

# Reimagining the European periphery

## The case of Asturias

According to the UN, 7 in 10 people will be living in cities by the year 2050. This is a huge challenge for spatial planning and urban design and will certainly keep our profession occupied for decades to come. Considering this fact, one could be forgiven in thinking that the biggest challenge, that faces the planners and designers of the future, is growth. However, in many places in the developed world, the opposite is true.

In the developed world, shrinkage is becoming more and more prevalent. A significant portion of cities in Europe, the US and Japan can no longer expect growth (McKinsey, 2016; Schlappa & Neil, 2013). Though shrinkage is not a new phenomenon, but the pace with which it is happening throughout the developed world is unprecedented (Karina Pallagst, Mulligan, Cunningham-Sabot, & Fol, 2017).

Shrinkage poses a challenge for spatial planners to keep cities and regions functional and liveable. In the coming age, many developed regions will undergo deep and far reaching transformations.

With the population of the western world receding, the question arises: what happens to the places and people that will be hit by decline?



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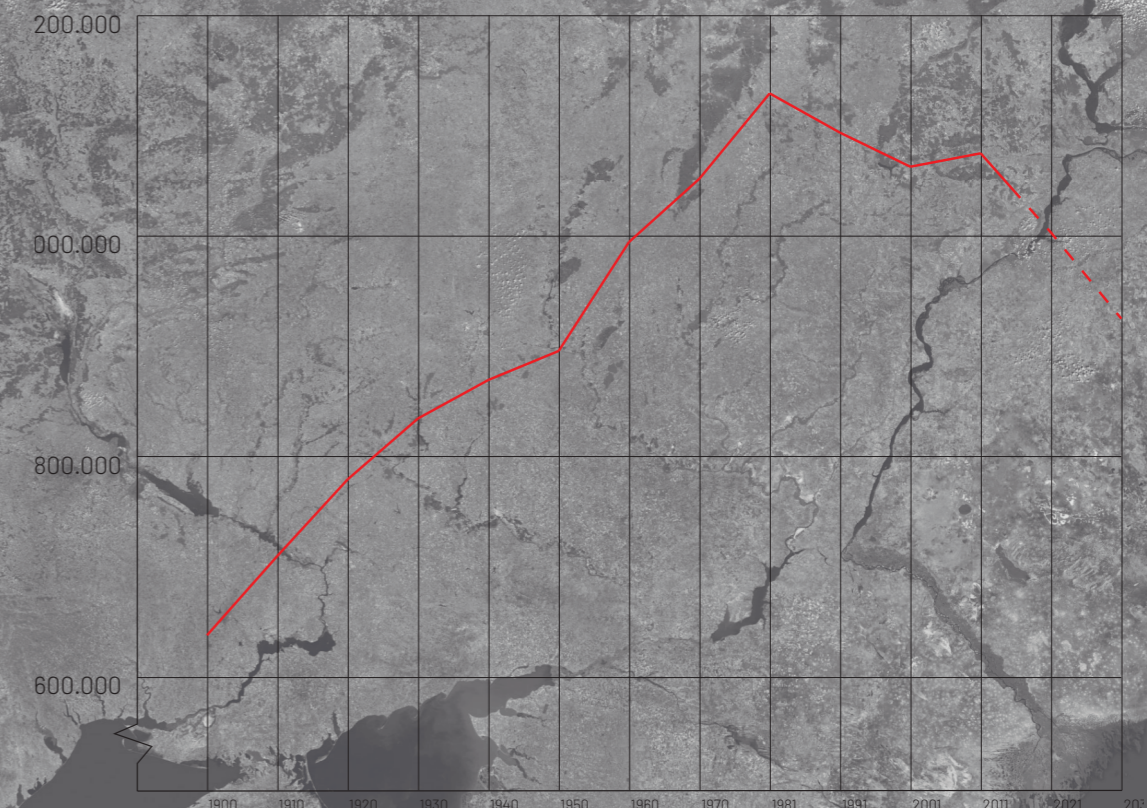
### Drivers of decline



Industrial decline

Rural depopulation

Aging



The demographic change from 1900-2017 combined with the projection for 2031. Source: based on data from the SADEI

### Problem statement

Throughout Europe, shrinkage drives a dramatic process of land use change, resulting in under-utilisation, vacancy, demolition, emerging brown- and greyfields, and general deprivation (Dagmar Haase et al., 2014). These changes carry negative social, economic and environmental consequences (Branas et al., 2011; Garvin, Branas, Keddem, Sellman, & Cannuscio, 2013; Megan & Jeremy, 2012).

In many cases, planners and decision makers are slow to acknowledge the reality of shrinkage. This leads them to pursue growth-oriented strategies and policies long after the prospect of growth has wilted away. This is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, valuable resources are spent on projects that have a low chance of success. Subsequently, these resources are not spent on non-growth projects that could improve the quality of life of the local inhabitants.

Secondly, the growth fallacy lead governments and private parties to hold on to undeveloped assets, such as brownfields, greyfields and abandoned buildings, in the hope that these assets will eventually be picked up by the market. Thus, eliminating the opportunity for these assets to be used for other alternative uses (e.g. energy landscapes, reforestation, ecosystem restoration, agroforestry, etc.).

Not exploiting the opportunities to implement such new land-uses is not merely a loss for the local population, who might stand to gain from it. The implementation of these uses is important for the European society.

### Research questions

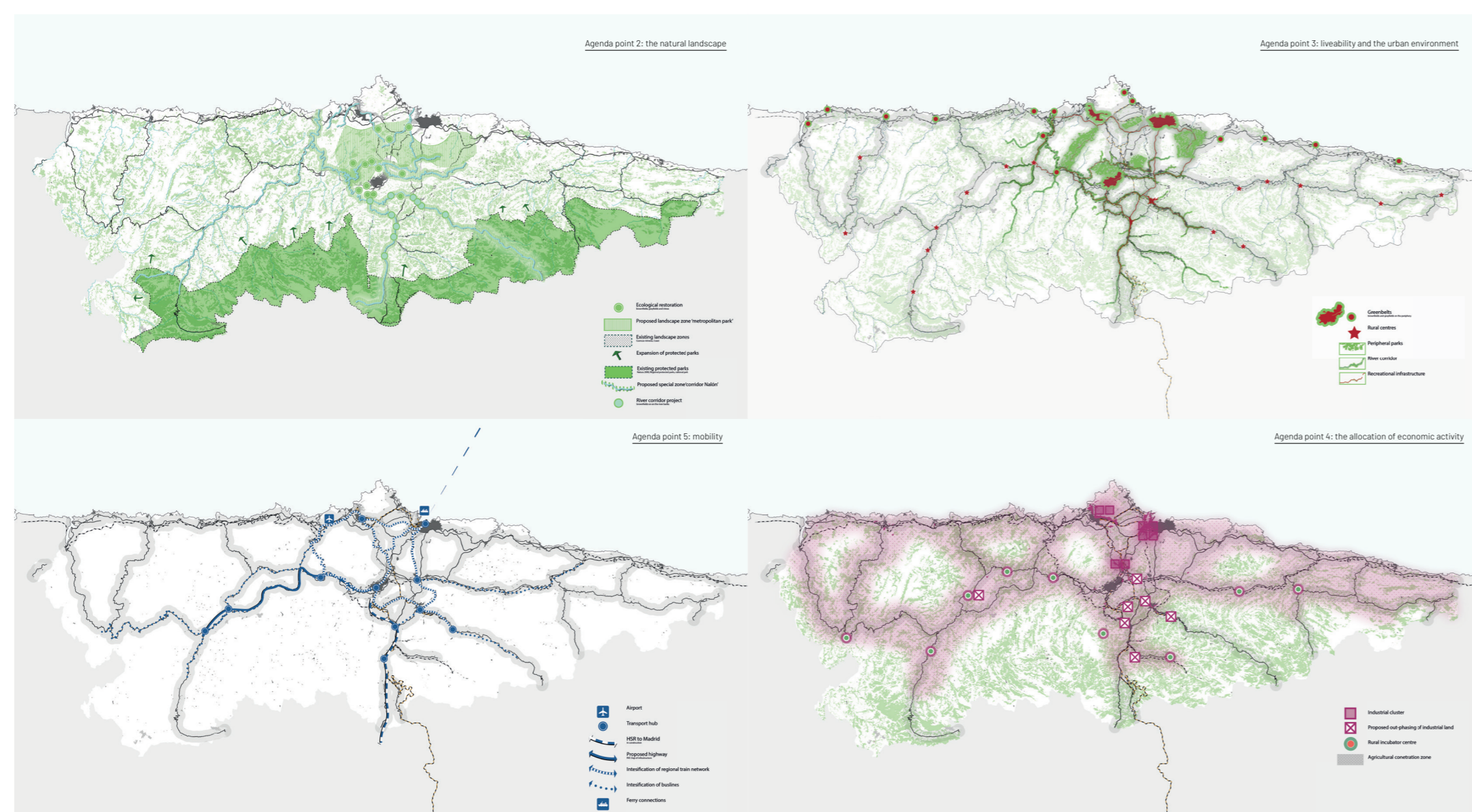
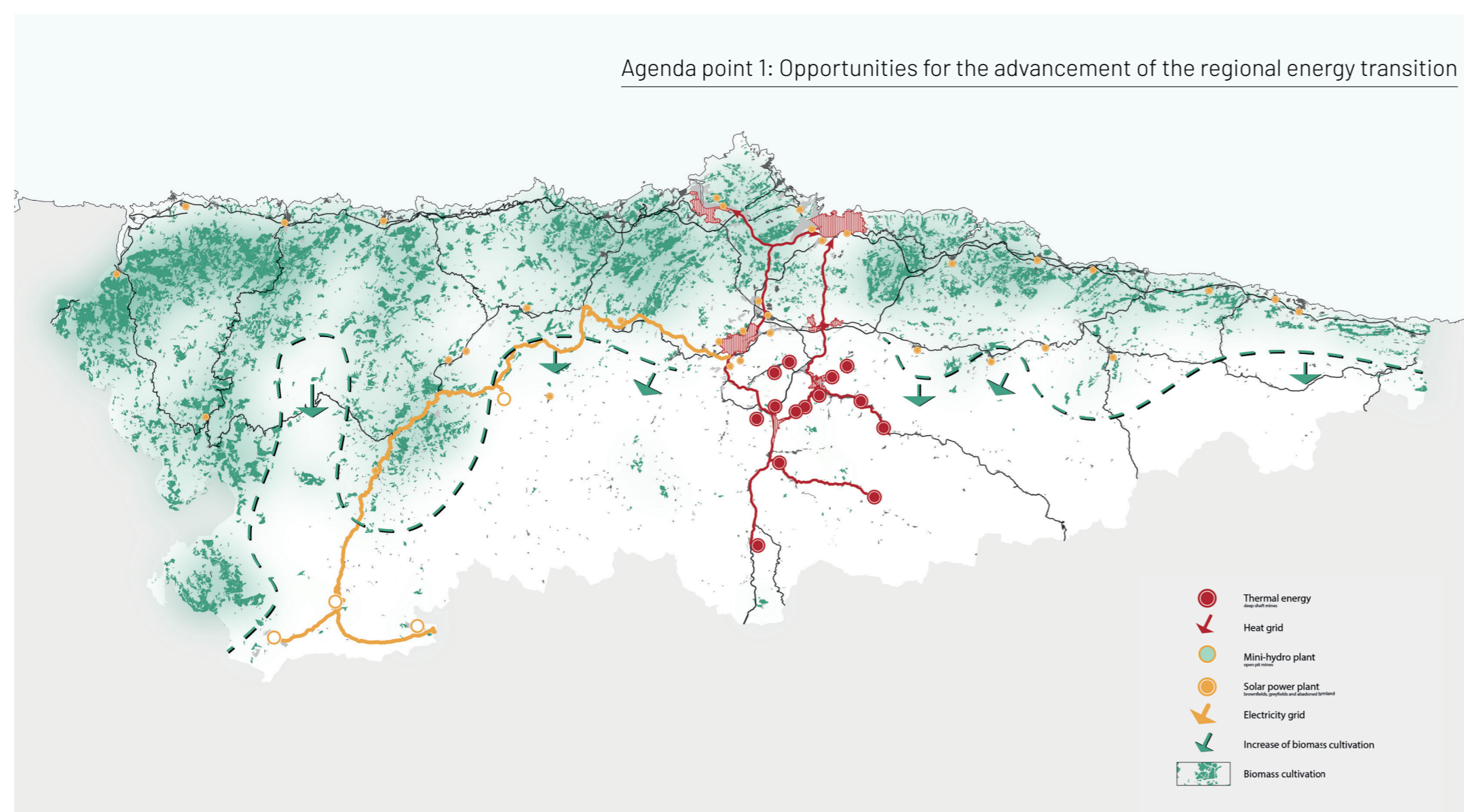
Main research question: *How can regional spatial development be directed to exploit the opportunities that stem from shrinkage?*

Sub research questions:

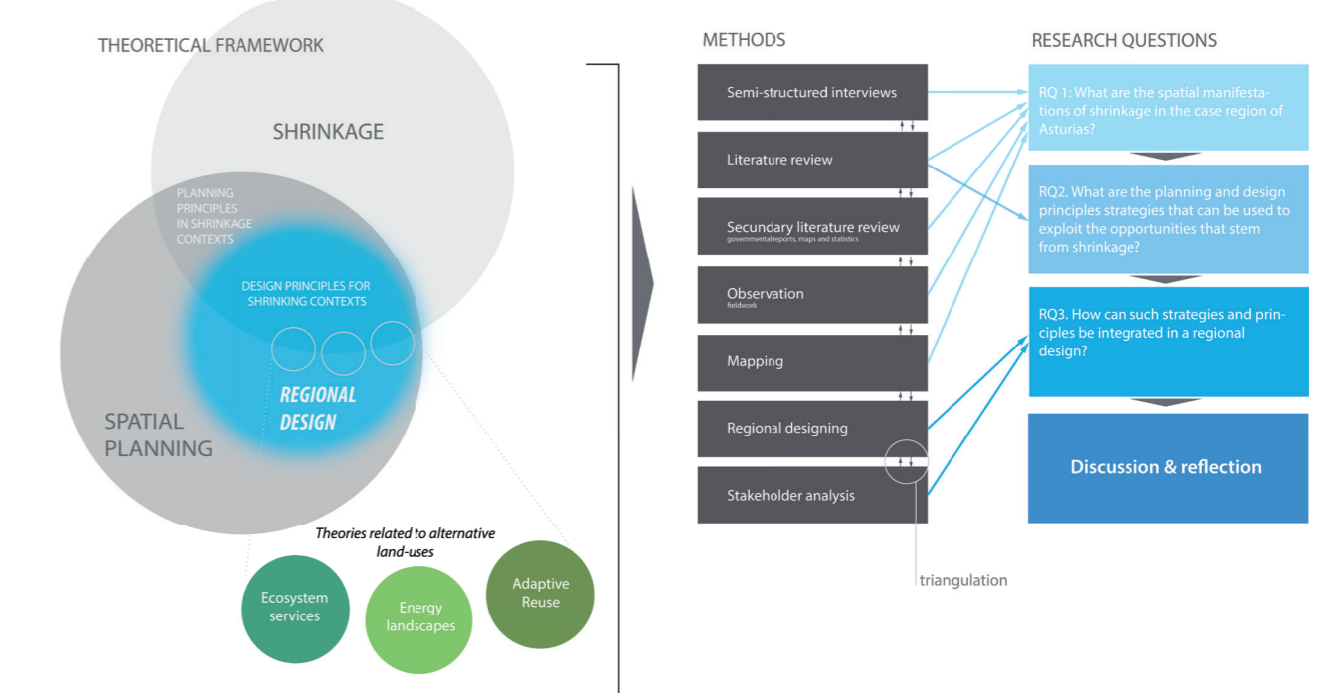
1. What are the manifestations of shrinkage in the territory and planning system of Asturias?
2. What are principles and strategies for design and planning that can be used to exploit the opportunities in shrinkage?
3. How can these principles and strategies be integrated in to a regional design that guides regional spatial development?

### Regional design

The regional design is a proposal for the Principality of Asturias. It outlines a perspective for future development and paves the way for Asturias; 'from a region preoccupied with shrinkage, to a region that exploits shrinkage to reach a sustainable future beyond shrinkage'. The goal of this regional design is to outline regional challenges and opportunities and envision pathways that enable the regional authorities to respond to these challenges and opportunities. The design outlines a spatial agenda for inter-regional collaboration and proposes concrete policies and projects. The regional design is intended to guide spatial development for the next 20 years. It is not intended as a blue print, but rather as a first step towards a regional territorial plan that guides Asturias towards a more sustainable future beyond shrinkage. (for more details see rapport)



### Research design



### Conclusions

1. What are the manifestations of shrinkage in the territory and planning system of Asturias?
  - Relationship between shrinkage and the rise of certain environmental threats
  - Complex relationship between shrinkage and the internal dynamics of the regional planning system
2. What are principles and strategies for design and planning that can be used to exploit the opportunities in shrinkage?
  - Potential of alternative land use to address regional environmental issues
  - Regional design as a tool to break the planning deadlock
- 3) How can these principles and strategies be integrated in to a regional design that guides regional spatial development?
  - One holistic approach for regional change
  - Regional platforms for cooperation