The Ins & Outs of Regional Shrinkage
in the Netherlands, Europe & beyond

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Dutch population is still growing, and will keep growing in the next decades...
... but growth divided very unevenly across country, and some regions are already shrinking.
Regional and local prognoses 2015-2030

Relatieve bevolkingsgroei 2015-2030

COROP-gebieden

Gemeenten

- krimp (5% of meer)
- lichte krimp (2,5% tot 5%)
- redelijk stabiel (-2,5% tot 2,5%)
- lichte groei (2,5% tot 5%)
- groei (5% tot 10%)
- sterke groei (10% of meer)

Bron: PBL/CBS regionale bevolkings- en huishoudensprognose

www.pbl.nl of www.cbs.nl
The geography of shrinkage in the Netherlands

- Recent shrinkage started in 1990s at the country’s edges / border regions
- More recently spreading more across the country
- Mainly rural (and/or former industrial) areas, villages, smaller towns
- So far we have only few shrinking cities / urban regions
- Exception: Parkstad Limburg region, the only shrinking urban region in the Netherlands
- Demography in shrinking areas: low or negative natural growth; selective out-migration of younger and/or higher-skilled people; only partly and/or temporarily compensated by international migration
The Dutch situation in international perspective

- Dutch shrinkage much less dramatic, more gradual than in several other European countries
- Regional development much less polarised than in for example Germany or Eastern Europe
- Incomparable to extreme cases of urban or regional shrinkage in Central and Eastern Europe or in US ‘Rustbelt’
- Small country – short distances – good connections, being a wealthy country, but also redistributive policies of past decades may have prevented ‘disastrous’ shrinkage in the Netherlands
- Some countries a step ahead of us in demographic transition: e.g. Germany, Japan
- Still, explanations of ‘geographies of growth and decline’ are quite comparable throughout the ‘Global North’; similar mechanisms, different outcomes
We will never get a ‘Dutch Detroit’…

[Image of a cityscape]

... or empty villages, like in Spain...

‘When in 2005 demographer Francisco Zamora was asked to calculate how best the country could retain its population structure in 2050, the only answer he could come up with was for women to have 7.5 children each. A decade later, he says, “there is nothing to be done other than selective immigration.”’

https://elpais.com/elpais/2014/10/29/ingenish/1414592775_914701.html?rel=mas
Recently emerging trends in the ‘Global North’ (since 1990s)

- Increasing concentration of people, jobs, amenities/facilities and economic growth in the largest city-regions
- Increasing dominance of the top layers of the ‘world city network’ (where the multinational headquarters are)
- Increasing demographic and socio-economic polarisation between regions
- Selective migration from shrinking to growing regions increases this polarisation further

→ But eventually, if population keeps greying and international migration is limited/discouraged, shrinkage may spread across larger parts of Europe, North America and East Asia

→ And: also currently fast-growing cities did not always grow, shrinkage may return there some day
Amsterdam was also a shrinking city not so long ago (and it may shrink again if it becomes overcrowded and/or too expensive?)

Source: City of Amsterdam, Department of Research, Information and Statistics (OIS), 2017
Shrinking Cities project (2002-2008) – one of the first international comparisons of shrinking cities

- German project led by architect Philipp Oswalt
- Research + art projects + travelling exhibition
- Unfortunately not continued after 2008
Causes of urban / regional shrinkage

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http://aesirlab.cc/writings/vol3-1
‘Winners’ and ‘losers’ in ‘Global North’
(Europe / North America / East Asia / Australia)

- Knowledge cities / university cities
- Creative cities
- Largest city-regions
- Capital cities
- Airport cities / regions
- Diverse / broad economic basis
- Diverse population / tolerance?? (Florida)

- Industrial cities / regions
- Harbour cities
- Mining cities / regions
- Rural regions
- No higher education
- Smaller cities / towns
- ‘One-sector’ / ‘one-company’ towns
Types of urban shrinkage in Europe (1990-2010)

Selective migration of young and higher-educated (-to-be), 1995-2014

Source: Latten, Kooiman & Bontje in Demos (June 2017)
Local variations within shrinking regions: example Zuid-Limburg

Source: PhD thesis Josje Hoekveld (AISSR – Urban Geographies, PhD November 2014)
National policy: ‘shrinking areas’ and ‘anticipation areas’

National shrinkage policy is mainly: facilitating and stimulating regional and local initiatives.

Not (much) national funding, but rather sharing / offering / organising expertise, information, sharing experiences, encouraging experiments, etc.
Coping with shrinkage as national policy priority?

- Not really...
- National economic, infrastructure, spatial strategies are mostly targeting the largest / fastest growing city-regions: what is good for them is good for the country as a whole?
- Shrinkage put on national agenda in 2009, but never really prominent and meanwhile ‘off the radar’ again?
- Shrinking regions try to join forces and strengthen their lobby in ‘The Hague’, so far with limited success
‘Randstad’ vs. ‘Randland’

“Randland is an experimental area where shrinkage plays a central role in the administrative, economic, and sociocultural design of society”
(Meier et al., 2015)
‘Netherlands in Balance’ (2016): national lobby of 5 ‘shrinkage provinces’ (failed?)
Variations of shrinkage → local /regional strategies will work better than national ones

5 examples, all shrinking, but 5 different stories!
The ‘real’ coping with shrinkage happens on regional and local levels: the example of Limburg

- Limburg as the ‘pioneering’ province
- Parkstad Limburg as the ‘pioneering’ city-region
- Regional agreements and strategies to avoid intra-regional competition: South Limburg and/or sub-regions Parkstad, Sittard-Geleen, Maastricht-Heuvelland
- Regional housing market strategy, leading principles: reducing oversupply, improving quality → article Hoekstra et al. in Journal of Urban Affairs (‘online first’ May 2018)

- 2013: provincial decree Limburg: no new construction without demolition
- Regional economic strategy (clusters, campuses, vacant retail spaces etc.)
Shrinkage policy should be place-specific, no ‘one size fits all’, but as a general policy advice:

- Don’t panic!
- Adapt / anticipate instead of trying to stop / work against
- Long-term strategy, not short-term / ad hoc reactions
- Look carefully at local / regional qualities / characteristics
- No ‘top-down’ government intervention, but collaborating with / discussing with residents, local companies, interest groups etc.
- Regional strategy is usually better than competing local self-interest strategies
- Leave room for ‘bottom up’ initiatives
- ‘Expect the unexpected’ like changing pace of / changing impact of shrinkage, stabilisation/ regrowth, new chances in the future
South Limburg and UvA represented in 2 JPI Urban Europe projects on shrinkage-related topics
New project ahead: RE-CITY
Reviving shrinking cities – innovative paths and perspectives towards livability for shrinking cities in Europe

- Marie Skłodowska-Curie European Training Network (EC-Horizon 2020)
- Led by TU Kaiserslautern (Prof. Karina Pallagst)
- Partners (amongst others) UvA, ENS (Paris), TU Dortmund, University of Porto, A. Mickiewicz University (Poznan), Helmholtz-Inst. UFZ (Leipzig)
- 13 PhD projects, research training programme
- Expected to start in October 2018, 4 years