

# Stories as catalysts for impasse?

How politicians in Ooststellingwerf hold on to growth in a region of population decline



FINAL VERSION OF BACHELOR THESIS  
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## Abstract

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The municipality Ooststellingwerf in Southeast-Friesland is labelled an ‘anticipation region’ by the Dutch national government, meaning that population decline is projected. In the municipal council, this leads to a dilemma: should we limit new housing development to prevent vacancy, or should we stimulate new housing development to counter shrinkage? The research aims to improve the understanding of various political problem perceptions through exploring the stories told in documentary data and conducting interviews with local politicians. Therefore, the presence of stories on population decline, the dominance of stories over time and the way politicians define their problem perception towards shrinkage are scrutinized. The four common policy responses to shrinkage by Hospers (2014) categorize the stories found. A mix of stories linked to trivializing, countering and accepting shrinkage are found, of which the latter two shift in dominance over time. The fourth response, utilizing shrinkage, was virtually absent. Policy recommendations to limit the variability affecting the shrinkage debate in Ooststellingwerf are: (1) agreeing on the value of demographic prognoses; (2) incorporating long-term developments more prominent in decision-making; and (3) presenting the shrinkage scenario as a feasible option. Further research on the effects of shrinkage on rural regions and the role of the COVID-19 crisis is recommended.

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*Figure 1: Town hall of Ooststellingwerf, seat of the municipal council (personal collection)*

*Figure 2 (background): Municipality Ooststellingwerf (adapted from: Esri, 2021)*

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

This research focuses on the reaction to (prospects of) population decline by politicians in the rural municipality Ooststellingwerf (see figure 3). In 2006, the Dutch report *Structurele Bevolkingsdaling* (structural population decline) by Derks *et al.* was published. The report announced that many regions in the Netherlands will face structural population decline between now and 2040 (Derks *et al.*, 2006), which resulted in a media hype that awakened planners and policymakers (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2009). Derks *et al.* (2006) state that policymakers usually react to population decline with rejection and disbelief, since this involves a structural political shift from growth to shrinkage.

Ooststellingwerf exemplifies this typical reaction. The region Southeast-Friesland, where the municipality is located, is labelled ‘anticipation region’ by the Dutch government (Ministerie van BZK, 2019). These regions need to anticipate to population decline of at least 2,5% between 2014 and 2040. Ooststellingwerf’s politicians do not unanimously accept prospects of decline (Nieuwe Ooststellingwerf, 2020). In line with Haartsen & Venhorst (2009), politicians attempt to battle decline by stimulating residential and business development (Nieuwe Ooststellingwerf, 2021). Several parties claim to prevent decline rather than to plan for it and avoid the term ‘shrinkage’ (Nieuwe Ooststellingwerf, 2020).

Derks *et al.* (2006) accentuate that timely acceptance of population decline is needed to profit from opportunities e.g., the lowering pressure on nature and public space. Why do policymakers try to solve the problem of decline by planning for growth (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2009), rather than developing stories that match the projected reality? Derks *et al.* (2006) describe a hurdle: the attitude of policymakers towards population decline. Currently, this hurdle has increased, as policymakers in rural municipalities see the COVID-19-crisis as an escape from population decline (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2020).

Population decline is a relevant theme not only in the Netherlands, but also on a European scale (Wolff & Wiechmann, 2018). Many municipalities (will) face the consequences of population decline, which asks for a change in policies. Although much research is already done on shrinking urban areas, little is known about how rural areas deal with population decline. Lessons from Ooststellingwerf can prevent other (rural) municipalities from inventing the wheel regarding shrinkage-related policymaking.

## 1.2 Research problem

This research aims for exploring and explaining the past’ years policies to shrinkage in Ooststellingwerf through storytelling. Many authors state that stories can shape the future as catalysts for change (Sandercock, 2003; Van Hulst, 2012; Freudendal-Pedersen, 2017). However, little is known about the opposite: can stories also catalyse an impasse in planning, prohibiting change?

The research aims to identify the stories illustrating how policymakers in Ooststellingwerf regarded population decline over time. As the starting point of the research, the publication of the municipal Structural Vision in 2009 will be taken. This document forms the basis of more recent policies.

The main research question is defined as followed:

*To what extent have stories on population decline led to an impasse in policymaking in Ooststellingwerf since 2009 and how can this be overcome?*

In order to answer this question, the following sub-questions are defined:

1. *What are the dominant stories on population decline in Ooststellingwerf told within the political domain since 2009?*
2. *How has the dominance of specific stories told on population decline in Ooststellingwerf developed within the political domain since 2009?*
3. *How do local politicians define and explain their current problem perception regarding structural population decline in Ooststellingwerf?*

The first sub-question serves to inventory the stories on population decline found in Ooststellingwerf's policy documents, electoral programs and council meetings. Sub-question 2 builds upon this by putting these stories in perspective. The third sub-question takes another approach by reflecting on the findings in interviews with five politicians.

### 1.3 Reading guide

The report is structured as follows. The following chapter discusses the key concepts of this research, such as acceptance, policy responses and stories. A conceptual model visualises the relationships between the concepts. The third chapter describes the methodology of the research, including the collection and analysis of data from policy documents, council meetings and interviews. The fourth chapter demonstrates the results from the analysis of the above-mentioned sources of data. The final chapter presents the conclusion, reflects on the research and states recommendations for policy and further research.

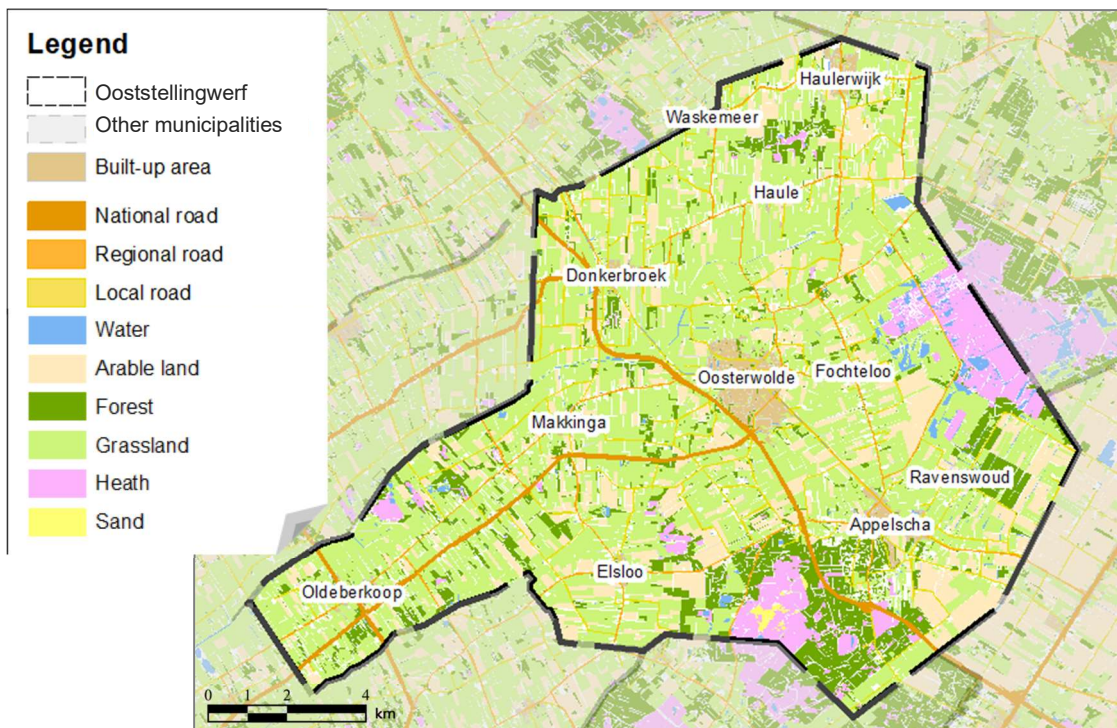


Figure 3: Municipality Ooststellingwerf and its eleven largest villages (adapted from: Esri, 2021).

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Shrinkage, acceptance and stories

The upcoming section defines the concepts ‘(structural) population decline’ and ‘shrinkage’. The second section discusses the relation between the political acceptance of shrinkage and policy. Lastly, the third section introduces the role of stories and storytelling in this.

#### 2.1.1 Population decline & shrinkage

Population decline, or demographical shrinkage (Van Dam *et al.*, 2006), refers to the loss of inhabitants of a geographical area, due to a mortality surplus and/or negative net migration. Wolff & Wiechmann (2018) demonstrated that Europe-wide, 17% of the smallest cities (between 5.000 and 10.000 inhabitants) faced population loss between 1990 and 2010. They label shrinkage a long-term trend when population decline occurs in at least five successive years.

The term ‘structural population decline’ suggests that policymakers face fundamental challenges (Kilper, 2006). Derks *et al.* (2006) stress that the idea of structural population decline opposes the ‘genes’ of practically every policymaker. In Dutch debates, the word ‘krimp’ is used (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2009), which literal translation is ‘shrinkage’. Beside population decline, the word ‘krimp’ also refers to economic decline (Derks *et al.*, 2006). Oftentimes, these two are mentioned together, as policymakers associate decline with a downward spiral of demographic and economic decline (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2009).

#### 2.1.2 Policy responses and acceptance

Hospers (2014) distinguishes four common policy responses to (structural) urban shrinkage in Europe: trivializing, countering, accepting and utilizing shrinkage. Table 1 offers an overview of these policy responses.

Table 1: The four common policy responses to shrinkage (adapted from: Hospers, 2014).

Policy response	Definition by Hospers (2014)	Evaluation by Hospers (2014)
<i>Trivializing shrinkage</i>	Policymakers ignore the symptoms of shrinkage	Irrational policy response due to the reliability of demographic prognoses. Persuasion of relevance is difficult.
<i>Countering shrinkage</i>	Shrinkage can be solved through policy measures fostering demographic & economic growth.	Increases intraregional competition and overestimates the mobility of people and businesses.
<i>Accepting shrinkage</i>	Take shrinkage as a given, develop anticipation policies to mitigate unwished effects of shrinkage.	Most suitable and sustainable response to shrinkage.
<i>Utilizing shrinkage</i>	Attempting to take advantage of shrinkage.	Future-oriented and room for entrepreneurs, but risk of overoptimism.

Elzerman & Bontje (2015) state that there is no universal approach to deal with population decline. Location-specific factors and contexts determine what strategy is most appropriate. Hospers (2014) confirms the complexity of planning for shrinkage. ‘Rightsizing’ (Berglund, 2020), or ‘smart shrinking’ (Hospers, 2014) is an approach to anticipate to shrinkage. Aalbers & Bernt (2018) define ‘rightsizing’ as the pro-active adjustment of infrastructure, development and governmental services for a reduced

population. Berglund (2020) indicates that ‘rightsizing’ can also be applied in a situation of concentrated local growth.

Hospers (2014) encounters a challenge: “how to move from growth thinking to accepting shrinkage?” (p. 1515). Haartsen & Venhorst (2009) explain that policymakers commonly think and act within a ‘paradigm of growth’. Hospers (2014) takes a step further by speaking of “societies addicted to growth” (p. 1515). Shrinkage is considered unnatural from a political economy perspective (Aalbers & Bernt, 2018). Kilper (2006) states that policymakers associate development strictly to growth. Van Dam *et al.* (2006) add that shrinkage is linked to governmental failure and lowers the status of local administrators. Therefore, policymakers only recognize population decline in other municipalities, a ‘not-in-my-backyard-reaction’ (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2009). Elzerman & Bontje (2015) describe four phases of political acceptance to shrinkage, which link to Hospers’ (2014) common policy responses to shrinkage (table 2).

Table 2: The four phases of political acceptance to shrinkage (adapted from Elzerman & Bontje, 2015).

<b>Phase of political acceptance to shrinkage</b>	<b>Definition by Elzerman &amp; Bontje (2015)</b>	<b>Link with Hospers’ (2014) common policy responses</b>
<i>Ignorance</i>	Shrinkage is temporal and accidental.	Trivializing shrinkage
<i>Observation without acceptance</i>	Structural decline is noticed though not yet accepted.	Trivializing shrinkage
<i>Certain acceptance</i>	Shrinkage is recognized as a problem. Search for instruments to counter decline.	Countering shrinkage
<i>Acceptance</i>	Growth is no longer pursued	Accepting / utilizing shrinkage

### 2.1.3 Stories and storytelling

Stories give credibility to future-oriented plans by (re)framing the past, present or future (Van Hulst, 2012). Thereby, stories become “catalysts for change” (Sandercock, 2003, p.11). In planning, stories can amongst others be uncovered in community participation processes, negotiation, policy documents and critiques to existing or upcoming plans and policies (Sandercock, 2003).

More than the story content, the persuasive power of the storyteller is of importance. Throgmorton (1996) states that planning is indissolubly connected to persuasive, rhetorical constructions. Deliberate word use guides the audience in a particular direction. Sandercock (2003) demonstrates that stories are filled with meaning by the teller, who has (un)consciously chosen and interpreted particular facts in order to arrive at a conclusion for action. She notes that it is not necessarily the best theoretically underpinned story that determines policy, but the most persuasively told one.

Policymakers who are not in the phase of accepting population decline (Elzerman & Bontje, 2015) are likely to develop stories that do not serve as ‘catalysts for change’ (Sandercock, 2003), but support the ‘paradigm of growth’ (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2009). This may be the case in the municipality of Ooststellingwerf. Central in this research will be the question what role such stories have played in enforcing an impasse in planning.

## 2.2 Conceptual model

The conceptual model (figure 4) demonstrates a circular relationship between the discussed concepts. The model takes demographic prospects and politicians' expectations to shrinkage as a starting point, resulting in a particular phase of political acceptance to shrinkage (Elzerman & Bontje, 2015). In line with table 2, these phases link to one or more of Hospers' (2014) common policy responses to shrinkage. Continuing, the model demonstrates that trivializing and countering shrinkage both result in a growth-focused policy, whereas accepting and utilizing shrinkage leads to a shift from the 'paradigm of growth' (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2009).

As Sandercock (2003) indicates, stories can be extracted from policy documents and negotiation. The above-described process therefore results in stories supporting particular policy responses to shrinkage. In their turn, stories can influence politicians' expectations to shrinkage through persuasive storytelling. At this point, the cycle starts off again and may result in a different policy decision.

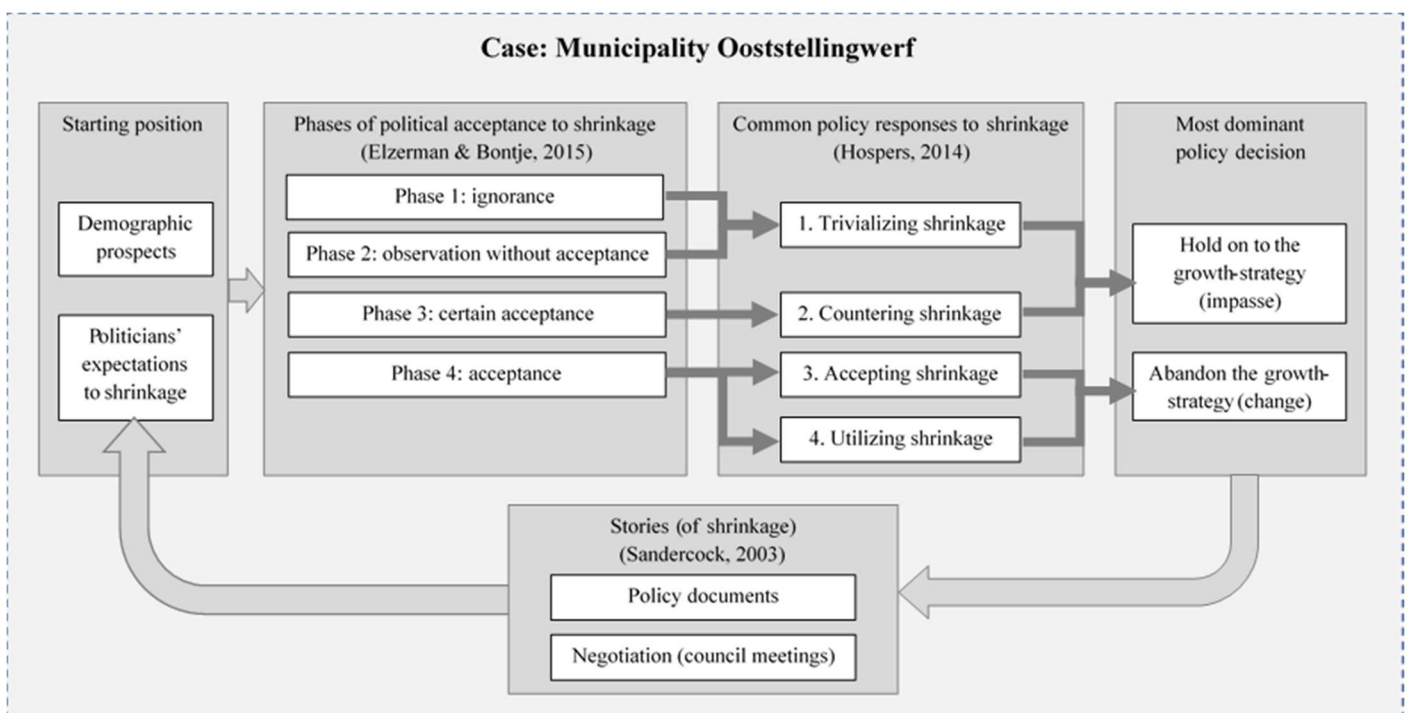


Figure 4: Conceptual model

## 2.3 Expectations

Stories' function of framing (Van Hulst, 2012) is expected to manifest the political debate around shrinkage, amongst others through rhetoric constructions (Throgmorton, 1996). Policy documents and municipal council meetings are expected to contain stories which express Hospers' (2014) four policy responses to shrinkage. Growth-focused stories may include doubts on the reliability of demographic prospects and an emphasis on optimistic future perspectives. From the more shrinkage-accepting side, stories may put more trust in demographic prospects and warn against future vacancies and impoverishment.

Each political party and politician (un)consciously tells different stories (Sandercock, 2003). Therefore, multiple, eventually contradicting stories can coexist within the political domain. However, specific stories may be dominant over time. Given that demographic prospects are relatively constant throughout the years, changing expectations to shrinkage are expected to be the main factor determining the level of acceptance to shrinkage (Elzerman & Bontje, 2015) and the resultant policies (Hospers, 2014).



## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Data collection

#### 3.1.1. Sub-questions 1 & 2

Since sub-question 2 builds upon sub-question 1, these are answered by the same sources of documentary data. Three types of public records are used (Punch, 2014): policy documents, electoral programs and recordings of municipal council meetings, since stories are present in policy documents and negotiation (Sandercock, 2003).

A textual analysis (Clifford *et al.*, 2016) is conducted to policy documents in which shrinkage is treated (table 3). Policy documents are queried for storytelling in the form of (un)conscious interpretations (Sandercock, 2003) regarding shrinkage. This is done by a keyword-based search (table 4), for which a list of Dutch keywords was generated, based on literature and newspaper articles. Relevant paragraphs containing these keywords are collected. The keyword-based search sometimes led to duplicate selections, as sentences contained several keywords. Furthermore, keywords such as ‘growth’ resulted in less relevant output, such as the ‘growth’ of rents (Housing Vision) or tourism (Budget document 2021). After those were removed, the result was a complete list of stories on population decline from policy documents.

Table 3: The selected policy documents

Original name	Translated name	Year of publication
<i>Structuurvisie Ooststellingwerf 2010-2020-2030</i>	Structural Vision Ooststellingwerf 2010-2020-2030	2009
<i>Woonplan Gemeente Ooststellingwerf 2011-2020</i>	Housing Plan Municipality of Ooststellingwerf 2011-2020	2011
<i>Woonvisie Ooststellingwerf 2017-2022</i>	Housing Vision Ooststellingwerf 2017-2022	2017
<i>Coalitieprogramma 2018-2022</i>	Coalition Program 2018-2022	2018
<i>Raadsprogramma 2018-2022</i>	Council Program 2018-2022	2018
<i>Uitvoeringsprogramma 2018-2022</i>	Implementation Program 2018-2022	2018
<i>Begroting</i>	Budget document	2016-2021

Table 4: The keywords which formed the basis of the query

Dutch keyword	English translation
<i>Demografie / demografisch</i>	Demography / demographic
<i>Bevolking</i>	Population
<i>Krimp</i>	Shrinkage / decline
<i>Groei</i>	Growth
<i>Stagnatie / stagnerend</i>	Stagnation / stagnating
<i>Prognose</i>	Prognosis
<i>Acceptatie / accepteren</i>	Acceptation / accept
<i>Anticipatie / anticiperen</i>	Anticipation / anticipate

The second source of documentary data is a set of recorded municipal council meetings, which are openly accessible online (Gemeente Ooststellingwerf, 2021b). Considering the ability to contact politicians who took part of these meetings, only council meetings from the most recent electoral cycle (2018-2022) have been selected. Newspaper reports (Nieuwe Ooststellingwerf, 2020) showed that population decline is discussed predominantly during meetings on housing development. Three meetings were selected for the presence of this item (table 5). The meetings are reviewed and queried for stories represented as persuasive, rhetorical constructions (Throgmorton, 1996), which subsequently are transcribed.

*Table 5: The selected municipal council meetings.*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Agenda point (Dutch)</b>	<b>Agenda point (English)</b>
29-01-19	9. Woningbouwvolume in relatie tot planvoorraad	9. Housing development volume in relation to planned stock
17-12-19	7. Afronding plan van aanpak woningbouw Ooststellingwerf	7. Completion action plan housing development Ooststellingwerf
30-03-21	5. Startnotitie en aanvraag budget woon(zorg)visie	5. Initial memorandum and application budget housing-(care) vision

### *3.1.2. Sub-question 3*

This sub-question is answered through semi-structured interviews with five politicians from Ooststellingwerf's municipal council. Semi-structured interviews allow for unplanned follow-up questions, while remaining coherent through standardised questions (Punch, 2014). Clifford *et al.* (2016) add that semi-structured interviews give room for the participant to explore issues they feel important in a conversational manner.

Quotes from electoral programs and municipal council meetings serve as input. By elaborating on these, interview participants explain their points of view towards shrinkage in Ooststellingwerf. Furthermore, topics such as the respondent's opinion regarding demographic prognoses are treated. For the full list of interview questions, please see appendix I.

While aiming for the largest variety in problem perceptions, the respondents are selected based on quotes from electoral programs and municipal council meetings. The selected respondents are contacted via email or WhatsApp. The interviews took place via Zoom meetings and lasted for around half an hour. With verbal consent of the participants, the interviews are recorded. The interviews have been transcribed manually.

### 3.2 Data analysis

The analysis of all sources of data followed a similar process. The first step of the analysis was topic coding. Punch (2014) describes topic coding, or descriptive coding, as a method to summarise segments of data. The four policy responses to shrinkage by Hospers (2014) are taken as a basis for topic coding (see table 6). Coding is done with the use of ATLAS.ti.

Table 6: Codes of the topic coding process

Code name	Linked policy response (Hospers, 2014)
<i>Shrinkage is trivialized</i>	Trivializing shrinkage
<i>Strive for growth</i>	Trivializing / countering shrinkage
<i>Shrinkage can be countered/limited</i>	Countering shrinkage
<i>Shrinkage is a threat</i>	Countering shrinkage
<i>Acceptance of &amp; anticipation to shrinkage</i>	Accepting shrinkage
<i>Doubts to strive for growth</i>	Accepting / utilizing shrinkage
<i>Shrinkage is an opportunity</i>	Utilizing shrinkage

Secondly, analytic coding is performed. Punch (2014) describes analytic coding, or pattern coding, as a method to arrive to more abstract, meaningful concepts from the data. For every policy response to shrinkage (Hospers, 2014), rhetorical constructions (Throgmorton, 1996), personal interpretations (Sandercock, 2003) and methods of framing (Van Hulst 2012) were explored. A code-document table is used to analyse the presence of codes in the various data sources.

Lastly, similarities and differences are searched between the stories which are linked to specific policy responses to shrinkage (Hospers, 2014) to draw a pattern from the findings.

### 3.3 Ethical considerations

Structural population decline currently is a source of heated debates in the political domain of Ooststellingwerf (Nieuwe Ooststellingwerf, 2020). Political considerations and disagreements are treated with respect though critically (Clifford *et al.*, 2016). Based on the Principle of Trust (Punch, 2014), respondents have the right to disclosure non-public information about the respondent (Punch, 2014). Also in data management, attention is paid to privacy. Mentioning the names of respondents in data files is avoided as much as possible. Political party names are mentioned, as statements in electoral programs and council meetings in name of the political party are publicly available.

Furthermore, the Principles of Autonomy and Beneficence (Punch, 2014) apply, as each person participates on a voluntary basis, has the right to withdraw participation and data will be processed in an anonymous and harmless way. The interview analysis is based on literal transcriptions.

The risk of positionality applies, as I live in Ooststellingwerf. Years of passively following political developments through newspaper reports may have led to (unconscious) positionality in the debate. I am not actively involved in local politics. However, some politicians are familiar to me from other settings. I am well aware of the potential biases linked to this position. Strategies to deal with these biases contain the use of multiple sources of data and using a list of standardised questions as the basis of the interviews.

## 4. Results

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### 4.1 Stories on population decline

The next subchapters each discuss one of Hospers' (2014) four common policy responses to shrinkage. The various sources of documentary data each contain elements of more than one policy response and therefore are mentioned multiple times. Per policy response, the related stories are discussed.

#### 4.1.1 Trivializing shrinkage

The Structural Vision (2009) describes how village interest groups questioned taking shrinkage as a starting point. Pointing at the little vacancy of houses, attendees asked for more evidence of prognoses. Limitations to housing development due to future decline were not accepted. The authors conclude that the denial of shrinkage was dominant in these discussions.

The Housing Plan (2011) tempers the "very negative" (p.12) prognosis on which the Structural Vision was based. The demographic "dip" (p.11) of the years before the prognosis is considered unrepresentative, as this was caused by a temporary stagnation of housing development. Hence, stimulating housing development will lower the likelihood of significant population decline on the (medium-)long term. One electoral program states that 'anticipation region' only refers to the *chance* of population decline occurring. Statements as "*we do not think in terms of shrinkage*"<sup>vi</sup> (Ooststellingwerfs Belang, 2018) trivialize demographic prognoses. Accordingly, the recent population loss (table 7) is a short-term fluctuation, no structural development.

In municipal council meetings, one council member speaks of an "inaccurate estimation of the market", claiming that the municipality has pre-sorted towards shrinkage too early. Prognoses are trivialised, as this councillor encourages common sense and the local knowledge of construction firms.

#### 4.1.2 Countering shrinkage

In the village discussions described in the Structural Vision (2009), the municipality was regularly asked to counter shrinkage and prevent loss of amenities by allowing development. Attendees argued that Ooststellingwerf could attract people by actively promoting its (natural) qualities. The authors regard investments in public space and accessibility, combined with aligning the housing demand and supply, as a tool to limit shrinkage, but not to put a hold on shrinkage.

The budget documents of 2016, 2017 and 2018 state that the future level of amenities and liveability in villages would be maintained while anticipating to demographic developments, including population decline. The 2021 budget document also promises the maintenance of local amenities. The availability of houses and parcels is regarded a strategy to reach this.

The Housing Plan (2011) expresses the idea that shrinkage can be countered when enough new development occurs, even though the existence of structural decline in Ooststellingwerf is trivialized. The Housing Vision (2017), the successor of the Housing Plan, aims to stabilize the population through economic growth, the creation of employment and innovative forms of housing like tiny houses.

Several electoral programs mention solutions for countering shrinkage: the creation of employment, investments in Ooststellingwerf's infrastructure, the relaxation of building guidelines and the redevelopment of built-up areas. However, some parties aim to foster growth without mentioning the term 'shrinkage', which shows how closely related trivializing and countering shrinkage are.

In municipal council meetings, a councillor speaks of counter-cyclical investments against shrinkage. Municipal investments in land preparation are called a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', rapid action is needed to answer housing shortages. Politicians who find this too speculative are blamed for blocking initiatives.

#### *4.1.3 Accepting shrinkage*

The Structural Vision (2009) frames population decline as a nation-wide trend among rural municipalities. Ooststellingwerf should recognize this and anticipate to shrinkage by adapting housing to an ageing population and concentrating development to the three largest villages. A loss of amenities, under which schools, is a threat for smaller villages. The authors consider countering this trend through housing development unreachable.

The Council Program 2018-2022 announces a vision on how to anticipate to ‘demographic developments’, which is still to come. Budget documents express the expectance that the upcoming Environment and Planning Act offers flexible solutions for anticipation. They indicate that smaller villages will need to share amenities. Another aim is to raise awareness on the spatial/socio-economic consequences of population decline.

The Housing Plan (2011) states that the chance of shrinkage before 2020 requires early policy adaptation, such as a lowered ambition regarding yearly net migration. The Housing Vision (2017) explains that the anticipation to shrinkage involves a close co-operation between the municipalities forming the anticipation region Southeast-Friesland (Ministerie van BZK, 2019). Furthermore, caution is needed to prevent a downward spiral of a housing surplus, vacancies, pauperization and degeneration. Ooststellingwerf should utilize the last years of growth wisely, while anticipating, or ‘pre-sorting’ to shrinkage by adapting housing to future demands. Additionally, strict housing quota from the province of Friesland limit Ooststellingwerf’s legal room for housing development.

Acceptation of and anticipation to shrinkage is, rather inexplicitly, present in some electoral programs. One party mentions the term ‘shrinkage region’, another party calls population decline a given, whereas most use the more abstract ‘demographic developments’. Some parties list measures such as merging primary schools.

Municipal council meetings demonstrated that councillors favouring this policy response present this as ‘the realistic perspective’. Down-to-earth rhetoric as: “*The idea that you improve liveability through housing development is outmoded*”<sup>ii</sup> and “*If we want it or not, we are in a region of shrinkage*”<sup>iii</sup> illustrate this.

#### *4.1.4 Utilising shrinkage*

The idea that shrinkage can be an opportunity was absent. The policy documents and debates around shrinkage mainly focused on negative aspects of shrinkage. Eventual positive sides, think of the lowering pressure on nature and public space (Derks *et al.*, 2006), did not receive attention. Population decline was regarded as a phenomenon that should be avoided (countering); a phenomenon that is unavoidable (accepting); or a non-existing problem (trivializing).

## **4.2 Fluctuating dominance of policy responses**

Section 4.1 demonstrated that policy documents can contain two or three different types of policy responses (and corresponding stories) simultaneously, of which ‘countering shrinkage’ and ‘accepting shrinkage’ are the two most dominant ones. The ratio in which these policy responses are present in the data varies. Figure 5 globally illustrates how the ratio between these two has fluctuated since 2009.

Four data sources form the peaks of the wave pattern: the Structural Vision (2009) and Housing Vision (2017) are positioned at the maximum dominance of ‘accepting shrinkage’, whereas the Housing Plan (2011) and the council meetings of the last three years are positioned at the maximum dominance of ‘countering shrinkage’.

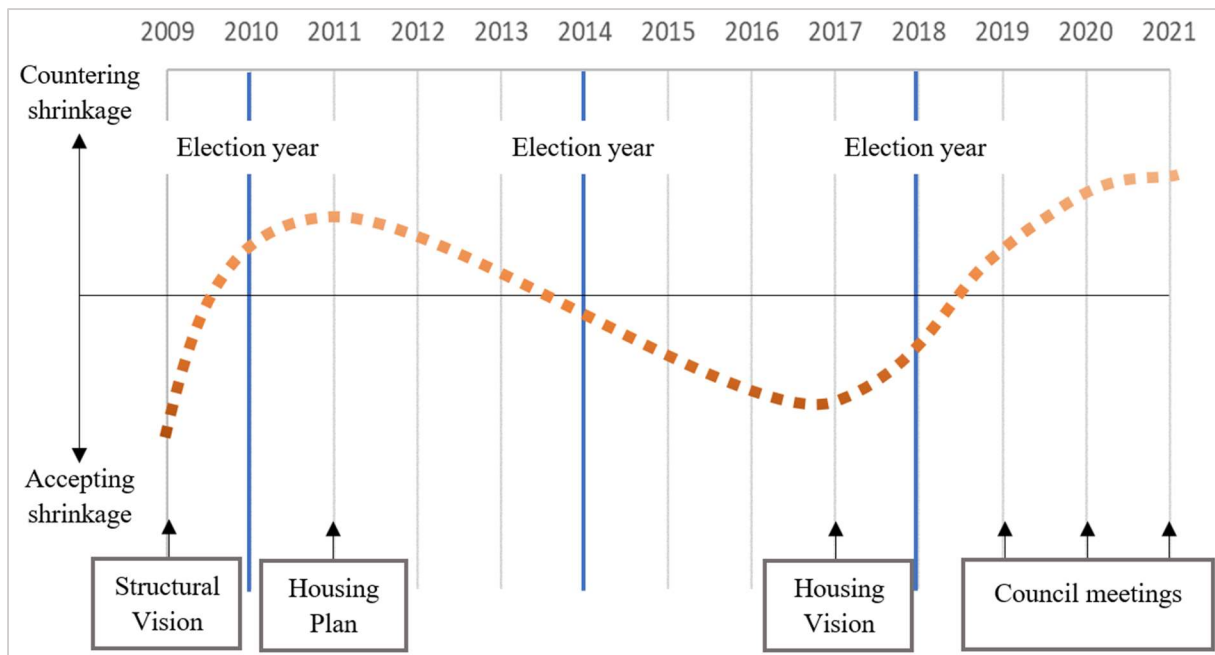


Figure 5: The fluctuating dominance of two common policy responses to shrinkage (Hospers, 2014) in Ooststellingwerf since 2009

The Structural Vision (2009) advocates the need to anticipate to negative demographic prospects through limiting housing development and adapting housing for an ageing population. Countering shrinkage through housing development is considered unreachable. The Housing Plan (2011) contradicts this statement and claims that Ooststellingwerf's population loss was caused by a lack of housing development. An increase of development will therefore counter shrinkage. The Housing Vision (2017) tempers these expectations and stresses the negative consequences of a housing surplus. Population decline is considered an unavoidable phenomenon that needs acceptance. During municipal council meetings, observations of the local and national housing market were the reason for optimistic, ambitious councillors to support housing development and counter shrinkage.

### 4.3 Politicians' problem perceptions

Five semi-structured interviews have been conducted with politicians from different political parties, four councillors and an alderwoman. In the first paragraph, explanations are given for the fluctuation observed in figure 5. The subsequent four paragraphs each describe interview outcomes which are linked to one of Hospers' (2014) common policy responses to shrinkage.

#### 4.3.1 Explanations of fluctuating policies

None of the respondents denies the observed fluctuation in policy, respondent 1 commends the accuracy of the observation.

Respondent 2 argues that in the past, the threat of vacancies due shrinkage was used as an argument to limit housing development. This respondent recognizes a recent turn in the debate, as the increasing demand for housing results in a more positive attitude towards development. Respondent 3 agrees that societal developments play a role, which complicates making long-term demographic prognoses. Respondents 1 and 4 stress the influence of provincial politics. Respondent 4 speaks of the variability of man-made processes, pointing at the influence consultants have on policymaking by provincial commissions. Respondent 1 states that until recently, Friesland's housing policy was predominantly based on a fear of

pauperisation. Respondent 5 points at the variability, or ‘stubbornness’ of Ooststellingwerf’s politicians. The respondent argues that the Housing Vision (2017) is not incorporated seriously in current day-to-day decision-making.

#### 4.3.2 Trivializing shrinkage

Four out of five respondents trivialize shrinkage in Ooststellingwerf to some extent. These respondents regard recent population loss (table 7) and future prognoses (table 8) as relatively mild. Last years, population numbers dropped with tens per year, which respondents 2 and 4 call ‘a stable situation’ or a ‘break-even’. Respondent 1 argues that the most recent demographic prognosis, indicating a population loss of 3.000 people in thirty years, was no reason to turn ‘super-dramatic’. Respondent 4 takes a step further by challenging the reliability of the prognosis, claiming that important ‘gamechangers’ (see 4.3.3) were not incorporated, resulting in more negative prospects.

Nevertheless, the respondents do not feel fully confident talking about shrinkage. Respondents 1 and 3 express their dislike regarding the word shrinkage. Respondent 1 calls the word ‘terrible’ (*verschrikkelijk*), respondent 3 explains that the word is banned from council meetings. Terms as ‘anticipation municipality’ and ‘demographic developments’ are used instead. Considering this an expression of ‘political acceptance phase 1: ignorance’ (Elzerman & Bontje, 2015), this is an extreme form of trivializing shrinkage.

Table 7: Population development Ooststellingwerf since 2014 (adapted from: Gemeente Ooststellingwerf, 2021a).

Date	Population number	Cumulative change since 2014	Relative to 2014 (=100%)
1-1-2014	25680	0	100
1-1-2015	25620	-60	99, 76
1-1-2016	25574	-106	99, 59
1-1-2017	25538	-142	99, 45
1-1-2018	25466	-214	99, 17
1-1-2019	25505	-175	99, 32
1-1-2020	25479	-201	99, 22
1-1-2021	25470	-210	99, 18

Table 8: Demographic prognosis Ooststellingwerf, 2020-2050 (adapted from: Provincie Fryslân, 2020).

Date	Population number	Cumulative change since 2020	Relative to 2020 (=100%)
1-1-2020	25473	0	100
1-1-2025	25184	-289	98,87
1-1-2030	24914	-559	97,81
1-1-2035	24525	-948	96,28
1-1-2040	23991	-1482	94,18
1-1-2045	23308	-2165	91,50
1-1-2050	22569	-2904	88,60

#### 4.3.3 Countering shrinkage

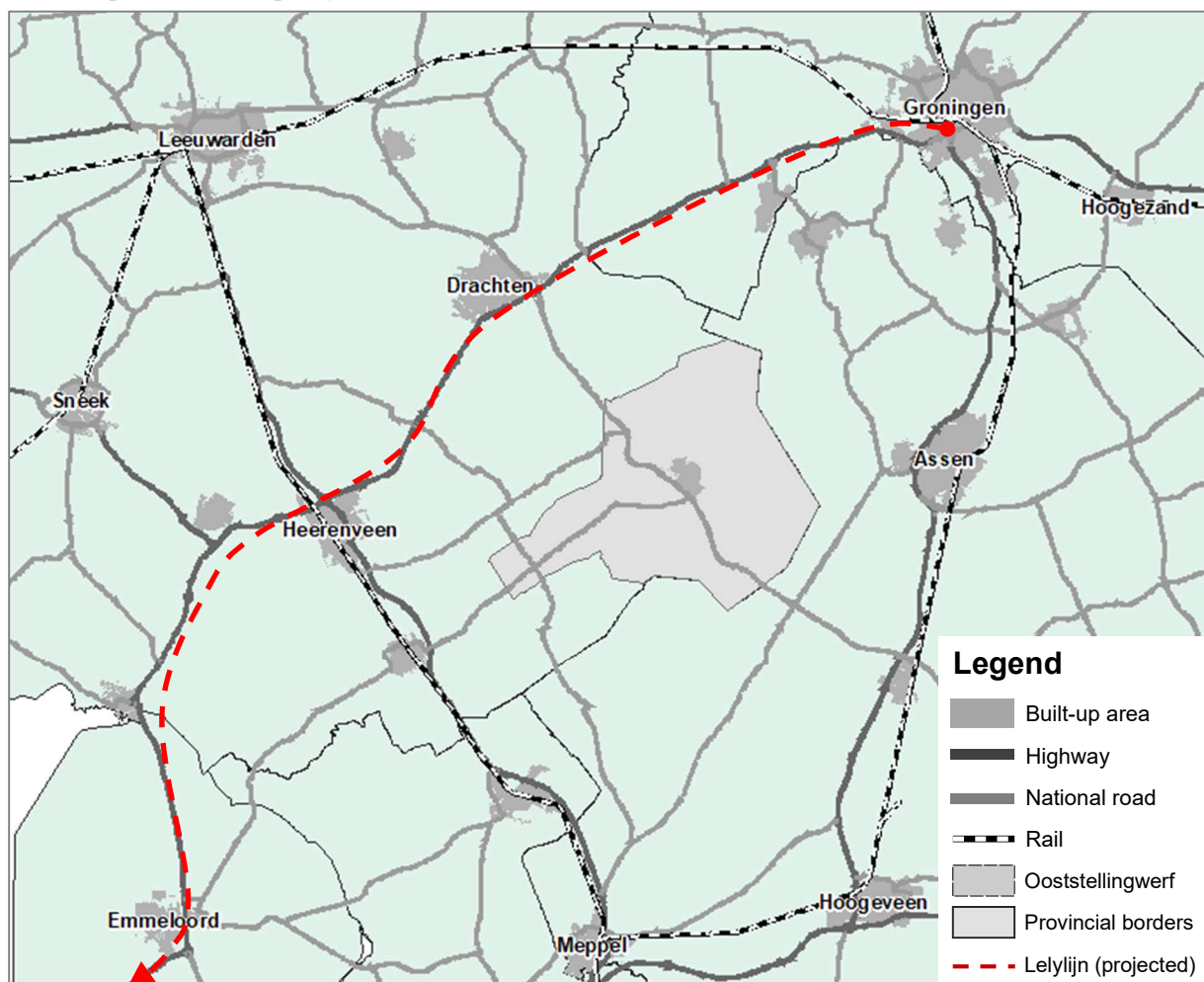
The idea that the municipality (to an extent) can counter shrinkage is shared by four out of five respondents. Four main solutions to shrinkage, the ‘gamechangers’, are mentioned: the legacy of the corona-crisis, the Lelylijn, bio-based economy and housing development.

All respondents, in varying degrees, think the corona-crisis may have potentially unprecedented lasting effects on commuters’ travel behaviour. The option to work from home will improve the attractiveness of Ooststellingwerf. Respondents 1, 4 and 5 see the Lelylijn, a projected train track from Amsterdam to Groningen (figure 6), as a potential ‘boost’ (respondent 1) for the municipality. Given all uncertainty around the plan and its consequences for Ooststellingwerf, this ‘gamechanger’ is mentioned with some

prudence. The third solution to shrinkage, bio-based economy, refers to the recently opened Ecommunitypark in Oosterwolde, a bio-based industrial site. Respondents 1, 2 and 4 call this an ‘unique selling-point’ and a pull-factor for people and businesses.

Fourthly, respondents 1, 2 and 4 name housing development as a way to break the downward spiral of shrinkage: the continuous chain of population decline, amenity losses and decreasing attractiveness of the municipality for house-seekers. Respondent 2 explains that choices made by an alderman in the early 2000s initiated current-day’s population decline, as the expansion of villages was blocked to protect village identity. Respondent 2 concludes that a yearly addition of housing is needed to keep population numbers stable. Four respondents point at the limitations set by the province. Although respondents 1 and 3 explain that former housing quota have recently been loosed, respondents 1, 2, 3 and 4 express their disapproval of the dependence on the province. This limits innovative housing projects such as tiny houses, which could attract low-budget (first-time) buyers.

*Figure 6: The position of Ooststellingwerf in relation to main infrastructure and larger cores of the Dutch northern provinces (adapted from: Esri, 2021).*



#### *4.3.4 Accepting shrinkage*

Four out of five respondents show signs of accepting and anticipating to shrinkage. Respondent 1 disagrees the idea that the municipality has grip on its demographic development, other than ensuring an aesthetically appealing and liveable centre. Respondents 1, 2 and 3 argue for flexible, temporary housing to deal with long-term uncertainties and respond to the current nation-wide demand for housing. Respondent 2 stresses the need for tailor-made work, to prevent an oversupply of housing. In addition, respondent 3 mentions that once mortality rates will rise due to the ageing population, the need for extra, temporary housing will



disappear. Respondent 5 is most pronounced in accepting shrinkage. This respondent blames other parties for denying shrinkage and avoiding the word itself. According to respondent 5, shrinkage should be seen as a given, to which housing policy should be adapted: demolish two houses for every new one. Furthermore, the decreasing number of children on secondary school may lead to the removal of more exclusive school subjects. This does not take away that this respondent also aims for 'breaking the downward spiral', but firstly through stimulating Ooststellingwerf's attractiveness by improving and adding amenities, not by adding housing.

#### *4.3.5 Utilising shrinkage*

Imagining approaches to utilise shrinkage is hard for all respondents. Respondents 3 and 5 see some positive consequences of shrinkage. Respondent 3 focuses on the improvement of public space to attract tourists. Respondent 5 sees possibilities in sharing amenities like music schools with neighbouring municipalities to improve efficiency and maintain access to higher-level amenities.

#### *4.3.6 Links with literature*

The literature discussed in chapters 1 and 2 describes the common political responses to (prospects of) shrinkage and the corresponding levels of acceptance to shrinkage. The interviews showed that individual politicians can inexplicitly proclaim several policy responses to shrinkage simultaneously.

To 'solve' and counter shrinkage, several respondents indeed focus on the development of housing and businesses (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2009). The 'not-in-my-backyard reaction' (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2009) is exemplified by a quote from respondent 4: "*It could very well be that there will be shrinkage in the north of Friesland, but that does not mean we in Ooststellingwerf must shrink.*"<sup>iv</sup>. Three respondents associated shrinkage with the downward spiral Haartsen & Venhorst (2009) refer to. The statement that policymakers typically react to prospects of decline with rejection and disbelief (Derks *et al.*, 2006) is recognized in the interview responses Hospers (2014) would label 'trivializing shrinkage'.

When evaluating persuasive, rhetorical constructions (Throgmorton, 1996), what can be noticed is the ambitious vocabulary from the respondents aiming to counter shrinkage. The use of words like 'gamechanger', 'break the spiral' (both respondent 4) and 'boost' (respondent 1) expresses what could be called a 'yes we can' mentality. The focus on growth-oriented opportunities (e.g. working from home, Lelylijn) is part of this optimistic mentality. The interview with respondent 2 exemplified how stories can have the role of (re)framing the past (Van Hulst, 2012), as choices by a former alderman would have initiated today's population decline.

Accepting shrinkage is linked to different rhetorical constructions. Phrases such as "*and if it is like that, it is*"<sup>v</sup> (respondent 1) or "*there are 7 billion people who decided not to go live in Ooststellingwerf, and they have a good reason for doing so*"<sup>vi</sup> (respondent 5) illustrate a 'so be it' mentality. Mind that respondent 1 is quoted for both mentalities, which indicates the fine line between the two.

Table 9 (p. 18) gives an overview of interview quotes, categorized by Hospers' (2014) four common policy responses to shrinkage. The table demonstrates that problem perceptions regarding shrinkage are not black-and-white, as all respondents are placed within multiple policy responses. For the original Dutch quotes, please see appendix II.

Stories as catalysts for impasse?

Table 9: Translated quotes from five interviews with politicians from Ooststellingwerf, categorised by Hospers' (2014) common policy responses to shrinkage.

	TRIVIALIZING SHRINKAGE	COUNTERING SHRINKAGE	ACCEPTING SHRINKAGE	UTILIZING SHRINKAGE
#1	<i>"As I said, actually the current prognosis is: the population will stay stable, 3000 in thirty years. Well, that is actually nothing. If that is the case, you can build some more here."</i>		<i>"I don't think shrinkage can have positive sides [...] And if it is like that, it is. Then you should, I think, look at the cooperative power with more municipalities"</i>	
#2	<i>"At the end of last year, the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency has given a presentation of a research. Of course, there it popped up again, they still focus on the shrinkage-scenario, while society has shifted now."</i>	<i>"You already cited me: "If you want shrinkage, you will have it". I am very clear in this: if you say we are a municipality of shrinkage and therefore we are going to build less houses, you will indeed get shrinkage."</i>	<i>"It should not be the case that you take steps now which will get in your way later, that you have too many. You have to deliver tailor-made work."</i>	
#3	<i>"Actually, we are not allowed to use to word 'shrinkage' in council, we speak of 'anticipation municipality' or 'demographic developments'."</i>	<i>"The fact that we have to deal with an ageing population is a given. To compensate future mortality rates, it is of importance to stay attractive for young people."</i>	<i>"In Makkinga we are currently searching for the possibilities of temporary housing, which can meet the current wave of demand before higher mortality rates will give more room."</i>	<i>"What you could do is improving the quality of the public space to attract more tourists. You could create more green within the built-up area, but that is very expensive though. I would not know how the municipality would finance that."</i>
#4	<i>"...we lost fifty inhabitants and then people speak of shrinkage. However, you have to look at the relativity of that number. Fifty people out of 25.000 or 26.000, should you call that shrinkage? Within a specific bandwidth, you should say that you are stable."</i>	<i>"And I think we ourselves can be a gamechanger, by realising more employment and improving the accessibility of employment. Take the improvements of the N381, through which working in Leeuwarden, Drachten or Groningen has become easier. That way you already made our area more interesting to settle. Such things are not incorporated in the model."</i>	<i>"Of course, it is not that we as municipal council are literally building houses, right? You offer the possibility to build houses and that attracts buyers. If there are no buyers, or renters, nothing will be built. Not that we carelessly develop something without knowing there are customers, it is not like that."</i>	
#5		<i>"You saw that the agricultural sector was highly important, and next to that the manufacturing sector. That will decrease, the service sector increases in the whole country. Working from home will also play a role in that, as people will be less tied to the location of work in choosing where to settle. That will possibly be an opportunity to attract more inhabitants."</i>	<i>"...if you live in a region of shrinkage and you want to develop a house, you have to demolish two houses. Otherwise, you are building for vacancy. I have born this in mind very well. In case of development plans, people often claim the demand for, but in the end, results are often lower than expected."</i>	<i>"Maybe, you will have to cooperate more with neighbouring regions. For example, children from Haulerwijk do not necessarily have to go to music education in Oosterwolde, they can go to Leek too. For them, that is the same distance. Such kind of things you should think of."</i>

## 5. Conclusion

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### 5.1 Ooststellingwerf's dilemma

This research has contributed to the understanding of various points of view towards shrinkage. A dilemma is extracted: should housing development be stimulated to counter population decline or should housing development be limited to prevent vacancies? Three main factors make that the debate is far from black-and-white.

In the first place, the exploration of last years' policy responses to shrinkage demonstrated that multiple policy responses can coexist within a single policy document. Policymakers can first trivialize shrinkage while later in the document propose measures to anticipate to 'demographic developments'. This results in a blurred policy. Nevertheless, dominant policy responses to shrinkage could be extracted from the documents. Beside that policy documents lack a clear direction, this direction fluctuates over time. Starting from the 2009 Structural Vision, a wave pattern could be drawn between the dominance of the policy responses 'countering' and 'accepting' shrinkage. Explanations given for this fluctuation are short-term developments in the housing market and political man-made processes or 'stubbornness' by the province of Friesland and Ooststellingwerf. The third factor turns the dilemma into a trilemma. Some councillors bring a third alternative into the debate: there is no need for talking of shrinkage at all, as Ooststellingwerf is not facing significant population decline today, neither in the future. Trivialization of shrinkage shifts the discussion to a more fundamental level: are demographic prognoses a usable and reliable basis for policymaking? As long as this discussion is at stake, future policies will remain fluctuated and blurred: the impasse Ooststellingwerf is facing.

A final finding of this research is that the two most prominent responses to shrinkage, countering and accepting shrinkage, are presented through different kinds of rhetoric. The first expresses the 'yes we can' mentality, whereas the other can be best described as the 'so be it' mentality. Accepting shrinkage has a negative taste among politicians and is linked to the inevitably downward spiral, while countering shrinkage is associated with optimism, problem-solving and ambition. Taking these two as the only options is an unequal battle. Only if policymakers expose the potential strategies to make use of population decline, accepting and utilizing shrinkage become feasible options.

### 5.2 Policy recommendations

Findings resulted in three policy recommendations, focussing on the process towards policymaking. While addressing Ooststellingwerf, other municipalities in the Netherlands and Europe can draw lessons from them as well.

*1. Go back to the basics.* Without a degree of council-wide consensus on the usability and reliability of demographic prospects, no further steps can be taken. Ooststellingwerf's politicians are recommended to collectively explore the variables demographic prognoses are based upon and to decide on the role this data source can play in the shrinkage debate, for example as a reference value if current policies remain. In-depth sessions with the developers of demographic prognoses (CBS, ABF Research, Provincie Fryslân) could form the basis of this.

*2. Focus on the long-term (with room for short-term flexibility).* Respondent 1 compared policymaking to driving a car whilst minding the obstacles on the road and trying to keep balance. Following this logic, driving requires looking ahead. The uncertainty of societal developments requires a vision which is used as

a frame of reference, but also gives room for flexibility (De Roo, 2020). The example of temporary housing can be part of this when going along with regular dialogues between policymakers and other stakeholders.

3. *Show the positive sides of shrinkage.* This may be the most challenging, given the dominance of the ‘paradigm of growth’ (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2009). Policymakers are advised to exude the confidence that population decline is not the end of the world. Opportunities such as more regional cooperation and the improvement of public (green) space must prevent Ooststellingwerf from only being associated with the negative sides of shrinkage.

## 5.3 Reflection & further research

The research has succeeded in unravelling the complexity of the case through the diversity of data sources used. Documentary data and interviews added stories to the bigger picture. The fact that the interviews were conducted after the documentary data analysis made that respondents could elaborate on specific statements in policy documents, council meetings or electoral programs. As an inhabitant of Ooststellingwerf, I knew the local examples respondents referred to, which may also have contributed to the quality of the interviews.

As insight was gained, more question raised. Respondent 2 positioned the theme ‘shrinkage’ in a wider timeframe, referring to choices made in the early 2000s (see section 4.3). The documentary data analysis did not cover this time span. More research is needed on the relation between protecting village identity and limiting housing development. When preventing population decline, housing development may contribute to protecting village identity rather than negatively affecting this.

Much research is done on population decline in urban areas in e.g., Germany and the USA Rust Belt (see also Berglund, 2020). It is possible that measures to utilise shrinkage as described by Hospers (2014) and Derks *et al.* (2006), such as the improvement of public space, do not function as well in rural areas. Moreover, further research could focus on the role of spatial differences between rural regions in the shrinkage process. Two Natura2000 areas (Fochteloërveen & Drents-Friese Wold) attract tourists to Ooststellingwerf, other shrinking rural regions may lack this income source.

The observed bias between recommendations from theory and political practice led to questions on the existence of a ‘right’ strategy to shrinkage. Literature promotes the acceptance of shrinkage, seeing the phenomenon as inevitable. Furthermore, literature emphasizes the tendency of politicians to hold on to growth. This research has added nuance to the general image, as a mixture of responses was constantly visible. Theory can be enriched by researching the role of local knowledge in politicians’ confidence in shrinkage-free futures. The shrinkage-scenario may not be as inevitable as commonly stated. Could scholars foresee any ‘gamechangers’ as big as the COVID-19 crisis? The tide may turn for Ooststellingwerf, but prudence is required to not get wet.

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## Appendix

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### I. Interview questions

1. Bent u al lang verbonden met Ooststellingwerf?  
*Have you been connected to Ooststellingwerf for long already?*
2. Wat zijn volgens u de grootste kwaliteiten van Ooststellingwerf?  
*What would you say are the main qualities of Ooststellingwerf?*
3. Wat is volgens u de manier om die kwaliteiten te behouden of te versterken?  
*What would you say is the way to remain or enhance these qualities?*
4. Kunt u een beeld schetsen van hoe Ooststellingwerf er volgens u over pakweg dertig jaar uitziet?  
*How do you think Ooststellingwerf will look like in around fifty years?*
5. Hoe kijkt u aan tegen de voorspelde bevolkingskrimp in de toekomst?  
*What is your view upon the projected future population decline?*
6. Zijn negatieve bevolkingsprognoses verontrustend?  
*Do you think negative demographic prognoses are concerning?*
7. In hoeverre heeft de gemeente volgens u grip op eventuele toekomstige bevolkingskrimp in Ooststellingwerf?  
*To what extent do you think the municipality has control over future population decline in Ooststellingwerf?*
8. Stel dat de bevolkingskrimp door zou zetten, kan dat in uw ogen ook positieve kanten voor Ooststellingwerf hebben?  
*Imagine that population decline would continue, could there from your view be any upsides to that?*
9. Zou u zeggen dat de gemeente gefaald heeft als bevolkingskrimp doorzet?  
*Would you say the municipality has failed if population decline would continue.*
10. Het viel mij op dat sinds het verschijnen van de Structuurvisie Ooststellingwerf in 2009 er nogal wisselend beleid is geweest ten opzichte van woningbouw en bevolkingskrimp. Wat is hier volgens u de reden voor?  
*It appeared to me that since the publication of the Structural Vision Ooststellingwerf in 2009, policy towards housing development and population decline has been variable. What would you say is the cause of this?*
11. In het Uitvoeringsprogramma 2018-2022 staat beschreven dat er op korte termijn een visie op de demografische ontwikkelingen wordt opgesteld, die is nog niet verschenen. Wat maakt het opstellen van deze visie zo complex, denkt u?  
*In the Implementation program 2018-2022 is written that on the short term, a vision on demographic developments would be drawn up. This has not been published yet. Why is this so complex, do you think?*

*Stories as catalysts for impasse?*

12. In uw laatste verkiezingsprogramma las ik dat (...). Zou u deze uitspraak willen toelichten?  
*In your party's electoral program is stated that (...). Could you please elaborate on this statement?*
13. In hoeverre verschilt het standpunt van uw partij ten opzichte van krimp met dat van andere partijen?  
*To what extent do you think your party's statement on shrinkage differs from the other parties?*
14. Het viel me op dat u tijdens een raadsvergadering zei dat (...). Zou u deze uitspraak willen toelichten?  
*During municipal council meetings, I noticed you (...). Could you please elaborate on this statement?*
15. Zijn er dingen niet ter sprake gekomen die u nog zou willen benoemen?  
*Are there any other issues you would like to address?*
16. Heeft u nog vragen voor mij?  
*Do you have any questions to me?*



## II. Original Dutch quotes from interviews

	TRIVIALIZING SHRINKAGE	COUNTERING SHRINKAGE	ACCEPTING SHRINKAGE	UTILIZING SHRINKAGE
#1	<i>“Want wat ik zei, eigenlijk is nu de prognose: het blijft bijna stabiel, 3000 in dertig jaar. Nou, dat is eigenlijk niks. Ja, als dat zo is, dan kun je wel wat meer bouwen hier.”</i>		<i>“Kan er een positieve kant zijn aan krimp? Nou, nee, dat denk ik niet. [...] En als het zo is, dan is het zo, dan moet je, denk ik, kijken naar slagkracht met meerdere gemeentes.”</i>	
#2	<i>“Het Planbureau van de Leefomgeving heeft eind vorig jaar een presentatie gegeven van een onderzoek. Natuurlijk zag je daar weer in verschijnen, die zitten nog op het krimpscenario, terwijl de maatschappij nu gekanteld is.”</i>	<i>“Je had al een citaat van mij aangehaald, “Als je krimp wilt, kun je krimp krijgen”. Daar ben ik heel duidelijk in. Als je zeg: wij zijn een krimpgemeente, dus wij gaan minder woningen bouwen, dan krijg je inderdaad krimp.”</i>	<i>“Het moet niet zo zijn dat je nu stappen zet, die je later weer voor de voeten lopen, dat je te veel hebt. Je moet ook maatwerk leveren.”</i>	
#3	<i>“Het woord krimp mogen we in de raad eigenlijk niet meer gebruiken, we spreken van anticipeergemeente of demografische ontwikkelingen.”</i>	<i>“Dat we te maken hebben met een ouder wordende bevolking is een gegeven. Om sterfte in de toekomst te compenseren is het van belang dat we aantrekkelijk blijven voor jonge mensen.”</i>	<i>“In Makkinga zijn we nu bezig met een zoektocht naar de mogelijkheden van tijdelijke woningen, die de huidige hoos van vraag kunnen opvangen voordat overlijdens voor meer ruimte zullen zorgen.”</i>	<i>“Wat je dan kan doen is de kwaliteit van de openbare ruimte verhogen, om zo meer toeristen aan te trekken. Je zou meer groen binnen de bebouwing kunnen creëren, maar dat is wel erg duur. Ik weet niet hoe de gemeente dat zou moeten bekostigen.”</i>
#4	<i>“...we hadden dan vijftig inwoners minder en dan wordt er gesproken van krimp. Maar je moet wel de relativiteit van het getal gaan bekijken. 50 mensen op 25.000 of 26.000, moet je dan zeggen dat je krimpt? Binnen een bepaalde bandbreedte moet je zeggen dat je stabiel bent.”</i>	<i>“En ik denk dat wij zelf hier ook een gamechanger kunnen zijn, door meer werkgelegenheid te realiseren en dat de bereikbaarheid van de werkgelegenheid ook gemakkelijker wordt. Neem alleen al de verbeteringen van de n381, waardoor je gemakkelijker in Leeuwarden kan gaan werken, of Drachten of Groningen. Daarmee heb je eigenlijk ons gebied al interessanter gemaakt op je te vestigen. Dat zit niet in het model, het model houdt daar geen rekening mee en kijkt alleen naar die eerste varianten.”</i>	<i>“Het is natuurlijk niet zo dat wij letterlijk als gemeentebestuur huizen gaan bouwen hè? Je biedt de mogelijkheid om huizen te bouwen en daar komen mensen op af die dat kopen. Als je geen koper krijgt, of geen huurders krijgt, dan wordt er ook niet gebouwd. Het is niet zo dat je maar rücksichtslos wat gaat neerzetten zonder dat je weet dat er klanten zijn, dat is ook niet zo.”</i>	
#5		<i>“Je zag dat de agrarische sector heel belangrijk was, en daarnaast ook de maakindustrie. Dat zal toch minder worden, in het hele land stijgt de dienstensector. Thuiswerken zal daar ook een rol in hebben, dat mensen toch minder aan hun plaats van werk zijn verbonden om te gaan wonen. Daar zal wellicht een kans in hebben om meer inwoners te gaan trekken.”</i>	<i>“...als je in een krimpregio woont en je wilt iets bouwen, dat je dan twee huizen moet afbreken. Anders bouw je voor leegstand. Dat heb ik goed in mijn oren geknoopt. Bij bouwplannen wordt er vaak gezegd: er is zo'n behoefte aan, maar puntje bij paaltje valt het vaak tegen.”</i>	<i>“Je zal dan misschien meer moeten samenwerken met omliggende regio's. Bijvoorbeeld kinderen in Haulerwijk die hoeven niet per se in Oosterwolde naar de muziekschool, die kunnen ook naar Leek. Dat is voor hun dezelfde afstand. Dat soort dingetjes daar zou je misschien aan moeten denken.”</i>

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<sup>i</sup> *“Wij denken niet in krimp.”*

<sup>ii</sup> *“Het is een achterhaald idee dat je leefbaarheid verbetert door het bouwen van woningen.”*

<sup>iii</sup> *“Hoe je het went of keert, wij zitten hier in een krimpgebied.”*

<sup>iv</sup> *“Het kan best zijn dat ze bovenin Friesland heel erg gaan krimpen, maar dat wil nog niet zeggen dat we hier in Ooststellingwerf moeten gaan krimpen.”*

<sup>v</sup> *“En als het zo is, dan is het zo.”*

<sup>vi</sup> *“...er zijn 7 miljard mensen op aarde die hebben besloten niet in Ooststellingwerf te gaan wonen, die hebben er ook een goede reden voor.”*