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Managing Population Decline in Europe's Urban and Rural Areas



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Managing Population Decline in Europe's Urban and Rural Areas

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Population Decline

1.1 Population Decline, a New Approach

The global population keeps growing. More than 200,000 people are born every day, with a pace of 150 babies a minute (Muenz and Reiterer 2007). In 2011, a milestone was reached: the world totalled 7 billion inhabitants, twice as many as in 1960. For the most part, approx. 90 %, this population explosion took or takes place in third world countries. Megacities primarily form in these countries, varying from Mumbai to Manila. Developing countries have a young and youthful population—carrying with it all the consequences. For instance, the Arab Spring in North Africa in 2011 was led by a relatively large group of well-educated youths. Simultaneously, many countries in the Westernised world have had to deal with population decline and ageing; the population declines and ages. Together with Japan, European countries, such as Italy and Germany, are the front-runners of population decline and ageing. The old continent is literally becoming old. Have the Europeans perhaps become too decadent to reproduce, like the American writer Laqueur in *The Last Days of Europe* (2007) noted? To be sure, the population of many European countries will continue to grow, but we also see differences in growth and decline within nation states. In particular towards the rural parts of countries we can detect population decline, ageing, and a decrease of young people.

Population decline—also mentioned as demographic shrinkage, demographic shrinkage or depopulation—has become an accepted, even popular topic over the last couple of years. The popularity has become apparent, among others, by the growing number of consultancy and research agencies that concern themselves with this demographic decline. The reports, articles, and consultations that appear are generally about areas where the population decline is most obvious: housing, spatial planning, education, regional economy and healthcare and welfare, just to name a few. Are there enough care facilities in the area? Can the primary school and community centre stay? Is it possible to maintain the sporting facilities in the

municipality? And what about social life? These are all justified questions in a situation of population decline. In the past, population decline was far from popular; nowadays, it is a term of great importance. Creative minds, urban planners, and architects especially like to talk about population decline as an opportunity. This embracement of depopulation is, of course, hardly representative of the entire population. The popularity of demographic decline is not accepted by everyone. In administrative circles, people especially tend to avoid using the word because it implicitly refers to vacancy, deterioration, and loss. Population decline gives the village, city, or region in question a bad image; it becomes a taboo—something not worth mentioning.

Demographic shrinkage can be pleased with this newfound popularity. In the past, population decline was far from popular; nowadays, it is a term of great importance. Creative minds, urban planners, and architects especially like to talk about population decline as an opportunity.¹ This embracement of depopulation is, of course, hardly representative of the entire population. The popularity of demographic decline is not accepted by everyone. In administrative circles, people especially tend to avoid using the word because it implicitly refers to vacancy, deterioration, and decline. Population decline gives the village, city, or region in question a bad image; it becomes a taboo—something not worth mentioning.

Demographic shrinkage is hardly supported by the media. Newspaper headlines largely portray population decline as a negative reality. It is also suggested that demographic decline is a novel phenomenon. However, depopulation is not new. As early as in medieval times, population declines occurred. In addition, have a look at the old industrial areas where economic downfall often went hand in hand with depopulation, such as the 'Rust Belt' in the United States, Greater Manchester, and the German Ruhr district (Cooke 1995). In some areas, we now call it population decline when we never noticed it in the past. Vacancy is sometimes not related to a demographic decline. Many office buildings in centres of urban development are abandoned due to the effects of the global economic crisis. Even in growing cities such as Utrecht, the Netherlands, schools in primary education have to be shut down. This is not caused by a population decline, but rather by ageing. In short: not all problems that are associated with depopulation are related to population decline, not even the areas that are now focussed on. In terms of the questions that do have something to do with demographic decline, it is not always clear if a population decline is the cause, effect, or intervening variable.

¹ This leads to phrases like 'the new growth' and 'design the decline'.

Definitions of a Population Decline

Demographic decline knows a number of manifestations. Below, a number of definitions of population decline or demographic shrinkage areas from the international literature are listed:

- ‘urban population losses as a result of economic decline’ (Häussermann and Siebel 1988);
- ‘places where the losers of the so-called globalized economy live’ (Oswalt 2005);
- ‘cities with a population change below the national average’ (Turok and Mykhnenko 2007);
- ‘older industrial cities with significant and sustained population loss (25 % or greater over the past 40 years) and increasing levels of vacant and abandoned properties, including blighted residential, commercial, and industrial buildings’ (Schilling and Logan 2008);
- ‘an event resulting from the interplay of different macro-processes at the local scale... Such macro-processes may be related to the economic, demographic, or settlement system development, as well as to environmental issues or changes in the political or administrative system’ (Rink 2009);
- ‘reduction in the population (number of people), in number of households, or in working age population (the members of a population between the ages of 20 and 65)’ (Verwest 2011);
- ‘a combination of population loss, economic downturn, employment decline and social problems’ (Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012).

If we compare these definitions, it is remarkable that the authors interpret population decline in a variety of manners. Some relate population decline primarily with an economic downturn, while others point out the decline of the number of citizens. A lot of attention is paid to urban population decline—even though this variable in many countries is less relevant than population decline in rural areas. Only the definition of Rink (2009) and the last definition focus on the complexity of a population decline. In this book, we will be led through an explanation of demographic decline that goes beyond the economy, numbers, and city. Depopulation has a range of causes that can result differently in every area. Because of this complexity, we make use of a multidisciplinary perspective in this book.

1.2 A Preview on the Rest of the Book

In this book, population decline is viewed as an evolution in the way people in a particular area conjugate. Both the theoretical and practical sides of this transformation process will be discussed. We will not only focus on the relevant insights into demography, sociology, and geography, but we will also target theoretical

applications and practical examples. Using these angles, we hope to provide a complete analysis of demographic shrinkage. Moreover, this approach makes it possible to place population decline in a perspective that goes beyond the administrative order of the day. In Chap. 2, we will start with a demographic perspective on a global and European level, with a slight view of the Netherlands. How many people are born and how many die? How many youths, families, and elderly come to live in an area and how many leave? We speak of a demographic decline when an area ultimately has fewer citizens than before. Population decline is often related to a decrease of young people and ageing. The decrease of young people refers to the relative decrease of children and young adults compared to the rest of the population; ageing is the increase of age in the population and the growth of the number of elderly. All over Europe, we see a decrease of young people and ageing while in some peripheral areas the population is decreasing.

Just like growth, population decline has never been a chosen path or a thought out strategy. In Chap. 3, we will discuss the similarities and differences between growth and decline. In order to do this, we will use a sociological perspective: the influence of growth and decline on society is the main focus point. Population decline and growth is a development that influences a society in every way. Naturally, there are reasons why some areas grow and others decline. Everywhere we see some areas develop into ‘places to be’ while others fall behind. Why? Why is London more popular for higher trained individuals than Liverpool? What are the attractions for an area that declines for those that remain behind? Chapter 4 will focus on these questions on the basis of insights into geography. We will see that migration from the country to the city is a phenomenon that has taken place for centuries. And just like in the past, areas in demographic decline still have a future. The administrative reactions to population decline are central in Chap. 5. With a number of examples, we will discuss the four policies of population decline; trivialise, counter, manage, and utilise. This chapter concludes that managing population decline (learning how to wisely handle it) has the best chance of succeeding.

What is the impact of demographic decline on the core functions and core institutions of our society? In this particular question, demographic decline means the context in which a society shapes itself with less, mostly elderly, people: a society in transition and transformation. Chapters 6 and 7 will answer these types of questions. We will search for new principles—paradigms if you will—on which areas in demographic decline can build their society. In addition, we will present a coherent framework for analysing an area in demographic decline and the quality of the same area. In line with ‘creative with population decline’, we will approach depopulation differently in Chap. 8. We will focus on the relativity of demographic shrinkage: the Netherlands, for example, is a small country and the ‘global village’ is accessible anywhere. We will also introduce the experience index—a new concept that describes the reuse of human and social capital. Chapter 9 will conclude the book with several statements. A change of mentality is needed for a meaningful understanding of population decline: depopulation demands contemporary ways of thinking. Time will tell if we can succeed in learning how to handle population decline.

In concluding this introductory chapter, we would like to make a statement concerning the figures and statistics mentioned in this book. Concerning the demographic prognoses, the annually produced numbers can sometimes differ from one another (de Jong and van Duin 2010). These fluctuations are caused by calculating the existing variables onto the future structure of the population. For instance, parameters from 2011 determine the numbers in 2040. However, in the meantime, much can happen whereby prognoses will not be an exact reflection of the reality. The political, economic, and/or sociocultural developments and events between now and 2040 will heavily influence the established prognoses. The German demographer Schwarz (2002) noted in this context the following: ‘None of us are prophets and we will not be prophets in the future. As far as predictions and reality correspond, it is only attributable to coincidence. It is simply based on the fact that no one can know all of the data, including all of the side effects that can determine the future’.² The figures and statistics in this book must, therefore, be interpreted very carefully because they may already be dated after a particular period of time has passed. The aim is not to be precise but to indicate trend developments. The established prognoses will, therefore, support the trends, not vice versa. This book is about population decline, which is one of these trends. One thing is certain, whatever may happen, population decline is there to stay.

² ‘Wir sind alle keine Propheten und werden es auch in Zukunft nicht sein. Stimmen Vorausschätzung und Wirklichkeit trotzdem überein, ist dies in der Regel dem Zufall zu verdanken. Das beruht letztlich genau darauf, dass niemand alle Daten mit ihren Nebenwirkungen kennen kann, von denen die Zukunft abhängt’.

Chapter 2

Demographic Changes

Demographic developments are solely dependent on three variables: birth, mortality, and migration (Poston and Bouvier 2010). How does population decline fit into this picture? On the one hand, the population can shrink due to more people dying than being born—mortality surplus. On the other hand, the population can shrink due to more people migrating from one area than to another area. In terms of the latter, we notice a negative net migration, a mortality surplus. For every two deaths, 2.1 births must occur in order to keep the population in balance. If there are deviations to this calculation, then we observe a decrease of young people in an area and ageing. The former refers to fewer births (<2.1) and migration from young people from an area. The latter refers to the number of elderly in relation to the number of young people in an area. Ageing doesn't necessarily have to lead to a population decrease: an area can compensate its natural population decrease by drawing people from elsewhere. If this doesn't work, the population will decrease. In some areas, both processes can occur: relatively few children are born and relatively many people leave. A decrease of young people in an area and ageing are, therefore, related to demographic decline, but are not identical to it. As a rule of thumb, depopulation areas age, but ageing areas do not necessarily decline.

2.1 Population Decline and Low Fertility

If Italy refrains from taking action, then by the end of this century, the country will have lost 86 % of its population—only 8 million Italians will remain. The number of Germans will also decline: without the arrival of immigrants, in 2100 there will be 83 % fewer Germans than there are now. This is the expectation of demographers who are worried about the low fertility rates in Europe (Kösters 2011). Sixty years ago the European population grew slowly. The euphoria of the end of World War II caused the baby boom. However, in the swinging 1960s, fertility rates decreased:

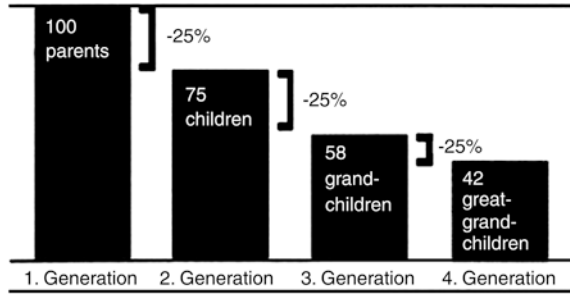
although sex was aplenty, it did not result in procreation. Since the middle of the 1970s, women produce too few to even guarantee a stable population. The average birth rate in the EU-27 (2010) is 1.6 children per woman (Eurostat 2011). The birth rates are particularly low in Southern and Eastern Europe. Italy doesn't rate above 1.3, and Bulgaria is stuck at 1.2. Germany has a birth rate that fluctuates around 1.4. With an average birth rate of 1.75, the Netherlands has, on European level, obtained a relatively high fertility rate. This average, however, is far below the so-called 'replacement level' of 2.1 children per woman. This results in a decrease of young people in an area: the number of babies, children, and youths in the population decreases.

What is the cause of the decreasing birth rates since the European baby boom? First: the invention of the contraceptive pill. At the start of the 1960s, a contraceptive pill was brought on the market, and it allowed women to influence the time of pregnancy. Birthing children became a somewhat conscious decision (Knook 2009). This pill contributed to a decrease of teen pregnancies and the age of women at the birth of their first born increased. Many years ago, children were a guarantee for old age, but now society plays that part. By consequence, socio-economic developments also contributed to a decrease of the fertility rates. In the past decennia, the European woman has become more emancipated. They go to school longer and follow-up with a career before settling for a family. Furthermore, modern women set high standards for a partner, which allows them to keep searching for 'the one'. Since the hit song from Madonna, we can speak of the 'material girl' effect—the modern woman who decides her own fate and thinks carefree dating is more important than an early pregnancy (Pearce 2010). An increasing number of women postpone maternity. Dutch women belong to the oldest mothers of Europe: the average age of pregnancy is 29.

The German demographer Birg (2001) perceives a pattern in the decreasing birth rates. According to him, there is talk of a 'demographic-economic paradox'—the higher the economic development of a country, the lower the fertility rate. Looking at this pattern, a decrease of young people in an area is the price which we will have to pay for more prosperity and emancipation. However, it is debatable whether this theory is correct. Statistically, the demographic-economic paradox for Western Europe cannot be observed (Klingholz 2009a). Up until the 1980s, a higher participation of women on the labour market and a decrease of the birth rate went hand in hand. However, in the following decennia, we see a positive correlation between the labour participation of women and the fertility level in Western Europe. In countries with a relatively high child average such as Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands, more women work than in countries with lower birth rates such as Italy, Spain, and Germany. This is not only a matter of cultural differences. Family politics also plays a part. In Italy and Spain, affordable childcare is hardly mentioned on the political agenda. Scandinavian countries carry out active family politics to facilitate working parents. For instance, Sweden's generous maternity and paternity leave, flexible working hours, and nurseries at the office are common. Cheap childcare and other measures that enable work and family to be combined are thus good for the birth rates.

In theory, a decrease of young people in an area has large consequences for a country. Indeed: in a society with fewer children, the number of potential mothers

Fig. 2.1 The consequences of a decrease of young adults for generations to come (Source Kösters 2011)



also recedes—children who are not born cannot produce their own children. This effect strengthens from generation to generation (Kösters 2011). Suppose in a country that 100 parents produce 75 children, with an unchanged birth rate (that amounts to 1.5 per woman), these 75 children will produce 56 offspring, and they in turn will produce 42. Of these 100 parents, just over half of them will become grandparents (Fig. 2.1). Some expect this domino effect of a decrease of young people in an area to lead to large shortages on the labour market. Shortages on the labour market and the growth of the number of people over 65 are severe threats for the financing of collective goods and the system of social security. Others comment differently; because the population of a country is not a closed system, immigration can largely compensate the shortages (Horx 2009).

Due to a decrease of young people in an area, the need for schools and teaching staff in depopulated areas strongly declines. For example, take the Achterhoek: a Dutch rural area, the number of pupils in primary education structurally decreases and employment for teachers is limited. Be aware that a quarter of primary schools in the area will have to close at some point. In other depopulation areas in the Netherlands, a decrease of young people in an area also leads to emptier classrooms. Up until 2015, the pupil population will decrease by 10 % (150,000 children). This means that in this period with an unchanged policy 900 village schools in the Netherlands must close (Aboutaleb and Mat 2011). In most villages, closing the primary school is a tough pill to swallow. The primary school is considered as a symbol of the existence of a village. van der Wouw et al. (2012) downplay the importance of a primary school for the future of a village. On the basis of foreign studies and research in Zeeland, a province in the Netherlands, they conclude that the areas without a school are by no means destined for abandonment.

2.2 Population Decline and Ageing

Since 2009, larger amounts of incontinence products than diapers are being sold in Germany (Kösters 2011). This is a trivial expression of a phenomenon that all of Europe has to deal with: ageing. The number of elderly in the population increases. In the EU-27 (2011), 17 % of the population is over 65, while in

1960 only 9 % was over 65. Germany and Italy are two countries with the largest percentage of ageing: 20 % of the population is 65 or older (Eurostat 2011). This is hardly exceptional because ageing goes hand in hand with a decrease of young people in an area. Fewer children ultimately ensure an increase of the average age—the measurement of seniors in the population naturally increases. Aside from a decrease of young people in an area, ageing has another, non-demographic cause: we are all getting older. In most European countries, the life expectancy keeps growing by 2 or 3 months a year; this is mainly due to medical developments, like diagnostic improvements, surgical treatment and medication. In 2008, the life expectancy at birth for European women was almost 82 years and for European men 76 years (van Nimwegen 2008). An end to the average age increase has not yet been spotted. The age of the Biblical figure Methuselah—he reportedly became 969 years old—is probably far beyond our reach. But according to some doctors, the life expectancy can easily reach 150. Knook (2009) calls this the ‘Methuselah mystery’: we are all growing older, but we have no idea what this will mean for the organisation of our society.

However, we can already observe that ageing has radical consequences for society. Think of new issues that can occur in health care or in housing. Because ageing comes with bodily defects, the need for health care and senior facilities increases. Where do we find care staff in a shrinking society? What about the supply of ground level housing? Or will medical technology and automation soften the problems of age? Ageing also raises new questions outside of the health care and housing sectors. Are there enough resting areas and toilets in public spaces? And is the safety of the elderly in traffic guaranteed? New York City made sure in 2010 that traffic lights in four hundred places in the city remained green for four seconds longer; this allows the elderly more time to cross the road. Some municipalities take extra space needed for mobility scooters into account when constructing cycle paths. The Dutch province of Limburg shows that ageing even has an influence on tap water consumption (Reverda 2011). WML, the regional water company in Limburg, the Netherlands, implemented a rate increase some years ago. This measure is not only due to a decrease of the number of households in Limburg affected by population decline but the water company has also had to incur costs to purify surface water. The reason for this? Due to ageing, the use of medication in Limburg has increased and, therefore, more pollutants have contaminated the surface water.

2.3 Global and European Trends

The global population is growing, but the number of Europeans stagnates and will decrease in 2040. All countries in the European Union are ageing and several member states, such as Italy and Germany, are already shrinking; this will also remove the era of the ‘population pyramid’. All EU member states, except Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden, Cyprus, and Malta will lose citizens in the next forty years.

The Netherlands is also going to have to accept the consequences: in line with the European average, the change from growth to decline is expected in 2040. Without the arrival of immigrants, the European Union could lose fifty million people in 2050—one tenth of the current population (Berlin-Institut für Bevölkerung und Entwicklung 2008).

Due to all the discussions about population decline we seem to forget that the world is becoming overcrowded. In 1950, the world population totalled 2.5 billion people; in 2000 it grew to 6 billion people and is expected to total nearly 9.2 billion people in 2050—a growth in half a century of more than 50 % (United Nations 2009). However, if we zoom in on the period between 2000 and 2050 in Europe, then we note both a gradual decline of the number of people and a strong ageing of the rest of the population. Two interesting developments take place. First, all the continents keep growing with Europe being the exception. As the only continent, Europe is preparing for a population decline. All continents are ageing, but of all the continents in the world, Europe is ageing the most. Demographic shrinkage and ageing take place simultaneously with growth. On a global scale, Europe is a demographic outsider.

The population prognoses and the distribution across the continents are shown in Table 2.1. The total world population will rise from 6.1 billion people in 2000 to 9.1 billion in 2050: an increase of over 50 %. In this period, the population of Africa and Asia will undergo the strongest growth. Latin America, North America, and the Pacific will also show growth. The African population will rise with a factor 2.5 in 50 years since 2000 and the Asian population with 40 %. Europe is the exception in this development. Between 2000 and 2050, the number of Europeans will decrease by as many as 36 million people: from 727 million down to 691 million.

Table 2.1 shows that the population share of the two richest continents—North America and Europe—in the total global population decreases from 17.1 % in 2000 to 12.5 % in 2050. Poverty and welfare are concentrated on a shrinking part of the global population. The migratory pressure, potentially occurring in the next few years, is hard to predict, which is also due to countries such as Brazil, India, and China experiencing strong economic growth. International migration

Table 2.1 Global population prognoses

Year	World	Asia	Africa	Europe	Latin America	Northern America	Oceania
2000	6,115	3,698 (60.5 %)	819 (13.4 %)	727 (11.9 %)	521 (8.5 %)	319 (5.2 %)	31 (0.5 %)
2010	6,909	4,167 (60.3 %)	1,033 (15.0 %)	733 (10.6 %)	589 (8.5 %)	352 (5.1 %)	36 (0.5 %)
2030	8,309	4,917 (59.2 %)	1,524 (18.3 %)	723 (8.7 %)	690 (8.3 %)	410 (4.9 %)	45 (0.5 %)
2050	9,150	5,231 (57.2 %)	1,998 (21.8 %)	691 (7.6 %)	729 (8.0 %)	448 (4.9 %)	51 (0.6 %)

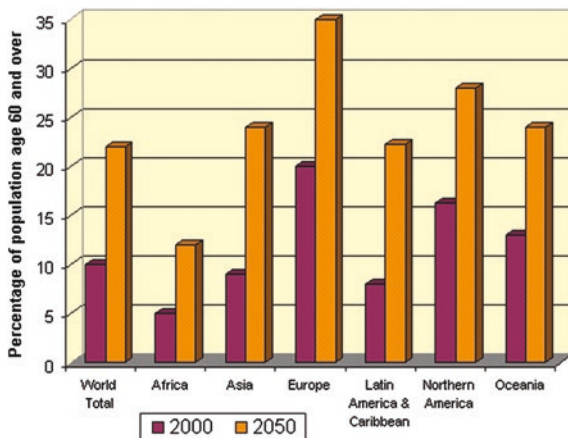
Source United Nations 2009

is often named as one of the solutions of population decline and keeping poverty and welfare in balance in Europe. Critically viewed, the demographic changes on a global level are arguments to develop an active European migration policy like the policies countries such as Canada, the US, and Australia have. These countries have been carrying out a selective immigration policy since their existence. Immigration is encouraged whereby education and gaps in the labour market are the main criteria for admission.

Figure 2.2 in turn shows that the world is clearly ageing. Europe is without a doubt the leader. The median age in the world will increase from 26 to 36 in the next four decennia: there will be just as many people aged 36 and younger in 2050 as people aged 36 and older. The numbers for the European Union are considerably higher: in 2005, the median age was 38.5 and in 2050 will most likely be 48 years (Muenz 2007). Where global ageing is concerned, the group aged 60 years and older will triple between 2000 and 2050 and will have grown from six hundred million to two billion people (United Nations 2002). Thus, the people aged 60 and older form 22 % of the global population in 2050. We can determine a large difference between the more prosperous and less prosperous areas in the world. In the poorer continents, 20 % of the population will be older than 60 in 2050; this percentage in the richer Europe will be 33 %. Furthermore, compared to all other continents, Europe is the largest aged continent of all.

One of the consequences of ageing is that the ratio of young people, potential workers, and elderly changes. Insight into this shift is needed to estimate how many people are going to need education in the future, how many people are in principle able to work, and how many could appeal to social support and health care facilities. This ‘potential support rate’ (PSR) is an interesting measure. This ratio shows the relationship between the potential working population of the ages 15–64 and the number of non-employed who are 65 and older. The PSR decreased globally between 1950 and 2000 from twelve to nine persons and will have dropped to four in 2050. In other words: in 2050, only four

Fig. 2.2 Prognoses of the ageing global population 2000 and 2050 (Source United Nations 2002)



people of the working population between the ages of 15 and 64 will be available for every pensioner globally (United Nations 2002). The decrease of the PSR naturally has large consequences for the economy and society: the labour market becomes tighter and a shrinking group of workers becomes responsible for the upkeep of the social security for an enlarging group of elderly. The potential working population will be challenged to work more and longer, and this means working full time instead of part time and working longer after the age of 65. Moreover, a large contribution is expected from them in terms of volunteering and informal care. Due to a declining PSR, the potential worker is going to be busy in the next decennia.

Table 2.2 is also interesting. This table shows that the population of the member states of the European Union (we are talking about the EU-25, without Bulgaria and Romania) will shrink: of 459 million in 2005 to 449 million in 2050. The number of young people decreases and the number of elderly (65+) increases considerably. We can also see that population decline and ageing are not processes that take place evenly across Europe. On the contrary, if we compare the EU-25 to the EU-15, we notice that the population decline mostly occurs in the ten member states that acceded to the EU in 2004; the EU-15 as a whole is still growing slightly. This is due to the presence of selected countries with relatively high birth rates such as France and Sweden. The average life expectancy in the EU-15 is also higher than in the ten ‘new’ member states of the European Union. This does not mean that there is no population decline in the EU-15—we already saw that Italy and Germany are depopulation countries. Moreover, even if countries as a whole are still growing, it does not mean that regionally there is no demographic shrinkage. Over a quarter of the European regions are struggling with depopulation, of which several Dutch regions are included (Demos 2011).

In the European Union, the ‘potential support rate’ will be dropped to 2 potential workers for every person aged 65 and over in 2050: there will be 51 people of 65 years and older in relation to 100 potential workers (Muenz 2007). This low score arises due to the low fertility rates in the EU: in 1995, it was 1.5 children per woman and in 2030 this will be 1.6. The strongly increased life expectancy is also important: in 2050 men will reach an average age of 79 and women will reach an average age of 85. At the same time, the working population (15–64 years) will have decreased from 2000 to 2050 with 56 million people.

Table 2.2 Population prognoses for the EU-25

2005		0–14	15–64	65+
EU-25	459.3	73.4 (16 %)	308.9 (67 %)	77 (17 %)
EU-15	384.8	61.5 (16 %)	256.5 (68 %)	66.8 (16 %)
2050		0–14	15–64	65+
EU-25	449	66.5 (16 %)	253.4 (56 %)	129.1 (28 %)
EU-15	387.2	58.2 (15 %)	218.3 (54 %)	110.7 (31 %)

Source European Commission 2008

In terms of demographic trends on a global and European level we can make a few assertions. Firstly: growth and decline both occur on a global scale. The world population grows from 2000 to 2050, while the European population in the same period decreases and thus shrinks. Secondly: the world population is ageing, but ageing in Europe is the strongest. Thirdly: it is unclear as to how migration to Europe will look like in the future. We can assume that due to developments, a European immigration policy will be needed. Finally: fewer (young) adults will have to take care of an enlarged group of elderly.

The Demographic Challenge of Europe

The European Commission considers the relatively strong ageing in Europe compared to the rest of the world as a success in its policy. Ageing is seen as a result of progress on the economic, social, and medical levels. However, ageing creates a ‘demographic challenge’, as the European Commission (2008) euphemistically refers to: the group of potential workers shrinks and the number of elderly grows larger. This creates issues. Therefore, the Commission proposes several measures:

1. Stimulating the demographic revival by making it easier for men and women to combine work, a private life, and a family (parental leave, a more flexible work division, sufficient child care and others);
2. Creating more jobs and increasing the pension ages by improving the education systems (life-long learning) and the emphasis on systems of ‘flexible security’ (higher mobility and more flexible contracts on the labour market);
3. Creating a European immigration policy and attracting qualified labourers to accommodate the needs of the labour market;
4. Organising government funding by implementing a strict budget discipline and reforming the pension system.

Without a doubt, the last measure is going to be a huge challenge due to the recent Euro crisis. Aside from a demographic challenge, the European Union will also have to face an economic challenge.

2.4 Case Study: The Dutch Situation

In the densely populated Netherlands, growth and decline occur simultaneously, just like a decrease of young people and ageing. However, within the country, large differences are discernable. The conurbation of Western Holland (Randstad) is still growing and the periphery of the country is shrinking. This is an example of a phenomenon that the sociologist Merton (1968) calls the ‘Matthew effect’, after the Biblical principle of Mathew’s gospel: ‘for unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath’ (Matthew, 13:12).

That the conurbation of Western Holland is slowly sucking the periphery dry is not necessarily a rule. On the contrary, there was talk of a reverse process during the Batavian Republic in the 1800s: the conurbation shrank and the periphery grew (van der Woud 2010a). In 1700, 33 % of the Dutch population lived in cities, mostly in Holland. This percentage receded to 28 % in 1800—a result of the decreasing influence of Holland in the world economy. Enkhuizen went from 22,000 citizens to 7,000 in 1800; Leiden faced a large decline of 67,000 to 27,000 citizens. Haarlem and Delft saw half of their population leave and Amsterdam shrank in 1815 from 217,000 citizens to 180,000 partly due to the influence of the trade embargo during the French revolution. Vacancy and demolition were the order of the day: Enkhuizen removed 1,600 homes, Leiden 1,240, and Haarlem over 1,200. The conurbation of Western Holland shrank in 1800 while the periphery slowly grew: Maastricht, Zwolle, Leeuwarden, and Arnhem, for example, grew quicker than the average growth of the Dutch population.

After the 1800s, a long period of growth began. In those days the Netherlands totalled 3.1 million citizens. Since then, the size of the population increased five-fold. This is in line with the average population growth of around 1 % per year. Not a single year in the period of 1850–2000 was met by a negative growth percentage. The signs of population decline have only emerged in the last couple of years, especially since the media is paying attention to demographic decline mainly in the periphery of the country. In the future, growth and decline will be strongly related. The Dutch population will grow with approximately one million people in the next generation: from 16.5 to 17.5 million in 2040. The growth is mostly concentrated in urban regions and agglomerations: the conurbation of Western Holland, the city of Utrecht, Arnhem-Nijmegen, the city ring of Brabant, Zwolle, and the city of Groningen. In other regions, the number of citizens is already decreasing. There are at least three known ‘depopulation areas’ in the Netherlands: East Groningen, Dutch Flanders, and South Limburg (Parkstad Limburg).

If we can believe the demographers, then population decline is only going to continue. The expectancy is that the population of East Groningen, Dutch Flanders, and Parkstad Limburg will shrink by 6, 11, and 26 %, respectively, between 2009 and 2040. Population decline, a decrease of young people in an area and ageing will strengthen each other in these regions. In fact, for every person aged 65 and over in Parkstad Limburg there are 1.6 potential workers. For every hundred potential workers in this area there will be 63 people aged 65 and over in 2040 (Table 2.3), which is a considerably high number! However, demographic shrinkage is not limited to the above mentioned regions in Groningen, Zeeland, and Limburg. Other regions in the Netherlands will or already do face a population decline at some point. Examples for such ‘anticipation areas’ are Drenthe, the Achterhoek, the Kop van Noord Holland, and the South Holland islands. Demographic decline is already visible in these areas.

Up until 2040, more than a third of the Dutch municipalities will have to deal with a decrease in their population. This totals 145 municipalities (Netherlands environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) 2010b). Most of these municipalities are in the above mentioned depopulation and anticipation areas in the Netherlands. However, municipalities in the future growth areas such as South East Brabant and

Table 2.3 A prognoses of the population development in the Netherlands and three well-known depopulation areas (numbers \times 1,000)

		0–20	20–64	65 and older	Total
The Netherlands	2009	3.924	10.080	2.471	16.486
		23 %	61 %	25 %	100 %
	2040	3.797	9.194	4.482	17.473
		22 %	53 %	26 %	100 % (+6 %)
East Groningen	2009	34	91	28	142
		22 %	60 %	18 %	100 %
	2040	29	72	41	142
		20 %	51 %	29 %	100 % (–6 %)
Dutch-Flanders	2009	23	63	21	107
		21 %	59 %	20 %	100 %
	2040	20	46	28	95
		21 %	49 %	30 %	100 % (–11 %)
Parkstad Limburg	2009	36	171	47	254
		14 %	67 %	19 %	100 %
	2040	23	101	65	190
		12 %	54 %	34 %	100 %

Source Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) (2010b), adapted by CESRT/Etil

the metropolitan area of Arnhem-Nijmegen will also lose inhabitants. This often takes place in rural areas where the young people move to the main city in the region. As it is, the Dutch demographic decline is largely related to the classic migration from the country to the city: 80 % of municipalities that shrink or deal with decline are situated in the country (Verwest et al. 2010). Furthermore, aside from a population decline, the Netherlands will face a decrease of the number of households in the coming decennia, even though the growth will last longer. This is due to the increasing number of singles and elderly who are left behind when their partner passes away. The growing number of divorces also plays a part. The consequence of this development is that fewer people live at just one address, a phenomenon that is called ‘household fragmentation’. Fewer inhabitants, therefore, do not necessarily mean fewer households or a lower need for housing. The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (2010b) expects population decline to be associated with fewer numbers of households in 45 municipalities. It is remarkable that in the next decennia in almost all Dutch municipalities the potential working population will drop in number, whereas the group of elderly (65+) will rise.

If we consider the demographic developments in the Netherlands, the following image emerges (Netherlands Environmental assessment Agency 2010b). Just like in the rest of the world, growth and decline go hand in hand. The total population is still growing, mainly in the conurbation of Western Holland. However, population decline has already started in the periphery. Furthermore, the Netherlands, in

line with the European position is becoming a nation of elderly. The decrease of young people in an area and ageing are clearest in the depopulation areas Dutch Flanders, East Groningen, and Parkstad Limburg. That fewer (young) adults are needed to take care of the elderly is also applied to the Netherlands. The labour market will become cramped. The main question is where the Netherlands will find the people to even out this imbalance. Labour saving technology is not going to be enough; an active immigration policy seems to be inevitable.

Chapter 3

Growth and Decline

Population decline is a challenging phenomenon to discuss in political and societal circles. Many aldermen, heads of school, and corporate directors have difficulty in handling this situation. Decline is something to be talked about in hushed whispers because it refers to deterioration, regression, and corporate failure. Growth is a positive word: it refers to success, progress, and opportunity. Growth makes one confident and proud—decline is about uncertainty and shame. In the planning of society, the economy and public administration, growth is the leading principle; decline is the undesirable opposite.

Since the time that humankind has been able to control nature, growth has been an obsession. Since the Industrial Revolution, our society has been fixated upon growth. Growth has become a target with a simple principle: three is not just more than two, it is also better. However, has the growth paradigm always been so obvious? Did growth back then also go coupled with jolts? In this chapter, the processes of growth and decline will be compared. They can show comparable characteristics but can also be each other's mirror images. They do have one main thing in common: both cause radical transitions and transformations in all facets of society.

3.1 Growth in the Nineteenth Century

Growth, popularly speaking, first arrived in the nineteenth century—a turbulent period in history in which life, work, congregation, and governing underwent fundamental changes. A new economy; capitalism emerged. Suddenly, growth, market, and mass production became focus points. Applying new techniques replaced the guild system and making profit was the core business of companies. The maxim: produce more, larger markets, and higher profit margins. For the development and progress of the economy, the possession of raw materials became more

important than the possession of land. The industrialist replaced the aristocrat and the class society replaced the state society. Europe changed from a rural to an industrial society (Bendix 1996; Reverda 2004).

The nineteenth century was also a turbulent period for politics. Slowly but surely, the power of smaller political parties and the social elite disappeared; gradually people began to gain the right to speak their mind about public administration and political decision making. The absolute monarch from the eighteenth century, still partially rooted in feudalism, was slowly replaced by a democratic regime. In this ‘new’ era, political philosophy and views on the organisation of the state flourished: the nineteenth century was by far the era of the ‘-isms’. Liberal, Social Democratic, and Christian Democratic opinions in all its forms gave shape and depth to politics, governance, and social planning. Of course, the transformation of absolutism to democracy did garner some criticism. This resulted in the creation of conservatism in the same period (Burke 1790 [1968]).

Factories would appear where raw materials could be found, and where industrial centres were created, people assembled. The depopulation of the country, the pull to the city, and the consequent growth of the cities—all summarised in the terms urbanisation and urbanity—are characteristics of the nineteenth century.¹ The population growth in the cities first enlarged, in respect to that in the country, around the middle of the nineteenth century. van der Woud (2010b) writes about this regarding the developments in the Netherlands: ‘The censuses that were being conducted afterwards strengthened that impression. The difference that was observed in 1870 did not seem to be a one-time occurrence; but rather structural’ (p. 23).² The new economy, changed political order, and urbanisation took care of the changes in society as a whole. The feudal state society was lost; the bourgeoisie took over the position of the aristocracy. The bourgeoisie traditionally positioned themselves in the city and trade and was their core identity. During the feudal age, the bourgeoisie had to accept its modest position opposed to the aristocracy, farmers, and clergy. However, in the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie slowly became the most important power in society.

The transition from a feudal society to a civil society was embodied by the classic sociologist Tönnies (1855–1936) as a transition from ‘community’ (“Gemeinschaft”) to ‘society’ (“Gesellschaft”), from a traditional rural society to a ‘modern’ or industrial society. In the ‘community’, as he stated, the norm is determined by the group or the collective. Therefore, the ‘community’ represents the traditional farming village or family, where the people have a strong affective relationships and acting is regulated by tradition and solidarity. Group cohesion and traditions are the cement of the ‘community’. In ‘society’, these are gone and the individual personally decides what makes a society. ‘Society’ refers to the

¹ The term ‘urbanisation’ refers to the building density; the term ‘urbanity’ refers to the ways of thinking and acting. See Zijdeveld (1998).

² ‘De volkstellingen, die daarna werden gehouden, versterkten die indruk. Het verschil dat in 1870 was waargenomen, leek in de jaren daarna geen incident te blijven, maar structureel te worden.’

city where the individual self-interest is most important and relationships are only formed if they contribute to self-interest.

Tönnies stated that the disappearance of the ‘community’ and the beginning of the ‘society’ is caused by industrialisation and urbanisation. Both processes were supported by the class that was preoccupied by them: the bourgeoisie. In the words of Tönnies (1887 [1991]): ‘The concept of ‘Gesellschaft’—society—is both socially and politically ingrained in the habits and views of the third class, the bourgeoisie... The bourgeois society is both a source and a result of their shared norms and developments. Where an urban culture grows, the society appears as its explicit structure. The countryside—rural areas—is not familiar with this.’ (p. 4).³ Growth had a central role, carried by the industrialisation, democratisation, urbanisation, and bourgeoisification of society. While in 1800, Europe totalled 165 million people; in 1900, Europe totalled 400 million people. In 1800, Europe only had 21 cities with 100,000 citizens or more, in 1900 it totalled 147 cities (van der Woud 2010b). The same development took place in the Netherlands: in 1800 there were only 2 million Dutch people. Circa 1900, this country counted approximately five million people and four cities even had 100,000 citizens or more. In a single century, the Dutch population grew more than twice its size; this growth was coupled with urban prosperity.

3.2 Uncontrolled Development, Planning, and Decline

Growth in the nineteenth century did not occur slowly and steadily but rather grew with jolts. The impact was radical for society: dilapidation, poverty, child labour, and a lack of education, infrastructure, and medical care. However, that wasn’t all: growth led to the demise of social cohesion that was based on tradition. Religion and magic no longer acted as the core values for interpreting and explaining reality. Growth demanded a rational and scientific approach. The ‘disenchantment of reality’ was permanently set (Weber 1919 [1988]). Core institutions such as work, housing, charity, spatial planning, education, public financing, and the social infrastructure were problematised and came up for discussion. Growth was identical to a drastic change of society: the introduction of capitalism (economy), the beginning of class (society) and the introduction of democracy and the emergence of official bureaucracy (organisation of public administration). The clear consequences of growth in the nineteenth century were labelled ‘the social affair’ and ‘a century of social problems’ (Hoefnagels 1966). The population explosion also gave occasion to the development of new social theories: the

³ ‘Der ganze Begriff der Gesellschaft im sozialen und politischen Sinn findet seine natürliche Grundlage in den Sitten und Anschauungen des dritten Standes... Seine Gesellschaft ist zu einer Quelle und zugleich zum Ausdruck gemeinsamer Urteile und Tendenzen geworden. Wo immer die städtische Kultur Blüten und Früchte trägt, da erscheint auch die Gesellschaft als ihr unerblickliches Organ. Das Land kennt sie nur wenig.’ (p. 4).

ideas of Thomas Malthus and the social Darwinism are the best known examples. According to the British defeatist Malthus, the production of livelihoods remained with population growth resulting in chronic poverty. In the social Darwinism theory only the strongest remained in the battle of social existence: ‘survival of the fittest’ (Malthus 1798 [1999]; Hermans 2003). And, as previously stated, the social upheaval in the nineteenth century led to the development of all the well-known ‘-isms’, such as socialism, liberalism, conservatism, and anarchism. To date, these movements form our political ideas.

Growth fumbled with the fundament of the nineteenth century society. Since then, more than a hundred years were needed to tame this growth, push it in the right direction, and standardise it. For us, freedom of speech and universal suffrage are so natural that we easily forget how much social and political conflict cost us this achievement. Ultimately it led to the recognition of unions and employers’ associations that have now been gathered to form the harmonious structure of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). At the start of the twentieth century, child labour was prohibited and welfare committees were established to fight dilapidation in the cities. The regulatory role of the government in urbanism, infrastructure, and education is more than logical now. However, in the nineteenth century this was far from obvious; the government played only a modest and reserved role during the organisation of the public space (van der Woud 2010a). Now, urban development takes place on the basis of construction plans that allows all parties to provide their input. The government is the driving force behind the construction of roads and other infrastructural projects—an abnormality in the nineteenth century. The importance of education and the growth of the number of students are no longer up for discussion: education is available for everyone, and everyone should be able to study. The development of new houses, expansion, and growth has become a part of general social objectives. Growth is the starting point and the absence of growth is regarded as an obstacle for the future.

The above mentioned achievements are merely a short summary of the number of accomplishments in our society which have been achieved by growth. Growth is in a reactive sense—in hindsight—only just curbed. Growth has been imbued in every aspect of our society and it is near impossible not to think in growth terms. Growth has become, as it were, a part of our socialisation process. We are so used to it that we experience a lack of growth as a problem, absence, and decline. Once upon a time, growth caused unpredictable turns in society, and now growth has been tamed and has even become a starting point for rational planning in the physical environment, economy, and civil society. Right now, population decline is in a similar initial phase as growth was in the nineteenth century: it is an event, it happens to us, and as of yet cannot be scheduled. It is not the case that in depopulated areas a part of a district or city is all of a sudden empty. On the contrary, in depopulated environments, vacancy is not predictable and randomly takes place in the public space. There are no new residents for vacant houses and buildings. Demographic decline represents a puzzle that in time loses an increasing number of pieces: the big picture is still discernible but undoubtedly pieces are missing. In an urban sense, the ‘compact’ city or district in a ‘perforated’ city or district

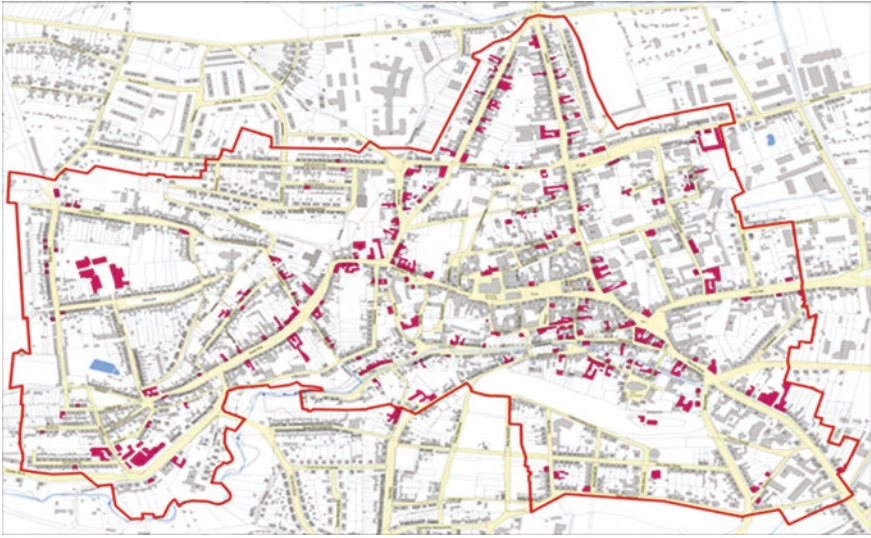


Fig. 3.1 The perforated city: *the dark spots* are the ‘gaps’ in the city caused by vacancy (Source Beeck 2011)

transforms (Beeck 2011). The original contours of the built environment are still clearly visible, but the shrinking space shows gaps (Fig. 3.1). These gaps grow here and there, for example when someone moves or dies. Moving and dying are, however, not collective planned processes—they are individual events, where gaps arise in the public space. In growth we can create a complete district or city; in situations of depopulation it is impossible to remove a district or city in one single try. Population decline is as of yet a random process that cannot be planned.

3.3 Population Decline: From Scarcity to Surplus

Decline is similar to growth, because it is a process that is not planned and cannot be planned. Thematically, growth and decline processes are very comparable. In both cases, new questions arise, not only in the field of housing, physical infrastructure, spatial planning and financing, but also in the fields of labour, social security, health care, education, and social infrastructure. Population decline is the opposite of growth—the relevant questions are an inverse to each other. Where there are too few houses in growth, in decline there are too many. Where there are too few schools in growth, in decline there are too many square metres of education area. The same applies to cultural facilities, association buildings, and recreational facilities: in a growing environment there is a scarcity, and in a depopulated environment there is a surplus. If the number of elderly grows then in a depopulated environment the health care facilities are scarce.

Naturally, this situation calls for a more nuanced approach. That scarcity is a principle of growth and surplus a principle of decline is a more analytical distinction than an absolute one. In other words: a growth society also knows a ‘surplus’ just as well as a depopulated society knows ‘scarcity’. Due to the Internet and mobile telephones, a surplus of information and communication has been established. The profit for the providers cannot be found in the purchase of mobile phones and iPads but rather in the usage by the consumer. In terms of decline, in due course, shortages will appear on the labour market in, for example, the fields of technology, agriculture, horticulture, and home care. One tries to cope with scarcity by stimulating immigration (labour migration from Central Europe to Western Europe and from Eastern Europe to Central Europe) or by using new technologies (for example the production of the household robot in home care).⁴ Furthermore, this scarcity is not specifically caused by a population decrease but more by ageing. Growth areas in Europe are also going to have to face a restriction on the labour market because society as a whole is ageing. Therefore, it is more suitable to state that in depopulated environments the reduction of the number of people forms the basic issue. Due to this reduction, the already ‘humanised’ environment is placed in a spacious area: there is talk of excess. With regards to growth, it is the complete opposite: growth of the number of people is hardly the problem but the fact that the environment where these people have to live, work, and recreate has not adapted yet to the increase of people. In other words: with growth there are too many people in an excessively small area; with decline, there are too few people in an excessively large space.

Thus, the most important distinction between growth and decline has been made. In situations of growth, we speak of shortages, too little, scarcity. In the case of decline, we speak of excess, too much, surplus. Where a growth society is mostly founded on scarcity, a depopulated society is largely based on surplus. This means that we should use the surplus in decline areas as the basis of community development. However, this is a completely new starting point for the approach of population decline—it is completely opposed to the dominant paradigm of growth thinking. A growth society and a growth economy cannot deal with ‘too much’. Too many houses mean demolishing, too many schools mean combining, and too many sports fields mean reducing. The question here is whether this is the most adequate reaction in depopulated areas. Doesn’t the principle of surplus create more interesting possibilities?

A ‘surplus’ in depopulated environments sheds new light on the relationship between humans and the environment. Growth means ‘expansion’ within the meaning of cultivating from the direct surroundings of humans—decline is ‘infill development’ and bears the question of what we must do with the already cultivated surroundings. We consciously chose the term ‘cultivated’ environment and not the term ‘space’. Space overly refers to the physical narrowing of

⁴ The South Korean government indicated that in 2020 every household must have a household robot.

our environment in terms of square metres, housing, architecture, urbanism, and infrastructure. Humans do not only express themselves in ‘stones’ but they also grant a social and cultural meaning to the environment in which they live. This environment is the surface in which they provide themselves with substance and depth, from which they derive their identity. A cultivated environment is also aside from a physical and built surrounding, a metaphorical, symbolic reality. Houses and streets are not only ‘stone’ products of urban planners and project developers; they also represent meaningful histories of people’s everyday life.

In terms of meaning and valuation, the cultivated environment knows a number of dimensions. Every house represents, aside from an economic value, also a historical, cultural, social, and emotional value; within its four walls, a home contains numerous stories on remembrance and future expectations (Boomkens 2006). Policy makers in depopulated areas tend to demolish homes when there is redundant infrastructure and a surplus of houses (vacancy). The concept of a cultivated environment clearly indicates that we need to cautiously handle demolition. Indeed, by demolishing we also destroy the other values and dimensions that belong to ‘space’ and we are at risk of losing a great part of our individual, social, and cultural life. The cultivated environment has too much built ‘surplus’ to simply remove it all.

3.4 Bridging and Concentration

Growth and decline are not only distinguishable in terms of scarcity and surplus. Another distinction is related to the proximity or distance between people. Growth brings people together due to the increased need for housing, jobs, and recreational space. Growth pushes people together and thus creates density and liveliness. On the other hand, decline creates distance between people and magnifies the space: in this respect, decline decomposes. When growth tends to lean towards overpopulation, decline leans towards depopulation. In an area with fewer people where previously more people lived, here and there pieces fall from the mosaic of city or village life. Because of this, the physical and social distance between people gradually increases. The limited geographical scale on which people expand their activities and on which most facilities are based is put under pressure. Population decline demands a wider range.

Can the village bakery continue to exist? Are the care facilities in the district still profitable? Can the primary school around the corner remain open? Do the choir and football club have enough members? Will the social support networks remain standing in an environment where the physical distance between people becomes larger? These are all questions that result from the ‘decomposing’ function of population decline. Alternatively, scenarios based on demographic shrinkage are desirable. How will we get our daily bread if there is no bakery in the village? How do we organise the education if the primary school around the corner is closed? How do we train if the closest football field is in another village?

In other words: if the demographic decline ‘decomposes’, how do we bridge the growing distances between the people? Later in this book (Chaps. 6 and 7), we will see the answer to this: bridging instead of binding social capital (Putnam 2000). To guarantee the quality of life in a shrinking area, acting together is the credo, bearing in mind the differences in descent and traditions.

Finally, growth and decline are differentiated because they have a different perspective on the use of space. Growth areas traditionally characterise themselves by a strong segregation of duties in the available space: living, working, and recreating are segregated in a physical way and in human mentality and action. Growth separates the functions of living, working, and recreating to be able to deal with the available scarce spaces most efficiently (Rottier 2004). Urban planners clearly differentiate, in the drawing of a city or village, the difference between shopping centres and industrial areas, and sports fields and care accommodations. For their part, these locations are further segregated from residential areas—take a look at the closest suburb. Every space has received its own destination and functionality. Due to the absence of sufficient critical mass in depopulated areas, this segregation leads to problems. In the case of population decline, segregation degenerates in decomposition. In depopulated areas, the segregation of functions isn’t relevant but mixing functions is an issue. To keep facilities profitable, people need to seek new connections in an expanded and compartmentalised space; new concentrations, centres, and bundles where previously living, working, and recreating were separated. In short: population declines invite mixed use and concentration instead of segregation and separation. Demographic decline demands multifunctional building and a certain compactness to prevent dissolution.

3.5 Planning Without Plans

In this chapter, we compared growth and decline: growth as we know it since the nineteenth century and decline as it manifests itself now. Both processes have in common that they are originally unplanned and arbitrary—they are not the result of a purposeful act. Growth and decline happened to us. It was only after they presented themselves to us that we took action. Growth and decline as a cause, in short, with a human reaction as a consequence. Adapting to the new situation was and is needed in all facets of society: the economy, civil society, and public administration. The core institutions of society mingle during growth and decline. Both call for identical questions: questions about living, working, recreating, and governing. Does growth or decline detract from society or does it contribute to it?

Growth and decline have many similarities, yet there are several large differences. Decline is more associated with excess (surplus) than with shortage (scarcity). This, however, is quite a fundamental starting point. Thinking in terms of growth works the opposite way in a situation of depopulation. Slowly urban planners are starting to realise this. An increasing number of urban planners advocate a paradigm shift in their job (Wiechmann 2008; Pallagst 2010). They

believe that the planning principles of growth are no longer applicable in times of decline. 'Today, there is a general agreement in the shrinking cities literature that a paradigm shift is needed for planners from growth oriented planning to "smart shrinking"' (Wiechmann 2008, p. 443).

Growth principles do not aid in an area where a decline increases the physical and social distance between people and where facilities are put under pressure. If there are indeed not enough people available, it is meaningless to keep overbuilding the space. On the contrary, in situations of depopulation it is important to bridge the distance between people. This can be done by joining activities and seeking collaboration. Principles of depopulation are needed to refurnish the physical and social space. We need to focus on that which is disintegrated by demographic decline. We need to develop new forms of multi-functionality; to re-combine the separated functions of living, working, and recreating. Do we need new plans to make this work? Or should we not handle this according to plans? Wiechman (2008) perhaps hits the nail on the head when he writes: 'Planning without plans may not be such a bad idea' (p. 144).

Chapter 4

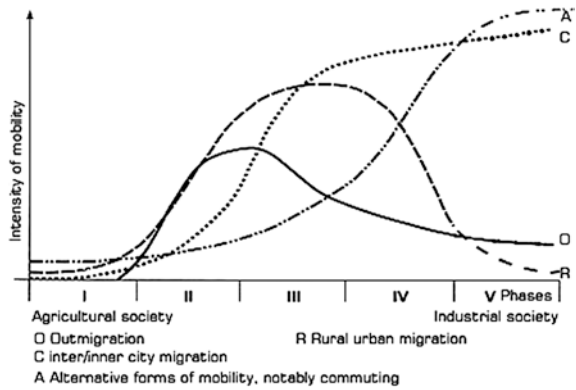
The Geography of Population Decline

In the Roman era, there was a strict difference between the city and the countryside. The city was the place to be; the centre of all social and political life. The countryside was a place for reflection, peace, and space and, therefore, the ‘homo urbanus’ would be more travelled than the ‘homo rusticus’. At the same time, there has always been vivid contact between city and country—they did not develop in isolation. If we want to understand population decline, then we cannot avoid this interaction. This chapter concerns itself with the geography of the city and the countryside and what it means for population decline. The key concept, therefore, is ‘mobility’. Mobility is subsequently divided into social and spatial mobility (Bähr 2004). Social mobility concerns itself with the change in someone’s social status, for example as a result of a career move. In this chapter, we will not be focussing on social mobility. However, sometimes social mobility demands spatial mobility: a change of venue. In this context, geographers like to point out the difference between migration and circulation. Migration assumes a change in our home address, in other words: a move. Why do people move from their village to a neighbouring city and what does this mean for those that remain behind? Circulation represents all the rides made from and to our place of residence in terms of daily activities, such as going to school, working, shopping, and recreating. What consequences does this commuting traffic have for population decline? These questions will be discussed in this chapter.

4.1 Mobility Between City and Countryside

Humans have always moved between the city and the countryside but it obviously does matter whether we’re talking about the 1750s form of travelling by barge or the carpooling of today. Over forty years ago, the American geographer Zelinsky (1971) published an article in the *Geographical Review* where he

Fig. 4.1 The ideal model of mobility transition (Source Paesler 2008)



pictured the development of city-countryside relations in the Western world. Zelinsky and his followers state that a ‘mobility transition’ has been happening since the Industrial Revolution. Their hypothesis: the interaction between the city and the countryside is related to the demographic and economic situation in which the society is located. The ideal model they present consists of five development stages (Fig. 4.1).

1. *Pre industrial period.* Aside from several great mass migrations, mobility between the city and countryside are limited in the agricultural society. The natural population growth is low because the birth and mortality rates more or less balance each other out. The majority of the population lives in the countryside. Many citizens hope for a better life in the city in line with the credo ‘urban air makes free’. However, becoming a townsman after being a farmer is not easy—often strict rules apply, which differ from city to city (Schwarz 2008). Therefore, most people remain living in their village their entire life. Those who often leave their village generally do not go much further than a few miles. Travelling simply takes time.
2. *Early transition phase.* Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the population has grown substantially and the countryside-city migration takes shape. This phase brings together demographic and economic developments. On the one hand, there is a population boom: due to better food, hygiene, and medical care, the mortality rates decrease while the number of births remains high in the countryside. On the other hand, the industrialisation of cities leads to a great need in labour forces which the countryside with its great number of children can satisfy. Farmers migrate to the city to work in industries such as mining, textile, or metals. Borders are hardly an obstruction which means that emigration increases (Keuning 1965).
3. *Late transition phase.* In this phase—which starts after World War II—the population keeps growing, albeit at a slower pace than before. After the post-war euphoria, which translated into a ‘baby boom’, the birth rate decreased because of looser views on relationship and family building. Simultaneously, the pull from the countryside to the city declines. In addition, emigrating is

hardly necessary anymore because the emerging service economy creates new jobs. The spatial mobility increases in this phase but also changes in character: domestic migration gives way to commuting flows. If people make the choice to move, then they mostly move within their own city or from one city to another one. Due to increasing private car ownership and a tight network of public transport many people decide to remain living in the countryside and commute to the city for work. Circulation becomes more important than migration.

4. *Modern period.* This phase starts around the 1990s and continues to the present. In this period, prosperity keeps growing while the natural population growth stagnates. The spatial mobility rises to great heights. This is mainly due to an increase of circular movements between the countryside and the city and cities mutually. Commuting from the countryside and the suburbs to the city expands even though new communication resources make it possible to work from home or from ‘third places like cafes, libraries and other hang-outs’ (Oldenburg 1999). Furthermore, the traffic rush increases because employees have more time to partake in other activities. Emigration becomes less popular: mostly highly educational professionals (think scientists) have to leave the countryside for their career. At the same time, immigration from abroad grows to catch shortages on the labour market. Domestic emigration mostly takes place across a short distance (Feijten and Visser 2005).
5. *Future phase.* In a ‘future super advanced society’, as Welinsky expected in 1971, the demographic growth slowly transforms into a decline. Notwithstanding the ongoing immigration from foreign labour forces, the total population size will decrease on a national level. New communication technology makes part of the moves and commuting flows between the countryside and city superfluous. Recreational traffic will keep increasing whereby circulation becomes the dominant form of moving. Ultimately spatial mobility decreases. Now, more than forty years after Welinsky’s dream of the ‘death of distance’, we know that this is not the way it is going to go. The roads are busier than ever and home workers are still a minority. However, professionals do expect a stabilisation or decline of mobility to be conceivable after 2020 (Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency 2011).

Just like other stage theories, the model of the mobility transformation is a caricature. The theory clearly waives the differences between countries and cultures. Furthermore, government policy in the fields of migration, traffic, and spatial planning is ignored. At the same time, the model provides valuable insights for the debate on demographic decline. To start off, we determine in one glance that migration from the countryside to the city has always existed, chiefly for economic reasons. Decline is hardly something new—it is a phenomenon of all times. Moreover, we observe that migration is not the only factor in demographic decline but circulation is also important. Thanks to the car and public transport, we can be in the city within a matter of minutes. In practice, this is sometimes overlooked: in many discussions on population decline it is suggested that a village is isolated

from the rest of the world, as if it was fenced in. Finally, the model explains that we cannot separate the city-countryside relationship from ‘space shrinking technologies’ such as information and communication technology (Dicken 2010). The terms distance and proximity receive a new meaning. How fast is the Internet in the countryside? What opportunities does the virtual world offer? Granted, just like Welinsky, we have the tendency to be overly optimistic about the technology of the future. However, it cannot hurt to take into account progress in this area. Or, like the British sculptor John Maxwell once said: ‘Where there is hope for the future, there is power in the present’. Especially depopulated areas could make use of this strength.

4.2 From Rural Migration to Boomerang Migration

The way the population in an area develops depends on birth, mortality, and migration. Of these three, migration—in particular domestic migration—provides the largest contribution to population change. This has been happening since the Industrial Revolution when the population largely moved from the countryside to the city. Intrigued by this rural migration, the British geographer Ravenstein decided to investigate the available population statistics in his country. He discovered a clear pattern in the British migration figures. He published his findings as the ‘laws of migration’ (Ravenstein 1885). The most important law: most migrants move over a short distance. This regularity is known as the principle of ‘distance decay’. If the distance increases the number of moves decreases. Ravenstein’s other laws state, among others, that relatively many migrants are single, want to improve their economic position and, therefore, often move to industrial centres. With these ‘laws of migration’ Ravenstein laid the basis for research on ‘push and pull factors’ (Tobler 1995). In this research the question as to why people leave their hometown to establish themselves in a new place is central (Table 4.1).

The migration laws of Ravenstein come from a different time and a different context than they do now. However, not an awful lot has changed. Let us, by way of example, take a look at the situation in the Netherlands (Feijten and Visser 2005; Latten and Kooiman 2011). Every year 10 % of the Dutch move; this

Table 4.1 Possible motives for domestic migration

Push-factors	Pull-factors
Independent living	Study
Divorce	Cohabitation
Unemployment/Lack of work	Employment/New job
Lack of facilities	Urbanity or rest/space
Health problems	Health care facilities
Discontent with a residential area	Proximity to family and friends

Source Based on Bähr (2004)

equates to more than one and half million people. We already determined that this is mainly short distance migration: 67 % of the movers move within the municipality. Of the 33 % who move to another hometown, the majority stays in the surrounding region. Only 7 % of all movers migrate from one area to another. It is notable that moves between 20 and 50 km are rare. Apparently the Dutch are prepared to bridge this distance on a daily basis by car, bus, or train. Changed residential preferences, such as the need for a bigger home, a home with a garden or a child friendly neighbourhood, are often the bases for short distance migration. Divorces and co-parenting are also reasons to stay in the area. The Dutch are decently fixated upon one area. This phenomenon of home-loving, however, barely differs from that of Western Europeans (Dahl and Sorenson 2010). Whether it is the Portuguese or Norwegians, they all prefer to stay just where they are. Americans also are much less inclined to move as is often expected in popular media (Florida 2008). This should not come as a surprise: moving is a radical lifetime event and it costs a lot of money and energy. Moreover, many people feel comfortable in their village, city, or region. Aside from this 'sense of place' people often build a socio-economic connection with their hometown (DaVanzo 1981). Examples of such 'location specific capital' are the proximity with family and work, social networks, and the fact that children still go to school in the area.

Those who migrate over long distances often do this in order to study, for love, or for a job. Usually a move is associated with a new stage in life, like living together, buying a house or entering the labour market. In other words: there is talk of selective migration. For instance, in the Netherlands mainly young adults, singles, and higher trained individuals move over a long distance (Latten and Kooiman 2011). Eighty percentage of the cases are about people in their twenties and thirties, with or without children. More than half of this group consists of young adults who leave their hometown to continue their education elsewhere. This group of 'educational migrations' grows gradually because an increasing number of school leavers continue studying. The countryside not only loses its young adults to the city but also the children they will receive. Moreover, these children definitely are not all born in the city where the young adults study. During or after graduation many twenty year olds become 'career migrants': they move to the country's economic centres to work or find a job. This is in line with the 'escalator theory' which states that individuals make use of the differences between areas to increase their social position (Fielding 1992). Social and spatial mobility often go hand in hand.

4.3 Exogenous or Endogenous Development?

A cliché of depopulation is that of a downward spiral. If an area shrinks, it would enter a vicious circle, from bad to worse. Is this correct? On the basis of the theory we could say: yes and no. The Swedish economist and Nobel Prize winner Myrdal (1957) showed how it worked in his cumulative causation theory. According

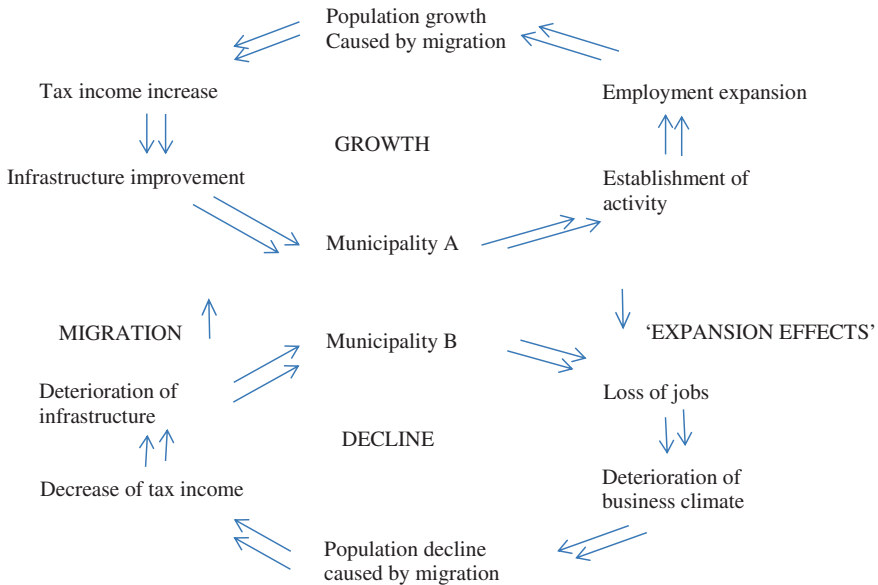


Fig. 4.2 The process of cumulative causation (*Source* edited from Lienau 1995)

to him an already set local development does indeed tend to strengthen itself (Fig. 4.2). For instance, if a company establishes itself in a municipality it can produce new jobs. The area receives an impulse and attracts career migrants. Due to growing population and activity, the municipal administration receives extra tax revenues that have a positive effect on the local infrastructure. The business climate improves which in turn attracts new migrants and companies, etc. This, however, is not the entire story: this growth does not take place randomly, but rather at the expense of the development of the surrounding areas. If it grows somewhere, it also declines somewhere. It is often the municipalities in the area or elsewhere in the country that have to pay the price for the success of the growth pole. They are going to have to watch how with the loss of inhabitants and companies the tax revenues recede and the local economy infrastructure deteriorate—with even fewer people wishing to live there as a result. Myrdal came up with the term 'backwash effects' for this domino effect of disadvantages. It is not easy for a municipality to climb out of such a spiral without outside help.

The strength of Myrdal's cumulative causation theory is in the interaction between growth and decline: because the core area grows, the surrounding area declines. The 'backwash effects' thereby offer a statement for centre-periphery relationships (Lambooy 1995). Myrdal states that over time 'spread effects' will take place from a growth pole to the periphery. Sooner or later the core area will have to face a lack of space, increasing land prices, and congestion. Thereby companies and inhabitants will settle themselves outside of the centre in areas where life is cheaper and quieter. Differences between growth and decline areas are,

however, persistent. If we can believe Myrdal, a complete levelling is impossible because the periphery remains dependent on the centre for its 'spread' effects.

The cumulative causation theory is a little fatalistic. Can an area really only develop itself by the settling of companies and inhabitants from the outside? Followers of the exogenous development approach think so. Public administrators have often applied the approach that is focussed on attracting newcomers (Strijker 2006). The experiences with these types of measures from the top are not very positive. People do not like to move over long distances and if they do then they will decide for themselves as to where they will go. Opposite to the exogenous approach of local development, we find the endogenous vision. The endogenous vision assumes that an area can develop on its own. In this case, public authorities focus on the qualities of the area and hook onto ideas that the local community put forward. In rural areas, this 'local empowerment' has led to a number of bed & breakfasts, care farms, and shops selling local produce. This causes the risk of tunnel vision: by only focussing on local qualities, you easily lose sight of the outside world.

For successful local development, a mix of exogenous and endogenous impulses is needed, where endogenous powers are the starting point (Terluin 2003). Economic geographers speak of 'local buzz' and 'global pipelines': local initiatives that are connected with the rest of the world via partnerships, import and export relations, the Internet or marketing (Bathelt et al. 2004). Due to globalisation, local dynamics have increasingly become a question of 'think global, act local'. A classic example is Emilia Romagna in Northern Italy: artisan textile and shoe products have developed into innovative 'global players', or the Austrian Bregenzwald, a region with a longstanding tradition of woodworking. With the support of young designers from outside the area, around ninety cabinetmakers and carpenters from the area united in the virtual workshop 'Werkraum Bregenzwald'. The affiliated businesses all work according to the principle of 'Product, Design, and Use': every piece of carpentry from the Bregenzwald should not only be of a high quality but must also look good and be functional. By jointly profiling themselves at fairs and on websites, the local artisans now sell their design furniture all over the world.

4.4 Fragmentation of Expanding Worlds

Aside from the cliché image of the downward spiral, in the decline debate we often come across the myth of a self-sufficient countryside. The rural area should be self-sufficient: it must not only be habitable but one should be able to work there, go to school there, and shop there. The village is, as it were, an island; a concentration of everything we might need on a daily basis. Indeed, for centuries, local society was such a microcosm. This was still applied to many parts of Western Europe until the beginning of the twentieth century. The next city over was equivalent to the end of the world. Those who would dare go to the annual

fair were cosmopolitans. After World War II the borders between the countryside and the city quickly vanished. The sociologist Groenman (1956) already stated in his oration ‘expanding worlds’ that the image of the isolated countryside core was no longer applicable. Thanks to modern traffic, new communication tools and the scale enlargement of social life, villagers became more acquainted with the outside world—with all its consequences. Objectively, their range increased which in turn caused the meaning of the village for the daily recurring activities to decline. However, villagers also expanded their horizon subjectively. They saw how townsmen lived, compared this with their own situation and thought: that is what I also want. The village butcher, the general practitioner and the school would no longer meet the criteria of the villager. The city and urban life would increasingly put village life under pressure.

Groenman had a foreseeing view. The circulation between countryside and city and between cities mutually increased radically. This is due to an increase in car ownership all over Europe. Moreover, we tend to use the car more often and drive further. Public transport also keeps growing. Due to the urge to move, the scale of our daily life has expanded. Our daily life no longer limits itself to our hometown but rather extends itself all over the region. We make use of a ‘palette of places’ between which we commute to and from (Grünfeld 2010). Naturally, it depends on the type of region which circular movements are dominant. Not all cities have the same central function for the surrounding area. Except for circular movements, information and communication streams have also exploded. Email, Internet, and mobile phones have dramatically changed our life. The Netherlands embraces this development more than the rest of Western Europe does—91 % of the Dutch use the Internet, with 84 % even using it daily (van Deursen and van Dijk 2011). This is why we cannot only move physically but also virtually. With the press of a button we can have contact with anyone anywhere in the world. Every day, such virtual communities arise. Some of these communities are still geographically specified, such as the digital village square which nearly every village has. More often than not, virtual communities arise of people with the same interests or occupations, whether they are heavy metal fans, hay fever patients, or Spanish teachers. It is no longer about the physical proximity but rather about individual characteristics—geography makes place for biography. You can be part of a worldwide community from a hamlet in the periphery although it is essential that the area is well connected digitally and mobile. In the French countryside, a dichotomy threatens to arise between regions with fast and slow Internet. Example: the Gers, a half hour drive from Toulouse, is more popular with teleworkers than other regions. This is due to the Gers region having broadband connections (Moerland 2010). The Netherlands can also gain a whole lot more in this area, as it appears that more than two thirds of the municipalities do not yet use broadband networks. According to the rural geographer Dirk Strijker from Groningen, the Netherlands (van Alem 2012) ‘the largest part of the rural areas is still merely connected with the Internet via a copper wire’.

Our increasing orientation on the outside world has caused a ‘fragmentation of the spatial order’ (Zonneveld 2009). For villagers, the local society has for

long not been the only reference: they often commute to the city nearby or further away for work, groceries, or leisure. In addition, the rest of the world is only a few mouse clicks away. We can now work from home, shop online, and maintain contacts from behind the computer, whether you live in a depopulated area or not. The daily spending of the modern human is increasingly fragmented. Pursuits outside the home receive competition from activities on the Web. This fragmentation has emancipated the countryside: there is little that separates the countryside from the city (Dirksmeier 2009). Of course, this development has its downsides. The story of emancipation of the countryside is namely also the story of schools, swimming pools, and village shops that have to close because inhabitants would much rather buy their groceries and carry out leisurely activities in the city. It is also the story of football clubs, cultural associations, and party committees who no longer receive new members because village would much rather watch TV and surf the Internet in the evenings. Fragmentation in this sense means saying goodbye to good old times.

4.5 The Silent Revolution in the Countryside

The countryside and city have had contact for many centuries. This contact used to be a one way street: countryside to city. The city offered freedom, work, and the chance to develop oneself. Traditionally, it was the promising young adults who said goodbye to the countryside, for a short or long time. This group of young adults is still the largest group that moves to the city. However, there is a larger difference now than there was before: it is no longer needed to pack up and move house to enjoy the pleasures that the city provides. Most village people often visit the city by car, bus, or train whether it is for education, work, or leisure. The countryside views these migration and circulation flows to the city as a great loss. Once people start leaving, it is expected, more will follow. How can the local grocery shop survive if most villagers go to the supermarket in the nearby city to do their shopping? What about the football club losing members? This development has been advancing for years but has been progressing relatively noiselessly. The rural area has slowly been included into larger structures under the influence of urbanisation and technological developments. Even in the smallest European hamlet you can still be aware of what takes place elsewhere. Due to information and communication technology, the rest of the world is also available for villagers now. We should not forget that this emancipatory process is also the result of a silent revolution in the European countryside.

Chapter 5

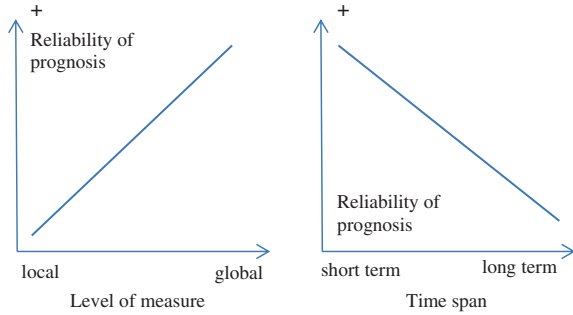
Policy Reactions on Population Decline

To prevent a decline of the quality of life in depopulated areas, plans need to be formulated that are resistant against population decline. Deputies, aldermen, councillors, and members of the village council—they all must take into account the new reality of population decline, decreasing numbers of young adults, and ageing. Not that this is easy. We are all caught up in the ‘growth paradigm’: growth is success; decline is failure (Goedvolk and Korsten 2008). Rules and subsidies in spatial planning have been focused on growth for decades. Aside from this, population decline demands a new way of governing, organising, and financing; it is only natural that resources are put under pressure with demographic decline. In practice, at least four administrative reactions take place with population decline: (1) trivialising (2) countering, (3) managing and (4) utilising (Verwest et al. 2009; van Vliet 2009; Hospers 2010). Earlier we realised that the questions that arise as a result of depopulation are not all issues that only the government has to face. Housing corporations, developers, associations, and schools are also faced with these issues—and let’s not forget the people themselves.

5.1 Trivialising: The Numbers Are Incorrect

Many mayors think that population decline in their municipality is not so critical. Still, the numbers of population decline are regularly questioned during board and council meetings. How can we value the numbers? Are they correct? It is a fact that demographic prognoses are a lot more reliable than economic projections. This is due to demography only having three important variables: birth, mortality, and migration. Paradoxically, the population is accurately predictable on a global scale. Indeed, the potential mothers of the next two generations have already been born (Gans et al. 2009). Changes in birth and mortality figures are furthermore predictable, with the exception of decline taking place after wars, epidemics, and natural

Fig. 5.1 The reliability of demographic figures (*Source* Gans et al. 2009)



disasters. The reliability of demographic numbers decreases if we take a look at regional and local scales. On this level, domestic and foreign migration flows play a role and they are much less reliable. According to ABF Research (2010, p. 10), the domestic migration forms the most difficult part of the prognoses. It is especially important to be careful with demographic numbers on the scale of villages. It is hard to determine whether newcomers prefer to live in village X, in neighbouring village Y, or, slightly further away, in village Z. In addition, the reliability of the demographic numbers decreases as the term of looking ahead becomes longer. In other words: decline prognoses for 2025 are more reliable than those for 2040 (Fig. 5.1).

It is wise to study decline prognoses on a regional level, i.e. on a scale of more villages and municipalities. The regional scale is of importance when considering decline questions. This level often contains the answers, such as housing plan alignment, bundling of facilities or inter-communal cooperation. Even on a regional level, the prognoses are uncertain. If in an area, for example, new resources are discovered or a successful industry is developed, decline could be not so bad. The cliché statement ‘demography is destiny’ is, therefore, only partially true. It must be said: most researchers clearly state that their prognoses are not predictions. Sometimes they even go back to previously made calculations. The expected decline in the Netherlands for 2040 has, for example, been re-adjusted to a lower number of half million people within a year (de Jong and van Duijn 2010). In short: depopulation numbers are not ineluctable, but directional. Furthermore, the importance of population decline not being a new phenomenon must be recognised. Decline is an event that has been taking place for centuries and occurs or has occurred in nearly all European countries.

Is decline, therefore, a myth which we are chasing needlessly? No, absolutely not! Although population decline is hardly predictable on a quantitative level, the trend developments are crystal clear. Quantitatively, a large demographic change is taking place: whether we want to or not, decreasing numbers of young adults and an increase in ageing are a reality, including all its consequences. The exact numbers are hardly important but the story behind them really is. This also means that population decline is already a fact all over Europe. Moreover, municipalities that are not yet losing inhabitants are going to have to prepare for demographic shrinkage. Once policy is implemented it is hard to handle and difficult to stop. In areas

where decline is already clearly visible more and more attention is paid to this question. With examples from abroad and excursions to well-known depopulated areas, officials (and an increasing number of aldermen) try to make the town council aware of population decline. Therefore, it is hopeful when we can read a ‘population decline manager’ stating in an interview: ‘I never actually hear anyone saying anymore to me: population decline is nonsense’ (van Boetzelaer 2011, p. 39).¹

5.2 Countering: We Are Not Going to Let that Happen

Even if public officials increasingly recognise the importance of decline, their reaction to it resembles a fighting spirit. The thought is that decline can be eliminated. Take a Dutch official who says in an interview: ‘We are not going to give up. We are going to recruit people to positively influence the population. We don’t want to become a sleeping city. We want to remain attractive’ (van Boetzelaer 2011, p. 39).² Many regions and municipalities who are concerned with depopulation invest in a campaign to attract new citizens. The Netherlands has a few well known examples.³ Simultaneously, new housing estates are being constructed. Especially some housing concepts are popular, like modern water homes or neo-traditional notary houses.

Everywhere in Europe regions hope to turn depopulation around with an elimination strategy. Some initiatives to attract new inhabitants are more original than others. Take Spain for example, where we can find a few hundred villages for sale. All the villages hope for a second life. In 2008, the complete village of Lacaste in the province Zaragoza was sold for €189,000 including all the castle ruins. A few years ago the Austrian village of Rappottenstein acted differently: the mayor gave away building sights to newcomers wishing to start a family. Singles were also welcome, provided they were looking for a partner who also wanted children (de Waard 2009). Sometimes the initiatives are very goal oriented indeed. For instance, the Swedish municipality of Lekeberg raffled off building lots to Dutch families who indicated they were going to move to the municipality within the next two years. Or take the Dutch municipalities Hulst, Terneuzen and Sluis; they have been on the Dutch Emigration fair for years claiming rest, space, and quality of life are not things you have to seek abroad. Without migrating, these things can also be enjoyed in Dutch Flanders. Furthermore, there are no language barriers between the Netherlands and Dutch Flanders, according to the place marketers.

¹ ‘Ik maak eigenlijk nooit meer mee dat iemand tegen me zegt: krimp is onzin.’

² We gaan niet bij de pakken neerzitten. We gaan mensen werven om de bevolking positief te beïnvloeden. Een uitgestorven rollator-city willen we niet. We willen aantrekkelijk blijven.’

³ Examples are ‘Zuid-Limburg, je zal er maar wonen’, ‘Kans in Oost-Groningen’, ‘Ontdek die ruimte in Dronten’.

These ‘cold’ marketing strategies induce a number of questions (Hospers 2011). Ultimately, municipalities and regions compete for the same group: they fish in the same pond that is slowly decreasing due to population decline. Successful recruitment in one place pulls people away from another. In other words: there is talk of ‘resident cannibalism’. People do not simply move because they feel like moving; most of the movers are, as we say in Chap. 4, attached to their place of residence. Furthermore: when those who are inclined to move look beyond their own region, they will very much decide for themselves where they are going to move to—marketing can merely act as a ‘trigger’. Swedish research even shows that campaigns have no influence whatsoever on people deciding what municipality they wish to move to (Niedomysl 2004, 2007). If you want to attract newcomers, you should focus on returning migrants. In the Dutch province of Friesland, for example, a project called ‘Friesland Connects’ (Fryslân Ferbynt) was started that maintains a global network of everyone who feels connected with Friesland. This allows individuals and entrepreneurs outside of Friesland to have easy access in the area and vice versa. However, availability of work is essential for returning migration.

If people do not quickly move from a depopulated area, it might be possible to more or less force them to. Over the course of the years, many different attempts have been made. Between 1960 and 1980 the Dutch government conducted an active spatial dispersion policy (Engelen 2009). The government made the first step: a part of national civil services was moved from the centre of the country and the periphery. Apeldoorn received the tax service, Groningen the Dutch Gasunie (and later on PostNL), Emmen received the Cadastre service and Heerlen received the premises of the national pension fund for government and education. With these measures, the Dutch central government, located in The Hague, wanted to unburden the conurbation of Western Holland and stimulate the economy of the ‘weaker’ regions. Those living in the conurbation who were sometimes forced to move to the other side of the country were not so enthusiastic about this forced removal. Unsurprisingly, the spirit among the Dutch population for moving more civil services to depopulated areas is hardly met with enthusiasm.

5.3 Managing: Learning How to Deal with It

Eliminating depopulation with ‘cold’ marketing is often a waste of money. It is more useful to accept decline and learn how to deal with it. Therefore, the relevant question isn’t ‘how do we attract new residents?’, but rather ‘how do we make sure the current residents don’t move?’. This last question demands ‘warm’ marketing that tries to tie residents to their village, city, or region (Hospers 2011). If a municipality is planning new housing estates then starter or subsidy loans are an interesting measure. Locals can, in many Dutch municipalities, buy the house of their dreams with starter loans. Everywhere in Europe, from England to Spain, municipalities invest in flexible work spaces, free wireless Internet and cultural facilities to try and retain the local creative class.

Volunteered initiatives to maintain basic facilities in small areas can be found everywhere. Especially housing corporations take the initiative. They will buy, for example, the local shop or contribute to the development of multifunctional accommodations where all sorts of services (libraries, cafes, cash machines, and home care) are assembled.

An increasing number of depopulated areas are forced to temper the development of new housing estates and restructure the existing stock of real estate. Germans euphemistically refer to ‘Gesundschumpfen’—downsizing—while England refers to ‘planning for decline’. Building fewer houses is, however, horrifying for some municipalities and developers (de Rie and de Zeeuw 2010). ‘We are shrinking because we are not allowed to build’, is a popular complaint. Slowly but surely an increasing number of areas choose the strategy of restructuring, revitalising, and renovation. Examples of measures in this respect are: removing the top floors of flats and converting terraced houses into semi-detached houses. Many depopulated areas do not want to search for new destinations for their excess houses. In order to prevent vacancy, a demolition company is often asked to intervene. Demolition knows great pitfalls, as we saw in Chap. 3. That demolition is not always necessary, is demonstrated by a case in the northern quarter of the Dutch city of Dordrecht. The upstairs and downstairs homes in this district turned out to provide the option of grandparents living upstairs and the family with their children living downstairs. Therefore, the district is renovated instead of demolished. Thus, the social cohesion in the neighbourhood could be preserved.

Naturally, revitalising existing housing costs a lot of money. Research shows that the cost of renovating is compensated for by the benefits of the replaced new housing estates (Poulus and Visser 2010; Koopman 2010). Renovating an existing building is in the current economic and construction crisis especially interesting for a contractor. Why always develop new houses? For depopulated areas the adages of ‘new ideas must use old buildings’ (Jacobs 1961) and ‘renovate before you innovate’ (Zyman 2004) make more sense. The transformation of functions also falls into these strategies. Thus, vacant office buildings can be converted to temporary living spaces. This happens in, for example, Amsterdam, although the owners are faced with financial snags. In the last few years, German towns have had some positive experiences with restructuring depopulated districts (Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency 2010a). Take Leinefeld (Thüringen) in Germany, for example. A mix of revitalising measures has been applied: in the same district, flats have lost top floors and homes have been merged, while some houses have received an extra room, balcony, or garden. Empty spaces in the districts have been filled with public green. The local population can use this public green for their own purposes, like a kitchen garden, barbeque spot, or playground. Many parts of Germany have widespread experience with revitalising. In Northern Germany, for example, the destination of empty houses is broadened so that tourists can spend their vacation there. Unsellable buildings are often covered with ivy, wild vines, or other greenery—which beautifies the house much more than the boards and fences that are often seen in Dutch and English shrinking neighbourhoods.

5.4 Utilising: More for Fewer People

Not everyone judges depopulation as a problem. Especially, urban planners, architects, and consultants plead for a positive view on population decline. Brokers also warn against problematising demographic decline. The title of a note from the Dutch Association of Brokers (2010) says enough: ‘Depopulation area = opportunity area’. The reasoning of the optimists is that our happiness does not necessarily depend on population numbers, but rather on the quality of the environment we live in. Thus regarded, population decline would be a blessing for the spatial quality, traffic, nature, and environment. Fewer people indeed means less fuss, less air pollution, and more space. Followers of this approach often refer to the ‘communication paradox’: identifying demographic decline creates awareness for it. Indeed: if you know that depopulation takes place somewhere, you are going to pay extra attention to it. Suddenly everything points towards population decline (like houses that are for sale or elderly people on streets) even if you would have never noticed it before. This is a variant on the Thomas theorem, named after the sociologist Thomas (1928) who stated: ‘If people define a situation as real, it becomes real in its consequences’. This ‘I told you so’-effect works as a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’. Alternatively, in terms of a depopulation manager: ‘Don’t try to sell population decline, if you sell misery, you will get misery in return’ (van Boetzelaer 2011).

Theoretically, demographic shrinkage indeed offers an area for new opportunities. You could even say that depopulated areas are laboratories for the society of the future. In these laboratories, new answers are conceived to develop questions that the entire country is going to have to face at some point—like ageing, the growing need for care and the need for civilian self-sufficiency. If depopulated areas can connect depopulation decline to the leisure economy then decline could even produce new economic drivers. There is already talk of a ‘silver economy’: the development of an innovative living, caring, and recreational concept for the elderly—inspired by senior city Sun City in Florida. Another trend is the development of care hotels where care seeking elderly can go on holiday with their family. Depopulated areas would also be able to anticipate on the trend of LILA (‘living in leisure-rich areas’), bilocation (living in two places), and the need for townspeople to experience quietness and reflection (de Roo 2009). Reflection and spiritual activities are quickly developing in rustic areas. For example, a number of monasteries is focussing on spiritual tourism, i.e. ‘tourist activities that lead to inner peace and balance’ that are related to ‘the purpose of life’ (Niesten and Elshout 2011).

This all sounds very attractive, of course, but the question remains where depopulated areas will get the money from to create their laboratory function. Moreover, the danger is that all over the countryside the same choices will be made. For example, many areas in the countryside in Europe profile themselves with nature, space, and recreation. How large is the market for care hotels and farms? And is an area that is focussed on seniors still attractive to young adults and families? The American ‘Sun City’ model seems to know limitations. Admittedly, the citizens of ‘senior cities’ like Sun City are enthusiastic about the concept—many elderly seem

to enjoy their quiet days with care and a number of recreational activities close by. However, the experience of special villages and cities for elderly in Europe are not met with great positivity. For instance, Messancy, a senior village in the middle of the Belgian Ardennes, only accepts people who are aged fifty and over. ‘The first citizens seem less enthusiastic than the commercials make you think’, note Lange and Schonewille (2007, p. 20).

Naturally, there are examples of other places where population decline has indeed been positively turned around. Take the municipalities that are part of the international ‘Cittaslow’ network that is linked to the ‘slow food’ movement. ‘Cittaslow is a brand for municipalities who see the importance of nature, cultural history, sustainability and hospitality’ (Knox and Mayer 2009). In exchange for this qualification, the chosen municipalities are obliged to invest in the quality of life of their residents and visitors. This can mean that cycle paths and trees are preferred over parking spaces and concrete. Even though not all residents are enthusiastic about the ‘slow’ profile of their municipality, the experiences of Cittaslow are quite positive. Also the German village Liebenau is a good example of a place taken advantage of population decline. The population of the village has aged substantially: two thirds of the village is aged sixty and over. Instead of complaining about this, the seniors have taken it upon themselves to divide the tasks of the local community amongst themselves. Self-sufficiency, contacts and mutual focus have become core terms. Every morning, a ‘moderator’—paid for by the community—stops by every house to check if everything is alright. Some elderly babysit children of young families while other residents take care of their peers with dementia. Meanwhile, the model of Liebenau has been adopted by other German places in decline.

5.5 Towards a Decline Policy of Managing

Municipalities across Europe are increasingly made aware of the context of population decline. Still, however, many councillors or village council chairmen still downplay the decline numbers. At the same time, a growing number of managers are realising that population decline is a trend which cannot be ignored. New housing concepts and corresponding campaigns remain popular strategies for eliminating depopulation. Such approaches, however, have little chance of succeeding because people generally do not move to the other side of the country, especially when they do not have any affiliation with the area. It is smarter to accept decline and learn how to deal with it. Try to tie people to the environment by offering starter loans and renovating the existing houses. In theory, areas could utilise depopulation, but creativity is essential.

For policy makers in depopulated areas it makes sense to focus more on current residents than on newcomers. This demands a transition in depopulation policy ‘from elimination to guiding’ (Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency 2010a). If such a ‘warm’ approach also attracts outsiders, then this is simply added

value—but this focus group should never be the starting point. Behaviour towards moving is simply hard to influence. Who would have thought that the abandoned GDR city Leipzig would become the ‘place to be’ for German creative types now? It just happened, maybe because there was no policy at all. In a long-term process like demographic decline, we should be patient and accept that progress is slow.

Chapter 6

Population Decline and Society

Demographic decline and ageing have a deep influence on the functioning of the social institutions in a country, region, city, or village. They influence the political relationships, affect the economy and leave their mark on the shape and content of civil society. A declining and ageing society differs greatly from a growing society with large numbers of young adults. Different norms and values and other institutions and organisations apply. In a society with many young adults, these young people dominate the society—not only in numbers. In a declining society, the ‘ageing power’ is clearly present. In this case, the elderly have more informal and formal powers in civil society and on political decision making.

The transition from a society with large numbers of young adults to an ageing society does not take place fluidly. Population decline represents a society in transition. This chapter will extensively focus on this societal transformation. We notice in advance that changes in population decline are a slow process. ‘Institutional inertia’ and ‘institutional flaws’ prevent renovations in the system (North 1990; Rotmans 2003). In other words, institutions do not easily yield, are rigid and, therefore, often lag behind when it comes to the latest developments. Take, for example, the resistance against working longer in the Netherlands. Years ago it was obvious to increase the retirement age to just above 65: the average life expectancy has indeed increased in the last few decennia. However, it is not that simple. After many discussions, the meagre result showed that the retirement age in France has been increased from 60 to 62 (for a full retirement to 67), in the Netherlands and Germany to 67 and the United Kingdom to 68. It is going to take approximately 15 years to fully implement these new retirement ages: institutional changes take time.

6.1 Explanations for Population Decline

In the course of history, demography has always had a great impact on society. Rarely did demographic processes take place autonomously; they were most often caused by events and developments that generally had nothing to do with demographic factors. Oswalt and Rienits (2006) distinguish in their *Atlas of Shrinking Cities* more than 21 causes for population decline of which only five are demographically oriented.¹ For instance, changes in economic conditions can cause depopulation. Ghost towns of the former gold diggers in the United States are a good example. When the gold vein dried up there was no reason to stay and gold diggers left. Now, they have become ghost towns. Industrial areas specialised in coal and steel production also had to deal with vacancy during exodus, especially if the area had difficulty in making an easy transition to new forms of economic activity—think of the American Rustbelt, the German Ruhr, and the eastern mining area (Parkstad Limburg) in the Netherlands.

Aside from economic malaise, illness and natural disasters are often causes of population decline. Take the Black Death—the plague epidemic in Europe between 1347 and 1351—that hit a third of the European population. The epidemic was a contributory cause of a transformation of a European society to the Renaissance. The cholera epidemics in Europe are also illustrative. They contributed to the high child mortality in Europe: in 1850, 150 children in Sweden, in England 155, and in Austria 300 children per 1,000 born babies died (Corsini and Viazzo 1993). It was clear that these events gravely struck society.

In the past, political events also caused demographic decline. Especially absolute rulers have changed their territory by defending and expanding it. Notorious is the arrival and the decay of the Western and Eastern Roman Empire described by Gibbon (1781 [2006]). This period was a mix of losses and wins, violence and pillaging, devastation, and deportations. During the first centuries after Christ Rome was one of the most multicultural cities—at the time Rome was facing a ‘settlement surplus’, demographically speaking. The Romans were not the only ones with a patent on the use of violence and looting of conquered areas. Several centuries later, around the year 1000, the Saxons, Franks, Vikings, and Wends also added their share of destruction. Led by Emperor Otto III, Henry IV, Forkbeard and Canute, William the Conqueror and Empress Theophanu, the political and demographic map of Europe was frequently redrawn. The more recent European history also shows barbarism. In the first half of the twentieth century, mustard gas, Zyklon B, and ethnic cleansing led to 9 million deaths in World War I and 45–50 million deaths in World War II (Reverda 2003).

The effects of economic circumstances, diseases, natural disasters, and political events on the development of population and society have been frequently discussed. That the design of an area’s civil society can lead to decline has barely

¹ Oswalt and Rienits (2006) group these causes accordingly: destruction, loss, shifting, and change. The treated decline causes vary from earthquakes and lack of water to sub-urbanisation and ageing.

been an object of study. Aside from an economic, physical-geographic, biological, and political-administrative explanation, decline also has a need for a sociological explanation. Decline establishes a great number of interesting sociological questions. What role does civil society play in decline and how does decline in turn influence this society? How far can declining societies be named traditionalistic? And what about the transformation from tradition to modernity? But it also counts the other way around: how far do demographic developments challenge shrinking societies to new ways of thinking and acting and to a new organisation of societal institutions? Could decline simultaneously be a source of renovating and modernising precisely due to its transforming character?

6.2 Population Decline and Social Capital

Although the sociology as a science of civil society has existed for over one and a half century, the sociological perspective has lost influence especially during the second half of the twentieth century. Great emphasis is placed within politics and economics on the creation of society. At the start of the 1990s, the American Putnam (1993) brought the independent role of civil society back on map. In his book *Making Democracy Work* he demonstrated that a distinction in economic and political performance between Northern and Southern Italy was associated with the differences in building and organising the society. In the northern regions, the population trusted their own neighbours and the government, in the south there was a general distrust on both ends. In the north, transparency and horizontal networks were important, while in the south clientelism and power thinking were dominant. Putnam named regions such as Northern Italy ‘civic regions’: they are characterised by political involvement, mutual trust, and tolerance. Areas that scored low on these characteristics were called ‘uncivic regions’. We could call the first mentioned regions ‘modern’ and the latter mentioned ‘traditional’.

In his study on region formation in Europe, Reverda (2004) also differentiates between traditional and modern regions. Traditional societies are referred to as ‘ethno-regions’ and modern societies as ‘civil regions’. Ethno-regions have a strong identification with the past, a sharp distinction between ‘we’ and ‘they’, and strive for a certain shape of political autonomy on the basis of own cultural heritage. History, tradition, myth, language, and dialect—often summarised in the terms ‘own culture’ or ‘cultural heritage’—are the ingredients for the shaping of a regional identity. The past provides the explicit, meaningful structure for daily thinking, acting and feeling. Ethno-regions always have a shared culture that refers to shared ideas, norms and values and the possession of a collective identity. This refers to thinking in terms of ‘we’ versus ‘they’ and recovering or even constructing that ‘we’ as opposed to the other (Hofstede 1991). Ethnic histories are always mono-cultural and always fixate on the fate of the group. People experience outsiders as a potential threat or think they must be assimilated. Ethno-regions seem rural and look a lot like what Tönnies (1887 [1991]) referred to as ‘community’.

In a civic region, the future of the population is the more important target point of action than the past. Civic regions are characterised by creating an open social space. In this open space, people can meet each other, are motivated to establish joint initiatives, and they find these initiatives good for their consolidation. In civic regions, the population considers the sociocultural reality as a meeting place where the cultural diversity and multiple identities offer added-value to society. Civic regionalism motivates people to interact in the public space so that individual talent can optimally contribute to the collective. Civic regions reach a high score on the three indicators that the American Florida (2002) uses for a creative, tolerant and open society: talent, technology and tolerance. In such environments, new and different ideas are given plenty of space and diversity is embraced instead of problematised. Civic regions generally have an urban character and correspond with the ‘community’ of Tönnies (1887 [1991]).

The capacity of a society to develop interactions and networks between its members is called ‘social capital’. Mutual trust plays the key role. Social capital refers to both formal and informal networks and structures that have intrinsic value for the concerning members. This refers to networks in which individuals can develop themselves and on which they can fall back. This leads to social capital being a core variable in civil society. Societies with a lot of social capital characterise themselves by an active involvement and the participation of civilians in political, religious and social organisations and associations. Informal networks are also of interest: think of fleeting contacts in cafes and sport canteens, friendly visits, neighbour contacts, volunteer activities, book clubs, self-help and support groups, human rights and environment movements, etc. However much they may differ, they are still all expressions of social capital on society.

Echoing Putnam (2000), people nowadays make a distinction between ‘binding’ social capital and ‘bridging’ social capital. Binding social capital balances people out. It often has an emancipating and supporting role for people who up until then were not organised. Examples: associations for heart patients, mothers with social benefits and community crossroad initiatives. Binding social capital is mainly focussed on people with common characteristics. Because it is focussed internally, it can eventually lead to relatively closed communities. In a plural society, we are also familiar with bridging social capital. This kind of social capital refers to networks that also bring people together, who offer a great diversity in ethnicity and background, but who simultaneously have a common goal. Think of associations who are committed to human rights, singles care, and interdisciplinary collaboration between different sectors and the like. Bridging social capital promotes the exchange and integration of diversity. Mutual contradictions disappear to the background—this can form a civic society, where citizens, however different they may be, can still feel involved with each other.

The above mentioned introduction is perhaps a bit long to explain the statement of this chapter, i.e. the character of a society in terms of traditional or modern can influence whether or not demographic decline can occur. This statement mainly refers to decline that has grown due to a emigration surplus: more people leave the area than come to live in it. Social pressure or control can be a reason to move for some young adults, while outsiders do not want to move to the area

given its closed-mindedness. Sociologically, the negative migration balance could be described as the absence of an inspired ‘people’s climate’ (Florida 2002) or of a lack of relative ‘attractiveness’ (Marlet 2009). When regarded as the above, decline regions are areas that have missed the change from a traditional towards a modern society. In the next paragraph we will elaborate on this sociological idea.

6.3 Institutions and Networks

Traditional and modern societies differ so greatly from each other that they can be used to establish a typology (Table 6.1). Traditional institutions are placed opposite modern networks. The traditional society focusses on the past and is strongly hierarchic: it is characterised by a top-down approach. Behaviour is regulated, prescribed and often enforced. Culturally, homogeneity is highly regarded; singular identification and identity are important. The traditional society also assigns uniform loyalty to power. Social capital is binding in its nature. On the other hand, modern society is focussed on the future and works via horizontal and bottom-up networks (Zijderveld 2000). Behaviour is based on negotiation and individual agreement and, therefore, develops voluntarily. Cultural diversity and bridging social capital are central. They form the blocks of societal pluralism: both the identity and loyalty of the citizen in a modern network society are versatile.

Seen from this typology, depopulated areas are areas that were unable to adapt to new developments on political, economic and sociocultural level on time. They linger in the ‘old’ economy, the ‘old’ political structures and the ‘old’ social relations. Young people leave, areas are declining, traditions are cultivated, changing the past into a legitimisation of the present and future. Since ‘new’ people have never belonged to the past, they are, therefore, not affiliated with the singular identity of the area. Those ‘new’ people are not only new generations (who leave the area due to a lack of contemporary identifications), but are also people ‘from outside’ (who have no reason to ‘come inside’). The area is not interesting for

Table 6.1 The traditional versus the modern society

Traditional institutions	Modern networks
Orientation on the past	Orientation on the future
Hierarchic and ‘top-down’	Horizontal and ‘bottom-up’
Regulated and prescribed behaviour	Behaviour based on negotiation and individual agreement
Enforced	Voluntary
Homogeneous	Plural
Binding social capital	Bridging social capital
Singular identity	Multiple identities
Singular loyalty	Multiple loyalties

Source Reverda (2011)

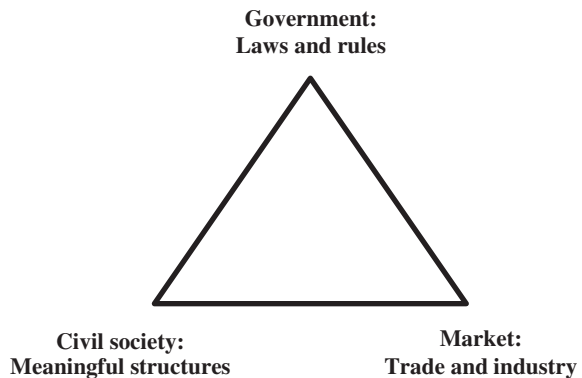
newcomers because it lacks relevant, contemporary identifications. Furthermore, participation in civil society is made more difficult by the relative closeness and the dominance of binding social capital.

Modernising society is in line with this vision and the solution to boost the quality of life in the respective depopulated area. Policy should be focussed more on the future, diversity and individual equivalence and less on the past, tradition and hierarchy. The social message to depopulated areas is, therefore, substantially different from a political-administrative and economic message. It is not about an approach of ‘saving what can be saved’, but more an approach in which the beginnings of modernity are stimulated and the influence of traditional institutions is restricted. This is especially challenging for areas with a lot of elderly people. Indeed, the transformation is sociologically not focussed on a region that is aging but in the question on how an aged population can use the already accumulated human and social capital to transform the region from a traditional to a modern society. We expect behaviour which we do not generally expect from old age or the elderly: taking initiative and leadership in the transformation, innovation and modernising process of society. Elderly who renew and young adults who follow this example—the challenge of a declining society lies therein.

6.4 Government, Market, and Citizens

In the previous paragraphs we have discussed the relationship between demographic shrinkage and government, economy and civil society. We will now move on from the examples and seek concepts with which we can analyse the reality in general and the reality of a declining society. An ‘analytical triangle’ arises where we can describe and interpret social reality (Fig. 6.1). The constituent parts of this triangle exist of (1) the government or the state, (2) the market or the economy and (3) civil society or society. Every element knows its own content and power but depends on the other two elements in the triangle.

Fig. 6.1 The analytical triangle



The main function of the government within the triangle is organising the society by developing solid legislation and regulation; hereby the laws and duties of citizens are defined. The government takes care of regulation, enforcement of the rules, order and authority; furthermore, the government is, for example, responsible for the construction of infrastructure and preservation of cultural heritage. The main task of the market is to generate trade and industry that are both foundations of material security and prosperity. The market promotes competition, individual initiative and entrepreneurship. Finally, the main task of civil society is the development of useful and meaningful institutions from which people can derive their individual and collective identity. The civil society promotes social integration and mutual support relationships. It creates the framework in which citizens can give their formal and informal activities shape and content. Social networks offer citizens the opportunity to expand themselves and to usefully arrange the direct environment with others.

Government, market and civil society are dependent on one another and in theory none of them have primacy. On the contrary: strictly speaking, the core tasks of each element can only develop optimally when there is no dominance of one over the other tasks. Highlighting or unilateral development of one of the cornerstones merely leads to an impoverishment of the quality of life. It may even possibly lead to crisis situations. Abundant state intervention leads to a subversion of the free market and a cavity of the meaning of civil society in society. If there is too much emphasis on the market a reality arises where ‘survival of the fittest’ applies. Mutual solidarity makes way for extreme individualism. Too much focus on civil society is not desirable: it leads to group conformism with no place for the individual initiative. Regulation and legislation will, for example, be considered a violation of the internal community relations.

What does this triangle mean for the analysis of population decline? Basically, decline—just like growth—is about ‘quality of life and living together’. As indicated, decline has an influence on all facets of daily life, both on an individual level and in a political, sociocultural and economic context. Discussions about living, local economy, government finances, care facilities and education all point towards the way the citizen relates or can relate to their direct environment. The quality of life and living together is, therefore, the result of a certain relationship between government, market and civil society. This relationship can be operationalised in six qualities: the political and physical quality of the government, the social and cultural quality of the civil society and the economic and ecological quality of the market.

The ‘political quality’ refers to the relation between public administration and citizen. The participation and engagement of citizens in the political debate and the ‘culture’ of public administrative power are central. The ‘physical quality’ refers to the core dimensions such as the residential area, infrastructure and public space. The responsibility for both the political and physical quality lies mostly, but not exclusively, with the government. The civil society is primarily, but not solely, responsible for the social and cultural quality of a society. ‘Social quality’ refers to social cohesion and diversity, the facilities that were created for this purpose and

the presence of clubs, associations and networks of active citizens. The availability of education, nurseries, and sports facilities also belong to social quality. The ‘cultural quality’ refers to all forms of art and culture. This concerns not only consuming culture but also participating and contributing to the cultural climate of society whether it is professional or amateur art and culture. The social and cultural qualities play an important part in identity formation and the perception of an area. Economic activity in a clean and environmentally friendly environment is essential for the viability of a society. That is why the quality of a society is also about the ‘economic quality’ and the ‘ecologic quality’. Economy and ecology are no longer

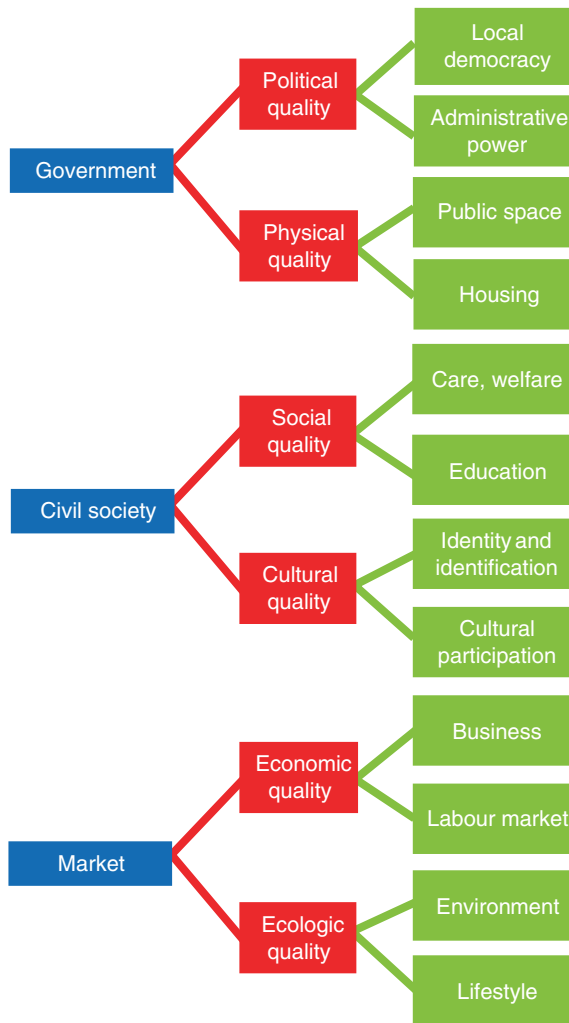


Fig. 6.2 A model to determine the quality of life in depopulated areas

opposites—they are slowly becoming each other’s extensions under the common denominator of sustainability. The primary responsibility of a vital economy in an ecologically attractive environment lies mainly with the market.

Every single one of the six mentioned qualities can be decomposed in a number of relevant indicators (Fig. 6.2). Through this, a clear and coherent model appears which reflects the quality of living (together) in depopulated areas. Political quality can be determined by the functioning of local democracy and the administrative power of local government. The physical quality is indicated by the quality of public space and living. The social quality appears from the state of care, welfare, and education. Identity, identification, and passive/active cultural participation are indicators of cultural quality. Industry and labour market are indicators of the economic quality while the ecologic quality became visible in environmental aspects and lifestyle. The model provides a coherent framework with its three dimensions, six qualities, and twelve indicators, with which the influence of depopulation and the political-administrative, sociocultural, and economic reality can be analysed.

6.5 Population Decline: Hard and Soft Sides

The quality model sketched in Fig. 6.2 can clarify the reaction of government, market and civil society on demographic decline. Precisely because it is a coherent framework, selective choices come to light. It is immediately clear where reactions are missing. In practice, we can, for example, see that most interventions take place around depopulation in the field of physical quality; especially residential areas and the public space are addressed. Demolition, renovation, and public greens dominate the policy of many municipalities that deal with decline in opened spaces. Economic and ecologic qualities are also often prioritised in policy. The local economy must be strengthened by stimulating innovation and sustainability in the use of resources and energy. We can count the physical, economic and ecologic qualities as part of the ‘hard’ aspects of depopulation.

Astonishingly enough, little attention is paid to the ‘soft’ aspects of depopulation in decline policy: lifestyle and population, quality of social institutions or the functioning of the local and regional administration. That smooth side is just as important even though it might be less tangible. We have already determined that the relative attractiveness of an area and investment in a ‘people’s climate’ are determining factors when it comes to regional dynamics and vitality. That also refers to depopulated areas. The quality model makes the gaps in handling depopulation visible and can lead to additional measures. Anyway, the selection process and what people want to do or not become visible and negotiable—the model can serve as a ‘checklist’ of population decline policy.

That in reality the ‘hard’ sides of population decline often remain central is apparent from, for example, the regional action plan population decline *To a sustainable vital region* of Limburg (2010), the largest depopulated area in the Netherlands. The two pillars of the policy document are restructuring of the housing market and

the economy. For example, in the note we can read the following: ‘The city region Parkstad Limburg has named its ambitions for the long-term development of the region: ‘Parkstad Limburg 2040: a sustainable vital region’.... Starting from the personal qualities and opportunities of the region, the impending developments are indicated: the economic vitality has shaped sustainably; several qualitatively valuable residential and green environments were established; and a dynamic and energetic population have taken advantage of the cross-border location’.

This emphasis on the physical environment and restructuring the constructed environment can also be spotted elsewhere in Europe, like in the restructuring of the housing stock in Oporto, Portugal (Sousa and Pinho 2012), or the City Development Plan and Urban Renewal in Leipzig in 2002 (Bontje 2004), where the physical renovation of buildings and the public space are the main focus point of policy. Physical qualities of the regions, such as living and mobility and the regional economy, as a rule dominate the action programmes. Policy makers often keep silent about investing in the soft side of depopulated areas—even while the key to modernising the area into an attractive and challenging ‘place to be’ may just lie there.

Chapter 7

Population Decline and Quality

The German urban planner Sulzer stated in an interview with *Der Spiegel* (2006): ‘Population decline... I can’t bear to hear these words anymore. I don’t think it is relevant that a few houses are empty. Let’s look ahead and not demolish everything—that is a last resort’. Fed up with the East German discussion on population decline, Sulzer pleads for a replacement of ‘shrinking cities’ in favour of ‘waiting cities’—‘cities that wait, slumber until their hidden qualities are discovered’ (p. 115). Sulzer actually does have a point: specifically decline and social changes contain questions of a long-term perspective that benefit from looking ahead instead of looking back. Decline forces us towards a different way of thinking, towards reflection, towards a future vision on the physical, economic, ecological, social, cultural, and political quality of living.

How do we want to live, work, and recreate in fifteen years, and what do we need to attain this? Which facilities are indispensable, which must be changed, and which can disappear altogether? Which investments are demanded and who does what? These are all questions of which the answers are not clear. However, we can do a few educated guesses and suggestions. These guesses suggest that decline is not an indication of stagnation but rather a source of innovative thinking and modernising. The ideas and suggestions in this chapter are related to demographic decline. However, this does not mean that they are only applicable to depopulated areas. If, for example, more physical space has opened up due to population decline, we are forced to reflect on the use of space. The ideas that arise from this reflection are also useful for growing areas. Depopulated areas can function as laboratories for other areas that decline in a later stage.

7.1 Population Decline and Physical Quality

In terms of physical qualities, we will restrict ourselves to housing. Vacancy and demolition, the collapse of the housing market, depreciation of property, and lack of flow (people are unable to sell their homes) are all typical decline issues. However, population decline also offers opportunities for alternative ways of filling the available space. Previously, we indicated that when houses and other buildings open up we must be careful with demolition. The constructed environment is not only a 'stone' surrounding, but it also represents a 'cultivated' environment (Boomkens 2006). A house has more than only economic value, it also involves historical, familiar, emotional, cultural, and social value. These additional values are often overlooked in discussions on the decreasing property value in depopulated areas. The default reasoning reads: the economic value decreases with a surplus of houses—the scarcity of the labour market is lifted—and in order to safeguard the property value demolition must take place. In fact, this economic and technical perspective on vacancy and the built environment are quite one-sided and actually only takes the functional value of a house into account. Demolition eventually leads to a restoration of traditional economic market principles.

By adding the broader value-perspective to the functional value of a house (e.g. the state of the house and its parts, the quality of the stucco and the gutters) a new vision on area development emerges. It is important to add both perspectives together. The functional dimension of living has been completely taken over by the producers of houses over the last century: architects, construction engineers, housing corporations, project developers, and contractors—in short: the professionals. They possess the technical knowledge, know the regulations, and are able to calculate the construction price per cubic metre. The professionals produce a house with the future resident being the consumer. However, people want more than just a house; they want a 'home': a place that they experience as their own territory where they can move freely and where people can leave imprints of themselves—in a street with the same terraced houses wherein the décor differs in each one of them. In other words: people add value to a house. Decline makes it possible to bring housing production and housing consumption closer together in the restructuring due to the absence of traditional market principles. This can be done by allowing (aspiring) residents, builders, and renovators to work together in an early stage; the result is active citizenship and the co-creation of the built environment.

This partnership between builders and residents can lead to a larger variety in construction forms and construction styles. For a depopulated area this creates a unique opportunity to modernise and to distinguish itself from other areas. The latter is of interest because an environment based on growth principles has ample space and people are forced to rethink the refurbishment of space. The refurbishment must distinguish itself in giving people the opportunity to establish new identifications with an area, new forms of identities, and new forms of bonding—issues that are important for regions that are facing an emigration surplus. Thematic residential complexes that are developed in growth areas can serve as examples: Le Midi in Rotterdam, the Netherlands and Brandevoort in the Dutch municipality Helmond (Meier 2009). The

people live happily here, and the out-migration is limited. However, houses and flats that need work—shell homes that are sold or rented at a relatively low price—offer the opportunity to produce their own physical environment via co-creation. Take for example, the Belgian city of Genk where the creative class has transformed former mining buildings into contemporary work environments.

Finally, the concept of the compact city for depopulated areas may be a source of inspiration. We already saw in Chap. 3 that growth areas tend to divide the space into tightly marked functions: living, working, and recreating are divided, and human proceedings are segregated. In a built environment this segregation is strengthened by decline—think of the metaphorical perforated city (Beeck 2011). In depopulated areas it is crucial that the space is ‘de-functionalised’ as much as possible. Living, working, and recreating must be concentrated. Only then can a city or village maintain its core. Only then can residents focus on established orientation points where they can go to and visit each other. Centres form the basis of public space and facilitate human contact. Both are important for the development of social capital and a vital civil society.

7.2 Population Decline and Ecological Quality

The ecological quality of an area is closely tied to physical quality. Environment and space form a kind of Siamese twin. Depopulating areas generally profile themselves as green, quiet, and spacious in the hope of attracting new residents and visitors.¹ Depopulated areas should apply this green, quietness, and space to their own population, like we see in the ‘Cittaslow’ network (Chap. 5). Population decline offers the opportunity to redefine the spatial environment. Sustainability, new raw materials, new energy, and ‘cradle-to-cradle’ are, therefore, key concepts. Take the villages Hästekasen (Sweden), Jühnde (Germany), and Vasse (the Netherlands), where citizens use population decline to experiment with local power generation. Sustainability is a theme that is also of interest in growth regions. Being a transition area, a declining environment is perfectly suitable as an ecological incubator.

In a publication of research centre RiBuilt (2010) an ecological prospect of depopulated areas is outlined. The central question is what the Dutch province of Limburg will look like in 2050. ‘Urban areas have been transformed from consumption centres into producing environments. Everything is about renewable energy; urban farming has been integrated partially on roofs in greenhouses that create a pleasant garden in the spring and fall. Mobility is effectively divided and only occupies half of the space. That space is utilised by natural water treatment, recreation and greenery integrated as production for biological raw materials (...). On a regional scale, food, in particular slow food, has become a major driving force. The people value local products and have discovered new eating habits and dishes. Meat

¹ Forty six percentage of the municipalities in the Netherlands brand themselves with such qualifications (Wouters and Boisen 2010).

is only eaten once in a while; algae and insects are processed into protein-rich products' (p. 3). In the dream world of ecologists, an after-decline-era cannot be better worded. The target: a person who no longer exhausts the world, but lives harmoniously in their environment. Due to depopulation cities could become green oases and commuting might be decreased by people working close by in business complexes.

The ecological opportunities of decline can also form an impulse for economic innovation. To achieve this, they must satisfy two conditions. First, a better connection is needed between ecology and urban culture. Many of the dreams of being green and sustainability are reasonably anti-urban while specifically the cities take care of social, cultural, economic, and political dynamics. Cities exist by the grace of contradictions: poor and rich, young and old, winners and losers, an arrived upper layer and a fighting-for-survival under layer—these tensions form the fuel, the sustainable energy of the city. Heterogeneity and diversity are the characteristics of urbanity. 'Only in the city can communities like art and science grow next to business. Only in a city can an immigrant culture, a gay culture, a homeless culture, an entertainment culture, and a mobility culture develop itself' (Reverda 2004, p. 122). Reconciliation between ecologic ideals and urban tensions is needed to prevent views from becoming no more than green oases in a non-ecologic desert. In other words: how can we link sustainable thinking to an urban lifestyle?

Second, ecology demands behavioural change. If people want to establish sustainable villages and cities, then they must invest in the attitude of people who are going to live there. Take the EVA-Lanxmeer district in the Dutch municipality of Culemborg: it is an ecologic 'responsible' district that is fully supported by the people that live there (Sustainable Urban Design 2005). In a way, the residents are selected on their behaviour towards the district. This makes the district special: only people live there who consciously identify themselves with the sustainable qualities of their residential and living environment. This formula, however, is not applicable everywhere. On the one hand, a certain selection of 'supporters' (binding social capital) has taken place and, on the other hand, a large number of depopulating areas are socioeconomically weak. In these areas there is often more talk of poverty than elsewhere, the people die younger than elsewhere, and feel less responsible for the direct living environment. These areas will first have to be socioeconomically strengthened before space is available for the implementation of ecological ideals. There is still a significant gap between aspiration and reality.

7.3 Population Decline and Economic Quality

Depopulated areas are areas in transition; and areas in transition are economically interesting. What opportunities does population decline offer in terms of economic quality? At first sight, decline seems to be a disaster for the local and regional economy: shops have to close due to a lack of customers or problems with succession, while companies look for their future elsewhere due to a lack of labour force and talent. What remains is a traditionalistic and inwardly focussed population—hardly an attractive investment and business climate for new business. In some

cases, economic circumstances also lead to decline, in particular in areas with a mono-structure. The dependence upon a single economic activity makes areas vulnerable, also non-economically. For these types of regions, seeking sufficient economic differentiation and variation is an important task (Jacobs 1969).

Notwithstanding or perhaps due to the abovementioned issues, a depopulating region offers plenty of opportunities for business and innovation. Decline makes for creativity: entrepreneurs who are confronted with population decline are challenged to innovate. Therefore, it is obvious to experiment with new technology to enable services provision from a distance. Digital shopping centres from the living room can partly replace physical facilities. Houses can be stabilised against demographic decline by connecting them with the broadband network. Digital shopping, digital ‘live’ access to concerts, digital doctor consultation—these ‘e-services’ already exist, but in a depopulated region they can contribute significantly to the quality of life. If ageing puts home care under pressure (not just because of budget cuts, but also due to a lack of manpower), then household robots can make life a little bit easier. The administration of declining municipalities would be wise to provide their territory with a broadband network and to present themselves as a ‘playground’ of technological innovation; population decline as an incentive to economic modernising.

Depopulated regions also offer space for new forms of business that deviate from the conventional market economy. Depopulated areas are characterised by a ‘surplus’: there is too much of everything—too many schools, too many houses, too much infrastructure, etc. Things that people have too much of are, however, also exchangeable. Social economies are exchange economies where not the profit maximisation but the principle of equity reigns. They promote the economic independence of stakeholders by developing a network where goods and services are exchanged. A social economy is naturally local or regional, and the members within the network have a direct say in decision making and policy implementation. Social economies are by definition anchored in the sociocultural context where they originate from. Not only because they lean on local or regional networks, but also because the exchange system exists of nothing more than the present talents, competencies and skills. The human and social capital of a sociocultural network forms the substantial base of a social economy (Elsen and Walliman 1998).

Local and regional exchange systems appeal to people’s talents and strengths. They are activated on the basis of what those persons can do. This could be a variety of things: fixing household equipment, babysitting, fixing tyres, painting houses, working in the garden or offering vegetables from their own vegetable garden. However, giving language or computer courses, organising debating nights, or writing a text are also all part of this system. The connected operational system is fairly simple: all that is needed is a list of names of the members, a newspaper or website with an overview of the supplied and demanded goods and services, and a simple accounting system with debit and credit registration of the exchanges. Setting up a ‘talent base’ where the constructed human and social capital becomes visible in a shrinking and ageing region would fit perfectly well in such an exchange economy. A beckoning perspective: modern depopulated regions characterised by a differentiated talent economy.

LETS as an Alternative Economy

The LETS-system is the most common system of social economy. LETS stands for ‘Local Exchange and Trading System’. It is an exchange system where the participants supply each other with goods and services and subsequently settle the bill with exchange points. People can use these points to ‘buy’ other goods and services—it represents alternative money that is only valuable within the system and can, therefore, not disappear to outside the sociocultural network (van Arkel and Peterse 1996; Ramada and van der Valk 1999). The most well-known LETS initiative in the Netherlands is ‘Noppes’ in Amsterdam. Products and services are settled in the currency ‘Noppes’. Initially, all adverts and notifications were published in the magazine of the association, the ‘Noppes paper’ and the members would pay by transferring Noppes via paper cheques. Currently, the members can study the adverts online and the ‘Noppes payments’ are mostly performed digitally. Other Dutch cities have also implemented an alternative currency to the euro: the ‘Devi’ in Deventer, the ‘Keitje’ in Amersfoort and the ‘Eco’ in Groningen; all cities in the Netherlands. We can find LETS-systems all over the world: in Nigeria, India, Japan, Belgium, Germany, Sweden etc.; as a matter of fact, there are very few countries that are not familiar with a kind of alternative local exchange economy.

7.4 Population Decline and Social Quality

We slightly discussed the social qualities in depopulated regions in the previous chapter. We stated that depopulated areas are in need of sociocultural modernising. This demands parting with traditionalism and facilitating existing talent to provide the depopulated area with new energy. This task is mainly targeted at people from the older generation. They will have to use and transform their accumulated human and social capital to guarantee the quality of life in a depopulated region. How paradoxical it may sound: specifically the elderly have to take the lead in modernising the area. This does not necessarily have to be an individual or collective decision. Population decline will force the older generation to maintain the desired standard of living and services. Decline will ‘force’ the elderly into active citizenship.

The transition from a society with many young adults to an ageing society will change civil society. With fewer people who are mostly ageing, the social infrastructure is going to have to thoroughly change in the fields of healthcare, welfare, education, culture, and sports. Education will rearrange the perspective from a society with many young adults to ageing; from education for the young adults to ‘lifelong learning’. Football clubs and other sports clubs will have to collaborate due to a decrease of pupils. Vocal societies and harmonies are condemned to each other because their members are decreasing and ageing. Especially in traditional societies, the forced collaboration, caused by population decline, will initially lead to tension and resistance, where football clubs, vocal societies and harmonies are

a part of the local identity—until people see that cooperation is the only way to fill up the sociocultural infrastructure. Associative life will modernise, and multi-sports societies, multifunctional conservatories and combined culture centres will emerge. Shared use and shared ownership of an accommodation will bring former competitors together in varying compositions and governance structures. They are examples of modernisation of the traditional society: heavy club and association structures are replaced by light, network type forms, while multiple identities replace singular identifications (Zijderveld 2000). In short: the decomposing effect of decline forces civil society into collaboration.

It can be expected that residents in depopulated areas will use the opportunities of information and communication technology (ICT) more effectively. Especially in areas where fewer people live, digital communication and virtual communities provide solutions. The market will mostly take responsibility for the informative and technological aspects of ICT; society will claim the communicative aspects. Meanwhile, 91 % of the Dutch population uses the Internet and 84 % uses it daily (van Deursen and van Dijk 2011). This percentage will continue to grow. Netherlands is at the top of the European list, while in Europe as a whole Internet usage has increased to more than 63 % of the 800 million Europeans (see <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm>). Virtual communities bring people together in all imaginable fields and invite interaction. The exchange of information is socially organised, whether we are talking of parents, car enthusiasts or teenagers. What should I do if my son cannot sleep at night? Which car dealer can supply me with parts for my BMW from 1952? I have fallen in love with a boy in my class: what do I do?

The laptop, smartphone, or iPad allows us to inform each other, discuss with each other, give each other advice, and gossip about others. ICT also leads to people arranging 'live' meetings, catch up or develop an idea. Some even say that ICT has ultimately led to more physical meetings than in the pre-ICT era (Gaspar and Glaeser 1998; Polèse 2009). ICT contributed to people meeting new people and discovering new trade perspectives. Thus, the Web is a source for the development of meaningful interactions and relationships. This refers to community development, be it in a new or in a different way. Parallel to the local community a virtual community arises where time and space, knowledge, experiences and interests are shared. The unique selling point of the Internet is that it brings people together who would otherwise never or rarely meet in real life. Special websites for the elderly, gays and lesbians, for Muslims, Jews, and Christians, for young women and motorcyclists make it possible to interact, dialogue, and act (van den Boomen 2000). This is an attractive perspective for depopulated areas that are confronted with diminishing relationships.

7.5 Population Decline and Cultural Quality

Cultural quality is related to social quality. Indeed, culture demands active participation and identity formation of citizens in the public domain. We distinguish cultural quality in a narrow sense and cultural quality in a broader sense. Cultural quality in

the narrow sense represents the presence of both professional and amateur art and cultural practice in a region. Depopulated regions demand the question of how art and culture can contribute to the quality of life. Art and culture are, after all, important determinants for the attractiveness of a region. Therefore, it is always useful to invest in culture, both from above and from below. From above: by formulating local policy where creative talents receive the opportunity to expand. Facilitating the local talent and creating podiums where the talent can manifest itself delivers an important contribution to the regional living environment (Florida 2002). That ‘decline’ is thematised or can even lie at the basis of art, and culture makes it even more interesting. Examples are ‘house’ music in vacant buildings in Detroit, the ‘Design-for-Emptiness’ prize in Heerlen, the Netherlands and the annual decline lecture during the festival *Cultura Nova* that also takes place in Heerlen.

Cultural quality in the broader sense refers to the ways in which citizenship and identity in depopulated areas can be filled in. Again, we refer here to the transformation that depopulating regions go through and that we typed as a transition from a traditional to a modern society. In depopulated regions, citizens are asked to relate to their surroundings and subsequently form new alliances; even if it was just because the old, growth related habits no longer functioned. Other reference frameworks and identifications are necessary. Multifunctional role behaviour, multiple identities and differentiated loyalties make up the most important ingredients of citizenship in a depopulated area. The relation to the government changes from a waiting relationship to a relationship focussed on involvement (the critical citizen). The resulting tightness of the labour market and the pressure on facilities due to decline furthermore demands a different attitude with respect to labour (the entrepreneurial citizen). The responsibility for the direct living environment demands volunteer work, informal care, and civil initiative (the active citizen).

In a shrinking and ageing society, these critical, entrepreneurial, and active citizens are often the elderly people. ‘Critical’, ‘entrepreneurial’, and ‘active’—these are terms that fit into an appeal on re-using the accumulated human and social capital of the older generation (see Chap. 8). After economic retirement, their capital becomes reasonably invisible—when someone retires they are no longer automatically addressed for their knowledge and experience like they would in a professional work situation. That is a shame, especially because older, former employees have accumulated substantial human and social capital. Depopulated regions are challenged with seeking methods for activating and addressing this hidden capital provision.

Civic Engagement in Declining Areas

Civic engagement is often seen as the way forward for declining areas. However, it is important to remain realistic here (Haase et al. 2012). Notably in large declining cities, there are some barriers to overcome before citizens are really taking the lead. After all, how to explain citizens that they have to engage for their community, when at the same time the neighbourhood

is deteriorating and tariffs for utilities affected by population decline are rising? In addition, there is the risk of what Hooghe has called the ‘sour grapes’-phenomenon in citizen participation: just like the fox in Aesop’s fable imagining that the grapes that cannot be reached are sour anyway, citizens might pretend not to care for civic action, because that is ‘not for our kind of people’ (Hooghe 2001). Another problem is a difference in expectations between government and the civil society. Public officials and citizens often speak another language, reflecting the different worlds in which they live—the daily life of a citizen is another reality than the system world of a public official (Termeer et al. 2011). This can create a lot of confusion, misunderstanding and irritation. For example, citizens concerned about the traffic safety in their street can come up with the idea that an extra pedestrian crossing might be desirable. After a meeting in the community centre, they go to the city hall to ask for support. However, after a month an official at the municipality sends a letter in which the request is refused, referring to the local policy that crosswalks are not allowed in this type of street. Impersonal treatments and oversimplified reactions like ‘these are the rules’ frustrate any form of local empowerment. Also government officials must engage themselves when they want to engage the civil society as a whole. In short: it takes two to tango.

7.6 Population Decline and Political Quality

The critical, entrepreneurial, and active citizen in a depopulated area must, of course, be granted the space to develop and present themselves as such. Is this space available? This question brings us to the political quality of a depopulated area. Giving space to a citizen is not that easy. On the contrary, politicians and officials do not boast about being active in a depopulated area. Decline demands political embarrassment and is perceived as administrative failure. To compensate this, aldermen initially do anything possible to maintain the local facility level. Promises to voters that schools and swimming pools will remain opened and that shops will not be closed and that everything will be done to retain employment belong to the regular political rhetoric in depopulated areas. Many analyses of depopulated areas end in recommendations with a call to ‘strong leadership’ that would guarantee a turn in decline. In countering decline, public administration finds its legitimation: giving space to citizens does not fit into that.

Although depopulation issues are local, the solutions are often found on a regional level. Decline forces intensive, non-committal, administrative collaboration on the regional level. This is also a sore subject on the political administrative level. Closing down a primary school takes place in a particular neighbourhood, not in another and different one. Children and their parents will not be happy with the closure while the children and parents in the adjacent neighbourhood can be

relieved that their school remains open (for now). The same applies to sports complexes, community centres, and cultural centres: one particular accommodation must close due to decline while the other can remain open. However, memberships decrease everywhere and the financial sources dry up: if people want to do something they must approach the neighbouring municipalities in the region to collectively seek a way to maintain the educational, sports, cultural, and social facility level, both quantitatively and qualitatively. If this regional level is the appropriate form of action, then there is no escaping administrative scale enlargement. The consequence is a redundancy of the number of public administrators and councillors. However, no one will declare themselves to be redundant. Therefore, the depopulated areas will remain administratively busy.

Yet, the relationship between citizens and politics in depopulated regions will undergo a change in a direction to a more reserved government and a more active citizenship. The reasoning is simple: the government lacks money and equipment to maintain the existing. Because of this the citizen will naturally get the space to actively contribute to the quality of the direct living environment. Maintaining the swimming pool or the cultural centre is not only an issue of the local or regional government but has also become an issue for citizens that wish to use these facilities. The government is no longer solely responsible for the problem. The citizen is involved from the outset because the solution is unachievable without their help. In growth environments, the citizen demands and the government answers—the citizen reports a problem and the ‘strong leadership’ consequently solves it. In depopulated regions, this relationship between the citizens and government is no longer maintainable. On the contrary: if we want to secure the quality of life in a depopulated region, the relationship between the government and citizens is characterised by ‘formal advice, co-decision, and self-government’ (Arnstein 1969). The ‘participation ladder’ in depopulated regions keeps moving in the direction of giving more influence and responsibility to the citizens in the public space.

Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, we can find several good examples of a restrained government with an active civil society. Take the concept ‘self-control’ in the municipality Peel and Maas, the Netherlands (Schmitz et al. 2010). In self-control, citizens take responsibility for the quality of their direct living environment. Citizens will go to work independently and the role of the government and social organisations (housing associations, healthcare institutions, welfare organisation, and the like) restricts itself to facilitating this process. In this way, a variety of villages in Peel and Maas have implemented a ‘village meeting’ to pay attention to issues that concern the village. The consultative body is established by the residents and serves as an information point and communication medium for residents and municipal administrators. The villages in the municipality Peel and Maas have managed to maintain their vitality due to this ‘self-control’.

We also spot government interventions in depopulated regions in other countries that are being filled with active citizenship. Take bottom-up initiatives focussed on strengthening the health and vitality of the older employees in Saxony or the project ‘Chance Zone’ in Silesia, Poland to tie young adults to the depopulated area (van den Ham and Ročak 2011). Reverting to the analytical triangle, we

can state that in growth regions the government and market dominate; however, in depopulated areas, civil society is crucial for maintaining the quality of life—an observation that is quite important for the future of Europe's urban and rural areas.

Chapter 8

Creative with Population Decline

Population decline can be considered in two different ways. The first perspective is looking back, fear, and pessimism: decline is a problem that needs to be fixed immediately. Things have to return to the way they were because in the past everything was better. That is a restricted vision, or like Hiddema (1992) put it into words: ‘Fear causes the pupils to dilate but narrows the view’. The second approach to decline is looking ahead, creativity, and optimism: decline is potential that needs to be exploited. Let us grab the new situation to investigate the ingrained mentalities and procedures. In short, let us use population decline as a motivation to look differently at the reality.

In this chapter, we will consider the second view that we will call ‘creative with population decline’. Creativity is namely looking at things identically to others but thinking and acting slightly differently. Bearing this in mind, we will first look at the issue of facilities. In most depopulated areas the villages face a decrease of the number of facilities: shops and schools close and the libraries are in debt. What to do? Fight for conservation, or are alternative options imaginable? Then, we will focus on the increasing number of elderly in a declining society. Is this really a problem or does ageing offer opportunities?

8.1 The Region of Daily Life

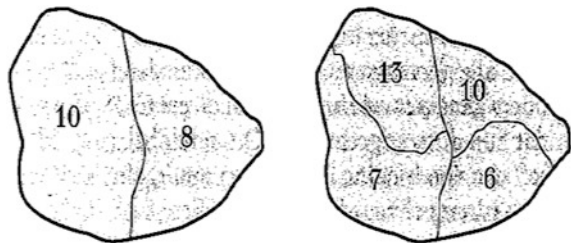
In Chap. 4, we concluded that the current European countryside is not comparable to the countryside in the past. However, until the beginning of the twentieth century, villages in rural areas were relatively isolated. Villagers rarely made it to the city. Local facilities such as the village school, bakery and sport club were a great influence on the livability of the village. However, after World War II, Europe’s countryside was added to the bigger structures. With the scale enlargement and increase of mobility, most villages have become satellites of a larger or smaller

city in the area. Nevertheless, the cliché of the autonomous, self-sufficient village is persistent (Thissen 2010). This is clearly reflected in the wish lists of many village councils. Take the Netherlands: if village councils are asked how they see the future of their village they generally think in terms of preservation. They often wish that the school can stay and claim that a new sports accommodation and new starters have to be built. The question is whether this vision is realistic. Due to an increase in mobility, a village with all sorts of facilities is not available everywhere: people partly live outside the village, commute to their job and shop when they feel like it. According to research into consumer and commuter flows (I&O Research 2010), villagers who do not live in the city still come to the city for their work, groceries or leisure time.

In most European countries the borders between city and countryside are practically dissolved. Cities and villages have grown together to form a ‘Zwischenstadt’ (Sieverts 1997). Decline and growth go hand in hand—they balance each other out. Take the Dutch depopulated province Groningen: the total number of people from Groningen has not declined but rather increased in between 2000 and 2010 (van Sluis 2010). In nine of the twenty two municipalities, the population has grown. Not only the city of Groningen has grown but also the municipalities, such as Zuidhorn, Slochteren, and Stadskanaal, have gained residents. Thirteen municipalities (with Delfzijl being the frontrunner) in Groningen have lost residents, mostly to surrounding growth villages. Growth and decline sometimes lie literally side by side: the shrinking Delfzijl lies adjacent to Slochteren and the growing Stadskanaal borders the largest depopulated area East Groningen. Naturally, it is important to examine the story behind the numbers: the population in individual municipalities has changed in structure. However, even then, the question is whether it is useful to keep staring at the own village Anno 2014. ‘Think global, act local’ is not necessarily needed—‘think regional, act local’ is more than enough. So, what we perceive from decline always depends on the geographical scale we are looking at (Fig. 8.1). The broader our scope is the broader the view on the real depopulation issue will be.

Thus, it is not more than logical that many facilities on the village level have not managed to prevail. In fact, the German geographer Christaller referred to this in his book *Die zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland* (1933). Christaller clarifies that not all settlements in an area have the same function. In other words: not all villages and cities in an area can offer all goods and services. Villagers go to the library in the big city, and the village library, as a result, gets fewer visitors and thus struggles to survive. In order to be profitable, the facility needs a

Fig. 8.1 Growth and decline are relative on regional scale
(Source Based on de Pater et al. 2002)



minimal number of customers (threshold)—sometimes referred to as ‘minimum level’ in the decline debate. This bottom line differs per offered good or service. For instance, the threshold for a specialised fashion shop is high but is low for a bakery. Someone from the village may visit the bakery on the corner several times a week, may visit the provincial city twice a year for new clothes but may only buy a wedding suit once in their life in the country’s capital city. Christaller emphasises that the threshold is not all that matters when it comes to facilities. The maximum distance people want to cover to seek the facility (scope) is also of importance. People will gladly drive twelve miles for a wedding suit but are less likely to do so for a loaf of bread.

Thus, decline is not all about finding the threshold of facilities. It is also about the distance people are willing to cover to get them. We can see great differences in Europe. Residents in small countries like the Netherlands, Belgium, and Denmark are quite spoiled for that matter. We find it not more than obvious that all the needed facilities are nearby. But how normal is this? Rural residents in Germany, France, and Sweden do not mind traveling an extra half hour by car to reach the most basic facilities. Kösters (2011) refers to the example of health care in South Sweden where parents with a sick child have to drive 46 miles to get to the closest hospital. Thus, it is a question in smaller countries as to whether it is so terrible if residents have to travel further in the future to reach the closest school, general practitioner, or bakery. Most of the larger groceries are already mostly done in the closest shopping centre. Such a regional focus is also inescapable for education, health care and the daily groceries. In short: residents of depopulated areas are going to have to get used to facilities being further from their reach. Perhaps children are going to have to go to a school in a different small village and parents are going to have to buy their groceries in the next village. Especially in a small country like the Netherlands the distances are never insurmountable. So, how far is far?

If facilities are further away, then it is of utmost importance that they are reachable to everyone. The fact is that people without a driver’s licence are marginally less mobile in a depopulated area. Many households in the countryside have one or more cars. The residents are used to commuting. Therefore it does not have to come as a surprise that residents of declining areas ask for off road safety (Rozema and Tjeerdsma 2011). Their list of priorities counts investments in road safety and the maintenance of roadsides and verges—hardly things that raise a flag when thinking of decline. Village councils should, therefore, question the mobility of the population. Which groups in the village are less mobile? Can they ride along with someone else? Does public transport connect to daily life of the local community? Aside from physical accessibility, digital accessibility is also important. If a village wants to profit from a ‘global village’, the Internet is crucial. Strijker (2011) justly pleads for the installation of a broadband network in rural areas. This is the only way villages can be well prepared for the ‘new way of working’ (time and place independent working), automation, and everything that such a technique has in store for us.

What is the most appropriate scale level for the reorganisation of facilities in depopulated areas? In theory this concentration of main facilities in a centre

is obvious. In the 1960s, the sociologist van Doorn (1961) spoke of the necessity to appoint a ‘regional centre of allure’ in rural areas. Municipal boundaries do not have to play a role in this—a more relevant criterion is joining the ‘region of daily life’ as is apparent by consumer flows: where do most residents within a three, six or nine mile radius do their groceries? In most of the depopulated areas the regional centre is usually a larger village or a nearby city (cf. I&O Research 2010). Furthermore, a village that traditionally or because of tourism functionality is slightly more attractive than others can also qualify for this criterion. From this centre location the ‘mobile brigades’ could bring facilities to people’s front doors. All forms of mobile services are possible, on call or on delivery. Think of the services that bring elderly to activities in the city or employees of home care who, on request, bring medication and groceries with them when making house calls. Undoubtedly, smart entrepreneurs can find a niche in the market for these services.

8.2 Farewell to Narrow-Minded Politics!

In theory, the region of daily life is the logical scale level for depopulated areas. During the reorganisation of facilities, municipalities should assume the orientation of citizens in their direct living environment. The practice, however, is resilient. Logic plays a subordinate role in politics, which is more focussed on established interests and power. An additional problem for the regional interpretation of depopulation policy is the outdated administrative organisation of many countries. That organisation is based on the time when mobility was much smaller than it is now, with a large number of municipalities as a result. The question remains as to whether this still fits into this era: people move for their work, social contacts, and recreational time all over the region. Most of the political issues take place on a regional scale as well. Population decline is a striking example of this: whether a municipality declines depends largely on developments elsewhere in the region. Someone’s growth comes at the expense of someone else’s growth. Every municipality will, however, try to attract new residents and maintain their own facilities—with the regional cash not growing but distributed between other parties. The consequence is even more competition. In order to prevent overcapacity in construction and the supply of facilities, regional alignment and collaboration is necessary (Verwest et al. 2009).

There is also competition within the same municipality. The different villages and districts and their representatives are not yet acting on a regional scale. Take, for instance, the discussion that takes place in many villages: village councils give the impression of a fenced village—the own village is perceived as a lengthening of axis on which the world rotates. Collaboration with the neighbouring village; that is the last thing we want! This often merely resembles local sentiments. Especially neighbouring villagers or small villages that look alike to do not begrudge each other anything. It seems like they must react against each other in order to define their own identity. van Houtum and van Naerssen (2002) speak of ‘ordering by bordering’: by creating borders, you can create order for yourself.

Too many aldermen are still limited in this approach in fear of losing votes and under pressure from ‘village mayors’. The result: fighting symptoms as opposed to a stable policy against depopulation.

On paper, many politicians endorse the importance of coordination and collaboration in municipal and village boundaries. However, in practice the results are disappointing. Power struggle, macho behaviour, and distrust often win from a shared vision where every municipality abides by. Even if all the municipalities know that collaboration produces the best effect, eventually the self-interest wins from the collective importance—an example of the classic ‘prisoner’s dilemma’ (Axelrod 1984).¹ In the context of decline we could speak of ‘narrow-minded politics’: When it comes down to it, local politicians look at their own district (Reynaert 2007). Generally, this reflex is understandable. After all, aldermen and village council chairmen are not judged on what they do for the region but what they do for their municipality and respectively their village.

It is an illusion to assume that such narrow minded politics will stop by itself. Especially with decline, voluntary collaboration of municipality is not to be expected. This situation concerns division: politicians are going to have to readjust their ambitions. Fewer residents mean lower incomes—and no one wants that to happen. Because local officials are unlikely to agree, help is needed from outsiders, like the national or provincial government. They could, for example, move onto political reorganisation, by combining municipalities and focus on a more regional scale. Naturally, such a political reorganisation will take a lot of effort. Especially citizens and small municipalities are not enthusiastic. However, Denmark shows a definite possibility: in 2007 municipalities scaled to regional level. It took some getting used to but now the Danish do not know any better.

8.3 Liveable Without Facilities

In 2011, the CAB bureau in Groningen researched the liveability of villages in North Groningen, as one of the Dutch municipalities which is strongly confronted by population decline. The researchers asked 1,600 people from depopulated areas as to how satisfied they were with their living environment. The result? The small villagers in North Groningen are alive and kicking. Ninety three percentage of the residents say they are more than happy with living in North Groningen. The liveability of the region is mainly caused by the social cohesion in the villages: close contacts, a close community and participation with activities in the

¹ The classic example of a ‘prisoner’s dilemma’ is two prisoners committing a crime together (Axelrod 1984). They are both faced with the choice of denying their involvement (collaboration) in the crime or by betraying the other (no collaboration). If the prisoners both remain silent they will both receive one year in jail. If they testify against each other they will both go to jail for fifteen years. If only one testifies, he will walk freely and the other will go to jail for thirty years. The result: due to distrust and insecurity the prisoners do not work together—they both go to jail for fifteen years. In short: the favorable result for both prisoners and thus the collective interest is not achieved.

environment. Facilities like shops, schools and sports facilities do not seem to be relevant to the liveability. People do find it important that facilities are easy to reach by car. Research also shows that the liveability of villages does not depend on the present facilities in other Dutch depopulated areas. Liveability has more to do with the quality of the living environment and social factors—a conclusion that also counts for depopulating cities (Wiechmann 2008). Or to cite the researchers of CAB (2011): ‘The main question in our research was whether the disappearance of facilities would endanger the survival of small villagers and the liveability. This seems not to be the case. The most important conclusion determined from the research is that facilities are no prerequisite of liveability’ (p. 73).

Studies of individual villages in depopulated areas seem to support abovementioned findings. Take the village Ossensisse in Dutch Flanders, part of the municipality Hulst (Out 2011). The village has no more than 400 residents of which about fifty children and youngsters are 15 years or younger. The villagers have spacious homes and live happily. There are no shops and there is no school. Two miles from Ossensisse in Kloosterzande lay the supermarket, bank, primary school and the like. The parents mutually decide transport and organise all sorts of activities for the children in the village; like play days, carnival and a summer camp. The villagers are strongly attached to their town centre as a meeting place. The people from Ossensisse have single-handedly insulated the building and contribute to the maintenance. Residents seek each other’s company, commit to the village and thus realise facilities; whether it is a shop, community centre or service jobs.

Everywhere in Western Europe we can find examples of initiatives where residents have single-handedly run facilities on village level. The civil society itself takes care of aspects of the quality of life. In the British depopulating village Hesket Newmarket, the residents have jointly bought the local pub that was nearing closure. There are 250 ‘community-owned village shops’ in England that are assisted by a special organisation, The Plunkett Foundation (Bensley 2008). In Germany, we also find many resident initiatives. Almost every German depopulated village has a ‘Bürgerbus’—‘citizen bus’—with which volunteers pick up the elderly and bring them to places in the environment. An increasing number of volunteers emerge in the Netherlands as a final resort in maintaining the facilities. In the North Holland village Warder, active people have pieced together EUR 700,000 from the community to save the village centre. And since 1979, a local bus was introduced (STAMM CMO 2011). The bus, which was offered by carrier Connection free of charge, is driven by a team of around fifty local volunteers.

If the government takes its citizens seriously it seems they are more than prepared to take responsibility for their direct living environment. This can be observed in thinly populated regions in Finland. Parents, teachers and municipalities discuss how to best organise education. Do we choose a mini-school or a circulating school? Do we make the children commute or the teachers? How can we optimally use the Internet? This ‘local empowerment’ produces fine education—all while forty per cent of the schools in Finland have no more than fifty students (Klingholz 2009b). That this is even possible is due to the large scale autonomy of Finish regions. They are not strictly bound to national regulations for education,

health care and retail. This is unthinkable in many European countries. Here, the structure is central, not the service. Schools must comply with the same rules everywhere, varying from building demands to the number of bathrooms that must be available to the students. The retail business also has to abide to all sorts of rules and permits. Thinking in services indeed starts with a question: how can we offer the service as well as possible in this area? Take the library: is the library as a building important for a municipality or are we speaking of promoting reading among the own residents? It should be about the latter—it is a question of whether in time we will still need a building to achieve this.

8.4 A Re-use of Human and Social Capital

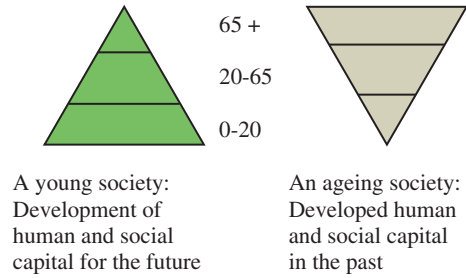
Civil society is set to make its move in depopulated areas—thereby redefining the relationship between the citizen and the direct living environment and the relationship between the citizen and the government.² What do decline and ageing mean for living, working, and recreating? Which facilities are needed and what kind of investment does this demand? And perhaps the most crucial question: what role do the elderly play as the dominant age group? Indeed, if declining environments become dependent on resident initiatives for the quality of life, then these initiatives should mostly come from a relatively aged population. On the other hand: why not?

In the ‘hard’ side of society, the world of production and consumption, the re-use of already used material increasingly becomes popular. The availability of natural resources is put under pressure and the necessity to deal with it in a different, more ecologically responsible way is felt everywhere. Slowly, an attitude arises that replaces the disposable attitude with re-use. Thinking in terms of sustainability and ‘cradle-to-cradle’ in turn challenges companies to reform existing and used products into new energy sources and innovative materials (McDonough and Braungart 2002). There is no such thing as waste in this philosophy. There is no reason not to apply these principles in the ‘soft’ side of the society, the world of people and their mutual relationships. The sustainable use of human resources could play a leading role for the organisation and regulation of the society. The existence of social waste will no longer be accepted. Slightly disrespectfully phrased, it refers to ‘recycling’ human and social capital.

The re-use of human resources, acquired expertise and accumulated networks is essential for the quality of life in an aged society. In a society where in the short term one third of the population is 65 and older, we can simply no longer afford to ignore this category. Sustainability and re-use socially mean that economic retirement does not necessarily have to mean social retirement. After all, ageing could

² This paragraph is based on the chapter ‘Population decline and ageing in Europe’ by Nol Reverda published in Hessle, S. ed. (2014). *Human Rights and Social Equality*. London: Ashgate Publishing.

Fig. 8.2 A young society and an aged society



also be seen as an indication of a society that has accumulated a lot of knowledge and networks (Fig. 8.2).

This alternative analysis of ageing is more constructive than the limited perspective of ‘the costs that keep increasing due to an increasing number of elderly’.³ Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship are clearly mostly expected from unbound people who think ‘out of the box’—and these characteristics are subsequently associated with the young adults (Horx 2009). This naturally bypasses the bulk of experience and knowledge that people have in an aged environment. Therefore, it is useful to sometimes question why innovative projects could not also be carried by the older people. The distinction between the already accumulated human and social capital and the human and social capital that still needs to be realised can be expressed in the so called ‘experience index’ (Reverda 2011). The experience index assumes the 45 years that people dispose of to build their own social capital: the period between 20 and 65. In this case, the young society has many years to go and the aged society has already had many years behind it. And even an aged society never stops learning. Illustrative is the statement of the well-known Spanish violoncellist Pablo Casals (1876–1973). Answering the question from a journalist why at 92 he still practiced the cello every day, Casals answered: ‘I believe I am making progress’.

There are an increasing number of examples on the re-use of human and social capital. Retired engineers of Mitsubishi in Osaka (Japan) offer their technical knowledge to promote the mobility of people who have difficulty in walking—they build treadmills and stair lifts in the city’s public space. In Switzerland, retired bank employees give advice to the elderly in a ‘senior for seniors’-project who would much rather like to learn the tips and trick of banking from their peers than from employees who just graduated from university. The Netherlands is familiar with the PUM-project where retired managers and engineers, in return for an expense reimbursement, commit their experience and knowledge into running

³ Research shows that ageing only determines a quarter of the increasing health care costs in the Netherlands (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport 2012). Three quarters of the cost increase is applicable to other factors such as our higher prosperity (we accept a decreasing amount of discomfort whereby the demand for care increases), technological development (an increasing number of diseases can be detected and treated thus the number of procedures increase) and an increase in the number of chronically ill patients.

non-profit projects in developing countries. In the Netherlands, the company IM-Aces⁴ has dedicated itself to recommitting retired technicians in the small and medium-sized enterprises sector in return for a slight compensation. An example of a complete different order can be found in the small Dutch municipality of Vaesrade: associations of mostly elderly have saved the community centre so that the meeting place in the village could remain. Finally, in the municipality of Landgraaf people promote active citizenship by approaching people directly on their talents and saving these in a so-called ‘talent base’ where supply and demand of knowledge and experience come together. These are some examples on the productive reuse of the large human and social capital of elderly people.

The Experience Index

How young or aged is a society? The formula to calculate the experience index is as follows: $E = (\text{percentage a}) : (\text{percentage b})$. ‘E’ refers to the experience index and ‘a’ and ‘b’ refer to the age categories ‘0–20 years’ respectively ‘65 years and older’.⁵ The number of people that belong to each age category is expressed in percentages. In the intermediate period of 45 years—20 to 65 years—people build their own social capital. All scores above 1 point to a young society, all scores below 1 point to an aged society; the turning point being 1. The smaller the experience index, the higher the degree of ageing in a society; the larger the index, the younger the society. The lower the score is below 1, the more human and social capital is present and the larger the need for ‘re-use’ in society. A detailed version of the experience index for the Netherlands between 1950 and 2040 is shown below:

	0–20 (%)	65+ (%)	E-index
1950	37	8	4.6
1960	38	9	4.2
1970	36	10	3.6
1980	31	11	2.8
1990	26	13	2.0
2000	24	14	1.7
2010	24	15	1.6
2020	22	15	1.6
2030	21	24	0.9
2040	21	26	0.8

⁴ <http://www.im-aces.com>.

⁵ With special thanks to Albert Riga, researcher at the research centre Social Integration at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, for thinking along with the formula of the experience index.

8.5 Transition and System Innovation

Handling facilities and ageing creatively is easier said than done. We are stuck to existing thinking and working methods that are, moreover, anchored in our institutional structures. In addition, parties who should be taking care of the mental shift have different interests. Aldermen want to be re-elected, parents want the village school to remain open just as long as their children still go there and many elderly are glad to be able to retire after their working life. The regional reorganisation of facilities and the reuse of elderly require a real transition process.

Co-inciding with the demographic and economic decline in 2014, everything points towards a ‘take-off’ of Europe’s institutional system in the direction of a new balance. Gradually, the government, the market, and civil society realise that the results from the past do not provide any guarantee for the future. We have to stop with things that do not work anymore and come up with new ideas. It will undoubtedly take many years before the transition to a new system has been completed. System innovation is a very slow process (Rotmans 2003): it requires not only a transition in our thoughts and behaviours but also changes of institutional structures.

Chapter 9

Managing Population Decline Well

Demographic decline is an unruly phenomenon, whether it concerns the causes or the consequences. Decline refers to decreasing birth rates, but also about where people want to live. Decline refers to the society in the future, but also about libraries that have nearly run out of visitors. Decline indicates transition, quality of life, and sustainability, but also refers to aldermen who would do anything to be re-elected. No wonder that all sorts of disciplines say something sensible about depopulation. This book has mainly focused on theories, applications, and examples from demography, sociology, and geography. This last chapter summarises some important insights into population decline and comes up with policy recommendation. This will be done by means of six statements on managing population decline in city and country. This is followed by a plea to explore the other side of demographic decline.

9.1 Six Statements on Population Decline

1. *Population decline is about the story behind the numbers*

The debate on population decline in Europe's urban and rural areas is still being dominated by numbers: prognoses until 2025 (or even 2040), numbers of inhabitants, and percentages of unsellable houses. The story behind the numbers, the human side is, however, much more relevant. In depopulated areas, it is often the young adults who leave. With this population decline the population structure also changes: there is talk of decreasing numbers of young adults and growing numbers of aged persons. These processes determine a different social structure which is eventually definable for the future of the area. How do residents experience decline, what do they notice? How annoyed are they that their music school is going to merge with the music school in the next village? Be mindful to offer

attention to the latter decline prognoses—instead, go and talk to the residents and make them co-owners of the decline agenda.

2. *Growth principles are not effective in depopulated areas*

Growth and decline look somewhat alike. They are both unplanned and random processes—they are not the result of deliberate handling. Still, there remains a large difference: growth is paired with shortages (scarcity), while decline situations are paired with excess (surplus). The first reflex of population decline is continuing the line of thought of growth principles: the ‘too much’ should become less to recover the state of relative scarcity. Such an approach, however, results in the opposite. Indeed, if there are not enough people, there is no use in filling the space up even more. Decline requires bridging of physical and social distances. This can be done by joining activities and seeking cooperation. We must condense what is disintegrated by decline.

3. *Population decline demands a warm instead of a cold approach*

In the hope of turning decline around, many public officials invest in new housing concepts, tourism, and campaigns. This ‘cold’ strategy hardly works. All over Europe, people do not just leave because they feel like it and they determine for themselves where they will go. It is more sensible to accept and manage decline. This demands a ‘warm’ approach that tries to tie the (previous) residents to the area. Bet on the people who have a feeling for the area, make it attractive for young peers to buy a home and temper construction plans. Be careful with demolition: by removing the walls of a house, memories are also erased. In a long-term process like population decline, fewer or more vacant houses do not make a difference. Moreover, there are plenty of opportunities for revitalisation.

4. *Population decline demands a coherent approach*

In the population decline debate, much attention is paid to the ‘hard’ side: population decline and its influence on the physical, economic, and ecological characteristics of a region, city, or village. The ‘soft’ side of decline—the cultural, social, and political quality of an area—is just as important. Think of people’s lifestyle, social capital in a local community, or the functioning of the regional administration. Specifically this ‘software’ can explain why some policy interventions do not have the required effect in the ‘hardware’. To prevent omissions and selective choices in policy it is wise to always use a coherent ‘checklist’ of hard and soft decline dimensions. The quality model in Chap. 6 can serve as a starting point.

5. *The relevant scale to look at is the region of daily life*

All over Europe, the borders between urban and rural areas have disintegrated. Growth from the city and decline in the countryside go hand in hand. There is no use pretending that the world outside the village or neighbourhood does not exist. Due to scale enlargements and commuting, every place in Europe is absorbed by larger structures. The ‘global village’ ensures the further equalisation of Europe’s city and countryside. Regional alignment and collaboration should replace narrow

minded local politics. Ensure that ‘the region of daily life’ is taken into account when re-organising local facilities: where in the surrounding area do residents buy groceries and pass their free time? The liveability of a depopulated area is guaranteed by a concentration in the centre and civic engagement in the surrounding villages and neighbourhoods.

6. *Economic retirement is still no social retirement*

Unfortunately, ageing is often referred to as a large cost item: old age comes with a defect and that would cost society a lot of money. This limited view ignores the fact that elderly people have built up a lot of knowledge and networks. On the basis of the so-called ‘experience index’, the amount of human and social capital that is reusable can be easily calculated. Economic retirement does not necessarily mean social retirement. The elderly can play a useful part in the maintenance of public space, the organisation of sociocultural activities and regulating transport. Depopulated areas are challenged with connecting supply and demand. This can be done by, for example, investing in local talent bases and ‘seniors for seniors’-projects.

9.2 Population Decline, a New Way of Thinking

‘It is impossible to fix a problem with the mentality that caused it’. This statement belongs to no one else but the super-scientist Albert Einstein. Demographic decline is the subject par excellence that is applicable to Einstein’s wisdom. This book argued that population decline and the related developments of decreasing numbers of young adults and an increase in aged people cannot be solved by continuous thoughts of growth. Managing population decline rather demands a new approach, a different way of thinking, one that we must all get used to. In the chapters of this book we have made suggestions in line with this change of thought. Decline is no longer about scarcity but rather about surplus. Concentration and mixed use rather than separation and segregation are useful starting points in areas that are confronted with decline. In a growth society, government must try to remain in charge, and in depopulated areas they must try to let it go. That is the new approach population decline demands.

In the last two chapters of the book we went one step further. Is decline really such a big problem? Does decline offer any opportunities for a sustainable future? Can an aged society not do something with its accumulated human and social capital? The Dutch author Bertold Gunster provides a great example of such a strategy. He writes: “When the wind blows hard, it could be a problem. You could remedy this by building a windscreen. That works just fine. Problem solved. But approaching it differently you could look at it from a different angle. In that case you try to turn the problem into an opportunity. How? By building windmills for example.” (Gunster 2011, p. 10). Population decline could also, without a doubt, supply ingredients for something new, of which we may say in the future: it was good that we ultimately changed our train of thought, because otherwise we might not have achieved this result at all.

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