it is questionable to what extent the analysis fits the decline in the area. No distinction is made between the different municipalities within Zeeuws Vlaanderen, while Terneuzen and Sluis are characterized by decline and Hulst by a stagnating population. Therefore the description of the population decline remains imprecise.

In contrast, the document Woonvisie Sluis (2004) provides a clear analysis of the situation in Sluis by providing data from the last 10 years on population development and migration. This is outstanding due to the age of the document (2004). However, although according to the document the population is stagnating and the facilities decreasing, the government still believes that it is possible to turn this development due to the right goals and measures. After publishing the provincial documents regarding decline, this optimism has changed into awareness how to accept and adapt the population decline instead of how to turn the population decline. Moreover, it is noticeable that Woonvisie Sluis is the last planning document provided by the municipality Sluis also responding on the population decline although the municipality is already dealing with a declining population.

An exception has to be made for the document Stuctuurvisie 2025 Terneuzen. This document takes into account, as one of the few, the analysis of population decline in the area and makes a distinction between the situation in Terneuzen and in the rest of Zeeuws Vlaanderen. This analysis of the current situation is based on statistics and a secure description of the development within the municipality (in contrast to the other documents). Moreover, the document is linked to the provincial document on decline Op Pad. This can be explained by the fact that the document is the youngest document based on the situation in the region and therefore also taken into account the recommendations based on decline from the provincial document. Regarding the development of the quality of the documents on municipal level, it is expected that the forthcoming planning documents of the municipalities of Sluis and Hulst are also of this quality.

Remarkable is the fact that despite the awareness of the local population decline, population decline is addressed as a regional phenomenon. However, this is in alignment with the provincial guidelines. As already mentioned in the analysis of the provincial document, even the LEADER program recommends an alignment in the municipal planning documents (to the extent they exist). Although there are differences in the measures and development plan, these development plans are always in alignment with the other municipalities. This can be explained by the fact that according to the planning documents on higher level (provincial and national) this coordination and cooperation is suggested and therefore taken for granted on the regional and local level. However, it is questionable to what extent population decline is a regional problem since there are differences in the current situation between the municipalities.

However, due to this recommended guidelines from provincial level, it is always easier for a municipality to rely on the cooperation. Due to the small size of the municipality, they need support from other municipalities and governments on a higher level. Furthermore, competition among the municipalities does not make it easier to anticipate on the population decline. It is questionable to what extent the municipalities are anticipating on the stagnation or decline since the regional level
does not seem the right level to address the problem. Moreover it is even arguable that the municipalities should not collaborate on a regional level but focus on their own population development in the municipality. According to the statistical analysis, population decline takes place on a local level and therefore it is recommended to anticipate on this level.

Due to the just published documents on provincial level it can be said that there is no update of the current situation in the local/regional planning documents, while this update already exists on provincial level. However, it remains remarkable that despite the fact the municipalities are already dealing with population decline or stagnation, no existing elaboration of the current situation is provided by the region and municipalities. This suggests that the municipalities do not take own initiative in already responding on population decline, but wait for guidelines from provincial level.

It is significant that there is no separate planning document regarding population decline on this level, in contrast to the national and provincial documents. Due to the already existing decline in Sluis and Terneuzen it is expected that also on regional level a document on population decline would have been published. As already outlined in the previous part, the Dutch planning system regarding population decline is characterized by guidelines from national and provincial level. The local level implements the national and provincial guidelines in their planning documents. Therefore within this research it is assumed that there is lack in implementation from the provincial level to the regional/municipal level.

However, it is worth mentioning that the Terneuzen, Sluis and Hulst are cooperating to develop a Masterplan Facilities regarding population decline for the whole region. This Masterplan is promoted on the site www.nu2021.nl where the municipalities in partnership with the citizens are searching for a joint approach regarding the population decline in the area. This site provides data on the current situation in the three municipalities on basis of different facilities (education, sport, health care, culture, well being) and takes into consideration the causes of population decline. Even more remarkable is that on the site four scenarios are outlined how to anticipate on the consequences of population decline for the facilities. According to scenario one, every nuclei anticipates on their own way, the second scenario is based on clustering of the facilities in the nuclei, the third suggests rearrangement of the facilities in the nuclei and the fourth is based on providing the facilities at one place for all the nucleus (NU2021.NL, 2011). This indicates that there is certain awareness for a local response on population decline. However, it remains noticeable that this Masterplan still not exists, despite the fact that population decline already exists for years and planning documents regarding decline are provided on national and provincial level. This confirms that there is a certain top-down approach.

To sum up, the documents on regional/local level are, based on the implementation of population decline, not of the same quality as the documents on provincial level. However, this does not apply for the Structuurvisie Terneuzen which, as one of the few, outlines population decline by, although short, an analysis of the current situation, the causes, consequences, measures and even the implementation of the measures. Hopefully, due to the introduction of the new legacy of the WRO (every municipality has to come up with its own planning document) the other two municipalities will provide a document with the same quality, responding on population decline. After analysing the planning documents on the regional and local level, it also can be said that on this level there is gap
between the existing situation in the municipalities and how population decline is addressed in the planning documents.

9.4 Population decline in planning documents

To sum up the analysis of the documents it can be said that there is a great awareness for population decline in the Netherlands. Due to the given attention on the causes and especially consequences/measures of population decline, it is assumed that according to the Dutch government it is not possible to counter the demographic changes in the more remote rural areas of the Netherlands. However, as already mentioned, those researches are based on prognoses of population decline and how to anticipate this population decline in an early stage. As well as the national as the provincial documents regarding population decline, do not take into account the already existing population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen (first proposition).

However, a few documents outline the existing population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Especially the provincial planning documents regarding population decline provide an analysis of the situation in Zeeuws Vlaanderen and even outline briefly the differences within the region by making the distinction between a stagnating or declining population. However, none of the existing documents, not even the local development plans, do further elaborate these differences in population decline/stagnation between the municipalities, although these differences seem to be relevant. Even more significant is the fact that on national and provincial level documents regarding population decline are published, while there is no existing regional planning document regarding the population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. This is expected due to the importance of a regional cooperation between the municipalities, mentioned in the national and provincial planning documents (this is in contrast to the proposition based on the differences within the region).

It is important to anticipate population decline based on the current situation instead of the prognoses (like the second proposition). According to the prognoses Zeeuws Vlaanderen is expected to decline while the current situation shows a decline in the municipalities Terneuzen en Sluis and stagnation in the municipality Hulst. According to the statistical analysis the differences between the municipalities can be explained by the fact that the municipality of Hulst is better accessible and thus more attractive for commuters than the other municipalities. Due to the differences between the municipalities it is remarkable that no measures are provided for the municipalities to anticipate on the current situation. Moreover, it is not possible to rely on prognoses due to its insecure character and an unpredictable future. For instance, it is unpredictable if the municipality of Hulst is still characterized by stagnation or even growth in the future, while Terneuzen and Sluis are characterized by decline. On the other hand, by using prognoses the planning documents do take into account the worst case scenario and are able to anticipate on the expected situation.

The consequences of population decline are mostly well outlined within the planning documents. However, since the documents do not take into account the current situation on local level, it is questionable if the document is anticipating on the consequences in an adequate way. Are the consequences the same for the whole area, or is it necessary to take into account the situation of the municipalities?

Due to the different situations regarding population decline between the municipalities, it is questionable to what extent it is possible for municipalities to cooperate in their response on the population decline. However, according to the national government, a collaboration and decision
making on regional level is necessary to prevent individual municipal interests for the collective regional interest. It can be said that, although the provincial level wants to avoid competition among the municipalities, there is always competition going on, whether is it accepted or not. As outlined in the analysis of the provincial documents, according to the planning documents population decline is a regional threat and therefore measures are provided on a regional level. According to the statistics Hulst is more attractive than Terneuzen and Sluis and it is not even clear if Hulst is going to decline in the future. It is therefore suggestible that population decline need to be addressed on the local level instead of the regional level.

Moreover, people move to places and not to regions. Therefore it is noteworthy that the whole region is promoted instead of places, which in this case means the municipalities. This regional promoting can be explained by the fact that competition is discouraged. However, competition supports innovation and creativity. This can also raise new innovative ideas how to anticipate on population decline in the municipality. Especially the differences within the region between the municipalities should therefore be taken into consideration and competition encouraged.

Moreover, the development of Zeeuws Vlaanderen can be seen as a polycentric development, with the municipalities as nodes, which compete and cooperate, within the area. These nodes develop in different ways and therefore need different measures and plans of action. In this case, as well as competition which is good for the innovativeness, as complementation of the nodes is encouraged in the region. There is always a certain need for regional cooperation to align the projects across the municipal borders, e.g. transportation issues. Therefore regional planning is important for the alignment and can be seen as an arena for planning on municipal level. However, the regional document should also take into account the current situations of the municipalities and provide measures regarding that current situation. Within the regional cooperation the analysis of the current situation could be based on cooperation while there still exists competition regarding the measures of population decline.

Explanations for this regional cooperation and the lack of local planning documents can be found in the Dutch planning system. As already mentioned the aim of the national government is decentralisation and deregulation and therefore their slogan is: *decentralisation where possible, centralisation if necessary.* The Dutch planning system is characterized by as well as a top-down approach as a bottom-up approach. This indicates that the national level also has to take into account the local strategy. However, according to the outcome of the analysis it is suggested the motto should be: *centralisation where possible, although decentralisation is necessary.*

As already outlined during the analysis of the planning documents, the national government is based on a risk-averse approach. This implies that on the one hand the national and provincial government set guidelines which need to be adopted by the municipalities. On the other hand planning is influenced by informal ways and especially the lower levels of government have the power to the refusal of planning permits etc. However, due to funding by the national government for planning at provincial and local level, the central government retains influence (top-down approach). Policies on national and provincial level need to be integrated into the plans of the regional and local government. Therefore especially the provincial level has influence on the coordination of the population decline on regional level. This, in turn, makes the municipalities reluctant to anticipate on their own way on the population decline and due to believe in planning wait for the steering from
national and provincial level. Moreover, this reluctance is supported by the EU policies regarding population decline. The projects and funding regarding population decline on EU level are, like the national and provincial planning, based on guidelines how to anticipate the population decline and recommended to be implemented by the local governments. However, these projects are often not based on the situation within the municipalities but stimulate, like national level, a regional and provincial approach. This does not stimulate the municipalities to have their own strategy regarding population decline. Measures are just implemented in the regional and municipal strategies. Therefore a more bottom-up approach is suggested by, as already outlined, cooperation on regional level (three municipalities) to analyse of the current situation and to map the differences between the municipalities. On the occasion of this analysis, the municipalities can come up with their own strategy and measures. Based on these measures an alignment of the projects can be provided on regional level, adjacent to the provincial and national level (bottom-up approach). Moreover, due to reluctance of the municipalities there is no responding on the current situation. However, it can be said that due to the importance of the already existing population decline, municipalities should already act instead of waiting for the guidelines how to act. The municipalities are most familiar with the population decline and therefore know best how to respond on the population decline. In this case it is suggested that the municipalities are still able to enhance a stagnating population instead of a declining population by branding the municipality due to the existing competition between the municipalities.

Zeeuws Vlaanderen is a remote rural area, not conveniently located in relation to the Randstad. Therefore the area is not attractive for working families etc. However, according to the population trends outlined in the theoretical framework and the statistical analysis, the region is attractive for retirees and second home owners. Since it is impossible to adequately turn demographic developments (birth and death rate) and the area seems not attractive for migration anymore, it is suggested that the government accepts the decline and focus on attracting (pre-) retirees and second home owners.

Moreover, there will always be regions lagging behind and in this case Zeeuws Vlaanderen lags behind on the rest of Zeeland and the Randstad. Therefore the area should not focus on competing with other regions, but more on complementing these regions with their strengths.

To refer back to the methodology chapter, a distinction can be made between the approach of researcher and the planner’s approach. As outlined in the analysis of the planning documents, the documents are mostly focused on the measures and the plan of action how to respond on population decline and thus solution based. The planners did not take into account the current situation within the municipalities but are focused on the prognoses for Zeeuws Vlaanderen and Zeeland. The documents show the pro-active government intervention to plan ahead of the actual event. Is corresponds with the planners approach as outlined in the methodology. According to the planners’ approach, planners are focused on the future and the expected (in this case) population decline. However, as already mentioned, it is questionable to what extent planners should focus on the future while there is an already existing population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen which now is not taken into account. Due to this planners approach, the differences between the municipalities are not elaborated and therefore the goals and measures do not correspond with the existing situation in all three municipalities. Moreover, it can be said that the Dutch government is responding on population decline on the wrong level. This approach corresponds to the approach of the researcher.
which takes in account the current situation and outlines the causes by using a theoretical framework and for instance examples from other countries. The approach of the researcher therefore is a re-active approach.

On the other hand, by focusing on prognoses, the planners are prepared to respond on worst case scenarios. However, it is questionable to what extent it is necessary to prepare for a future population decline if there already an existing decline and it is unpredictable how population decline in the future will look like. To make use of prognosis it is important to focus on the theories behind population decline.

**Approach researcher;** The situation in the real world → action plan

**A planner’s approach;** Action plan → impact on the real world

In sum, within this research focus was on the current situation in the municipalities by analysing the statistics. According to these statistics differences exists between the municipalities within Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Due to the pro-active government intervention, this current situation and thus the differences between the municipalities are not taken into account. Therefore a discrepancy is visible between the population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen and how population decline is addressed in the planning documents.
10. Conclusion

The previous chapters have examined how population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen (the case study) is addressed in planning documents. According to the statistical analysis Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by differences between the municipalities in the population development. While Terneuzen and Sluis are declining, Hulst is characterized by stagnation. As outlined in the analysis of the planning documents, these differences between the municipalities are not taken into consideration in the approach to respond on population decline. Therefore it is concluded that there is a discrepancy between the approach in the planning documents and the current declining population development in Zeeuws Vlaanderen.

According to the statistical analysis, Zeeuws Vlaanderen is characterized by the same kind of rural development, outlined in the theoretical framework. The remote rural area is characterized by young people migrating out of the region due to a lack of education. In contrast, Zeeuws Vlaanderen is attractive for people in the (pre-) retirement phase, due to the rural character (counter-urbanisation). Planning documents have little influence on the development of regions; the development is more based on lifestyles and preferences. Therefore it is suggested to enhance the strengths of the region instead of focussing on attracting young people to the region. However, due to the differences between the municipalities, branding of the municipality could reduce the impact of population decline. In this case the municipality is responding on population decline on a local level (bottom-up) and can compete with the other municipalities.

The causes, consequences and measures have been taken into account within the research to examine how these are addressed in the planning documents. It can be concluded that there is great awareness for population decline within the Netherlands. However, the causes of population decline are often just named and not further elaborated. Therefore it can be concluded that there is lack of a theoretical discussion the planning documents. To refer back to the theoretical framework of the thesis, developments as ageing and the decrease in birth rates in combination with the rural development are not elaborated in the planning documents. A development as the counter-urbanisation, which is of great influence for the development of the more remote rural areas, is not mentioned in the documents. However, within the planning documents there is notion of a certain implicit theory regarding the out-migration of young adults and the attractiveness of the area of the (pre-) retirees. This is noticeable because some of the measures are focused on a pleasant living environment (space, environment, quietness, meeting places, activities) in combination with attractive housing (in order to attract more people to the region).

Moreover, especially the consequences and measures are outlined within the planning documents. All consequences within the theoretical framework are appointed in the planning documents. This can be explained by the fact that several researches are done on population decline and the consequences in the Netherlands. Therefore, most planning documents do provide measures how to deal with population decline on regional level. However, these consequences and measures are based on prognoses for the region and therefore the actual population decline is not taken into consideration. This suggests that there is a gap between the consequences and measures examined in the planning documents and the existing consequences within the region and especially the actual situation within the municipalities. Moreover, the make use of prognoses in a planning documents,
this prognoses need to correspond with the theories regarding rural population decline. However, as already mentioned, the planning documents do not take into account any theories as outlined in the theoretical framework of the thesis. Especially due to the importance of the counter-urbanisation, the link to this theory is expected. Furthermore, the planning documents are focused on the regional level, while the actual population decline takes place on a local level. Therefore it can be concluded that population decline within the planning documents is not addressed on the right level. However, the regional level is an appropriate level for cooperation and alignment between the municipalities if the current population decline within the municipalities is taken into account. The regional level can be seen as an arena to address the current population decline in the municipality but leaves room for competition among the municipalities which is good for the innovativeness. In this case, as well as competition which is good for the innovativeness, as complementation of the nodes is encouraged in the region.

Furthermore, the discrepancy between the planning documents and the current situation can be explained, as already mentioned in the discussion, by the Dutch planning system. The Dutch planning system consists of 3 levels; national, provincial and local, however regarding to the planning documents an unofficial regional level is added for the cooperation between the municipalities. It seems rather odd that there is no response on population decline on local level although population decline already exists on this level. This can be explained by the fact that the Dutch planning system is based on providing guidelines from national to provincial, to local level and therefore suggests that the local level is waiting for guidelines on provincial level and provincial level is waiting for the guidelines from the national level. This is called ‘doorwerking’ (‘performance’) in the Dutch Planning system (Spit & Zoete, 2006). As already outlined, the European Union also provided guidelines to respond on the population decline. According to the results, these guidelines do not adapt the current situation in the region. Moreover, in the case of population decline in the documents, it can be said that due to the performance of the Dutch planning system, the current situation of population decline on local level is not addressed in the planning documents. This is extraordinary since it is suggested that the Dutch planning system is characterized by top-down approaches as well as bottom-up approaches and therefore more independence is expected on local level.

Another explanation for this discrepancy is the difference between the planner’s approach and the approach of a researcher. As already taken into consideration in the discussion, the documents are mostly focused on the consequences and measures how to respond on population decline without taken into consideration the theoretical background. Moreover, the documents are providing a proactive intervention to plan ahead of the actual event. Therefore, the planners do not respond on the current declining situation within the municipalities but are focused on the prognoses for Zeeuws Vlaanderen and Zeeland. However, to make use of prognoses it is important to focus on the theories behind population decline. Moreover, the differences between the municipalities are not elaborated and therefore it can be concluded that the Dutch planning system is responding on population decline in a wrong way on a wrong level.

It is suggested that to respond on population decline, the planning documents should focus more on the approach of the researcher (re-active). In this case the current situation within the municipalities is taken into account by outlining the causes of population decline by using literature and best practice examples from other countries. Moreover, it is necessary to respond on population decline on the local level by using a more bottom-up approach instead of the current top-down approach. In
this case competition between the municipalities is encouraged while regional cooperation is used to outline the causes and current situation for all three municipalities. The knowledge of the national and provincial levels can be used to complement the local/regional planning documents.

Overall it is concluded that the following motto seems to fit the Dutch planning regarding population decline:

‘Centralisation where possible, although decentralisation is necessary.’

Moreover, to refer back to the research question on how population decline is addressed in planning documents in the declining rural areas of the Netherlands, it can be said that although the consequences and measures of population decline are well addressed in the planning documents, there is a discrepancy between the current population decline (in Zeeuws Vlaanderen) and the population decline addressed in the planning documents.

Contribution and limitations of the research

This thesis contributes to a further understanding of how population decline is addressed in the planning documents. This is an updated study because most other studies on population decline are based on the awareness of population decline in the region. There is a great awareness for population decline within the Netherlands (e.g. due to the amount of research and planning documents). However, it is remarkable that a discrepancy exists between population decline addressed in the planning documents and the actual situation within the region. Unfortunately this research is only based on one case study within the Netherlands. However, the outcome of the research on population decline in Zeeuws Vlaanderen offers new perspective for further research in the other declining regions within the Netherlands.

This thesis also gives an understanding of the planning system within the Netherlands regarding population decline and how the planning documents on different levels are related to each other. Most planning documents do not provide an analysis of the current declining situation of the region. It would be of interest to research whether this lack of analysis corresponds with a lack of analysis based on other topics in planning documents in the Netherlands.

Although the research is limited by one case study, the development of the rural area is comparable to other remote rural areas within Europe. Based on this assumptions it would be interesting to compare the results of this thesis to another case study with another planning system. The outcome of the research can contribute to a further understanding on European level on how population decline is addressed in planning documents.
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