DEPOPULATION:
STRATEGY FOR A VITAL DUTCH COUNTRYSIDE

- IN SEARCH OF A NEW RURAL IDYLL -

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FOREWORD

This thesis is written as part of my graduation project architecture, which I made together with my companion Ule Koopmans. The subject concerns current transformation processes on the Dutch countryside from which demographic depopulation is the main problem-related motive. The choice for such a distinctive unordinary architectural theme is based on the desire to radically seek for the boundaries of architecture. With this project we intent to explore an underexposed field within the discourse of architecture; that of the countryside. It’s based on our belief that architecture is meant, or has the capability, to solve or at least reveal societal problems. In order to understand the possibilities, relations and consequences of a new rural community we made two different studies. One will focus on the process of depopulation and the possibilities of an integrated energy landscape, the other focuses on the different target groups and the meaning of the contemporary image of the countryside. Both studies resolve in preconditions, shaping a strategy. The strategy is meant to perform as a basis for our design project.
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ABSTRACT

In this thesis an attempt has been made to develop a strategy which reacts to the root causes of depopulation and guarantees a vital countryside on the long-term. Firstly depopulation as general phenomenon is examined. What becomes clear is that in the near future more and more regions and municipalities are faced with declining numbers of residents and households. In some regions such as East Groningen, this is already the case. Depopulation manifests mainly on the countryside (in contradiction to the city), which is why we need to review our orientation from government and city to habitants and rural areas. Current strategies aimed at depopulation are focused on the short-term consequences of depopulation; an appropriate long-term strategy focused on the underlying causes of depopulation is yet to be formed.

Although depopulation can have different practical causes on regional level there are two main determines: the fertility rate (socio-cultural influences) and the migration rate (economical influences). The migration rate is mainly based on the driving forces -the attractiveness- of a place. Therefore depopulation has not only a selective character in people (age, education etc.) but also in place (attractiveness). The depopulation of Bellingwolde mainly concerns the aging of the baby-boom generation and a domestic migration of the youth to urban areas. The main ‘push-factor’ for the youth to move to the city is the presence of good and high education institutions. The fact that they don’t return to the countryside is the lacking of economical prospect en possibilities. As a consequence of this transition the potential workforce looses its majority, this makes the countryside on a long-term no longer vitally stable.

A new transitional balance can be reached when a region can become economical, social and spatially vital without special support from the government. In order to become vital as a region now and in the future a proper balance of the working force versus the grey and green pressure is needed. In the development of a strategy a focus is be made on the attraction of entrepreneurial driven pioneers. The problem of this target group is the common image of the countryside that is based on recreation and excludes the notions of working and living. With the transition into a knowledge-based economy, the possibilities of working with high level knowledge on the countryside increases. Besides the image reclaim, new earning models will have to be integrated as economical stimulus. There are two
possible strategies on two different scale levels of intervening with a strategy, in order to create acceptance and resign the responsibility to the local residents a strategy with the bottom-up approach will have more chance of success.

The transformation of the countryside will be a process that covers the upcoming decades. Depopulation is a transformation process that can lead to a phase in which a structural change in our living and working pattern can take place. In order to make this new community possible we developed a solution strategy consisting a transformation process which takes from about 1 to 2 generations (10-20 years). Two physical elements have been developed as architectural interventions. The two buildings are the embodiment of the strategy and form the final products of our graduation project. In the appendix the strategy is portrayed in a comic. We choose for this format because it is a good reflection of a transformation through time.
I. Research

1. PREFACE

Motive

Empty streets, rows of boarded-up houses, empty shops, abandoned industrial sites, dilapidated buildings: these are familiar images from regions abroad who suffer from a substantial population decline. Former mining areas, old industrial cities and a major vacancy among the housing stock in Spain are just some examples of areas where the driving forces of the regional economy has disappeared and the population is strongly declined. Without a proper reaction from the (local) government depopulation can have a serious negative influence on the quality of life, for instance structural vacancy with decay as a result.

Also in the Netherlands in some regions we encounter declining population numbers. The regional population projection model (called PEARL) indicates that demographic decline will commence, continue or strengthen in the near future for several regions, like South-Limburg, South-Zeeland and East-Groningen. According to the latest national population projections of the CBS, the total population of the Netherlands will decline from about 2035. Over the last years the topic has increasingly been in the news and dominated the public debate. The planned demolition of the village Ganzedijk in 2008 (North-East Groningen, Netherlands) -which was stopped by the residents themselves- was a prominent mark in the public debate; it showed the resistance and influence residents can have. This raises questions on what the spatial implications of the demographic decline could be. Especially the regions, which are already dealing with a declining population, will need to anticipate fast in order preventing a possible doom-scenario.
Methodology

In this thesis an investigation is made into depopulation in order to get to the root (cause) of the problem. By especially looking at the causes instead of just the consequences an attempt is made to define a strategy that reacts to the problem in total. Firstly a general examination to the subject of depopulation is given as literature study. In order to gain quantitative results, a focus on the migration numbers for the village Bellingwolde is made as a case study, this is a combination of empirical research and literature study. From these results several preconditions are composed, from which a strategy is developed.

Project goals

Project goal project

The design goal is:

To develop a new ideal (communal) rural life, a utopia, as a proper reaction to the phenomenon of demographic depopulation in order to inspire policy makers or other participants and to rethink the role of integrated architectural design.

This goal is achieved through:

The development of a strategy for an exemplary village, based on preconditions resulting from research on the topic of depopulation in The Netherlands and on rural communities.
Research goal depopulation

The research goal is:

To contribute to the understanding of demographic depopulation and to develop preconditions for a strategy as a proper reaction to rural depopulation. The focus will be on contemporary rural villages (municipality Bellingwedde) that depopulate as an effect of economic and spatial conditions in Western society.

This goal is achieved through

A literature study into depopulation and an analysis of possible developments the municipality Bellingwedde as a case study will experience as a consequence of the underlying causes of depopulation.

2. FRAMEWORK

Background

Demographic transition has different appearances and takes place from the beginning of mankind. The focus in this thesis will be on depopulation as an effect of economic circumstances in relation to spatial conditions in Western society. Depopulation, or shrinkage, can be defined as the structural decline of the population (DE GRAAF, 2009). Without a substantial reaction from the (local) government depopulation can have several serious negative consequences on the quality of living conditions. Depopulation in our time is relatively new, it is a current development concerning the society of this time. The Dutch countryside, yet mostly at the borders, are the regions that will depopulate at the shortest term. At some places in the Netherlands depopulation is already a fact (South-Limburg, East-Groningen), in the near future more regions will encounter this demographic transition (DERKS et al., 2010).
In addition the Dutch countryside is subject to other major changes besides depopulation. Agriculture is changing due to broadening in product offerings and scaling to larger megafarms. New economies are introduced and demographic depopulation has its extensive consequences on the viability of villages. Growing tourism focuses increasingly on the exploitation of small-scaled and traditional cultural landscapes (HEINS, 2002). The spatial consequences of these developments are still underexposed - let alone being recognized as an integral design tasks. The spatial quality policy in recent years focused on protecting the existing landscape and the integration of urbanization. Due to the financial crisis, a reassessment of public tasks - where is the government still responsible for - and the big financial cuts in nature and landscape, the task at hand lies wide open.

Since a few years a notion of the phenomenon is growing; documentaries are made and studies are done. In March 2011 the SER (Social Economical Counsel) - an institution that advises the government on policies - published their advisory on this topic. A new, fundamental, appropriate strategy to counter the negative consequences is yet to be formed. In the formation of such a strategy creative thinking, like architecture and urbanism, could contribute in broadening the conceptual framework in order to propose
a wider range of possibilities. Now public and collective values are located in a vacuum and the role of the government as ‘guardian of the spatial order’ is not self-evident anymore, we need to review our orientation from government and city to habitants and rural areas (REITSMA & HENDRIKS 2011).

![Image of a newspaper article](image.png)

Article in Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*; dated: 17 oktober 2011. A notion of the importance of the phenomenon is growing.

**Setting**

The development in the agricultural economy is changing under the influence of globalization and technological developments. The production is less land-based, becomes gradually industrialized, more complex, larger scaled, more labour-extensive and knowledge-intensive. The classic farm disappears and is replaced by mega stables and other industrial complexes. In addition, lots of agricultural businesses are forced to end - by poor economic prospects and the lack of a successor. Moreover, non-agricultural economies are introduced such as energy, healthcare and tourism (REITSMA & HENDRIKS, 2011). Depopulation, dejuvenation and aging are resulting in serious depopulation scenarios. That is why it is high placed on the agendas of the government and the ten largest rural municipalities (VAN DAM, 2005). They approach the depopulation problem as yet only from a social perspective, as shown by the report issued by the P10 Summer in the Netherlands. It concludes how depopulation can be ‘accepted’ and new partnerships should be made (LATTEN, 2009).

Simultaneously, there is a revival in the appreciation of the classic ‘idyllic’ image of rural areas: a natural and cultural landscape where one still finds open spaces, rest, slow life, regional and local customs. This is reflected in the expansion of farms with
activities such as camping on the farm, full of local shops, hugging cows and relaxation training. In many places, the landscape policy is characterized by a protective approach in which the preservation of the recreational experience value - the positive image of the area - is taken central. This desire for a small and sometimes ‘romantic’ landscape is conflicting with the undergoing progresses, wishes and aspirations of the farmers, the ‘producers’ of the landscape - whom advocate up scaling and therefore new landscapes (SIMON et al, 2008).

The countryside, the place where it all started out, now threatens to perish on its own motive. The countryside has become the supplier of the city, both in material flows and in demographic terms. This contrast, between city and countryside is a predominant feature of the phenomenon of depopulation. Being a production landscape it is seen and used by many city dwellers as a consumption landscape. The countryside needs to reinvent itself, new earning models must be found. Great possibilities can be found in the field of energy production. Instead of remaining the producer of just food, the agricultural section can find a renewed source of economical interest in a transformation to an innovative energy landscape (EO WIJERS STICHTING, 2011).

Involvement
The fact that population is actually declining arouses mostly negative images. It is most often seen as an incompetence of the local government, while a wide range of opportunities remains underexposed. Without proper research into the causes and consequences and especially the possibilities, this image is hard to change. The last decades the focus in the fields of architecture and urbanism has mostly been on population growth and urbanization. There was always enough need and space for architects and urbanists to exploit and perform their profession in it’s basic form. This basic profession, designing new plans and expansions of the urban tissue, is shifting. As the composition and quantity of population is changing and the need to build more ‘city’ becomes less, the focus shifts more and more to the existing social structure. Architecture and urbanism should increasingly emphasize an accent on improving the existing urban (and rural) tissue.

"More important than the design of cities will be the design of their decay."
- Rem Koolhaas in 'Imagining Nothingness‘ (KOOLHAAS & MAU, 1998).
There is a big gap in design proposals and perspectives for depopulation in The Netherlands.
There are several studies from which the DesignLab Shrinkage of the BNA offers the most
design proposals. It is a comprehensive study into the causes and consequences of
shrinkage in The Netherlands. It consist an overall-study and three case studies on three,
shrinking locations along the borders of The Netherlands (South-Limburg, South-Zeeland
and East-Groningen). The first conclusion they drew is the fact that shrinkage for every
region, on a practical level, manifests itself differently. Resulting in a large quantity of
architectural design, the study offers different perspectives. What is remarkable is that all
the designs are on a ‘small’, functional and practical level, meant to solve direct (visible)
negative consequences. They are focused on the short-term consequences instead of the
causes (DE GRAAF, 2009). The designs seem to lack of an attempt to also solve the
underlying causes.

Conclusions
- In the near future more and more regions and municipalities are faced with declining
numbers of residents and households. In some regions such as East Groningen, this is
already the case. The notion of depopulation is growing.
- Depopulation manifests itself mainly on the countryside (in contradiction to the city),
we need to review our orientation from government and city to habitants and rural
areas.
- The Dutch countryside is subject to other major transformations besides
depopulation, there can be a benefit in the relation with depopulation when developing a
strategy.
- Current strategies are focused on the short-term consequences of depopulation; an appropriate long-term strategy focused on the underlying causes of depopulation is yet to be formed.

3. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

Relevance
Depopulation has various causes that come together and make the depopulation of this time substantial. A distinction of these different causes and a determination of the relevance of each cause is important. It is not the question whether it is possible to influence every aspect of depopulation and encounter the problem as a whole, to find an architectural solution for each problem, but a search for which aspects we can try to suggest possible solutions (DE JONG, 2010).

European context
Depopulation occurs all around Europe, The Netherlands is certainly no exception. It is the question where and why population declines. In the Netherlands we currently still experience a minor growth in total population. This is also the case in most other Western European countries (like Denmark), in Ireland for example the population size even increased with 14 percent in the last ten years. When this growth decreases and even, somewhere in 35 years, changes to shrinkage, this would still be no startling development in European context. Some European countries, mainly the new Eastern Europe countries (Bulgaria, Latvia), are already experiencing shrinkage of the total population, this is mainly due to a very low fertility rate. Political development also plays an important role; the fall of the communistic regimes triggered an enormous migration. South European countries (Spain, Italy) also still experience minor growth but will start shrinking on a much shorter term than The Netherlands. The question arises whether it is important to focus on the total population of countries when it is clear that mainly the rural regions are the victims of shrinkage. Urbanization is a fact and rural regions experience a ‘brain drain’; an emigration of the potential workforce and the higher educated. This is why the comparison between urban and rural areas is more appropriate than looking to differences between countries (VAN DAM, 2005).
Regional prognosis

In order to get a better understanding between rural and urban areas and predict Dutch domestic future scenarios more precisely the CBS (Central Bureau for Statistics) and the PBL (Planning Bureau for the Living environment) made a prognosis model called PEARL (Projecting population Events At Regional Level).

This prognosis is a collaboration between the two institutions as a supplement to the yearly national prognosis from the CBS. It is meant to show a more detailed prognosis on regional level, according to municipalities. They started their collaboration in 2004 and published their first prognosis in 2006. They publish a renewed prognosis every two years, as a thorough update of the existing model. PEARL is an integral calculation model meant to predict the most likely scenarios for the future. It takes people characteristics (gender, age, origin, household position) and household characteristics (type, size, composition) into account.

Defining such a calculation model means a thorough analysis of the current composition of society. A good insight in regional developments is necessary. This composition and regional developments are compared with earlier stages. With this knowledge several assumptions on possible future developments can be made. These assumptions are the key elements in making the prognosis. On first hand the assumptions have a qualitative
character; core indicators constitute an important basis. Secondly the assumptions become quantitative factors, practically this means that the calculation model is generated.

There are several ways to determine these assumptions. In this prognosis they examine the recent past for every component of depopulation (birth- and migration rate). If certain trends become clear, it is most likely that these trends will continue in the near future. If certain trends can be explained according to background variables the assumptions can be underpinned more thoroughly. To understand these ‘driving forces’ better they perform literature studies and make explanation models.

Regional developments, in contrary to the national prognosis, are most often analysed in terms of increasing differences (divergence), decreasing differences (convergence) and stable differences between regions. Most often the basis is a stable ‘different’ development, unless there have been abnormal developments in the recent past or there are substantial reasons from (literature-) research to assume otherwise.

From the different components -birth rate: birth and mortality, migration rate: domestic and foreign migration- the domestic migration is the most important in this prognosis. Though the other factors do have a certain influence on demographic transitions, the domestic migration is the most determining for the differences between regions and therefor the most interesting to investigate.

The domestic migration is modelled in six steps:

1 - Estimation per municipality for the number of people with moving plans for each calendar year (the possibilities to move are important).

2 - Division of the residents that move in two groups: within municipality or to another municipality.

3 - Division of the movers to other municipalities in two groups: short-distance (demographic and housing reasons) and long-distance (study and work).

4 - Determination of destinations for the long-distance movers (with destination patterns).
5 - Determination of destinations for the short-distance movers (with distance model - comparison between attractiveness of a municipality versus the distance)

6 - Demand for housing by households is compared with the housing market (national prognosis for household development is an important parameter).

(DE JONG, 2005)

Causes
To explain the process of depopulation we look at two direct determinants that have an influence on demographic transition: the fertility rate (fertility vs. mortality) and the migration rate (immigration vs. emigration). Without explaining why population declines these two factors are the direct components of population transition. (BUCHER & MAI, 2005). The first factor, the fertility rate, is a more ‘natural’ factor with changing processes over a longer period of time. This factor is harder to influence but better predictable. It is based on choice and is most of the time the result of societal-cultural developments like emancipation of woman and the common acceptance of birth-control pills. In the coming three decades the fertility rate will experience a serious negative development as a consequence of the aging of the baby-boom generation; a demographic term used to describe the birth wave of the generation right after WWII (HARMSEN et al., 2008). To change or influence the fertility rate will mean a focus on societal-cultural trends in society. For the development of a strategy it is needed to examine the current and predicted developments as a direct consequence of this fertility rate, as they are an important factor in possible scenarios and they can have a certain influence on the migration rate.

Scheme determents depopulation.
The other factor, the migration rate, is dependent on several factors. They can be classified in two main divisions: economical and political developments in relation to the spatial conditions. When mentioning 'political' developments we indicate migration as a consequence of dictators, wars etc. Besides a slight immigration, such larger problems are not the case in Western Europe and are therefore not included in the research framework.

The focus will be on the causes of migration as a consequence of economical development. Migration as a result of economical developments almost always has a selective character (to age, life stage, income, education). This is a result of different demands in life stages. As younger people for example go to the city to study or work, older people will look for a place to settle down.

Economical migration is mainly caused by the attractiveness of a (country,) region, city or town. Certain push- and pull-factors determine are the driving forces. The status of these forces determines whether it attracts people or pushes them to emigrate or immigrate.

These driving forces can be assessed on three different scales: on a regional level the possibilities in employment are important; on a municipality/town level the quantity and quality of the housing stock and facilities are decisive; and on the district/ neighbourhood level social and physical characteristics and also the quality of the housing stock are important. Migration is therefore logically not only selective according to the characteristics of the migrant, but also to the characteristics of the region, town or neighbourhood. Similar to economical models the balance between the offer and demand of different factors is important. Regional demography and regional economy have a complex relationship, the question remains whether jobs follow people or people follow jobs (VAN DAM, 2005).
Consequences
Shrinkage has several consequences but can also have several possibilities. Some consequences work mutual and can have a negative amplifying effect. I will briefly explain the effects of seven main consequences of depopulation that are assumed beforehand (VAN DAM, 2005).

- Housing stock; major changes as a consequence of household dilution. In depopulating regions and towns the less attractive (early post-war) neighbourhoods are the most vulnerable. The quality and quantity will have to be adjusted to future housing demands in order to prevent vacancy and decay. A choice will have to be made between construction, demolition or transformation. As depopulation has a selective character (to age, life stage, income, education) it will be very important to understand what the market will look like and to which target groups the housing stock will need to be adjusted. Shrinkage can also lead to a relaxation of the housing market (VERWEST et al., 2009).

- Living conditions; decline of living quality in physical and social structure. This can be a consequence and a cause of depopulation; it is a mutual consequence. This manifests in vacancy, social segregation and loss of social cohesion. Shrinkage can also lead to more participation of residents and a reinforcement of the green environment.

- Facilities; in relation to the local population dynamics and the local quantity of facilities the behaviour of buyers and suppliers is much more defining than the shrinkage or growth of the population. Scale enlargement and concentration due to globalisation are important factors. A decreasing level of facilities could be an important cause instead of consequence of shrinkage.

- Regional economy; since growth of population is an important source of growth of the economy (more people is more products is more production) it is most often feared that the opposite will mean the same. This development is very much related to the basics of capitalism (growth is needed). There are three important factors; the amount, the participation and the efficiency of the workforce. When population declines the amount of the workforce will most certainly also shrink, but this doesn’t mean that a higher level of participation and a higher level of efficiency can compensate this shrinkage. We can also state that the income from the same amount of land can be divided among a smaller
amount of people. As a reaction on the needed growth of capitalism, quality can also be found in life value instead of money value.

- Mobility; as the population development of the past decade has had little influence on the development of mobility it is hard to say what influence shrinkage can have. Our perspectives on the ratio distance vs. time are changing; mobility can be seen as the network connecting all kind of factors.

- Government-policy; the effect of shrinkage in population on the governmental institutions also seems to be minimal. The distribution of funding from the government is more based on equality than on population numbers, and it is flexible. Shrinking municipalities will have to cooperate instead of compete with each other; partnerships between these different institutions will have to be made. When a strategy is developed concerning more freedom for entrepreneurs, the government will have to take a step back. Regional partnerships between different municipalities already arise in current depopulating areas. A focus on the local identity and unicity of the region is important. The region around Heerlen in South-Limburg is a good example of how collaboration on regional level can work in the benefit of multiple villages. In order to encounter the problems of demographic depopulation they concluded it is better to work together instead of counteract each other, by promoting local qualities they intent to focus on the identity and unicity of the region.

"The region around Heerlen deserves credit for understanding and seizing the positive image of the concept 'Parkstad' ('Parkcity'): it unites park and city, green and red, and avoids the often negative branded associations with the Randstad metropolis." - Cor Wagenaar (WAGENAAR, 2005).

- Environment; the development of the quality of milieu is in a very limited degree determined by development of population. Important are developments in individual prosperity, consumer behaviour and technology. It does not mean that when population shrinks our need and use of space also shrinks; this could still grow. In 1972 the 'Club of Rome' presented an influential report 'Boundaries to Growth', concluding that population cannot grow forever, seen the physical limitation of the earth. There are several possibilities in a positive stimulation of greenery what can have a positive effect on living conditions (VAN DAM, 2005).
Conclusions

- The Netherlands is no exception when it comes to depopulation. A comparison between countries is subordinate to the comparison between rural and urban.
- The PEARL prognosis model is based on recent demographic trends and is meant to predict the most likely scenario on a regional level, that of municipalities.
- Although depopulation can have different practical causes on regional level there are two main determines: the fertility rate (socio-cultural influences) and the migration rate (economical influences).
- The migration rate is mainly controlled by the driving forces of a region; these can be assessed on three scales (region, town, district).
- These driving forces consist of certain push- or pull-factors; they determine the attractiveness, or unattractiveness in the case of push-factors, of a place.
- Depopulation has not only a selective character in people (age, education etc.) but also in place (attractiveness). Different target groups will react differently to certain push- or pull factors of a region.

4. CASE STUDY

Introduction

Since depopulation has a selective character in people (age, education etc.) and in place (attractiveness) a focus on a specific region or village is made as a case study. With this case study the conditions of the driving forces (attractiveness) of this place can be discovered. This location is the village 'Bellingwolde', located in 'Bellingwedde', a municipality in East Groningen, in the Northeast of the Netherlands. Bellingwolde is also the project location for architectural design.

The choice for this location is based on three reasons: firstly because according to the PEARL prognosis the municipality is already depopulating and will continue to do so in the upcoming decades. Secondly because it is one of the sparsely populated regions in The Netherlands, the address density calculated by the CBS determines whether a region can be called countryside (CBS, 2009). The third reason is the fact that the region can be defined as a rural region; it is based on the productive cultivation of land. It is not just open landscape, but moreover a region where people (used to) live of the production of the surrounding land. (BIJKER & HAARTSEN 2010, p.6). These three factors make Bellingwolde an extreme example of a depopulating rural village.
History

Bellingwolde is a typical ‘linear-village’ situated along a main road. It is a structure created by a main road that serves as a backbone of the whole community. This backbone/road is positioned on a sand ridge that separates the peat ground from clay grounds. This ridge is created during the Pleistocene and has been inhabited since the eleventh century. The history of Bellingwolde is marked by the struggle with water. Until the seventh century the village was threatened repeatedly by the Dollard, an estuary to the North Sea. Because of the floods Bellingwolde was relocated more and more to the east. The sand ridge, where Bellingwolde is positioned, marked the south-western border, which the Dollard reached in 16th century. Agriculture was the main source for the existence of Bellingwolde. All the activities in the village were related to agriculture. Bellingwolde developed rapidly in the 19th century, due to the transition of grassland with cattle breeding to farmland with vast agricultural and mechanical progresses. Extensive grain production marks the region. This development is still perceptible in the current situation of Bellingwolde; the main road became densely populated with large decorated farmhouses, a product of increasing wealth of the farmers. This development triggered an important change in the social structure of the village.

Formerly a labourer lived on the farm, in the second half of the 19th century they increasingly started to live independently. They built their own enclosures on the infertile ground, located east of the village. These enclosures consisted out of brick buildings but also turf huts. This resulted in poor living conditions for the labourers. This created tension between the two groups, resulted in a revolt by the labourers. Order was restored by support of militaries, but the contradictions in work and living between the rich farmers and the land labourers were enormous. After World War II the interest of agriculture decreased.
and mechanization led to a strong decrease of the demand of labourers. The village became more a commuter village. Because of the increased mobility, people who were attracted by the character of the village arrived.

Observations
To get a first grip on the location an empirical research method is used. The village is examined through observations, resulting in a ‘soft map’. Several visits to the village have been done and through observations and interviews with local residents a good general picture of the village can be made. In order to capture this essential information a ‘soft map’ has been made where all small observation are placed on a map. The idea of this soft map is inspired on a Dutch artist named Jan Rothuizen. The map shows a top view of the village with locations marked with text. In relation to the driving forces of the village we look at four push- or pull-factors.

Regional level - the possibilities of employment are important. What can be noticed is that the agricultural activities of the village have decreased. Some farms are used for other activities like day-care. Several larger functions like primary schools, supermarket, and care for the elderly offer some jobs. The village has become a residential village with most people working elsewhere. There is total absence of possibilities for work on a higher educational level.

Town level - the quality and quantity of the housing stock.
Like in the past the village is being characterized by contrast. The buildings along the main road are part of the protected village-scape of Bellingbolde, this means that the zone surrounding the main road has special regulations. Some are well maintained; others are in an advanced state of decline. Due to fiscal rules the big farmhouses become expensive and due to protecting regulations rebuilding for reuse is hard to achieve. The houses in the ‘attached’ labourer neighbourhood consist of smaller row houses.

Town level - quality and quantity of facilities.
After analyses of the present facilities it can be concluded that the level of present facilities can be referred to as positive. The facilities are all located along the main road; this has some advantages, but also disadvantages. They are easily accessible, but very widely spread throughout the village; there is no concentration. Problematic is the fact that the only supermarket and asylum sanctuary have plans to move to another location.
District level - social and physical characteristics.
When entering the village the main road with its highly decorated farms is overwhelming. The physical spatial qualities of the main road are positive; the main road of the village is regionally also known as the ‘farm boulevard’. It still serves as the backbone of the village but is also the artefact from the past that symbolizing the contrast between farmers and labourers. The power of the main road is being strengthened by a number of vistas; they display an infinite idyllic landscape. The social and physical qualities of the labourer’s neighbourhood are less positive, ‘rural living’ does not come to its rights.

Specific prognosis
To understand the underlying causes of depopulation on a town scale, quantitative data is used to examine the expected and current transition. The expected depopulation for the village Bellingwolde, and municipality Bellingwedde, is severe. An estimated shrinkage of -3.8% in total population is expected for 2040. The numbers are calculated from the PEARL model (CBS and PBL) in combination with the population pyramid of the CBS. A shrinkage of the total population and a growing percentage of the retired population is noticeable. The expected -3.8% is a significant decrease. Though it is not the scenario for total disaster, there are dangerous underlying consequences. Depopulation has an amplifying character. The assumed factors for the prognosis are now mostly assumed to stay stable, though they are likely to strengthen themselves (VAN DAM 2005, p28).

A prognosis of the amount of residents living in the town Bellingwolde, from now till 2040. An extrusion from the PEARL (CBS/ PBL) model.

What is important is to understand who is leaving and why, and who ‘stay behind’. In the
case of Bellingwolde aging will have a major impact, combined with a stagnation of a new
generation. This transformation in the population composition is of importance to the
balance of the working population versus the not working population. The population is best
expressed in three categories; the youth, potential workforce and the pensioners/ elderly.
The youth exert a pressure called ‘green-pressure’ and the pensioners exert a pressure
called ‘grey-pressure’ on the potential workforce. The sum of these two has its effect on
the economic power and flexibility of the village, which itself is again one of the main
influences on the migration rate. This causes the amplifying effect of depopulation.

In order to understand what migration processes takes place at the moment an
examination of the migration numbers of the municipality Bellingwedde, the province
Groningen and The Netherlands in total, is made. There are big differences between these
numbers. There are two specific characteristics for the depopulation in the northern regions
of The Netherlands. Firstly, the demographic transition is mostly caused by domestic
immigration. The birth rate in 2008 was already negative in the municipality Bellingwedde
(-3.5%) and will decrease further in the future due to aging and lesser young couples, yet
this is not the main cause for a strong depopulation. It is the migration rate that causes the
strong depopulation in Bellingwedde; with -22.1% in 2008 (CBS, 2009). Secondly, it is
remarkable that in the region are very strong growers, like the city of Groningen, and very
strong shrinkers, like the municipality of Bellingwedde.

The crucial role of domestic, or even regional, migration ensures that an integral approach
on different scales is necessary (VAN DAM, 2009). There are also big differences
between the popularity of different rural municipalities. Popular rural areas are marked by
their semi-open landscape (combination of agricultural land and nature) and their peripheral
location towards urban regions. The less popular regions are the more peripheral
municipalities along the borders of The Netherlands, with the most travel time to the urban
areas. They are also characterised by large-scale agricultural activities (BIJKER, 2009).
Migration numbers for the municipality Bellingwedde, province Groningen and The Netherlands in 2008. An extrusion of a population rapport 'Gemeente op Maat' from the CBS.

Groningen is a good example of a growing city in a shrinking region. Such cities deal with two processes on two different scales. First, on a regional level they act as a magnet attractive for their diversity and possibilities. They are human capitals and work as optimizers for the development of personal ambitions. Second they act on a national level, they function as a hub, an in-between platform, from where many proceed to the central urban centres of the country. In the northern regions students move to the city to study, the presence of good high education institutions is important. The diversity and activities of the city are attractive for this specific group. On a regional level families move in and out of the direct surroundings of the city, attractive living environment and a good connection with the city is important. Most students that study in Groningen (55%) will move on to the Randstad, a conurbation of the four largest cities in the west The Netherlands. in the this migration has two main reasons; further study and better labour abilities. With the Bsc-Msc system there is a lot of flexibility, which makes it possible for students to do their master study in another town. With a wider range of different educational institutions the Randstad has more possible studies to offer. The city and region of Groningen are at the moment not capable to retain most high-educated students. There is not enough work available on the level they graduated on; so many students are forced to seek work in the Randstad. The internationalization of study and work also stimulates migration to the Randstad, or abroad (VAN DAM, 2009).
Conclusions

- The depopulation of Bellingwolde mainly concerns the aging of the baby-boom generation and a domestic migration of the youth to urban areas.

- The main ‘push-factor’ for the youth to move to the city is the presence of good and high education institutions. The fact that they don’t return to the countryside is the lacking of economical prospect en possibilities.

- As a consequence of this transition the potential workforce looses its majority, this makes the countryside on a long-term no longer economical stable.

- A possible ‘pull-factor’ of Bellingwolde to attract new residents is the green environment and monumental main road gained through the history.

Ratio composition population Bellingwolde. An extrusion of the population pyramid and a population rapport ‘Gemeente op Maat’ from the CBS.
II. Strategy development

5. PRECONDITIONS

Goal
Due to a domestic migration of the youth and aging of the baby-boom generation the potential workforce looses its majority. This type of depopulation occurs in a growing amount of municipalities and is unstoppable. We are dealing with a transition where growth was the standard and shrinkage should become the accepted criterion (SER, 2011). This transitional balance can be reached when a region can become economical, social and spatially vital without special support from the government. A vital region is a region that to a certain extent is able to function on itself, and does not fall into decay with vacant neighbourhoods, leaving and closing facilities or a weak community.

In order to become vital without special support from the government we developed a strategy to guide this transitional phase. The goal of this strategy is to create an independent and sustainable rural community. Independently on the basis of enough healthy functioning (social) facilities such as schools and health care centres. The community should also function as a producing rural community instead of consuming one. Sustainable because the vital region need to be independent over a longer period of time. Demographic decline is a process of several generations; our solution strategy is also aimed at the future. This objective is achieved by the creation of a community consisting of natives and newcomers. The recruitment of these newcomers and enabling an interaction between these two groups are the main challenges of our solution strategy.

This interaction can be achieved by both groups to benefit from their diverse backgrounds, for example, a farmer knows well how you can best in a field sowing as newcomers to the ipad can precisely calculate the economic impact at micro level. In order to become vital as a region now and in the future a proper balance of the working force versus the grey and green pressure is needed. The attraction or the retention of entrepreneurial driven pioneers does not mean that the total population of a region has to grow of even be stable. The region can, or has to, shrink in total amount of population, whilst the balance between the workforce and the grey and green pressures should keep a balance.
Target group
It appears that a contemporary rural community, in the perception of its inhabitants, combines the best of two worlds. On the one hand they experience the decline of compelling social standards as a liberation. And on the other hand the countryside shows a massive appreciation for the solidarity, a positive characteristic that survived the mental urbanization. The countryside offers the freedom of an urban society and the involvement of a countryside community (Steenbekkers et al. 2008). The village community is not replaced with one of choice but has transformed. Local bounds have become looser, more noncommittal and more selective. Because of this it is easier to combine them with networks outside the village (SIMON 2007). Although this image is mainly of inhabitants themselves it could be romanticized, but it still contributes to the interrelatedness of the countryside. This feeling of solidarity, interrelatedness and a place is also what it distinguishes from the other light communities.

The newcomers can best be described as entrepreneurial driven pioneers that aspire a green utopian lifestyle and are able to combine that with the capabilities of the new digital working method. It is a target group that is necessary in order to compensate the structural exodus of potential new generations and thus achieve a vital countryside in the future. They are people who desire to settle down and want to nurture their children in a healthy natural environment with a certain social security, rather than in a dense urban environment.

It is not our goal to maintain the same number of present inhabitants of a region or even grow again, we focus on conservation, or improvement of the quality of life. The total population figures may be reduced, provided that the combination of natives and newcomers should contribute to the value of the living environment. A focus on qualitative depopulation.

A problem is the current image of the countryside; 90% of the Dutch population uses the countryside as a place for recreation. This is, inter alia, stimulated by magazines that advocate the greenery, tranquility and wide spatial characteristics of the countryside. Dwelling and working are subordinate subjects in the image of the countryside. Whereas these notions are the most elemental to convince people to move to the countryside. What is needed as part of the strategy is an image reclaim of the potential target group.
With the objectives of the Dutch government to transform the Dutch economy into a knowledge-based economy a possibility for the Dutch countryside becomes evident. The knowledge-economy makes partially use of ‘the new working method’, where working will no longer be linked to a fixed location. In the digital age working can also be done at home or at semi-public concentrated ‘workscapes’. This makes it less important to live close to the economic heart of the Netherlands, and therefor the countryside becomes an attractive residential environment, especially entrepreneurial driven pioneers who are born and bred on the countryside but educated in the city (KOOPMANS, 2012).

Focus
In order to attract or retain this new target group new earning models will have to be integrated as economical stimulus besides the image reclaim. Use should be made of the available resources at hand. Bellingwolde has some unique qualities, and some generic characteristics of the countryside. Particularly important is the implementation of the possibility to work or undertake with the knowledge from a higher educational level.

The SER (Social Economical Council) has given advice earlier in 2005 on the development of a vital rural economy (‘Kansen voor het Platteland’/ ‘Chances for the Countryside’). In March 2011 the SER published their research rapport on the topic of depopulation (‘Bevolkingskrimp benoemen en benutten’/ ‘Depopulation appoint en exploit’), as an advise for the government. They noted that the countryside is relatively vital, in the essence that citizens and entrepreneurs are very well capable of keeping their own environment vital, as long as there is a balance. The SER advocates for function combinations, renewed entrepreneurship and participation of citizens.

Important is the participation and activation of private parties like entrepreneurs and residents themselves. They are capable to vitalize the region through a collaboration of different societal interested parties. This is especially important for the urgent regions where depopulation is already in process, like Bellingwedde. The local government and housing associations should make an adaption of the housing stock. By focusing on quality through selective demolition, restoration with scaling and reuse, private parties can be attracted. The focus in this project lies on the importance of economical possibilities. Though an adaption of the housing stock needs to be made, this is subordinate to the options of work. To preserve public facilities, like community houses or health institutions, a mixture of
commercial and public functions on location should be possible. Through optimization and flexibility of businesses possibilities the quality and accessibility of public functions can be guaranteed (SER, 2011).

In order to find new earning models a specific task for the Dutch countryside lies wide open, an urgent topic arises. The countryside has always functioned as a production landscape; a landscape which derives its existence from the productive use of land. Over time the countryside has transformed into a consumption landscape, resulting in the unilateral image of the countryside. In order to become vital the countryside should also enhance the notion of work and dwelling. As new economical stimulus the countryside should focus on extensive land use. In the last century the countryside has transformed in different types of energy landscapes; landscapes subject to the making of energy. Examples are the extensive mining of coal or the drilling of gas. These types of energy landscapes were mainly associated with large companies that took the most advantage.

Against the background of a growing notion of sustainability we produce and use energy more and more sustainable, a third generation of sustainable energy landscapes makes its introduction and could very well function as economical impulse. When looking at the possibilities of this innovative energy landscape it is important to understand the relation of policymakers and local inhabitants. The current integration of new energy systems proceeds slowly due to miscommunication and the lack of participation of the local inhabitants.

Implementation
There are two possible strategies on two different scale levels of intervening with a strategy; (A) top-down and (B) bottom-up. The first method, working top-down, is a more traditional standard of regional planning. Big plans made by offices commissioned by the government. This type of planning doesn't work (anymore). There is too much resistance from local residents that want to control their own environment and become more assertive. There is also too little local knowledge involved or unused.

Another possible approach (B) is a more bottom-up strategy based on integration, collaboration and activation of these local residents. They have, with enough willpower and good communication, the ability to put effort into their direct environment. ‘Platform Storm’ is a good example of how local residents are able to group themselves and stop

“I only know failed top-down projects in these complex problematic challenges. You need to seduce, persuade. A bit of optimism in the development ensures that in economics an increasingly amount of psychology is used. It is called ‘choice architecture’ (…) The first projects show us that this type of ‘behavioural economics’ seem to work”.

The Dutch government has a branch office with a special focus on energy called ‘Agentschap NL’. It was originated in 2010 as a fusion between three different agencies. It is an institution for sustainability, innovation and international entrepreneurship (AGENTSCAP NL, ‘Mooi Nederland’, 2011). Agentschap NL started a project in 2009 called ‘Mooi Nederland’. The program stimulates innovative integrated programs by subsidizing several example projects and awards these through an open election with audience prizes. This program could be seen as an attempt to stimulate strategy B. Collective responsibility is a new angle: the search for integrated strategies for the dynamic rural areas - where relationships are established between economic power and social cohesion (REITSMA & HENDRIKS, 2011).

“It is important to monitor the project framework and not immediately start big ambitious projects and initiatives of mutual dependence. For the acceptance of energy landscapes, a large-scaled approach could work to the detriment of a project. Small-scale projects with a strong involvement of local businesses and citizens can often be more quickly and more successful initiated.”
(MvIM, 2011 - P205).

In the process of integrating new energy landscaping 2012 architecten has developed ‘Recyclicity’. It is the design for a process in which they intend to close the loops on local, regional or, in the end, on national scale. The design is mainly based on the flows of water, food, energy and money and generating circuits in these systems. Closing the loop will be a process of many years and they have understood very well that this needs to be a process initiated bottom-up. They state that it is important to raise awareness among the residents themselves and that they need to be triggered to
Conclusions
- A new transitional balance can be reached when a region can become economical, social and spatially vital without special support from the government.
- In order to become vital as a region now and in the future a proper balance of the working force versus the grey and green pressure is needed. In the development of a strategy a focus should be made on the attraction of young professionals.
- There is certainly a potential target group. The problem is the common image of the countryside that is based on recreation and excludes the notions of working a living.
- With the transition into a knowledge-based economy the possibilities of working with high level knowledge on the countryside increases.
- Besides the image reclaim new earning models will have to be integrated as economical stimulus. The integration of a third generation of sustainable energy landscapes could be this stimulus.

- There are two possible strategies on two different scale levels of intervening with a strategy; (A) top-down and (B) bottom-up. In order to create acceptance and resign the responsibility to the local residents a strategy with the bottom-up approach will have more chance of success.

6. SOLUTION STRATEGY

Introduction
The transformation of the countryside will be a process that covers the upcoming decades. Depopulation is a transformation process that can lead to a phase in which a structural change in our living and working pattern can take place. In order to make this new community possible we developed a solution strategy consisting a transformation process which takes from about 1 to 2 generations (10–20 years). Two physical elements have been developed as architectural interventions. The two buildings are the embodiment of the strategy and form the final products of our graduation project. In the appendix the strategy is portrayed in a comic. We choose for this format because it is a good reflection of a transformation through time.
This solution strategy comprises three elements:

1 - Index (a traveling carnival) as initiator

Index is a traveling circus and will, like traditional festival weeks, be active for 1 to 3 weeks in a village. In index original residents and potential newcomers can exchange knowledge, party and launch the ‘ambition map’.

2 - Ambition map (a digital platform) as a communication medium

The ambition map is a digital platform of the village. In ‘Index’ the first layer ‘information’ is added. Determining elements in the village are posted, such as schools, restaurants and a sewage treatment plant. The ambition to map a thread in the transformation process. On this map initiatives can be placed; by bringing supply and demand on this map together, several “cyclifiers” can be developed.

3 - Cyclifiers (multipurpose building) as instruments

The cyclifiers are multifunctional buildings and aim to connect and combine different cycles in the village. They are important places in the village and will act as a certain ‘bearers’ of the new community.
Tool 'Index’

In order to compose the generic suit we designed a building that functions as a traveling fair. This fair hosts an event that initiates the transformation process. It is a kick-off for which everyone is invited and everyone who wants can adopt and share knowledge. Related to usual local festival weeks it is a social gathering with the whole village and its surroundings, young and old, including the potential target group. We hook onto existing practices; acceptance is the first and most important step for a successful strategy. Index will, depending on location, about a week at and operated by a team of experts. It travels around from town to town and is therefore not bound to certain limits. It can be disassembled and built in different configurations. Depending on the precise demands or size of a village it can host different types of program. In the case of Bellingwolde the activities will be focused on the integration of energy opportunities and entrepreneurship. The goal is to make residents aware of the possibilities and opportunities, and thus initiate the transformation process bottom-up.

Basically Index is a communication and knowledge base, but has much more to offer. Besides workshops, lectures and parties a digital platform is made in Index. This stimulates the process and makes it accessible, especially for the young professionals. This digital platform consists of an digital interactive map. It is an instrument that responds to the opportunities of the digital revolution. It is possible to place pictures and videos on Google Earth; we propose to use this to evolve it into an interactive map with a focus on bringing supply and demand in terms of initiatives together. Together with the inhabitants social, economic and energy actors are indexed. The map encourages entrepreneurship and gives people insight into their region. The advantage of internet is that people in the city or elsewhere can participate equally, and evolve themselves to potential newcomers. It is a platform on which the bottom-up approach finds its apotheosis.

Tool 'Cyclifiers

To attract the entrepreneurial driven pioneers the possibility of work and economical advantages need to be established. By offering cheap working places in a representational environment the entrepreneurial driven pioneers have the ability to undertake own businesses. In order to ensure these different programmatic demands,
and to realise the integration of energy actors as economical stimulus a network of nodes will be constructed. These nodes will function as anchorpoints and are defined through the use of the digital interactive map. A selection of current stakeholders in combination with possible vacant places will form the bearers of the strategy. A vital rural community creates its own programme-technical symbiosis. Economical functions, like a supermarket, are be linked to social functions, like a care centre. With the use of the three layers; economical, social-cultural and energy we intend to create a symbiosis of different life cycles. By linking these different types of program the viability and flexibility of the village can be ensured. In ‘Recyclicity’ 2012 Architecten shows the possibilities of closing the cycles in energy on different scale levels. We intend to take this concept to a higher level (2012 ARCHITECTEN, 2011).

It is much better to opt for a more integrated form of energy options. Everywhere are different kinds of energy actors present such as a sewage treatment plant, various types of farming or gardening of the municipality. What lacks is a sustainable ecology concept based on efficient exchange of (waste) products. Any form of energy makes a definite course from production to consumption. It is the goal to connect these different life cycles in order to achieve a form of metabolism. A good example in the energy cycle of a village is a biogas plant, which processed green waste into raw material and produces biogas. In the design project, the cultivation of algae is combined with flexible workplaces, a coffee cafe and a performance centre.

7 EVALUATION

Conclusions

What is clear is that in the near future more and more regions and municipalities are faced with declining numbers of residents and households. In some regions such as East Groningen, this is already the case. Depopulation manifests mainly on the countryside (in contradiction to the city), which is why we need to review our orientation from government and city to habitants and rural areas. Although
Depopulation can have different practical causes on regional level there are two main determines: the fertility rate (socio-cultural influences) and the migration rate (economical influences). The migration rate is mainly based on the driving forces -the attractiveness- of a place. Therefore depopulation has not only a selective character in people (age, education etc.) but also in place (attractiveness). The depopulation of Bellingwolde mainly concerns the aging of the baby-boom generation and a domestic migration of the youth to urban areas. The main ‘push-factor’ for the youth to move to the city is the presence of good and high education institutions. The fact that they don’t return to the countryside is the lacking of economical prospect en possibilities. As a consequence of this transition the potential workforce looses its majority, this makes the countryside on a long-term no longer vitally stable.

A new transitional balance can be reached when a region can become economical, social and spatially vital without special support from the government. In order to become vital as a region now and in the future a proper balance of the working force versus the grey and green pressure is needed. In the development of a strategy a focus is be made on the attraction of entrepreneurial driven pioneers. The problem of this target group is the common image of the countryside that is based on recreation and excludes the notions of working and living. With the transition into a knowledge-based economy, the possibilities of working with high level knowledge on the countryside increases. Besides the image reclaim, new earning models will have to be integrated as economical stimulus. There are two possible strategies on two different scale levels of intervening with a strategy, in order to create acceptance and resign the responsibility to the local residents a strategy with the bottom-up approach will have more chance of success.

The transformation of the countryside will be a process that covers the upcoming decades. Depopulation is a transformation process that can lead to a phase in which a structural change in our living and working pattern can take place. In order to make this new community possible we developed a solution strategy consisting a transformation process, which takes from about 1 to 2 generations (10-20 years).

Recommendations:

Our solution strategy is based on the activation of local residents and the attraction of possible newcomers. ‘The government’ however, initiates the transformation process. With ‘index’ as initiator the process is transferred to the residents. Because the initiative lies with
a good stimulus of residents, we think it is important to inspire policymakers. To end this thesis I will conclude with several recommendations, that could be used by policy-makers, regional planners and/or other colleagues:

- Depopulation is a slow, but certain process. When developing a strategy to encounter the negative consequences, try to look at the root causes and their consequences on the long-term, instead of the visible short-term consequences. Though it is also important to address physical decay, structural vacancy or the loss of social functions, it is more important to focus on the attractiveness of the region at large, in order to escape a vicious circle.

- In order to compensate the structural exodus of potential new generations there must be an innovative perspective on the usage of the identity and unicity of a region. The total population figures may be reduced, provided that the combination of natives and newcomers should contribute to the value of the living environment. A focus on qualitative depopulation.

- The countryside is constructed by pioneers that took a chance and through cooperative thinking made a social and economical vital living environment. It is exactly this mind-set, which should revive again.

- Local residents and potential newcomers are very well capable of taking care for their own living environment. Besides an initiative a communication platform should be introduces as stimulus for the cooperative mind-set.

- The majority of the Dutch city-dwellers have an image of the countryside based on recreation (consummation). In order to attract potential newcomers this image needs to be reclaimed. They will need to understand, see or experience themselves, that the life on the countryside has more to offer.

- The countryside is from origin based on the productive cultivation of land, that is the real power of the vast open land. Besides agriculture this exploitation can also be found in the production of energy as new innovative earning model.

- The countryside, in contrary to the city, has the capability to offer the best of two worlds; a healthy green living environment with social certainty and, with the rise of the new (digital) working method, possibilities to work with higher level education. A clear link between the digital and the physical should be ensured.
LITERATURE

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APPENDIX

1 - posters strategy as comic
2 - research Ule Koopmans; 'Rural Idyll 2.0'
Onder het pictogram op de afdrukverspreider draagulig genereren!

Voorbeeld van praktijkgedreven veroudering-industrie van POES. Plannen van plaatsen op de al-ouderen netwerkkaart, of als bewoners samen plannen sallar nemen.

Om mensen aan te wenden aan dit soort van archontie van POES. De mogelijkheden te redden van het terrains en te bereiken van de veilingen van het begrip van het voornemen inzicht.

3D-afbeelding is de 'software' (regels) met de 'hardware' (gebouwen) losgekoppeld!

Hoe wordt de voorspelde versie van de 'software' (gebouwen) losgekoppeld?

De bedrijfsexport van de 'software' (gebouwen) losgekoppeld!