



# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBJECTIVE LIVABILITY AND VOTING BEHAVIOR IN DEPOPULATING RURAL REGIONS

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## Preface

Dear reader,

I hereby present to you the final report of my master thesis 'The relationship between subjective livability and voting behavior in depopulating rural regions'. A research into the relationship between subjective livability and voting behavior in depopulating rural regions. The thesis is a compulsory part of the master course 'Cultural Geography' within the Faculty of Spatial Sciences at the University of Groningen. The purpose of writing a master thesis is to enable students to generate, establish and execute a scientific research.

I want to thank my supervisor Tialda Haartsen for her feedback, for her time and for guiding me during the writing process. Furthermore, I want to thank my family, girlfriend and friends for providing me with support and love during the process of writing this thesis. In addition, I would also like to thank all the respondents once again for their cooperation in my research. Thank you!

I hope you enjoy reading!

Christiaan Vlasman

Groningen, June 2019

## Abstract

The recent rise to prominence of populism in the Western world has caught the eye (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). In 2016 there was a surprising Brexit choice in the UK and later that year Donald Trump was elected as president of the USA. The last national elections in the Netherlands were held in 2017. The striking thing about these national elections was that compared to the previous national elections in 2012, there was an increase in the number of votes for the populist parties in all depopulating rural regions (Rijksoverheid, 2018). Policy makers are concerned about depopulating rural regions because they are associated with negative spatial developments such as: empty houses, causing diminishing values of real estate, disappearing facilities and services, and decreasing livability of the area (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2010). The government's policy has therefore been aimed at improving the livability in the depopulating rural regions (Leidelmeijer, 2015). The aim of this research is to investigate to what extent there is a relation between subjective livability and populist voting behavior in a depopulating rural region. The main question of the research is formulated as follows: *to what extent is there a relation between subjective livability and populist voting behavior in a depopulating rural region?*

The main question was researched by means of a quantitative research method. A group of 88 respondents were included in the survey. The result of the statistical analysis of the research is that there is a significant difference in the rating of the subjective livability in the municipality of residence between populist and non-populist voters in a depopulating rural region. However, when the subjective livability is measured by seven livability dimensions, the connection disappears. In terms of the motives on which a vote for a political party is based, there are three clear differences. For the populist voters, the motive 'interests in the region' was mentioned significantly more than for the non-populist voters. The non-populist voters mentioned the motives 'trust in leader' and 'religion' significantly more than the populist voters. It can be concluded that there is a relation between subjective livability and populist voting behavior in a depopulating rural region. However, the relationship is vague because it can only be seen in the general livability and cannot be seen in the livability dimensions.

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Background and relevance

The last national elections in the Netherlands were held in 2017. The striking thing about these national elections was that compared to the previous national elections in 2012, there was an increase in the number of votes for the populist parties in all depopulating rural regions (Rijksoverheid, 2018). This trend is also visible in other Member States in Europe, with nationalism once again reigning and especially in regions that are lagging behind the rest (Van den Berg & Vulpen, 2019). Batayneh et al. (2018) recognize that nationalism leads to the stimulation of populist feelings and therefore to the rise of populist parties. This trend also seems to have major political consequences (Idem.). As mentioned above, it can already be observed in the Netherlands. The election of Donald Trump as president of the United States and the Brexit choice in England also show that there are political consequences if people do not feel heard. But why do people not feel heard in these regions? Each region has its own reasons for not feeling heard, even in the Netherlands. In the province of Groningen the NAM (Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij) extracts gas. After a major earthquake in 2012, studies were carried out to determine whether the gas production was to blame for the earthquakes. After a major earthquake in 2012, studies were carried out to determine whether the gas production was to blame for the earthquakes (Van der Voort & Vanclay, 2015). These studies showed that less gas had to be produced and that the gas tap would eventually have to be closed. All the uncertainties caused by the earthquakes and claims handling, lead to distrust in the Dutch government. The residents do not feel heard because they do not feel that they are supported by the Dutch government (Grisnich, 2016). In the province of Limburg, the residents are disappointed in the government for another reason. It was promised that good benefits would come and that new jobs would be created, after closing the mining industry, but little was realized (Notten, 2017). Policy makers are concerned about depopulating rural regions because they are associated with negative spatial developments such as: empty houses, causing diminishing values of real estate, disappearing facilities and services, and decreasing livability of the area (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2010). The government's policy has therefore been aimed at improving the livability in the regional population decline areas (Leidelmeijer, 2015). Because there are fewer facilities due to population decline, there is still a higher risk of reduction of the livability in depopulating regional regions. It is interesting to investigate whether livability is still a determining factor for the residents of a depopulating rural region. Van Gent & Musterd (2013) conclude that in urban areas the role of social networks and living environments play a significant role in the support for populist parties in the Netherlands. They add that research in other areas in the Netherlands is interesting. Rodríguez-Pose (2018) calls the emerging populism in regional population areas the revenge of the

disadvantaged regions. He noted that this could be reversed by governments by producing better, rather than more, policies for the regions concerned. This research can help to discover whether governments still need to focus on livability in their policies for depopulating rural regions.

## 1.2 Objective and research questions

The aim of this research is to investigate to what extent there is a relation between subjective livability in depopulating rural regions and voting behavior in these areas. In particular, the reasons and motives why there is so much populist voting in a depopulating rural region. In order to achieve this goal, a distinction will be made between livability components to explain the general livability in an area. Then we look at which rating of livability components the populist and non-populist voters differ from each other. The next step is to examine whether the motives for voting for a party are different for populist and non-populist voters. The main question and sub questions, all deriving from this objective, are presented below:

### Main research question:

*To what extent is there a relation between subjective livability and populist voting behavior in a depopulating rural region?*

### Sub-questions:

- Which components of subjective livability are significant in predicting the general rate of livability?
- To what extent does subjective livability predict populist voting behavior in a depopulating rural region?
- To what extent do the motives for voting for a party differ between populist and non-populist voters?

The research will be carried out using a quantitative research method. The data will be collected by means of a paper survey. The municipalities of Pekela and Veendam, both located in East-Groningen, had the highest increase in populist voting between the last two national elections of all depopulating municipalities. For this reason it was decided to collect the data there.

## 1.3 Reading guide

Chapter one of this research consists of an introduction in which the background, relevance and objectives of the research are explained. This chapter also presents the main and sub-questions of the research. Chapter two contains the theoretical framework where the important concepts and

theories related to the research are defined. In addition, it also contains a conceptual model, which provides a visual representation of the links between the different concepts. Chapter three explains which methodology was used to carry out the research. The method of data collection, the analysis of the data and the research method are explained here. The results are presented in chapter four. Each sub-question has its own paragraph and will be answered. Chapter five contains the conclusion of the investigation. Then the strengths and weaknesses of the research will be reflected upon. Following this conclusion, a reference list of all sources used during the research was established.

## Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the key concepts of this research will be clarified with literature from published scientific articles, reports and books. In paragraph 2.1, the concept of regional population decline will be outlined. Then in paragraph 2.2 I will explain what the concept of livability is and how it can be measured. Next, in paragraph 2.3, the concept of populism is explained. In paragraph 2.4 it will be clarified how people come to decide on which party they will vote. Finally, a conceptual model is developed to visualize the relationships between all concepts.

### 2.1 Depopulating rural region

The populist parties get a lot of votes from depopulating rural regions (Bovens & Wille, 2011). Ročak (2017) concludes that there is a relation between populist voting behavior and depopulating rural regions. She says that the socio-economic situation in these regions is quite bad. What were once great industrial winners are now, as a result of globalization, great losers. Globalization mainly affects the most vulnerable population: the low-skilled and the poor. These people have nothing left to lose in terms of politics, and they like to vote for a party that wants to change the current policy, a populist party (Ročak, 2017).

The Dutch Ministry of BZK (Internal Affairs) presented in 2011 a list with regions who were facing regional population decline. This list formed the basis of a new policy for depopulating rural regions (Haartsen & Van Wissen, 2012). There was made a distinction between two types of regions. First there is the so-called 'topkrimp' region, that already experienced structural decline of population. Secondly there is the so-called 'anticipeer' region, that expects to experience population decline in the next 30 years. The national policy means that these regions deserve special attention on the aspects of an ageing population, structural housing vacancies and other problems that occur because of population decline (Haartsen & Van Wissen, 2012)

But what is the driven force behind the population decline? Hospers & Reverda (2015) explain that regional population decline is the result of three different phenomena in the Netherlands: ageing, rejuvenation and negative migration. Ageing in a region occurs because the proportion of 65+ inhabitants is increasing. In the next years The Netherlands continues with the aging process. In 2025 22% of the people in the Netherlands will be 65+ (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2013). The problem for population decline regions is that in many of these regions the share of 65+ inhabitants is higher than the national average and the proportion of 0-18 year-olds is lower than the national average (Verwest et al., 2009). Rejuvenation means the lack of new-borns. A negative migration balance means that more people are moving away than coming to the region. Regional population decline is mainly on the scale of villages and neighborhoods (Van Dam et al., 2006). Different problems can arise here. Mainly the livability in a depopulating rural regions is seen worse than average.

Regional population decline does not occur only in the Netherlands. Hospers (2014) describes what main factors lead to regional population decline in the whole of the EU. One of the first processes that led to regional population decline is economic transformation. The rise of globalization led to a relocation of work to low-cost areas (Hospers, 2014). An additional effect of shifting economic activities to other areas is a migration of young, highly educated people. In the EU economic activities are mostly concentrated in city regions which also leads to migration flows of young, highly educated people from the less urban areas to urban areas. The second process that leads to population decline in the EU is demographic change. The fall of birth rates in Europe is immense (Hospers, 2014). A lack of new-borns lead to less children but also to less children in the future. A third process in the EU is the political transformation. The transformation from socialism to democracy led to a transformation from plan economy to a market driven economy (Hospers, 2014).

## 2.2 Livability

Government, popular press and academics increasingly seem to focus on the concept of livability and the argument that an individual has the right to live in a 'liveable' space (Ruth & Franklin, 2014). Standards for livability are not the same everywhere in the world. They can vary by location, and the way in which people experience livability can vary due to their own wishes and needs (Ruth & Franklin, 2014). The government has to deal with these regional differences in livability and the different perceptions of livability. But what means the concept of livability? Researchers agree that there is no clear definition of the concept of livability (Leidemeijer & Kamp, 2003; Michalos, 1997). To show that there are different definitions of livability, a few will be appointed.

Pacione (1990) states that livability is a quality that is not an attribute that is inherently related to the environment but is also a perception in the mind related to the interaction between environmental characteristics and personal characteristics. Tilaki et al. (2014) conclude that livability is a collection of characteristics that explains the attractive elements of a place for people to live and rest and that the environment is the basic aspect for the community for increasing livability. The environment assembles other aspects of the community and has an impact on people's behavior. Newman (1999) points out that livability is a concept for the human requirement for social amenity, health and well-being and includes both individual and community well-being. These definitions imply that livability is an interaction between the environment and personal living conditions, but also interaction between the individual and the community. Leidelmeijer & Kamp (2003) agree with the suggestion that the concept of livability has to do with the environment. They say that the environment has to be seen as the object. The perspective from which the environment is being looked at is that of man.

To be able to measure livability, there are different dimensions. These dimensions are often discussed by researchers. The discussion about the dimensions of livability is mostly about which aspects of human and environment need to be measured. After years of research some researchers try to make a list and publish this. Michalos (1996) mentioned the following dimensions of livability: health, family, friends, work, finance, partner, education, recreation, residential, administrations and nature. Others used less dimensions, Dissart & Deller (2000) used the following dimensions: Social support, personal satisfaction, personality, skills, environmental factors, health and stressful events. The Dutch government also provided a list with dimensions in their research on livability: Safety, social cohesion, services, housing stock, public space and population composition (Ministerie van BZK, 2011). Leidelmeijer & Kamp (2003) mention that the difference in dimensions and aspects is not the most important. Every researcher can choose what is the most relevant for his research. Important is that the amount of dimensions and aspects is taken into account and the motivation for the chosen dimensions and aspects (Idem, 2003).

However, a distinction can be made in the field of measuring livability. In the literature a distinction is made between subjective livability and objective livability. Leidelmeijer & Kamp (2003) conclude from the literature that these 2 aspects of livability are inextricably linked. Reasons for using subjective or objective livability factors can be different. Subjective factors are important for knowing the wellbeing and the satisfaction from the people themselves. Objective factors are important for measuring observable and non-observable environmental factors (Leidelmeijer & Kamp, 2003). It is

not possible to separate the two when you want to say something about the human and its environment (Idem, 2003). If you do that, the overall picture will never arise.

Based on the literature review, this research will use the definition made by Leidelmeijer et al. (2008). Livability is the extent to which the living environment dovetails with the conditions and needs that residents place on it. This research will look at how individuals (subjective) look at different aspects (objective) like physical, social and safety/nuisance. The physical aspect can be divided among public green space, facilities, houses and quality public space. The social aspect can be divided among trust in neighbours and social interaction. The safety/nuisance aspect can be divided among violence, robbery, nuisance from people, litter (Leidelmeijer et al., 2008)

### **Livability and depopulating rural regions**

Leidelmeijer et al. (2015) conclude that regional population decline and livability had a great cohesion till 2008. In the cores that have declined sharply, the livability decreased according to the 'Leefbarometer' (Idem, 2015). The 'Leefbarometer' provides information on the livability in all neighborhoods and districts of the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2019). It reflects the situation in the neighborhood, but also developments and backgrounds of the neighborhood. But since the economic crisis in 2008 the livability did not decline that much in depopulating rural regions. One possible cause is that the selective out-migration - as a result of the situation on the housing market that made moving more difficult - has declined (Idem, 2015). Also in the period after the economic crisis (2012-2014) there is not a significant decline of livability to see in the regional population decline areas. Still in depopulating rural regions there is a higher risk of reduction of the livability, because there are fewer services due to the population decline.

### **2.3 Populism**

in the Netherlands, many people who are populist oriented, live in depopulating rural regions (De Voogd, 2017). Rodríguez-Pose (2018) calls the rise of populism in disadvantaged regions the revenge of the places that do not matter. By voting populistically, they can make it more difficult for the government to implement the policy they want. This all started before the economic crisis in 2008. But the crisis has given a boost to people's dissatisfaction. To clarify it, Rodríguez-Pose (2018: pp 200) says the following:

*'The areas left behind, those having witnessed long periods of decline, migration and brain drain, those that have seen better times and remember them with nostalgia, those that have been repeatedly told that the future lays elsewhere, have used the ballot box as their weapon'.*

The popularity of the populist parties in shrinking areas can be explained by this. The following paragraphs explain what populism really means and how it has grown in the Netherlands.

Populism has many descriptions, it is quite a wasp nest. Due to many different definitions in the literature there is no indication of an exact definition. Populism originates from the American people's party in the year 1892 (Vossen, 2012). This party opposed an economically and politically elite, which was presented as homogeneous, and which would not have an eye for the farmers and the less fortunate people. Later in the 20th century more and more parties emerged in Europe that were connected with similar ideas (Vossen, 2012). Political scientists have tried to define the core values of populism.

*"Populism in modern democratic societies is best seen as an appeal to 'the people' against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society"* (Canovan, 1999: pp 3).

Mudde (2004) describes populism as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: 'the pure people' vs 'the corrupt elite' and argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people. In addition, Schedler (1996) says that populist movements should not be seen as an anti-system movement, but as an anti-establishment movement.

In the 20th century was populism in the Netherlands as a separate political phenomenon still a marginal phenomenon. In the year 2002 this changed because of the rise of Pim Fortuyn, but shortly after he became so loved he was murdered by a Dutch environmental activist (Vossen, 2012). Politicians like Rita Verdonk or Geert Wilders wanted to continue the work of Fortuyn. Since then Geert Wilders has been the most successful with his political party the PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid). These Dutch politicians have in common the core concepts of populism. They create an image of a political elite who subordinates the interests of the Dutch nation to their own interests and to vague progressive ideals, and they get the support from academics and journalists (Vossen, 2012). Another shared spearhead is to counter the arrival of the Islam in the Netherlands. On the other hand, Fortuyn and Wilders set up the idea of a Dutch nation of self-reliant, hard-working and emancipated

citizens who fight for a government that protects them from crime and immigrants and leaves free for self-development (Idem, 2012). Philip van Praag (2011) explains that due to the arrival of the television and the internet a new political playground emerged. The media could determine which political issues were presented. In the first years of the new century when the prosperity of the Netherlands went well, the citizen became discontented and insecure about the increasing immigration, multicultural society and progressive European integration (Vossen, 2012).

With the help of Wilders and Fortuyn in particular, populism has established a place in politics in the last twenty years. Fortuyn succeeded in politicizing the existing dissatisfaction with politics and putting it on the public agenda (Rooduijn, 2017) . Nevertheless, the rise of populism itself has also caused more discontent among the population (Idem, 2017). Analysis by the Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau shows that before the arrival of Fortuyn the population had a lot of confidence in current politics, but Fortuyn mentioned what was wrong with the politics and that is a big reason why the confidence in the national politics went low. Rooduijn et al. (2016) show that this is happening the same with Wilders and his party. After people voted for Wilders they became more dissatisfied with the national politics. Rooduijn (2017) concludes that populist parties do not have a big influence on the attitudes towards immigration itself, but have a major influence on dissatisfaction with the current national politics.

The SP used the same dichotomy before the arrival of Fortuyn (the dichotomy between the good people and the immoral elite). The appeal to the 'ordinary people' and the 'ordinary man' is the most striking, but there are many other examples which make them a populist party in the literature. For example, the SP would bring 'a breath of fresh air' to the House of Representatives, if the party were to act as a crowbar in parliament 'to pry away old, rotten structures', it was 'reliable', it used 'clear language', it had to 'change tack' and it was in favor of 'a different policy'. A new forward-looking policy. In recent years, the SP still has populist tendencies and can therefore be seen as the left-wing populist party. Both left and right-wing populist parties are included in this research.

In the Netherlands there is an idea of the West against the Rest (Evans et al., 2019). Almost half of the Dutch population is living in the Randstad. In the political landscape the Netherlands does experience certain geographical layers that relate to political outcomes. Most of the areas in the Netherlands that struggle to hold their public and private services in their community and that experience negative migration of young talented people vote for populist parties like the PVV or SP (Evans et al., 2019). Every depopulating rural region has its own reasons for not feeling heard, even in the Netherlands. In depopulating rural regions the decline of the economy and industries also

plays a role in the emergence of populism. Rich industries like mining, agriculture and livestock farming were overtaken by activity at home and abroad and not replaced (Notten, 2017). Former Minister of Economics Joop den Uyl from the Labour party came to Limburg in 1965 to tell people in the mining industry that the mining industry was about to close within 10 years. It was promised that good benefits would come and that new jobs would be created, but little was realized (Notten, 2017). Marcia Luyten (2017) explains that the restructuring has completely failed after the closure of the mining industry. Everything that reminded of the mines was demolished, the entire identity of the Limburgers was destroyed. Luyten (2017) understands why people vote for the PVV. It is an anti-establishment vote. The anger among the Limburgers is a perfect means for feeding populism (Luyten, 2017). In Groningen the problems surrounding the earthquakes play a major role in the anti-government movements in the province. The people do not feel supported and treated fairly by their own government (Grinisch, 2016).

#### 2.4 Voting behavior

To create a deeper understanding about people's voting behavior, this paragraph explore the mechanisms behind how people determine their vote. It also looks specifically at what kind of people will be more likely to vote for a populist party. Adams & Agomor (2015) explain three main theoretical perspectives that have been used on voting behavior. The sociological theory, psychosocial theory and the rational choice perspective are these three different perspectives. The sociological theory is based on social characteristics of voters and shows that socio-economic variables, religion and place of residence are key determinants of voting behavior (Guest, 1946). However, the theory has one big problem. If the vote of a person was determined solely by stable sociological factors, election results would stay the same for a long time (Adams & Agomor, 2015). The psychosocial theory tried to solve the explanatory problem of the sociological theory. It provides a framework that combines sociological and psychological factors to explain the vote choice. The psychosocial model shows the need for an individual to belong to or to be identified with a political party (Idem, 2015). Dalton (2013) says that partisanship can be seen as a socio-psychological product of social group ties. The rational choice perspective compares political behavior with economic behavior. The model predicts the party or candidate closest to an individual's ideology (Adams & Agomor, 2015). In short it can be said that the sociological model centers on the influence of social actors, the psychosocial model searches for party identification and the rational choice perspective focus on rationality and choice.

Van Wijnen (2000) and Thomassen et al. (2000) show in a model how a party choice is made (figure 1). This model is based on the psychosocial theory which is earlier explained. Central in the psychosocial theory is the assumption that events that themselves have no immediate political connotation, such as the social background of the electorate, must first be translated into political attitudes. Political attitudes include views on political controversies and the assessment of political parties. Political attitudes thus constitute intervening values between factors that have no direct political meaning and political behavior, in this case party choice.

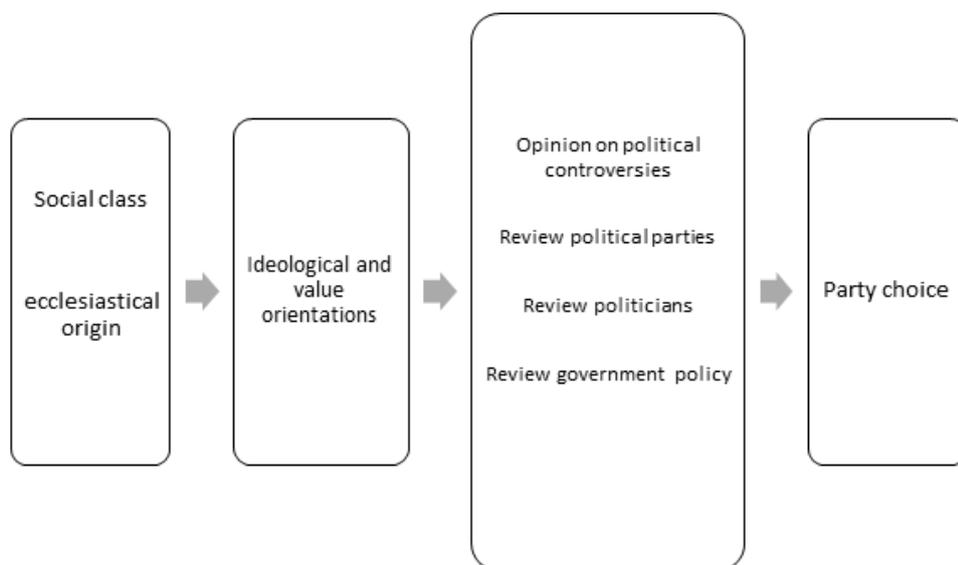


Figure 1: Party choice model (Thomassen et al. & Van Wijnen, 2000)

Volatility means that voters change their party choice (Van der Meer et al., 2012). In the Netherlands the volatility is rising significant since 1950. In the rest of West-Europe this is not the case (Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2011). Van der Meer et al. (2012) describe three developments that could have changed the voting behavior of people in the Netherlands, causing the volatility to rise. Short-term factors is the first development that plays a role. Voters do not vote for deeper values or ideologies but are focusing on charismatic leadership, scandals or the opinion about the previous government. The second development was the emergence of migration, integration and greater role of the EU. A third development shows the emancipation of the voter. The de-pillarisation from the 1960's continues which is another reason why voters choose between parties in the Netherlands is the political climate. De-pillarisation is the phase of secularization that started with the rise of television and growing prosperity (Koops, 2019). This gave people the opportunity to develop new ideas. The difference in political content between the first and second choice of the voter is not quite big (Van der Meer et al., 2012).

This research focuses on populist voters. What are the characteristics of these voters and what are the motives behind the vote? Generally, people vote for populist parties because they do not agree with the government's policy (Fennema et al, 2005). The main reason why someone votes for a populist party is because they agree with the policy that the party wants to pursue (Rooduijn & Schumacher, 2013). In this, they are no different from non-populist voters. Leadership is also an important factor for populist voters to vote for a party. To a lesser extent, this is also important for non-populist voters, but not on such a level as for populist voters (Rooduijn & Schumacher, 2013). A protest vote is another characteristic that comes back to populist voters. Populist parties such as the PVV and SP receive protest voters because they speak out against the policy of the government (Idem, 2013). This motive leads to the biggest difference between populist and non-populist voters. Dijkstra et al. (2018) identifies the people who mainly vote for populist parties as people who are older, working-class, white voters with few qualifications, who live on low incomes and lack the skills that are required to adapt and prosper amid the modern, post-industrial economy. Age and low income are also key factors. Older people do not have the capability to deal with changes in the economy and the migration issues.

## 2.5 Conceptual model

This research focuses on to what extent there is a relation between subjective livability and populist voting behavior in a depopulating rural region. This conceptual model is a visual representation of the possible relationship between subjective livability and party choice. The context of the model is all set in a depopulating rural region. The model shows that an individual has some socio-demographics, namely age, gender, marital status and working situation. These socio-demographics influence the way an individual views livability. The socio-demographics of an individual thus influence the way in which you rate the livability components such as the physical environment, social environment and safety aspects in a depopulating rural region. The subjective livability then influences an individual's ideology and opinion on political issues. Subsequently, an individual's ideology is also influenced by other motives for voting for a political party, such as the ideology of the party itself, or the habit of voting for a party. In the possible relationship between subjective livability and voting behavior, all this would lead to a vote for a particular party. The conceptual model presented below in figure 2. (De Voogd, 2017; Leidelmeijer & Kamp, 2003; Leidelmeijer et al., 2008; Ruth & Franklin, 2014; Van Wijnen, 2000).

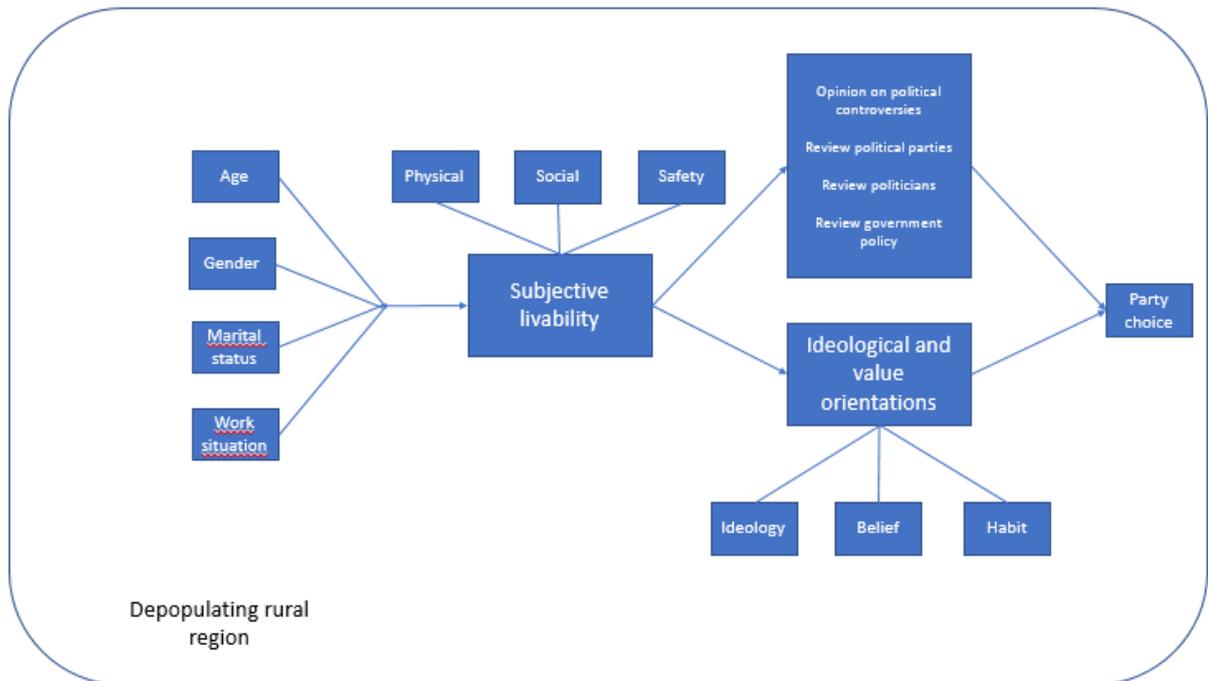


Figure 2: Conceptual model (author,2019).

## Chapter 3 - Methodology

### 3.1 Research method

A quantitative research method was used to answer the main question (and associated sub-questions). The choice to use a quantitative research method is based on several aspects. First of all it is possible through quantitative research to get a lot of information from a diverse and large population (McLafferty, 2010). Secondly, it is possible to have the variable livability rated in numbers. These quantitative data can be analyzed in SPSS and descriptive analyses can be done in SPSS as well (McLafferty, 2010). Because this research searches for insights into a larger group of people, the choice was made for a quantitative research instead of a qualitative research

### 3.2 Data collection

This research is focused on voting behavior in depopulating rural regions. The Dutch government provided a list with 44 municipalities stated as depopulating rural regions. The Dutch government has data about livability and voting behavior from all these municipalities. Before data is collected in one of these municipalities, a correlation test between livability and voting behavior was carried out by SPSS. The correlation between three variables is tested. All the numbers about livability per municipality come from the government's database. In 2016, the government used the 'Leefbarometer' to do research about livability. On different scales they have in this database rates about livability (Rijksoverheid, 2018). The livability rate is the score given to the municipality's livability in the year 2016. The choice consists of all numbers between 1= very insufficient to 9= excellent. The table 3.1 shows that there is a link between the livability rate and the development of populist voting behavior in the depopulating rural regions. The two municipalities with the strongest development of populist voting behavior between the national elections of 2012 and 2017 were chosen as research area. These two municipalities were Pekela and Veendam in the province Groningen. The populist voting behavior in Pekela increased with 16,6%, in Veendam the populist voting behavior increased with 13,4% (Appendix 2).

**Table 3.1.** Mutual correlations between the variables of voting behavior and the development of voting behaviour ( $X_1$ ,  $X_2$ ) and the scale 'livabilityrate' ( $Y$ ).

Variable	1	2	3
1. Livabilityrate ( $Y$ )	–		
2. Percentage populist voting behavior during national elections in 2017 ( $X_1$ )	-0,219	–	
3. Development populist voting behavior between national elections 2012-2017 ( $X_2$ )	-0,444*	0,192	–

\* $p \leq 0,01$

The municipalities of Pekela and Veendam are located in East-Groningen, as can be seen in figure 3. East Groningen is characterized by high unemployment rates. Unemployment rates in Groningen are on average the highest in the Netherlands. When looking at a smaller scale, it is noticeable that seven municipalities have a higher unemployment rate than the provincial average. Veendam and Pekela are part of these municipalities (Sociaal Planbureau Groningen, 2016). Special policies are adopted for the region in order to reduce the decline (Haartsen & van Wissen, 2012). The LEADER East Groningen program tries to make it a stronger region by looking at the existing qualities and potential that exist (LEADER actiegroep Oost-Groningen, 2015). It is clear that in the coming years, the region will continue to be a frequent subject of policy documents.



Figure 3: Municipalities of Groningen (Source: Van Aalst, 2011)

Data collection took place in week 19 of 2019 on Thursday and Friday and in week 20 of 2019 on Monday and Tuesday. There are 35 surveys collected in the municipality of Pekela. In the municipality of Veendam the data collection was a bit easier and 56 surveys were collected. These surveys are collected in places where people congregate, such as near shopping malls and public parks. Due to the nice weather during the data collection, there were many people who were taking a walk and therefore had some time to participate in the research. In addition, bus stops and the train station of Veendam were also good places to address people. People often here had some time to fill in a survey. To make it easier to complete a survey, I handed out a clipboard before the respondent was writing.

### 3.3 Research population

Table 3.2 shows the properties of the sample. The numbers are shown per category in two ways, namely the frequency and the percentage. The study population differs a little from the common population in terms of gender. Whereas in both municipalities the male/female distribution is around fifty-fifty (Informatie Veendam & Pekela, 2019). The distribution in the research population is further apart, namely 36,4% male and 63,6% female in Pekela and 35,5% male and 64,5% female in Veendam. The age distribution in the table shows that a large group of respondents is older than 41 years. This corresponds to the age distribution in the municipalities. The marital status distribution in the sample also does not deviate too much from the normal population in the municipalities. In both municipalities, most people are single or married and a smaller group of people is divorced or widowed (Informatie Veendam & Pekela, 2019). This is also the case in the sample. Looking at the employment situation of the respondents, it can be seen that most people have a full-time job. Although unemployment rates are relatively high in these municipalities, only two people are unemployed in the sample. The living situation distribution in the sample between owner-occupied and rented dwellings corresponds to how it is in both municipalities (Informatie Veendam & Pekela, 2019).

**Table 3.2.** Properties of the sample.

<i>Property</i>	<i>Complete sample</i>	
	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	31	35.2
Female	57	64.8
Total	88	100,0
Age		
< 21	4	4.5
21 - 40	34	38.6

41 - 65	36	40.9
66 – 80	14	15.9
Total	88	100.0
Marital status		
Single	22	25.0
Living together	8	9.1
Married	20	22.7
Single and children	1	1.1
Living together children	6	6.8
Married and children	31	35.2
Total	88	100.0
Work situation		
Fulltime	34	38.6
Parttime	26	29.5
Student	5	5.7
Unemployed	2	2.3
Retired	21	23.9
Total	88	100.0
Living situation		
Buy	63	71.6
Rent	24	27.3
Missing	1	1.1
Total	88	100.0
Municipality		
Pekela	33	37.5
Veendam	55	62.5
Total	88	100.0

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### 3.4 Survey

The survey questions are based on concepts mentioned in the theoretical framework and in the conceptual model, associated indicators and questions are presented in the operational schedule (table 3.3). In order to make sure that good questions were asked in the survey, several questions from existing studies were copied. RIGO Research made a LEMON study (RIGO Research en Advies, 2019). LEMON is an abbreviation for 'livability monitor'. The aim of the LEMON research is to make the opinions of residents about livability visible. By taking over questions from this research, it became possible to validly test subjective livability. All questions about the concept of livability are based on questions from the LEMON research.

In order to be able to track voting behavior, a study by political scientist Van Wijnen was used. Van Wijnen (2012) made a list with fourteen possible motives for voting for a party. In this research this list will be used to understand the motives of people behind their populist or non-populist vote. The list consists of the following possible motives: political position, ideology, trust in leader, sympathy for leader, influence on government policy, prevent other party having too much power, dissatisfaction with government policy, satisfaction with government policy, pro interest group, belief, pro interests of region, habit, best party, most sympathetic party and other.

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Question survey</b>
Personal characteristics	Gender	Gender: Male/Female
	Age	Age:
	Marital status	Marital status: Single/Living together/ Married/ Single and children/Living together and children/ Married and children
	Work situation	Work situation: Fulltime/Parttime/Student/Unemployed/Retired
	Content with work situation	Content with work situation: Yes/No/Other...
	Living situation	Living situation: Rent/Owner-occupied
	Postal code	Postal code:
Livability	General livability	How do you rate the general livability in your residential municipality?
Livability components	Employment offer	How do you rate the employment offers in the region?
	Living environment	What do you think of the maintenance of the living environment in your municipality?
	Green facilities	What do you think about the presence of public green spaces in your municipality?
	Living facilities	What do you think of the offer of the following facilities in your municipality?
	Feeling at home	To what extent do you feel at home in your municipality?
	Nuisance	Do you experience nuisance by others in your municipality?
	Criminality	Do you experience criminality by others in your municipality?
Development livability	Development livability	Do you think that your municipality has improved or deteriorated in recent years?
Voting behavior	Vote	Vote:
	Motives behind vote	Choose 3 motives from the list below that are most important to you in determining your vote
	Influence livability	Does your opinion about livability in your municipality influence your voting behavior?

Table 3.3: Survey operational schedule

### 3.5 Data analysis

SPSS Statistics 25 was used to analyze the data. In the following paragraphs, the method of data analysis will be described for each of the sub-questions of this research. The survey can be found in the appendix.

Sub-question one reads as follows: 'Which components of subjective livability are important in predicting the general rate of livability'? In order to get an answer to this sub-question, a multiple regression analysis will be used. The dependent variable is the rating on general livability in the municipality (question 8 in the survey). The independent variables are the components of livability: employment offer, living environment, green facilities, living facilities, feeling at home, nuisance and criminality (questions 9 till 15 in the survey). Before the multiple regression is done, a correlation test is performed. In this research the Pearson's correlation test is used, because there are two ratio variables and we want to check if there is a linear relationship. The multiple regression analysis is used to determine whether some livability components are stronger than others in predicting general livability. With the regression you look at how great the influence of all variables is on the general livability. Also you can see if the independent variables individually make a significant contribution to the explanation of general livability. Sub-question two reads as follows: 'To what extent does subjective livability predict populist voting behavior in a depopulating rural region? In order to get an answer to this sub-question, a logistic regression analysis will be used. The dependent variable is the vote of the respondent (question 17). The outcome is a dichotomous variable. It has two possible outcomes, namely populist voting behavior or non-populist voting behavior. First the general livability (question 8) will be put into the logistic regression as independent variable. This will be followed by a logistic regression with the variables that were significant for the multiple regression analysis in sub-question 1. That will be done because these components are significant predictors of general livability. After that a logistic regression will be done with all components of livability (question 9-15). This is done so that nothing is skipped. After these logistic regressions, it can be said whether there are components of livability that are significant predictors of populist voting behavior. The last logistic regression is done to see if there are socio-demographics that predict populist voting behavior. The socio-demographics that were included are gender, age, marital status, working situation, living situation and postal code (question 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7). Again the vote of the respondent (question 17) is the dependent variable, the socio-demographics are independent in this logistic regression.

Sub-question three reads as follows: 'To what extent do populist and non-populist voters differ from each other with regard to the factors they consider most important in determining their vote'? There are two groups: populist and non-populist voters (question 17). Through a Chi-square test it is

possible whether there are differences between populist and non-populist voters based on motives that are important in determining the party choice. The hypothesis for this test is: 'There are no differences between populist and non-populist voters based on motives that are important in determining the party choice'. Question 17 in the survey is important for the chi square test. For each factor it is possible to make a binomial variable. For example: 0 = not in the top 3 mentioned and 1= mentioned in the top 3.

### 3.6 Ethical considerations

In contact with the respondent I introduced myself and told them the reason why I approached them. Participation in my research was completely voluntary. Before I handed out the survey, I informed the respondent about the purpose of the research. I did this so it was clear for the respondent why particular questions were asked. It had to be clear for the respondent that the survey is anonymous and all the collected data is processed anonymously. I did this to ensure the privacy of the respondent (Hay, 2010). Next to that I ensured that the respondent knew that the data is only used for my research. I did not force people to make a choice. If people wanted more information about the research, they could have asked me for sending them the final report.

### 3.7 Reflection on data

The surveys were collected by means of a single random sample. As many people as possible were asked on the streets to participate in this research. Through this way of collecting data, the weather plays an important role during the days of the data collection. During the data collection, the weather was favorable and this led to a more enthusiastic response from the respondents. During the data collection, the weather was favorable and this led to a more enthusiastic response from the respondents. Nevertheless, there are factors that may have led to bias in the sample. The data collection took place during the day. This may be one reason why there is a large group of older people in the sample. Younger people are less easy to reach during the day because of work and a busier life. Partly because of the good weather there were many older people who cycled around, or were taking a walk. Older people have occasionally asked for questions and occasionally asked if the questions could be read out, people up to the age of 65 have not or hardly asked this. While reading the questions, I tried to be as objective as possible. I did this in order to prevent my own interpretation from having too much influence on the answers that the respondent was going to give. However, the larger older population in the sample should not be a problem. In the municipality of Veendam and Pekela, the majority of the population is 41 years old and older (Informatie Veendam & Pekela, 2019).

The second thing that strikes us about the data collected is that the number of women among the respondents is much higher than the number of men. These quantities are not representative of the municipalities Veendam and Pekela. The number of men and women in these municipalities is about fifty-fifty (Informatie Veendam & Pekela, 2019). Again the weather may have played a role in this. Part of the data collection also took place in the vicinity of a shopping area. Women may be more inclined to go to a shopping area than men. In addition, women were also more sympathetic to cooperating in the research. The days (Thursday, Friday, Monday, Tuesday) and time (early afternoon till late afternoon) of the data collection may also play a role. The woman more often has a part-time job in the family and therefore stays at home from work more often than the man in the family. When analyzing the data, the fact that there are more women than men among the respondents was taken into account.

As a result of the fact that surveys were conducted on a weekday in the afternoon, it is possible that a large number of unemployed people are included in the sample. This is not the case, as you can see in table 3.2. However, it is possible that there are more unemployed people in the sample, because it can be shameful for a person to indicate that he/she is unemployed. Unemployed people are generally more likely to vote populist because they are not satisfied with the current situation.

During the completion of the surveys in the SPSS statistics program, it appeared that several respondents had not indicated which party they had voted for. These were removed from the dataset because they were not usable.

## Chapter 4 - Results

The main question of the present research is: *To what extent is there a relation between subjective livability and populist voting behavior in a depopulating rural region?* The main question consists of three sub-questions. This chapter describes the results of these three sub-questions. In addition, we will look at how these results relate to the literature that has been found about it.

### 4.1 Results sub-question one

This section will show results with regard to sub-question 1: *Which components of subjective livability are important in predicting the general rate of livability?* The first part shows a correlation test between the scale 'livability in general' and seven components of livability. The second part shows a regression analysis for explaining the general livability on the basis of the seven livability components.

Table 4.1 below shows the direction and correlation between the variable 'rating livability in general' and the explanatory variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient has been used for analyzing, because it is a test to measure the linear correlation between two ratio variables. Analysis of the correlations shows a positive relationship between 'general livability' and all seven components of livability, namely all components score  $p \leq 0,01$ . This means that every higher score on one of the livability components is accompanied by a higher score on the variable 'livability in general'. A higher rate on one livability component goes together with a higher rate on the general livability in the municipality. So every livability component can play a role in the explanation of livability in general.

Table 4.1 below also shows that the components of livability correlate with each other. Almost all of them show a positive correlation. This means that a higher rating on one of the components goes together with a higher rating on one of the other components. The positive relationship can be interpreted as follows: If a respondent rated the one component high, he was more likely to rate on of the other components also higher.

**Table 4.1.** Mutual correlations between the various components of livability ( $X_1, \dots, X_7$ ) and the scale 'livability in general' (Y).

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Rating general livability in municipality (Y)	–							
2. Rating employment in the region ( $X_1$ )	0,515**	–						
3. Rating living environment ( $X_2$ )	0,751**	0,455**	–					
4. Rating green facilities ( $X_3$ )	0,411**	0,204	0,421**	–				
5. Rating living facilities ( $X_4$ )	0,680**	0,591**	0,664**	0,388**	–			
6. Rating feeling at home ( $X_5$ )	0,822**	0,443**	0,633**	0,466**	0,63**	–		
7. Rating nuisance ( $X_6$ )	0,424**	0,356**	0,260*	0,028	0,198	0,329**	–	
8. Rating criminality ( $X_7$ )	0,457**	0,236*	0,297**	0,101	0,245*	0,378**	0,780*	

\* $p \leq 0,05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0,01$

Table 4.2 below shows the regression analysis for explaining the general livability in the residential municipality on the basis of various components of livability. In total 77,8% of the variance in the score on the 'general livability' scale can be explained by the rating of the seven livability components. Analysis of the *variance inflation factors (VIF)* shows that all seven components have a score lower than four. So there is no question of multicollinearity, but it must be kept in mind that the variables are highly correlated with each other. Of the seven livability components, only the

variables 'living environment' ( $p \leq 0,01$ ) and 'feeling at home' ( $p \leq 0,01$ ) predict the rating on the scale 'general livability' significantly. Both variables show a positive relationship. A higher assessment of these variables leads to a higher score for the dependent variable.

**Table 4.2.** Summary of regression analysis for explaining the general livability in the residential municipality on the basis of various components of livability

Variable	$b_0$ (SE)
Constant	1,312 (0,383)
Rating employment in region	0,033 (0,045)
Rating living environment	0,262* (0,062)
Rating green facilities	-0,005 (0,044)
Rating living facilities	0,075 (0,057)
Rating feeling at home	0,379* (0,059)
Rating nuisance	0,053 (0,053)
Rating criminality	0,047 (0,051)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0,778

\* $p \leq 0,01$

In the literature, many different dimensions of livability have been identified. However, in the end they all agree on themes that are always recurring. The questions about livability in the survey came from the Lemon-study, they correspond to the dimensions used by Leidelmeijer et al. (2008). These questions are based on the themes that always recur in the livability debate. The high adjusted R square can be explained by this. All components of livability are part of the general livability concept. The positive interrelationships can also be explained by this. By looking at subjective livability, people who have a more positive view on livability will give more positive scores to each livability component, while the other way around, if people have a negative view on livability, they will give more lower scores to each livability component more quickly. It is striking that the rating of 'green' in the municipality is not significant at all. The reason for this is that the respondents generally gave a very high score during the rating of 'green' in the municipality. This score was often the highest of all.

However, this score did not correspond to the rest of the scores. In the literature, however, the rating of 'green facilities' is always taken into account when measuring the livability.

4.2 Results sub-question two

This section will show results with regard to sub-question 2: *To what extent does subjective livability predict populist voting behavior in a depopulating rural region?*. In order to answer this question, four different logistic regression analyses were carried out. First of all, it was investigated whether the variable 'rate general livability' is predictive for voting for a populist party. It was then examined whether the significant explanatory components of livability from table 4.2 were predictors of voting for a populist party. The next step was to look at all the components of livability. This was done because the adjusted R square of the multiple regression was very high (table 4.2). This means that the seven components explain livability quite well. It is therefore important to apply a logistic regression. To conclude, the demographic characteristics of the respondents were tested in a logistic regression. This made it possible to see whether demographic characteristics lead to significant predictors of voting for a populist party.

Table 4.3 shows the results of the logistic regression analysis for predicting the dependent variable 'vote' on the basis of the independent variable 'rating general livability'. In total, 19,3% of the variable 'vote' can be predicted by the variable 'rating general livability'. The logistic regression shows that the variable 'rating general livability' is a good predictor of voting for a populist party or non-populist party, because it gives a high level of significance. This shows that the chance of voting for a populist party is 0,470 times smaller for people who score higher on the rating of the general livability in the residential municipality. In other words, it is significantly more likely that if someone scores higher on the rating of livability in the residential municipality, they will not vote for a populist party.

**Table 4.3.** Summary of logistic regression analysis for predicting variable 'vote' (non-populism = 0, populism = 1) on the basis of the variable 'rating general livability in residential municipality'

Variable	<i>b<sub>0</sub></i>	<i>S.E.</i>
Constant	5,289	1,621
Rating general livability in residential municipality	-0,756*	0,227
Nagelkerke R square	0,193	

\**p* ≤ 0,01

Table 4.4 shows the results of the logistic regression analysis for predicting the dependent variable

‘vote’ on the basis of the independent variables ‘rating living environment’ and ‘rating feeling at home’. These two variables were chosen because in the multiple regression analyses (table 4.2) they turned out to be significant explanatory variables for the assessment of the overall livability. In total, 27,2% of the variable ‘vote’ can be predicted by the variables ‘rating living environment’ and ‘rating feeling at home’. The logistic regression shows that the variable ‘rating living environment’ is a good predictor of voting for a populist party or non-populist party, because the coefficient is significant. The other variable ‘rating feeling at home’ gives no coefficient that is significant. This means that the chance of voting for a populist party is 0,558 times smaller for people who score higher on the rating of the living environment in the residential municipality. In other words, it is significantly more likely that if someone scores higher on the rating of living environment in the residential municipality, they will not vote for a populist party.

**Table 4.4.** Summary of logistic regression analysis for predicting variable ‘vote’ (non-populism = 0, populism = 1) on the basis of the two significant explaining variables of livability

Variable	$b_0$	$S.E.$
Constant	5.212	1.490
Rating living environment	-0,583*	0,229
Rating feeling at home	-0,157	0,196
Nagelkerke R square	0,227	

\* $p \leq 0,05$

Table 4.5 in the shows the results of the logistic regression analysis for predicting the dependent variable ‘vote’ on the basis of the various components for livability and socio-demographics. Because in table 4.2 the adjusted R square was high, livability was well explained by the seven livability components. In order to be able to answer the sub-question correctly, it was decided to test these seven livability components in a logistic regression as well. In total, 28,5% of the variable ‘vote’ can be predicted by the seven components of livability. The logistic regression shows that all seven components are not significant predictors of voting for a populist party or non-populist party. This is because they are all tested in a logistic regression at the same time, they influence each other. The high number of correlations between the variables also plays a role. It is striking that the variable ‘living environment’ is almost significant, although this variable was significant in the previous table, it is no longer significant here.

Under the logistic regression analysis for the seven components of livability, the logistic regression for socio-demographics can be found in the same table 4.5. In order not to miss out on possible predictors of populist voting behavior, it was also decided to test the socio-demographics in a logistic regression. Table 4.5 shows the results of the logistic regression analysis for predicting the dependent variable 'vote' on the basis of the socio-demographics. As can be seen from the table 4.5, two variables have been deleted. In both variables the frequency was only one. This resulted in a distorted picture. In total, 60,3% of the variable 'vote' can be predicted by the different socio-demographics. The logistic regression shows that gender, fulltime (working situation) and retired (working situation) are good predictors of voting for a populist party or non-populist party, because the coefficients are significant. For the variable 'gender' it means that the chance of voting for a populist party is 6,152 times bigger when you are a women. In other words, it is significantly more likely that if someone is a women, they will vote for a populist party. Finally, for the variable 'retired (working situation)' it means that the chance of voting for a populist party is 28,203 bigger when you have a retired working situation. In other words, it is significantly more likely that if someone has a retired working situation, they will vote for a populist party.

The literature shows that populism likes to name negative facts, and this automatically makes people who vote for a populist party more averse to the current policy of the current government (Rooduijn, 2017). Also it shows that living in a depopulating rural region causes anger (De Voogd, 2017). As the government has increasingly focused on creating a livable space (Ruth & Franklin, 2014), it is possible that populist are negative about this precisely because they prefer to vote against the current policy. Table 4.3 shows that this is indeed the case. When asked about the appreciation of the general livability in the municipality of residence, a clear distinction can be made between people who vote for a populist party and people who vote for a non-populist party. This clear difference is blurred when the concept of livability is discussed in more detail by looking at the components of livability. These components do not significantly explain whether people vote for a populist or non-populist party on the basis of livability components. Low-income and older people are more likely to vote for a populist party (Dijkstra et al., 2018). This is consistent with what the research shows. People who are retired and therefore are older, are more likely to vote for a populist party.

**Table 4.5.** Summary of logistic regression analysis for predicting variable 'vote' on the basis of the various components for livability and socio-demographics

Variable	$b_0$	S.E.	$b_0$	S.E.
Constant	6,208	1,897		
Rating employment in the region	0,188	0,195		
Rating living environment	-0,484	0,267		
Rating green facilities	0,023	0,214		
Rating living facilities	-0,330	0,249		
Rating feeling at home	-0,015	0,244		
Rating nuisance	-0,275	0,222		
Rating criminality	-0,010	0,206		
Nagelkerke R square	0,285			
<b>Model 2</b>				
Gender			1,817*	0,849
Marital status				
Single			2,288	1,381
Living together			-1,220	1,777
Married			-0,976	1,106
Single and children			-	-
Living together and children			-0,996	1,196
Married and children			-2,288	1,381
Working situation				
Fulltime			-3,339*	1,358
Part-time			-1,485	1,112
Student			-1,744	1,954
Unemployed			-	-
Retired			3,339*	1,358
Living situation			-1,812	1,383
Postal code			-0,017	0,028
Age			0,057	0,033
Nagelkerke R square	0,603			

\* $p \leq 0,05$

### 4.3 Results sub-question three

This section will show results with regard to sub-question 3: *To what extent do populist and non-populist voters differ from each other with regard to the motives they consider most important in determining their vote?*

To see if there is a difference in the motives to vote for a party of populists and non-populists, table 4.6 is made. The table shows frequency figures and shows the chi square test score. The striking thing is that some motives are named a lot more often than others. The motives position party, interests in the region and influence on government policy are mentioned the most by both groups of voters. Several motives show a significant difference between populist and non-populist voters. Sympathy for the leader ( $p \leq 0,01$ ), religion ( $p \leq 0,01$ ) and interests in the region ( $p \leq 0,01$ ) are the motives behind the vote that are significant different between populist and non-populist voters. Non-populist motivate their vote more often than populist voters with the reason that they have sympathy for the party leader. They also motivate their voting behavior more often than populist voters because they have a certain belief. Populist voters motivate their vote more often than non-populist voters with the reason that the party of their vote has more to do with interests in the region.

An interesting result is that this research shows that non-populist votes more often vote for a party because they have sympathy for the leader. The literature describes the opposite, it happens more often that populist voters vote for a party because they have sympathy for the leader of the party (Rooduijn & Schumacher, 2013). This can be explained by the rise of 'Groenlinks' leader Jesse Klaver. Many people who voted for that party have mentioned sympathy for the leader as a motive. The populist parties have no affinity with religion, most of the time they are even against it. This is why it can be explained that there is a difference between populist and non-populist voters when it comes to the motive of religion. Living in a depopulating rural region leads to uncertainties and residents of this area generally feel that they have too little interest from the government (De Voogd, 2017). The result of this Chi-square test is that people who vote populistically more often do so with the motive 'interests in region' is in line with what is mentioned in the literature. Rodríguez-Pose (2018) writes that people who vote populistically in disadvantages regions do not feel taken seriously with their problems. It is therefore to be expected that they will vote for a party that is willing to represent the interests of the region.

**Table 4.6.** Frequency + chi square test motives for vote

Variable	Not populist		Populist		chi-square
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
Position party					
Not in top 3	19	55,9	15	44,1	0,289
In top 3	27	50,0	27	50,0	
Ideology party					
Not in top 3	33	55,9	26	44,1	0,961
In top 3	13	44,8	16	55,2	
Trust in leader					
Not in top 3	32	47,1	36	52,9	3,260
In top 3	14	70,0	6	30,0	
Sympathy for leader					
Not in top 3	37	46,8	42	53,2	9,154*
In top 3	9	100,0	0	0,0	
Influence on governmentpolicy					
Not in top 3	31	50,0	31	50,0	0,434
In top 3	15	57,7	11	42,3	
Preventing other party power					
Not in top 3	44	51,8	37	45,7	1,712
In top 3	2	28,6	5	71,4	
Policy during vote					
Not in top 3	35	49,3	36	50,7	1,306
In top 3	11	64,7	6	35,5	
Pro interest groups					
Not in top 3	44	51,8	41	48,2	0,258
In top 3	2	66,7	1	33,2	
Religion					
Not in top 3	38	47,5	42	52,5	8,035*
In top 3	8	100,0	0	0,0	
Interests in the region					
Not in top 3	35	67,3	17	32,7	11,517*
In top 3	11	30,6	25	69,4	
Livability in the region					
Not in top 3	43	54,4	36	45,6	1,441
In top 3	3	33,3	6	66,7	
Habit					
Not in top 3	36	56,3	28	43,8	1,488
In top 3	10	41,7	14	58,3	
Best party					
Not in top 3	35	49,3	36	50,7	1,306
In top 3	11	64,7	6	35,3	
Most sympathetic party					
Not in top 3	44	51,8	41	48,2	0,258
In top 3	2	66,7	1	33,3	

## Chapter 5 - Conclusion

The aim of the present research was to gain insight into to what extent there is a relation between subjective livability and populist voting behavior in depopulating rural regions. This chapter presents the conclusions of the research. In paragraph 5.1 the main results for each sub-question will be repeated and the main question of the research will be answered. In this paragraph we will also discuss whether these results correspond with what has been written in the literature. In paragraph 5.2 a critical reflection on the limitations of the research will be given. Paragraph 5.3 contains a number of recommendations for further research into this subject in the future.

### 5.1 Conclusion sub-questions and main question

The first sub-question of this research focused on the question which components of livability were significant in predicting the general rate of livability in the municipality of residence. All seven mentioned components of livability appear to explain the general livability well because there is a high adjusted R square. The components 'living environment' and 'feeling at home in the municipality' appear to explain the general experience of livability in the municipality of residence of all these components the best. This corresponds to what has been said in the literature about what defines livability. Leidelmeijer & Kamp (2003) conclude that the different dimensions of livability are always focus on physical, social and safety aspects. Leidelmeijer et al. (2008) worked this out and on the basis of these dimensions questionnaires about livability were created. The questions from this research based on livability are derived from this, which explains the high adjusted R square in the multiple regression.

The second sub-question of this research focused on the question to what extent subjective livability predicts populist voting behavior in a depopulating rural region, namely the municipalities of Pekela and Veendam. When asked about general livability in the municipalities, it can be concluded that populist voting behavior can be predicted on the basis of subjective livability. This clear difference is blurred when the concept of livability is discussed in more detail by looking in more detail by looking at the components of livability. Subjective livability is thus a good predictor of populist voting behavior, but it does not apply to the general level. Individual components of good livability do not lead to good predictions of populist voting behavior. The same phenomenon can be found in literature. Living in a depopulating rural region causes anger, but the people are not clear about what really causes their anger (De Voogd, 2017). The government focuses on making 'livable space' (Ruth & Franklin, 2014), this may explain why populists score lower on general livability because they like to be against the government policy. The results of the socio-demographics correspond to the literature. Older people are more likely to vote for a populist party (Dijkstra et al., 2018).

The third sub-question of this research focused on the question to what extent populist and non-populist differ from each other with regard to the motives they consider most important in determining their vote. Non-populist motivate their vote more often than populist voters with the reaction that they have sympathy for the party leader. This is contrary to what literature says about it (Rooduijn & Schumacher, 2013). Non-populist motivate their voting behavior more often than populist voters because they have a certain religion. This is because there is no party among the populist which have affinity with religion. Populist voters motivate their votes also more often than non-populist voters with the reason that the party of their vote has more to do with interest in the region. Rodríguez-Pose (2018) writes that people in regional population decline area do not feel taken seriously with their problems. It is therefore expected that they will vote for a party that is interested in their problems.

The main question that this research focused on is the question to what extent there is a relation between subjective livability and populist voting behavior in a regional population decline area. The answer is: yes, there is a relationship between subjective livability and populist voting behavior in a regional population decline area. However, the relationship only exists on the level of general ratings of livability. When, looking at different components of livability, no clear relationship appears.

### 5.2 Limitations of the research

One limitation of the research can be found in the data collection. The number of respondent who cooperated in the survey could have been somewhat higher. Women were more willing to participate in the research, which led to some bias in the sample. Next time, a better collection strategy will have to be drawn up to prevent this from happening. It may be better not to start surveying yourself but retrieve the data from larger researches on livability. A second limitation of the research is that there was little literature on the role that livability plays in voting behavior. On the other hand, this research was made to be able to fill this gap, but sometimes there is a lack of theoretical background. A third limitation of the research is that mixed methods not is applied. It has been discovered that there is a relation between subjective livability and populist voting behavior, but is not entirely clear where this relation comes from.

### 5.3 Recommendations for future research

A recommendation for future research is to do research about the relation between subjective livability and populist voting behavior in a depopulating rural region in a qualitative way. This will give municipalities, provinces and the national government more insight into the exact reasons why there is so much populist voting behavior in depopulating rural regions in the Netherlands. The policy can then be better adapted to this. It is also interesting to repeat the research in other regional population decline areas to see if the results match or differ. Two municipalities with population

decline have now been included in the research, but in order to discover a generalizing trend, research will also have to be carried out in other municipalities that deal with population decline. This should be done on a larger scale so that all population groups are included.

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## Appendix 1 - Survey



rijksuniversiteit  
 groningen

faculteit ruimtelijke  
 wetenschappen

### Enquête bewoners gemeente Veendam

Bedankt dat u de tijd wilt nemen om deze enquête in te vullen. Ik ben student Culturele Geografie aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Voor mijn afstudeeronderzoek doe ik onderzoek naar de relatie tussen hoe mensen de leefbaarheid ervaren en hun stemgedrag. Deze enquête bestaat uit een paar vragen die gaan over uw perceptie van leefbaarheid en een paar vragen over waarop u uw stem baseert. Ik zal de informatie uit de enquêtes vertrouwelijk en anoniem verwerken. De informatie zal alleen voor dit onderzoek worden gebruikt. Wanneer u een vraag niet wilt beantwoorden, dan kan u deze onbeantwoord laten. Het invullen van deze enquête zal een paar minuten duren.

Nogmaals bedankt voor uw medewerking!

Christiaan Vlasman

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#### 1. Wat is uw geslacht?

- Man       Vrouw

#### 2. Wat is uw leeftijd?

..... jaar

#### 3. Wat is uw burgerlijke staat?

- Alleenstaand     Samenwonend     Getrouwd     Alleenstaand en kinderen  
 Samenwonend en kinderen     Getrouwd en kinderen

#### 4. Hoe zou u uw werksituatie omschrijven?

- Fulltime baan     Parttime baan     Student     Werkloos     Gepensioneerd  
 Anders:.....

#### 5. Bent u tevreden met uw huidige werksituatie?

- Ja     Nee     Anders: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 6. Heeft u een huur of koopwoning?

- Huur       Koop

**7. Wat zijn de vier cijfers van uw postcode**

.....

**Vragen over Leefbaarheid en Stemgedrag (Per vraag mag u een rapportcijfer geven tussen de 1 en 10 waarbij 1 zeer slecht is en 10 zeer goed)**

<b>8</b>	<b>Hoe beoordeelt u de leefbaarheid in uw woongemeente in het algemeen?</b>	
<b>9</b>	<b>Hoe beoordeelt u het werkaanbod in uw regio?</b>	
<b>10</b>	<b>Wat vindt u van het onderhoud van de woonomgeving in uw woongemeente?</b> <i>Denkt u hierbij aan pleintjes, de bestrating, de manier waarop straten zijn ingericht etc.</i>	
<b>11</b>	<b>Wat vindt u van de aanwezigheid van groenvoorzieningen in uw woongemeente?</b>	
<b>12</b>	<b>Wat vindt u van het aanbod van onderstaande voorzieningen bij u in de woongemeente?</b> <i>Denkt u hierbij aan scholen, winkels, OV, sportvoorzieningen, zorgvoorzieningen.....</i>	
<b>13</b>	<b>In hoeverre voelt u zich thuis in uw woongemeente? (1 voel me helemaal niet thuis – 10 voel me zeer thuis)</b>	
<b>14</b>	<b>Heeft u in uw woongemeente overlast (van het gedrag) van anderen? (1 ernstige overlast – 10 geen overlast)</b> <i>Denkt u hierbij aan geluidsoverlast, overlast door rondhangende jongeren en overlast van buurtbewoners</i>	
<b>15</b>	<b>Heeft u in uw woongemeente last van criminaliteit? (1 ernstige last – 10 geen last)</b> <i>Denkt u hierbij aan vandalisme, geweldpleging, inbraak en diefstal</i>	
<b>16</b>	<b>Vindt u dat uw woongemeente er de laatste jaren op vooruit of achteruit is gegaan? (1 sterk achteruit – 10 sterk vooruit)</b>	

**17 Op welke partij heeft u gestemd bij de Landelijke verkiezingen in maart 2017?**

\_\_\_\_\_

<b>18</b>	<b>Kies 3 motieven uit de lijst hieronder die voor u het belangrijkste zijn in het bepalen van uw stem? (Zet een X achter 3 verschillende motieven)</b>	
	Standpunten van een partij	
	Ideologie/maatschappelijke visie	
	Vertrouwen in lijsttrekker	
	Sympathie voor lijsttrekker	
	Partij moet veel invloed op regeringsbeleid hebben	
	Voorkomen dat andere partij teveel macht krijgt	
	Kabinetsbeleid ten tijde van uitbrengen stem	
	Opkomen voor belangengroepen	
	Geloofsovertuiging	
	Opkomen voor belangen in de regio	
	Leefbaarheid in de regio	
	Uit gewoonte stemmen op de partij	
	Beste partij	

	Meest sympathieke partij	
--	--------------------------	--

**19. Beïnvloed uw mening over leefbaarheid in uw woongemeente uw stemkeuze?**

- Ja       Nee       Neutraal
-

## Appendix 2 – Table voting behavior regional population decline municipalities

Krimpgemeente	Ontwikkeling populistisch stemgedrag tussen landelijke verkiezingen 2012-2017	Percentage populistisch stemgedrag landelijke verkiezingen 2017	Leefbaarheids-ontwikkeling 2012-2016  4= Geen ontwikkeling 5= Mogelijke vooruitgang	Leefbaarheidscijfer 2016 4: Zwak 5: Voldoende 6: Ruim voldoende 7: Goed 8: Zeer goed 9: Uitstekend
Appingedam1	PVV: + 5.7% SP: + 6.6% Totaal: +12.3%	PVV: 14.9% SP: 19.5% Totaal: 34,4%	4	6
Delfzijl2	PVV: +5.9% SP: +4.8% Totaal: 10.7%	PVV: 15.9% SP: 16.6% Totaal: 32.5%	4	6
Loppersum3	PVV: +2.3% SP: 3.9% Totaal: +6.2%	PVV: 8.5% SP: 14.7% Totaal: 23.2%	4	7
Oldambt4	PVV: +8.4% SP: +4.1% Totaal: +12.5%	PVV: 18.8% SP: 19.5% Totaal: 38.3%	4	8
Pekela5	PVV: +10.3% SP: +6.3% Totaal: + 16.6%	PVV: 24% SP:24% Totaal: 48%	4	6
Stadskanaal6	PVV: +6.6% SP: + 4.7% Totaal: +11.3%	PVV: 16.1% SP: 16.6% Totaal: 32.7%	4	6
Veendam7	PVV: +6,8% SP: +6.6% Totaal: +13.4%	PVV: 16.3% SP: 18.7% Totaal: 35%	4	6
De Marne8	PVV: +5.4% SP: +2% Totaal: +7.4%	PVV: 12.8% SP: 13.9% Totaal: 26.7%	4	6
Eemsmond9	PVV: +4.9% SP: +3.9% Totaal: +8.8%	PVV: 11% SP: 16.3% Totaal: 17.3%	4	7
Brunssum10	PVV: +2.4% SP: + 1.6% Totaal: +3%	PVV: 26.4% SP: 18.5% Totaal: 44.9%	4	7

Heerlen11	PVV: +3.1% SP: -1.3% Totaal: +1.8%	PVV: 22.5% SP: 19.8% Totaal: 42.3%	4	6
Kerkrade12	PVV: +3.5% SP: 2.5% Totaal: +6%	PVV: 28.9% SP: 19.3% Totaal: 48.2%	4	6
Nuth13	PVV: +1.3% SP: -0.1% Totaal: +1.2%	PVV: 18.3% SP: 12.8% Totaal: 31.1%	4	8
Landgraaf14	PVV: +3.4% SP: -0.2% Totaal: +3.2%	PVV: 26.3% SP: 16.7% Totaal: 43%	4	7
Onderbanken15	PVV: +2.2% SP: -0.8% Totaal: +1.4%	PVV: 24.8% SP: 15.6% Totaal: 40.4	4	7
Simpelveld16	PVV: +1.8% SP: +2.1% Totaal: +3.9%	PVV: 22.6% SP: 15.1% Totaal: 37.7%	4	7
Voerendaal17	PVV: +1.5% SP: +0.6% Totaal: +2.1%	PVV: 16.7% SP: 13.1% Totaal: 29.8%	4	8
Eijsden- Margraten18	PVV: +1.4% SP: -1% Totaal: +0.4%	PVV: 14.3% SP: 9.6% Totaal: 23.9%	5	9
Gulpen-Wittem19	PVV: 2.6% SP: -1.4% Totaal: +1.2%	PVV: 18% SP: 12% Totaal: 30%	4	8
Maastricht20	PVV: 3.8% SP: -1.3% Totaal: +2.5%	PVV: 18.3% SP: 11.3% Totaal: 29.6%	4	6
Meerssen21	PVV: 3.7% SP: -1.5% Totaal: +2.2%	PVV: 18% SP: 11.3% Totaal: 29.3%	4	7
Vaals22	PVV: +2.8% SP: -0.4% Totaal: +1.4%	PVV: 21.1% SP: 14.1% Totaal: 35.2%	4	6

Valkenburg aan de Geul23	PVV: +2.3% SP: -1.1% Totaal: +1.2%	PVV: 18% SP: 10,4% Totaal: 28.4%	4	7
Beek24	PVV: +2% SP: -1.1% Totaal: +0.9%	PVV: 19.7% SP: 11.2% Totaal: 30.9%	4	7
Schinnen25	PVV: +0.6% SP: +0.5% Totaal: +1.1%	PVV: 16.5% SP: 13% Totaal: 29.5%	4	8
Sittard-Geleen26	PVV: +1.5% SP: -1.2% Totaal: +0.3%	PVV: 20.9% SP: 13% Totaal: 33.9%	4	6
Stein27	PVV: +1.1 SP: -0.3% Totaal: +0.8%	PVV: 22.7% SP: 14.6% Totaal: 37.3%	4	7
Hulst28	PVV: +4.3% SP: +0.6% Totaal: +4.9%	PVV: 17.9% SP: 12.2% Totaal: 30.1%	4	6
Sluis29	PVV: +5.3% SP: +0.7% Totaal: +6%	PVV: 16.8% SP: 10.7% Totaal: 27.5%	4	6
Terneuzen30	PVV: +3.9% SP: +0.9% Totaal: +4.8%	PVV: 17,4% SP: 10.8% Totaal: 28.2%	4	6
Aalten31	PVV: +2.2% SP: +0.7% Totaal: +2.9	PVV: 9.6% SP: 12.8% Totaal: 22.4%	4	7
Bronckhorst32	PVV: +2.3% SP: +0.3% Totaal: +2.6%	PVV: 9.2% SP: 9.2% Totaal: 18.4%	4	8
Berkelland33	PVV: +2.9% SP: +2.3% Totaal: +5.2%	PVV: 10.1% SP: 12.9% Totaal: 23%	4	7
Doetinchem34	PVV: +3.7% SP: +1.2% Totaal: +4.9%	PVV: 12.6% SP: 12.5% Totaal: 25.1%	4	7

Montferland35	PVV: +4.9% SP: 0% Totaal: +4.9%	PVV: 17.3% SP: 11.8% Totaal: 29.1%	4	7
Oost Gerle36	PVV: +2.4% SP: +0.7% Totaal: +3.1%	PVV: 9.0% SP: 10.8% Totaal: 19.8%	4	7
Oude IJsselstreek37	PVV: +2.9% SP: +0.5% Totaal: +3.4%	PVV: 11.9% SP: 13.3% Totaal: 25.2%	4	7
Winterswijk38	PVV: +2.2% SP: +0.5% Totaal: +2.7%	PVV: 9.3% SP: 11.8% Totaal: 21.1%	4	7
Achtkarspelen39	PVV: +7.4% SP: +2.7% Totaal: +10.1%	PVV: 16.8% SP: 11.4% Totaal: 28.2%	4	6
Dantumadeel40	PVV: +5.4% SP: +2.5% Totaal: +7.9%	PVV: 14.1% SP: 12.3% Totaal: 26.4%	4	7
Dongeradeel41	PVV: +3.9% SP: +0.3% Totaal: +4.2%	PVV: 11.2% SP: 10.5% Totaal: 21.7%	4	6
Ferwerderadeel42	PVV: +2.9% SP: +0.5% Totaal: +3.4%	PVV: 10.5% SP: 10.6% Totaal: 21.1%	5	7
Kollumerland C.A. 43	PVV: +4.3% SP: +0.2% Totaal: 4.5%	PVV: 13.6% SP: 10.4% Totaal: 24%	4	7
Tietjerksteradeel44	PVV: +4.2% SP: +1.2% Totaal: +5.2%	PVV: 10.7% SP: 10.2% Totaal: 20.9%	4	7