

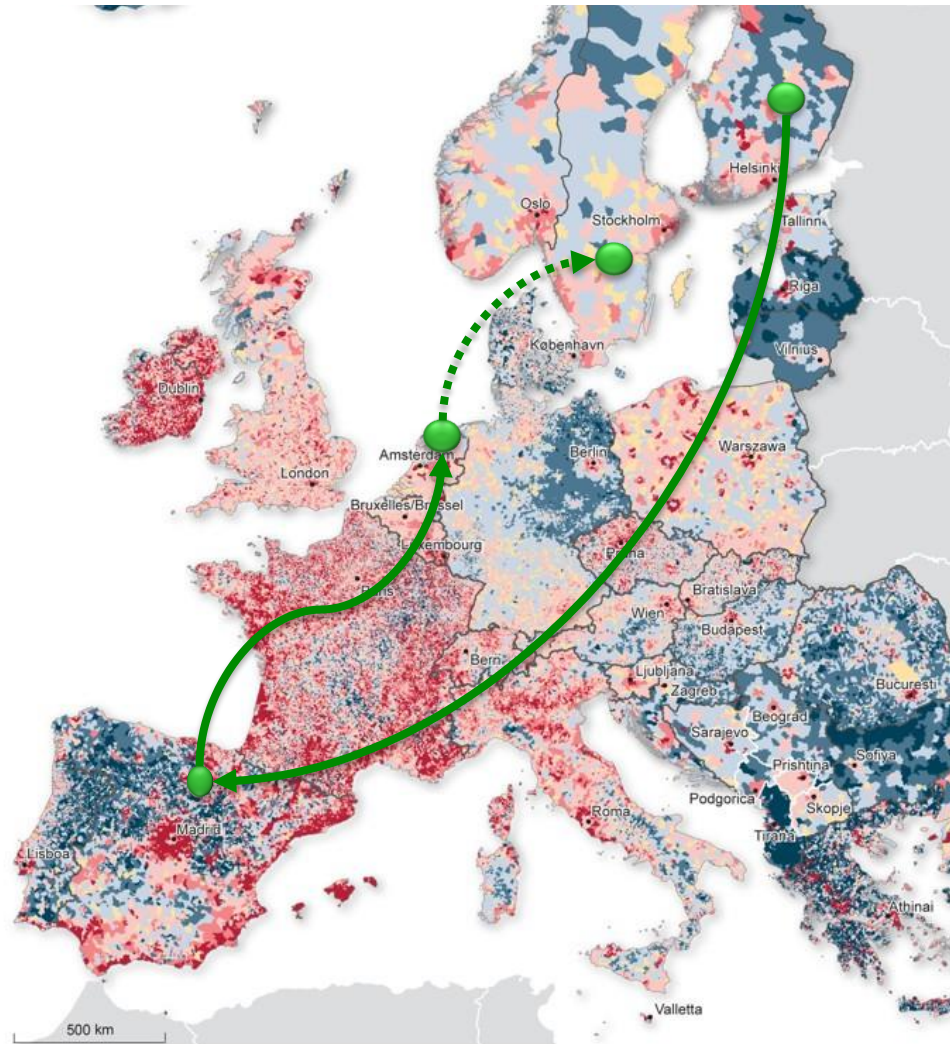
Shrinkage? What Shrinkage?

Alternative futures for challenged rurality's

November, 2022 dr. ir. Marlies Meijer



Today's route: a tour along the frontlines of shrinking geographies



1. What are we looking at?

2. Is it really shrinkage?

3. How can we imagine rural futures?

Starting point – Joensuu 2022

- Return of shrinkage?

- ... A matter of perception – wide diversity of shrinking geographies

- ... A reality check – local adaptive policies

- ... Desired/distanced futures > the future is political

What are we looking at?



The Rural Gaze



The rural gaze...



Dichotomous, but on the same binary

- A white, localist, community-centered, traditionalist, static and not urban perspective on the rural
- Persistent in research and practice
- Wherein in either the community potential for self-organization is praised
- Or the rural regarded as a problematic area

Also shrinkage exists on this binary

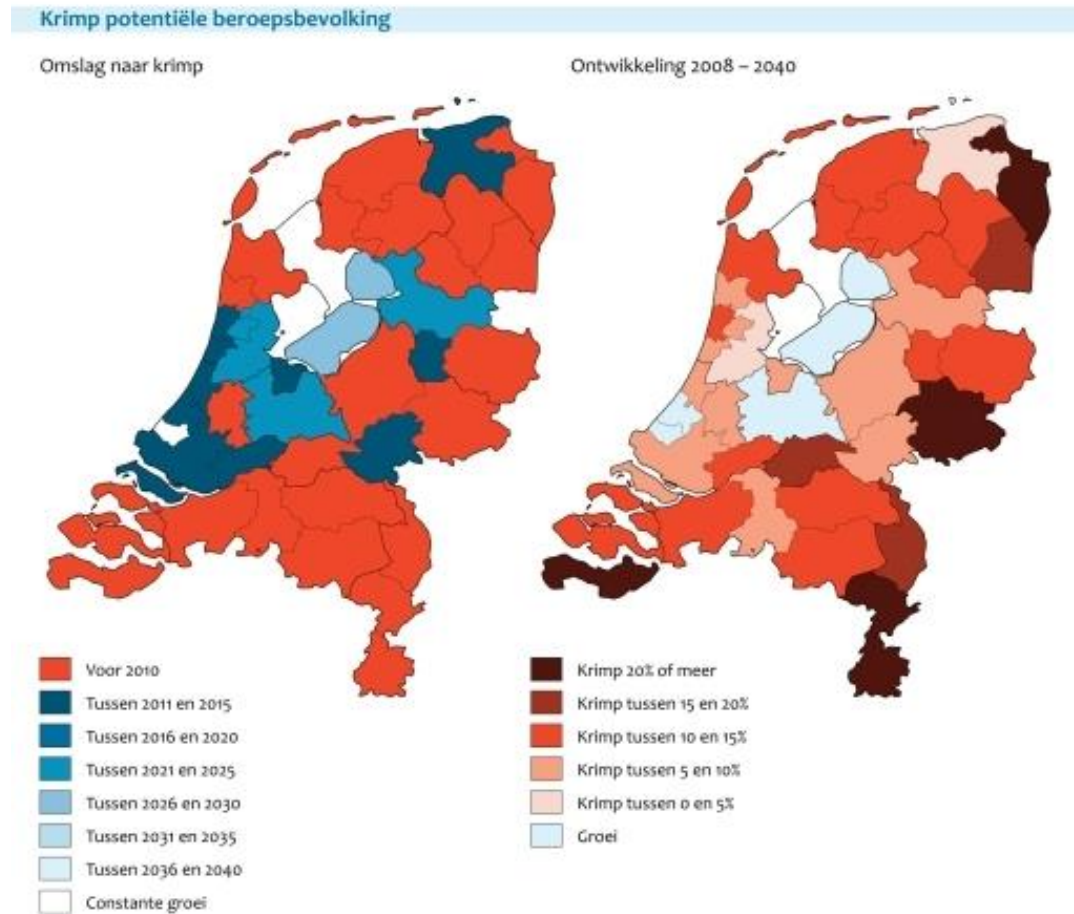
- The shrinking gaze:
 - denial, challenge > crisis, dystopia
 - or opportunity for smart innovation, celebrate resilience and community-based development



Is it really shrinkage we are looking at?



The Dutch situation (in 2009)

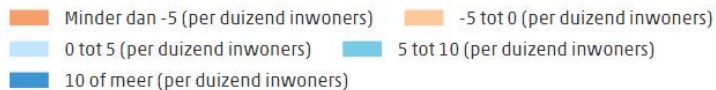
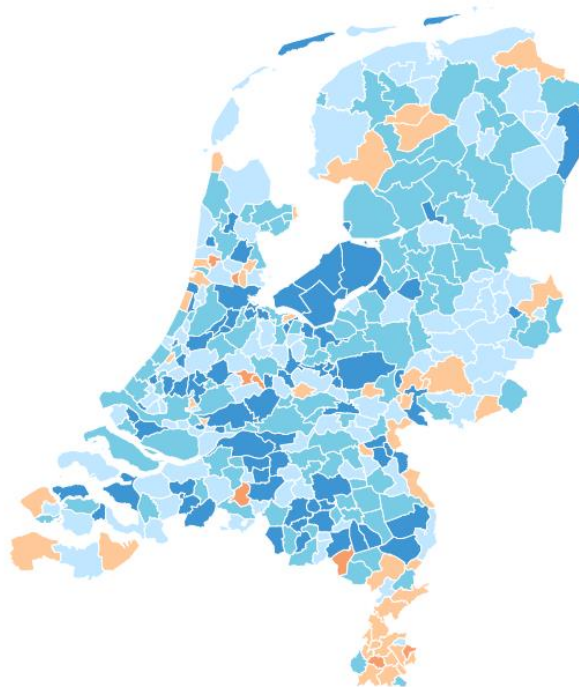


Shrinkage of working population (PBL 2009)

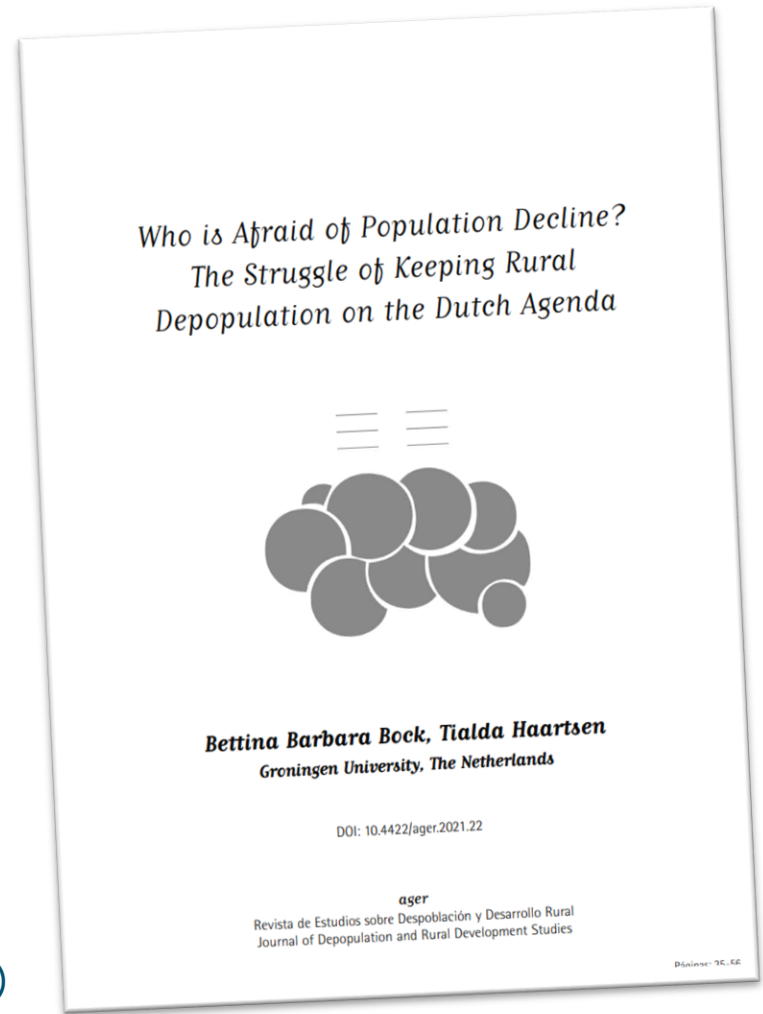
Demographic growth 2021

Bevolkingsontwikkeling, 2021

Bevolkingsontwikkeling



Absolute Population growth 2021 (CBS, 2022)



The year we did not shrink...

- *The downside of using the word ‘shrinkage’, and explaining that your region shrinks, is that it becomes a ‘self fulfilling prophecy’. It does not help, in changing the tide. Especially the local business community did not appreciate this approach.*
- *The last two years we abandoned the term shrinkage. We now call it the ‘demographic issue’. There still is degreening, just as aging. However, due to immigration from the Randstad (metropolitan regions) to the Achterhoek, population decline has been put on hold.*

(mayor Doetinchem, interviewed in 2022)

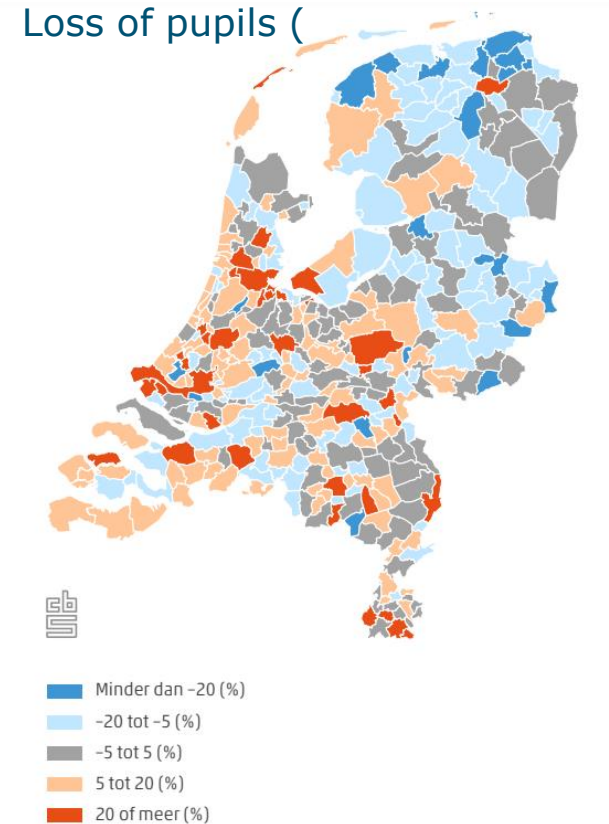
The year we did not shrink...

- *‘Most regions find ‘shrinkage’ too negative as a (policy) label; we are now working on renewed policies that better address the issues these regions are dealing with. Labelling ‘Shrinkage’ also implies that people are no longer attracted to move to the these regions; while it are also generally beautiful areas to live in. We are struggling with finding the right terms.’*

(policy-makers ‘team demographic change’ Ministry Internal Affairs, interviewed in 2022)

Was it shrinkage?

- Population is growing in nearly all municipalities
- Re-growing old: Hidden dynamics of old-age migration in shrinking regions (Steinfuhrer & Grossman 2021)
- Loss of pupil numbers... Hidden economic thread
- Uneven economic development – peripheral regions are disadvantaged



The reproduction of inequality

- The rural perspective is not researched/included in policies
- Inequalities are reproduced, while we fail to develop more inclusive and open rural imaginaries



*Jij woont hier ver vandaan, zeggen ze elders in het land
Dan zeg ik, insgelijks, u ook, a'j 't zien van dizze kant*
Daniel Lohues

*(you live far away, they say
I say: you too, if you look from my perspective)*

'Onderzoek: te weinig aandacht voor toename extremisme in Noord-Nederland'

23 november 2022 02:08 • Aangepast 23 november 2022



Drie jaar geleden protesteerden boze boeren bij



Groningen, Friesland en Drenthe van extremistische incidenten. D antioverheidsdenken, blijkt uit n



Radio Sweden

All broadcasts

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News archive



A big difference in votes in rural areas and cities. Credit: Fredrik Sandberg/TT

ELECTION 2022



Election results reveal Swedish urban-rural divide

2:34 min My playlist Share

Published torsdag 15 september kl 12.23

- People have voted differently in cities compared to rural areas in this year's Swedish parliamentary election.
- The Left Party, the Green Party, the Moderate Party and the Liberals are stronger in cities and

Geographies of small numbers

Statistics hardly represent the reality of low population densities and marginalized rural areas



Geographies of small numbers



A family
can change
a village...

In n dorp is iederiene 'n beroemdheid

Daniel Lohues

(in a village everyone is a celebrity)

What does it mean for Rural Futures?



The 50/50 moment became the pretext for an almost exclusive focus on the city in terms of publications, research, exhibitions, and other forms of discourse—and for an equally pervasive neglect of the countryside. This neglect has had profound effects, of which perhaps the emergence of populism and the apparent success of globalism are only the most visible.

Cities only grow, the countryside is neglected, but it cannot be neglected that conditions interesting in urbanization, the urban is profound.

Countryside—a glaringly inadequate term for all the territory that is not urban, 50 times bigger than all our cities combined—presents a selection of radical changes. Given the countryside's enormity, this portrait can only be partial. We collect evidence of "progress" in the countryside—from the gloom of globalism to the apparent success of globalism—but also raise alarms never even reached.



amo / rem koolhaas/samir bantal

THE FUTURE

THE FUTURE



Alternative futures? Functions attached to the rural

Table 1.2: Emerging functions of the rural

The rural as ...	
A playground as a place of consumption for new second home owners, tourists, food consumers
A dumping ground for controversial unwanted land uses (e.g. waste incinerators, prisons)
A post-carbon landscape a site for the (often contested) deployment of renewable energy – wind farms, solar farms, biomass
A resource sink a site for extracting resources, often with short-term 'boomtown' effects and limited long-term reinvestment in rural futures
A cultural heritage repository tied into perceptions of rural 'authenticity' and nostalgia, cultural landscapes and the commodification of place
A food basket as agriculture remains as a dominant land use and function of rural places
A provider of ecosystem services whereby ecosystems provide functions and services essential to human wellbeing, from recreation to flood alleviation or carbon storage
A social space at the scale of everyday life, where people live and interact, often characterised by strong place attachment

Source: Gallent and Scott (2017)

Is LULU the future?



Advies aan de (in)formateur (15): Ellen van Selm

‘Grote vraagstukken oplossen? Kijk naar het platteland

In de stad is altijd meer geïnvesteerd dan in buitengebied. Maar er is meer ruimte voor innovatie bij urgente thema's. Dat pleit Ellen van Selm, burgemeester van het Friese Fryslân, voor een andere aanpak. Het is een pleidooi voor meer aandacht voor het platteland.

Floor Milikowski beeldt Reyer Boxem

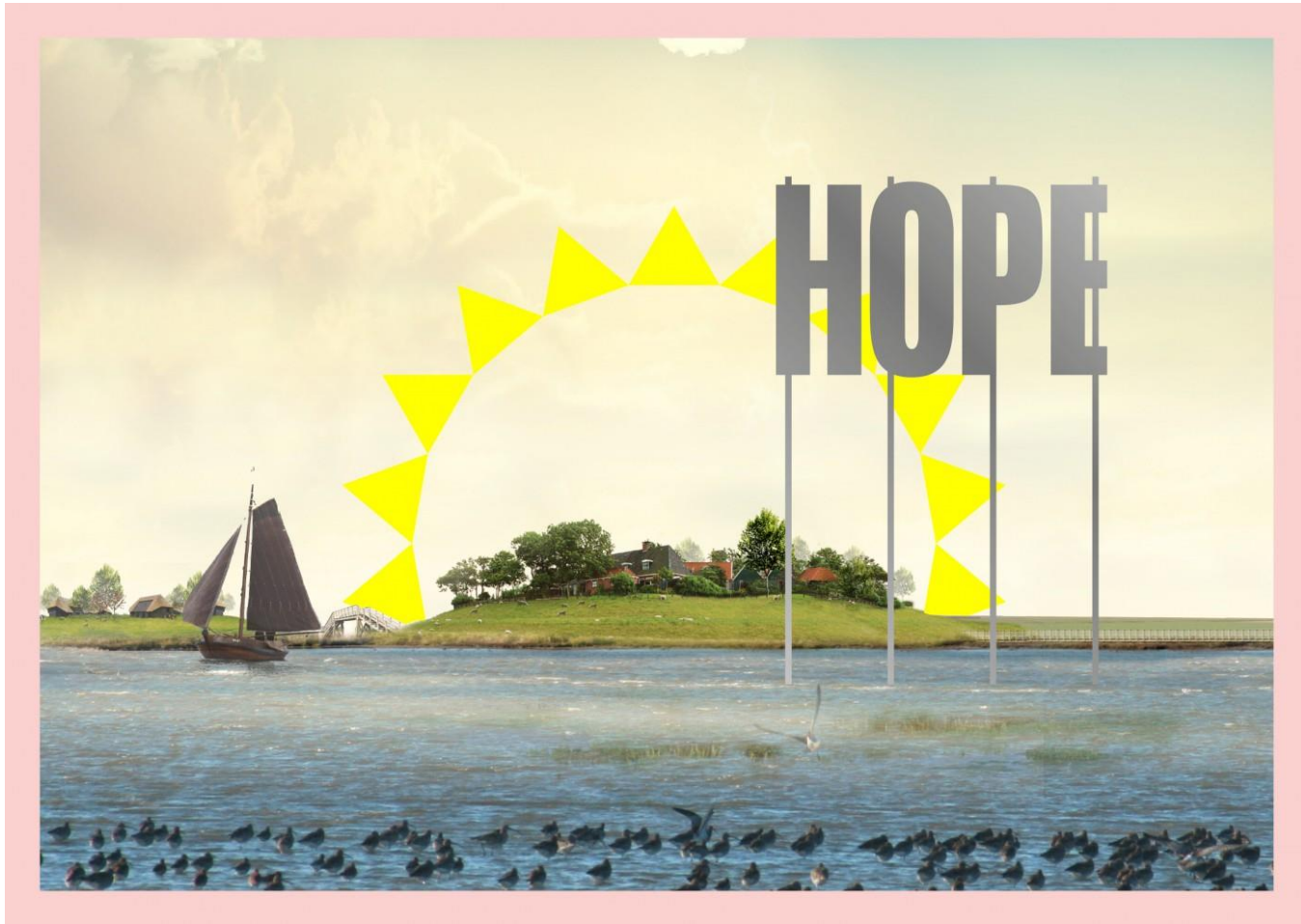
15 september 2021 – verschenen in nr. 37

Big societal challenges? Check the countryside!



Serie
Advies aan de
(in)formateur

The change-makers – places of hope



Community energy



The change-makers



Welcoming Spaces in times of crises



The changemakers



Holwerd as a deprived coastal village



Holwerd at Sea





Alternative futures

- A matter of scale – rightsizing after all
- A matter of investment
- The transformative capacity of small groups and agile governments:
 - Demonstrate that (scaling of) integrated, inspiring and incremental development is possible
- Change exists, so does inertia and failure...

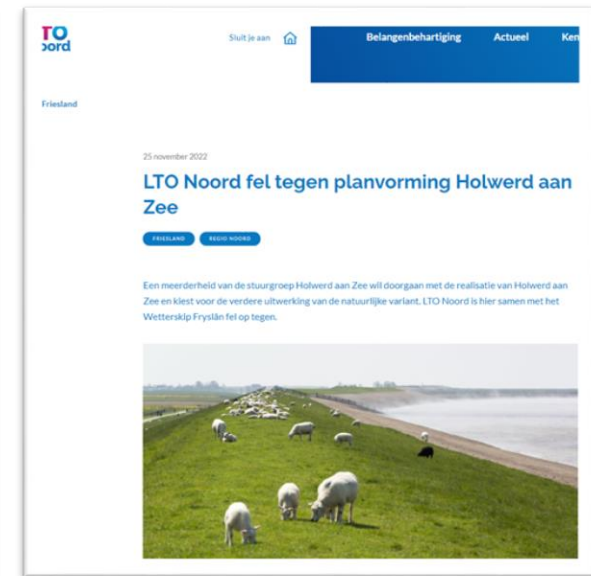
Local innovation is not uncontested...



Who loves turbines
hate people



What are you doing
to our village...



Agricultural sector
against Holwerd at Sea

Alternative futures – a research agenda

- The need for understanding the rural at eye-level
- Research beyond the rural gaze, and shrinkage...
- A rural idyll is not for everyone, or forever:
 - Imaginaries of the rural should open to diversity, innovation, robust and sustainable in multiple ways
 - Investments are needed: fast connections, services, to foster social innovation
 - And be represented in national policies and research

Alternative futures – a research agenda

- Local adaptive policy: Future perspectives for local governments and their wider network: what can it be, who is involved, with what results?
- Sustainable and inclusive development – seen from eye-level
- Successes, but also failures – how can we acknowledge and learn from them?