



– Homenaje a Joan Noguera Tur –

TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local
e-ISSN: 2386-9968
Número 8 (2021), 280-309
DOI 10.7203/terra.8.20366
IIDL – Instituto Interuniversitario de Desarrollo Local

European shrinking rural areas: key messages for a refreshed long-term European policy vision

Andrew Copus

Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland (FI)
andrew.copus@uef.fi
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0382-836X>

Petri Kahila

Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland (FI)
petri.kahila@uef.fi
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2954-7689>

Thomas Dax

Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain Research (BAB),
Vienna (AT)
thomas.dax@bab.gv.at
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0281-0926>

Katalin Kovács

KRTK Institute for Regional Studies, Budapest (HU)
kovacs.katalin@krtk.hu
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1690-2570>

Gergely Tagai

KRTK Institute for Regional Studies, Békéscsaba (HU)
tagai.gergely@krtk.hu
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4556-4355>

Ryan Weber

Nordregio, Stockholm (SE)
ryan.weber@nordregio.org

Julien Grunfelder

Nordregio, Stockholm (SE)
julien.grunfelder@nordregio.org

David Meredith

TEAGASC, Dublin (IE)
David.Meredith@teagasc.ie
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9211-0869>

Mar Ortega-Reig

University of Valencia (ES)
m.violeta.ortega@uv.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6798-7119>

Simone Piras

James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen (UK)
simone.piras@hutton.ac.uk
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0334-6800>

Linnea Löfving

Nordregio, Stockholm (SE)
linnea.lofving@nordregio.org
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7195-3082>

John Moodie

Nordregio, Stockholm (SE)
john.moodie@nordregio.org
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8795-2001>

Matti Fritsch

Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland (FI)
matti.fritsch@uef.fi
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6203-5917>

Adrián Ferrandis

University of Valencia (ES)
adrian.ferrandis@uv.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9478-603X>



Esta obra se distribuye con la licencia Creative Commons
Reconocimiento-No Comercial-Sin Obra Derivada 4.0 Internacional

SECCIÓN ARTÍCULOS

El retroceso de las zonas rurales europeas: mensajes clave para una visión renovada de la política europea a largo plazo

Resumen: El artículo comienza con un debate sobre el concepto de “contracción” y sus orígenes, fuera del ámbito del desarrollo rural. A partir de ahí, se muestra la distribución de las zonas rurales en contracción en toda Europa. A continuación, se describen los procesos socioeconómicos que impulsan el declive demográfico en las zonas rurales, utilizando tanto la revisión bibliográfica del proyecto ESCAPE como los resultados de sus ocho estudios de caso. Seguidamente, se describe de forma breve la evolución de las intervenciones de la UE para paliar los efectos del declive demográfico, y se hacen algunas observaciones sobre el panorama político/de gobernanza actual. Concluimos considerando cómo una mejor comprensión del problema y del proceso de reducción puede conducir a intervenciones más eficaces, en el contexto de una visión renovada a largo plazo para el medio rural europeo. Este último debe reconocer plenamente el creciente abanico de oportunidades a las que se enfrentan las zonas rurales, a medida que la COVID-19 cambia estas y se aceleran las transformaciones en el comportamiento laboral y en la geografía de la actividad económica, y se cumplen los anteriores cambios graduales en la tecnología y los mercados.

Palabras clave: Espacios rurales, declive demográfico, enfoque neo-endógeno, crecimiento inclusivo.

European shrinking rural areas: Key messages for a refreshed long-term European policy vision

Abstract: The paper begins with a discussion of the concept of “shrinking”, and its origins, outside the realm of rural development. Building on this, the paper shows the distribution of shrinking rural areas across Europe. Using both the project’s literature review and findings from its eight case studies the socio-economic processes which drive demographic decline in rural areas are then described. A brief account of the evolution of EU interventions to alleviate the effects of shrinking, and some remarks about the current policy/governance landscape follow. We conclude by considering how a better understanding of the problem and process of shrinking may lead to more effective interventions, within the context of a refreshed long-term vision for Rural Europe. The latter needs to fully acknowledge the expanding repertoire of opportunities confronting rural areas as COVID-19 changes in working behaviour, and the geography of economic activity, accelerate, and fulfil, previously incremental shifts in technology and markets.

Key words: Rural areas, demographic decline, neo-endogenous approach, inclusive growth.

Recibido: 03 de diciembre de 2020

Devuelto para revisión: 29 de abril de 2021

Aceptado: 17 de junio de 2021

Referencia / Citation:

Copus, A., Kahila, P., Dax, T., Kovács, K., Tagai, G., Weber, R., Grunfelder, J., Meredith, D., Ortega-Reig, M., Piras, S., Löfving, L., Moodie, J., Fritsch, M., y Ferrandis, A., (2021). European shrinking rural areas: Key messages for a refreshed long-term European policy vision. *TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local*, (8), 280-309. DOI 10.7203/terra.8.20366

IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. El declive demográfico sigue siendo una cuestión muy importante de la política rural y regional europea.2. En toda Europa siguen siendo evidentes los amplios contrastes entre el Este y el Oeste en cuanto a causas, resultados y trayectorias.3. A nivel más local, la equifinalidad (resultados similares asociados a diferentes impulsores/procesos) requiere una cuidadosa atención a las lógicas de intervención.4. Se requieren soluciones híbridas, que incorporen niveles realistas de mitigación con una adaptación sensible a la comunidad.5. Las respuestas políticas de la UE han evolucionado desde los efectos sectoriales y de propagación urbana hacia enfoques neo-endógenos.6. Se prevén nuevos cambios más allá de los “objetivos de Lisboa”, prestando mayor atención al crecimiento inclusivo, a los objetivos de bienestar más amplios y a las capitales territoriales.7. Estos cambios de paradigma exigen claridad de conceptos, orientación adaptada a nivel local y procesos inclusivos de múltiples partes interesadas. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Demographic decline remains a very important European rural and regional policy issue.2. Across Europe broad East-West contrasts in terms of causes, outcomes and pathways are still evident.3. More locally, equifinality (similar outcomes associated with different drivers/processes) necessitates careful attention to intervention logics.4. Hybrid solutions, incorporating realistic levels of mitigation with community-sensitive adaptation, are required.5. EU policy responses have evolved away from sectoral and urban spread effects towards neo-endogenous approaches.6. Further shifts beyond “Lisbon goals”, paying greater regard to inclusive growth, broader well-being objectives, and territorial capitals are anticipated.7. Such paradigm shifts necessitate clarity of concepts, locally tailored guidance, and inclusive multi-stakeholder processes. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. El declivi demogràfic continua sent una qüestió molt important de la política rural i regional europea.2. En tota Europa continuen sent evidents els amplis contrastos entre l’Est i l’Oest quant a causes, resultats i trajectòries.3. A nivell més local, l’equifinalitat (resultats similars associats a diferents impulsors/processos) requereix una acurada atenció a les lògiques d’intervenció.4. Es requereixen solucions híbrides, que incorporen nivells realistes de mitigació amb una adaptació sensible a la comunitat.5. Les respostes polítiques de la UE han evolucionat des dels efectes sectorials i de propagació urbana cap a enfocaments neo-endògens.6. Es preveuen nous canvis més enllà dels “objectius de Lisboa”, prestant major atenció al creixement inclusiu, als objectius de benestar més amplis i a les capitals territorials.7. Aquests canvis de paradigma exigeixen claredat de conceptes, orientació adaptada a nivell local i processos inclusius de múltiples parts interessades. |
|--|---|--|

1. INTRODUCTION¹

This paper provides a summary of the findings² of ESPON ESCAPE, a project carried out during 2019-20, which focused upon the widespread European phenomenon of rural demographic decline (shrinking), with the aim of re-assessing the rationale(s) of EU-funded policy interventions, within the evolving multi-level governance landscape.

Because the most accessible and densely populated rural areas of Europe are generally thriving economically, whilst conversely, the least prosperous areas tend to have fewer inhabitants, simple comparisons of urban and rural (per capita) averages tend to obscure the reality that a substantial proportion of the European countryside continues to experience demographic shrinkage, and that this phenomenon may well spread further in coming decades.

In the years immediately following the 2008 financial crisis, the necessity to identify and support “engines” of post-modern competitiveness which could underpin European recovery understandably resulted in a focus upon those urban areas which host knowledge-based activities. However, there is some evidence to suggest that such a strategy tends to deliver national (average) growth, but with the penalty of increasing regional disparities (Farole et al., 2018; EC, 2017a). A slowing, or reversal, of convergence has occurred because some areas, especially rural ones, are being left behind. To put it another way, the “spread effects”, which are generally assumed to transfer the benefits of growth from economic “hotspots” to the rest of the European territory, do not appear to be working very well.

A decade has now passed since the Financial Crash, and attention has to some extent switched to those cities, towns and regions which have contributed less to the recovery, and for whom levels of economic activity and wellbeing have either stagnated or regressed. Early investigations of the “shrinking cities” phenomenon have suggested that there is no “quick fix”, and that adaptation to entrenched processes of decline, is a more realistic objective than mitigation (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012).

Ultimately the ESCAPE project aimed to identify how shrinking rural areas could be better served by a range of policies (Rural Development and Cohesion/regional Policy in particular) across the range of governance levels, from EU, through national, regional and local. In order to achieve this, it needed to understand the many facets and manifestations of population decline, and the complex ways in which these are tied into wider socio-economic processes (as both causes and effects), especially where they seem to drive cumulative processes of decline. This paper summarises the findings, paying particular attention to the conceptual framework, understanding the shrinking process, and underlying principles for intervention which need to be acknowledged in our long-term vision for rural Europe.

¹ This paper draws together the key findings of a recently completed ESPON project: ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas: Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance). We had hoped that Joan Noguera would lead the Valencia research team in this project, so it is fitting that we dedicate this paper to him, with profound appreciation and respect, in celebration of our long, fruitful, and enriching collaboration.

² The paper covers a large volume of material in a concise form. Readers who wish to explore the findings in more detail are invited to visit the project web pages, where a substantial number of documents are available.

1.1. Defining Shrinking

Although rural population decline has been a long-term and global phenomenon (Franklin, 2019), the term “shrinking” was first applied to geographical spaces in the form “shrinking cities”. Only later was it applied to “shrinking regions”, and to rural regions in particular.

Early in the first decade of this century “shrinking” began to be used to describe processes of severe urban population decline (Grasland et al., 2008, p.22-23). In the shrinking cities the process was mainly linked to industrial restructuring and associated employment problems. At that time, wider regional (and rural) development processes characterised by substantial demographic decline, and often driven by similar restructuring pressures, were designated by a variety of terms, implying different nuances in the respective languages.

The term “shrinking region”, or “schrumpfende Regionen”, first became prominent in the German literature (Müller and Siedentop, 2004), and in the analysis of regional demographic change in Germany, and especially the New Laender. A seminal research report carried out in 2008 for the European Parliament by Grasland et al. “mainstreamed” the term and established a clear definition of specific simplicity: “a region that is ‘shrinking’ is a region that is losing a significant proportion of its population over a period greater than or equal to one generation” (Grasland et al., 2008, p.25).

The interest in shrinking rural regions mainly arose out of a research/policy discourse about long-lasting substantial population decline and its regional development implications. The majority of subsequent usages of the term have also related exclusively or primarily to demographic change (Ubarevičienė et al., 2016; ESPON, 2017; Šimon and Mikešová, 2014). However, some subsequent contributions to the literature extend the definition beyond demography, usually applying it also to the economy (and inter-related aspects of quality of life) of the region. Referring to such a concept of “complex shrinkage” Sepp and Veema (2017, p.6) state that “Regional shrinkage is a simultaneously demographic and economic process – demography and economy in combination are potential drivers of shrinking”. Moving beyond a purely demographic analysis of shrinking is helpful, because it opens up the subject to explore background socio-economic cause and effect processes within which the mechanics of demographic change are embedded.

There is a danger that “shrinking” becomes synonymous with all negative cumulative causation processes. Therefore, in the interests of clarity, we prefer to maintain the definitional primacy of demographic trends. Meaningful policy conclusions and recommendations necessitate a clear distinction between “simple” and “complex” shrinking, whilst acknowledging the importance of wider, and often recursive, socio-economic and territorial processes of rural decline.

It is also important to keep in mind the fact that because of the natural inertia associated with demographic age structures, current demographic shrinkage is often a result of past problems and historic migration flows, and that present-day migration is likely to have implications for future generations.

The Grasland (2008) definition of shrinking as “a region that is losing a significant proportion of its population” suggests that we should not define shrinking in terms of relatively small negative changes, whilst pragmatically acknowledging that exact numerical or proportionate thresholds must always be specific to the data source and scale of analysis. What is important about the Grasland definition is the emphasis upon

sustained decline – over at least one generation. This helpfully “filters out” short term fluctuation, steering us away from the temptation to content ourselves with a simple change in population numbers between two dates which are less than “a generation” (two-three decades) apart.

The Grasland report was forward looking, basing the identification of shrinking regions on (NUTS 2) population projections (see also Oswalt, 2008; Milbert, 2015; ÖROK, 2019; Verwest and van Dam, 2010). On the basis of these projections the risk of shrinkage was associated with the forecast duration (measured in decades). The ADAPT2DC analysis (Šimon and Mikešová, 2014) of demographic change in the CEECs adopted a threshold of -2% over the period 2001-2011 at NUTS 3, and -5% at Local Administrative Unit (LAU) level 2 (same period). A recent initiative in the Netherlands (quoted by Sepp and Veemaa, 2017) sets twin criteria of a 1.5% decline in population, and a 5% decrease in households (both projected over the period 2014-20).

Typologies of shrinking rural areas may reflect the level of risk (of shrinking) (Grasland, 2008), the balance of demographic components driving the decline (ESPON Demifer, 2010), or the wider regional development processes associated with shrinking (Weichmann, 2003).

A number of other threshold/definition/typology examples could be cited – but the key point is that the words “losing a significant proportion of its population” need to be interpreted in the context of available data – there is no simple universal criterion. Furthermore, there is scope for creativity in finding ways to reflect additional characteristics such as risk, duration, demographic components, and associated socio-economic processes of decline.

1.2. A slow car crash...

Shrinking is usually driven by the selective out-migration of younger, better educated people, (females in particular). Through this process the reproductive cohorts of the population become depleted, which in the medium- to long-term intensifies the decline (Wiest and Leibert, 2016; Oedl-Wieser et al., 2019). Such changes have been particularly noticeable in the post-socialist rural regions where, during the 1990s, outmigration and a significant fall in fertility rates affected both the current development trend and the demographic legacy.

In the North and West of Europe many rural regions, especially those benefiting from attractive landscapes, have been the recipients of large-scale retirement migration. Although temporarily boosting absolute population numbers this does nothing to improve the age structure of such regions, indeed it compounds the problem for the future.

Age structure is of course a wider issue, since increased numbers in the older cohorts raises the financial burden of the services which they require, whilst at the same time the reduced share of economically active population groups tends towards adverse effects on economic activity, associated fiscal returns, and limits the regional capacity for innovative policy actions to mitigate or adapt to shrinking.

Demographic legacy effects of past selective outmigration deliver “top-heavy” age structures and rates of natural decrease which are very difficult to turn around. One consequence of this is that it is extremely important to take account of what population projections can tell us about unavoidable lagged effects in the future (Grasland et al., 2008).

Demographic shrinking is thus characterised by long-term, slow-running cycles, which are, to an extent, defined and regulated by human life expectancy. Because of this it is very challenging to change or reverse established population trends within the ten or twenty-year time horizon typically associated with regional policy. The complexity of the process has been analysed in recent studies, searching for alternative pathways and action programmes to either cope with the situation, or elaborate effective initiatives which alter the regional trajectory. As with processes of *peripherization* (Lang and Görmar, 2019) the inherent negative “downward-spirals” are very difficult to break.

1.3. Tipping Points, Turnarounds and Critical Mass

Whether shrinkage is reversible or not, is, so far, an unresolved question. A negative view is adopted by those who write of Europe’s “demographic suicide” due to sub-replacement total fertility rates (<2.1), which render population sustainability dependent upon immigration (Fondation Robert Schuman, 2018). Others use the term “low fertility trap” to describe the same risk (European Opinion, 2005; The Guardian, 2015). The term “point of no return” generally refers to the situation where population decline has become so embedded as to be irreversible. Some experts argue that this point is associated with an ultra-low total fertility rate (<1.5). In terms of complex shrinkage, it might also describe the situation where territorial assets (especially human and social capital) fall short of a critical mass required for “meaningful” endogenous development processes. The term “tipping point” is used in the current context either to describe the situation where immigrants become more numerous than people born within the country, or where the dependent age groups (children and pensioners) exceed the working age population.

A more positive answer is supported by examples of reconversion even where the minimum capacity for local action seems to have disappeared. For example, in Iceland and other Nordic countries there are a number of initiatives in highly depleted contexts (OECD, 2017).

Another kind of positive response might be based upon evidence for a “population turnaround” or “counter-urbanisation”, whereby centripetal migration flows towards cities and towns are superseded by movement in the opposite direction, generally in pursuit of high amenity residential environments. This seemed to be a historic change of trend, first identified in the USA in the 1970s (Brown and Wardwell, 1980) and then in the UK at the turn of the century (Champion, 2001; Moss, 2006). Nordic researchers are more sceptical that any turnaround has occurred (Amcoff, 2006; Grimsrud, 2011), and within the UK Stockdale (2016) has pointed out that it is not a simple turning of the tide - multi-directional migration flows affect rural and urban regions in very intricately ways.

1.4. Complex Shrinkage

The notion of *complex shrinkage* places demographic decline within a broader context of socio-economic change, relating to levels of economic activity and employment, sectoral structure, productivity, innovation, social capital, “institutional thickness” and governance capacity. Detrimental effects from economic restructuring are not limited to remote places, but are generally associated with particular types and scales of economic activity, structural change, skills availability, capacity for regeneration and adaptation processes etc. Softer assets, such as place-based branding, local image, personal perceptions of regional opportunities and “local pride”, as well as institutional factors and social capital, might also be decisive elements for regional dynamics, and similarly for

strategies to cope with shrinking processes. Reductions in material infrastructure, accessibility, and provision of services, as well as defensive attitudes of local population, stakeholders and politicians may also accelerate the downward spiral of regional development. All these can affect the “liveability” of such areas, erase positive views on agency and available opportunities, triggering further out-migration, and exacerbating the shrinking process.

From the perspective of residents in such areas, one of the key issues is likely to be service delivery. Population decline results in changes in service demand, costs, and local taxation revenue. In many member states these constraints are combined with the effects of austerity, and the increasing adoption of New Public Management approaches, and usually have disproportionate effects on less well-integrated spaces, such as peripheral areas, border areas and areas of natural constraints (mountain areas and islands).

Thus “complex shrinkage”, is a multi-faceted self-perpetuating syndrome of decline. Ultimately the outcome tends to show up in key regional economic indicators, such as gross regional product (GRP), in a range of adverse socio-economic developments, together with intangible effects of regional identity, and reduced trust in future development options. However, some of the social or institutional processes involved are not easy to quantify, and require a more qualitative or narrative approach.

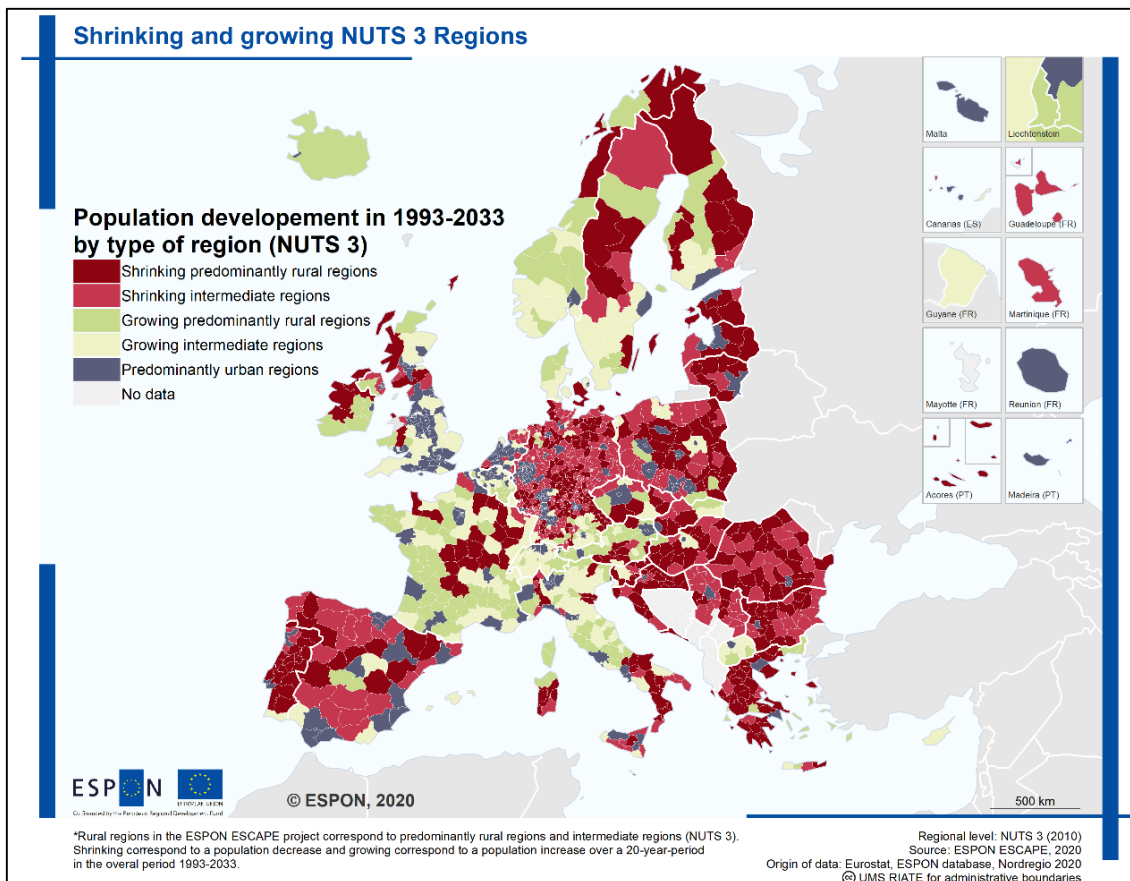
Later in this paper four typical drivers of shrinking, derived both from the academic literature, and from eight case studies carried out by the ESCAPE project, will be presented. However, before doing so, it will be helpful to set the geographical context, through an account of a mapping exercise at regional (NUTS 3) and local (LAU 1/2) level.

2. THE GEOGRAPHY OF RURAL SHRINKING IN EUROPE

Demography has long been one of the best-served socio-economic issues in terms of data availability, partly due to the fundamental need to quantify the population in order to tax it and to provide appropriate services, and partly due to the absolute/binary nature of change (births, deaths and migration). However, an element of uncertainty is introduced when we consider projections of future population change. The identification of shrinking rural regions used harmonised Eurostat data at NUTS 3 and LAU level.

A foundational step, which helps frame subsequent analysis, is to define the subset of European (NUTS 3) regions which both fulfil the Grasland shrinking criteria, and which may also be considered “rural”. The latter criterion was addressed by adopting the Eurostat (2019) definition of “predominantly rural” and “intermediate” regions, whilst excluding from the analysis those designated “predominantly urban”. This subset of regions was then screened in order to identify those regions which have experienced population decline over one or more generations (defined in this context as 20 years), as recorded in the recent past, and projected for the future. The exact calibration of this definition was inevitably a compromise between, on the one hand, making maximum use of the rich availability of data for some EU Member States (MS), and on the other, extending our analysis to cover as many regions as possible. This resulted in the selection of two 20-year periods, 1993-2013, and 2013-2033. The reference year is 2013 because the projection data at regional level from Eurostat is based on the year 2013 and is only available for that year. Data constraints also led to this analysis being carried out with the 2010 version of NUTS.

Figure 1. Shrinking Rural NUTS 3 Regions



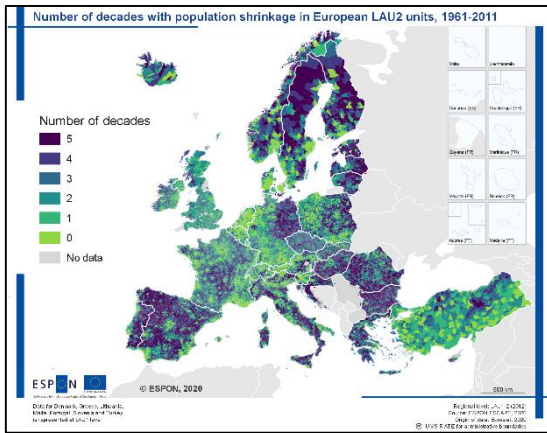
To be defined as “shrinking”, a rural or intermediate region had to exhibit a loss of (total) population over either one or both these periods. This combination of criteria identified a total of 687 regions (658 of which are within the EU 28) (Figure 1). Thus, according to this definition 59% of all EU28 Predominantly Rural and Intermediate regions are defined as shrinking. This equates to almost half the total number of NUTS 3 regions in the EU. These regions account for 40% of the EU28 area and contained one third of the (2016) population.

More detailed analysis of the chronology of shrinking (Copus et al., 2020, section 3.2), and of the relative importance of the two demographic components (section 3.3) underline broad macro-regional differences, with the East and South of Europe tending to show more evidence of “active” shrinking, driven by current or more recent migration, and the North and West characterised more by age-structure legacy effects, and negative natural change.

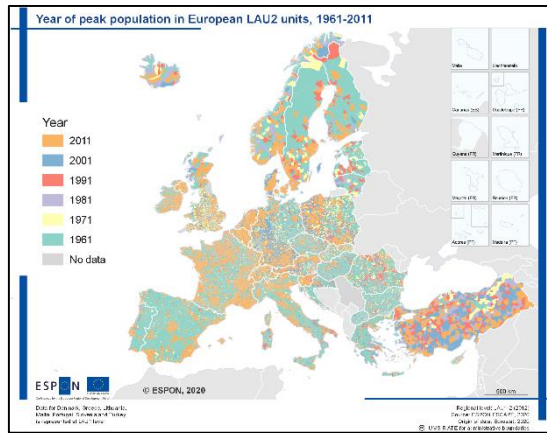
Data available at LAU level is generally more limited (selected years, no components of change, no comparable projections, etc.), restricting the analysis which may be carried out to the examination of trends in total population. However, such analysis is valuable, since the socio-economic processes which result in shrinking operate at a range of geographic scales, very often smaller than NUTS 3 regions. For this reason, various indicators of the duration and intensity of population loss, and of the distribution of population dynamics within higher territorial structures (NUTS 3) have been developed, using a historical (1961-2011) LAU-level dataset, available from Eurostat. All LAU areas (urban as well as rural) have been included in the analysis below.

Figure 2. Local patterns of simple shrinkage in Europe

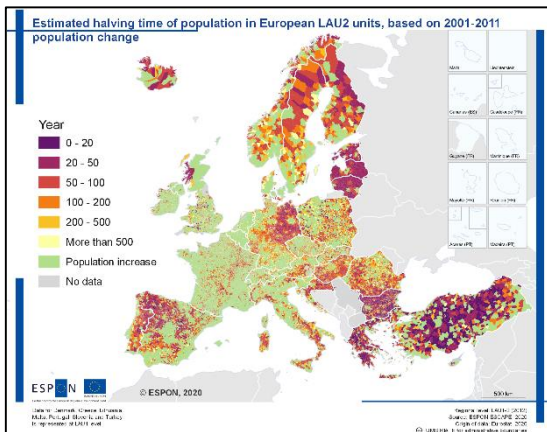
a) Number of decades with population shrinkage in European LAU2 units, 1961-2011



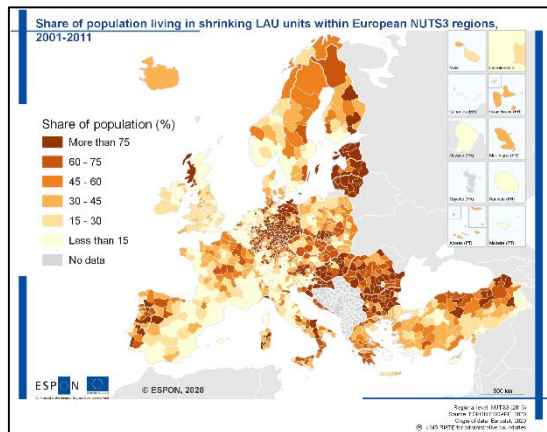
b) Year of peak population in European LAU2 units, 1961-2011



c) Estimated halving time of population in European LAU2 units based on 2001-2011 population change



d) Share of population living in shrinking LAU units within European NUTS3 regions, 2001-2011



Population figures covering such an extended period allow us to determine where shrinking is a long-established, a new, or a temporary issue. Figure 2a shows that many LAU areas, especially in East-Central and Southern Europe, have experienced prolonged periods (four-five decades) of population decrease since 1960s. A smaller number of areas, including the most dynamic urban zones in Western and Central Europe, exhibited continuous population increase over the past fifty years.

LAU level patterns of the year of peak population (Figure 2b) also reveal a rather divided Europe. The majority of LAU units (especially in the southern and eastern parts of Europe, and in rural areas), reached their peak population in the 1960s, and have faced more or less continuous population loss since then. Others (mostly in the Atlantic and Central parts of the continent, and in dynamic, urban regions of various countries) showed continuous growth, and only reached their population maximum in 2011.

A different perspective on this chronology is gained by identifying the period (decade) of the fastest rate of shrinkage (Piras et al., 2020, Map 3). In Western Europe shrinkage mostly peaked between 1961 and 1981, whereas in most post-socialist areas the peak was

reached after the turn of the century. There are also country-specific variations (1960s in Portugal and Italy, 1990s in Croatia), linked to industrialisation, opportunities of international migration, and political events.

Variations in the intensity of shrinking can be illustrated by mapping the average population decrease per decade or the average population change over different periods (Piras et al., 2020). The most seriously affected territories in Europe (8-10% or more population loss over a decade) are to be found in Bulgaria, the Baltic countries, the former German Democratic Republic, many parts of Croatia, Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal. Projecting future population trends by the simple forward extrapolation of measured rates of current (and past) shrinkage (the halving time of population) reveals similar patterns (Figure 2c).

Information derived from LAU-level population dynamics reminds us that NUTS 3 average data cannot tell us very much about the degree of homogeneity across regions – there may be more complex patterns at the LAU level. A map of the share of population living in shrinking LAUs within a NUTS 3 region (Figure 2d) shows that the most uniformly shrinking regions are in East-Central European countries, such as the Baltic states, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, or Bulgaria. Similarly, the share of population living in shrinking LAUs is also high in regions of Eastern Germany and (peripheral) parts of Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal and the Nordic countries.

In other parts of Europe there is greater diversity of demographic trends among LAU units within NUTS 3 regions (Piras et al., 2020). While the most common region types are shrinking NUTS 3 with a high share of shrinking LAUs, and growing NUTS 3 with a high share of growing LAUs, there are some exceptions (a high share of shrinking LAUs within growing NUTS 3) situated in Spain, the Nordic countries, Poland and Germany. There are also cases (e.g. in France, Czechia and Slovakia), where growing LAUs are overrepresented within shrinking NUTS 3 regions.

3. DIVERSITY OF PROCESS IS OFTEN MASKED BY EQUIFINALITY OF OUTCOME

We have already argued that the socio-economic processes which drive demographic shrinking are diverse. However, across a range of local contexts, each with its unique history and configuration of disadvantages, the demographic outcomes are remarkably similar. In systems theory such a cause and effect relationship is known as “equifinality”. The importance of this observation lies in the fact that it sets a trap for policy makers – superficial comparisons between different contexts may suggest that common solutions would be appropriate. In fact, the opposite is the case, it is only by taking careful account of unique local socio-economic processes that effective tailored solutions can be devised. We will return to this argument, as the point of departure for appropriate intervention logics, but first it will be helpful to describe four common processes, which may be observed in different combinations (pathways) in various European contexts.

1. *Economic Restructuring*: the phenomenon of shrinkage is commonly linked to the decrease of the agricultural workforce. Most European rural regions have, at some time, witnessed a dramatic change of agricultural structures with severe socio-economic consequences, and the effects are still observed in many Southern and Eastern European rural regions which have a strong reliance on agricultural potentials (Lukić, 2013). In some contexts, the process has, more recently, been exacerbated by

the decline of traditional extractive or manufacturing activities. Such economic restructuring is generally accompanied by other adverse territorial trends that impact negatively on well-being and cultural life; such as the loss of scope for associated economic activities, reduced basic public services, degradation of natural spaces, abandonment of settlements, weakening of local identity, deterioration of material and immaterial cultural heritage, and decrease in local governance structure and capacity (Sánchez-Sánchez, 2016). Land abandonment may be associated with ecological effects or soil erosion.

2. *Locational Disadvantage*: rural shrinkage is also often associated with “negative” locational characteristics, which are perceived as hampering pathways to economic growth. These are often associated with a poor resource endowment (Nikitović, 2016, Tanović et al., 2014), isolation (Kukovič, 2018), sparsity and proximity to borders (Bański and Flaga, 2013; Darques, 2004).
3. *Peripherization*: this shrinking process should not be confused with peripherality, which is a locational disadvantage (Copus et al., 2017a,b). Peripherization is distinguished by being the consequence of macro-scale processes of spatial reorganisation of economic activity (Lang and Görmar, 2019) and globalisation. Peripherization occurs at different spatial scales, often compounding the effects of pre-existing locational disadvantage (described above).
4. *Disruptive Events and Political/Systematic Transitions*: the final type of rural shrinking process involves the impact of historical events or transitions, such as those experienced by the CEEC countries during the course of the establishment of state socialist regimes in the 1950s, and at the end of the socialist era in 1989, the Balkan wars in the 1990s, or the EU integration process in the 2000s. Such changes can bring severe repercussions in regions with weak economic structures, triggering shrinkage at both national and rural levels. Persistent gaps in economic performance, institutional legacies and inertia in governance adjustment can contribute to low self-perception of regional actors and slow improvements in quality of life in affected regions.

4. SHRINKING PROCESSES OBSERVED: CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

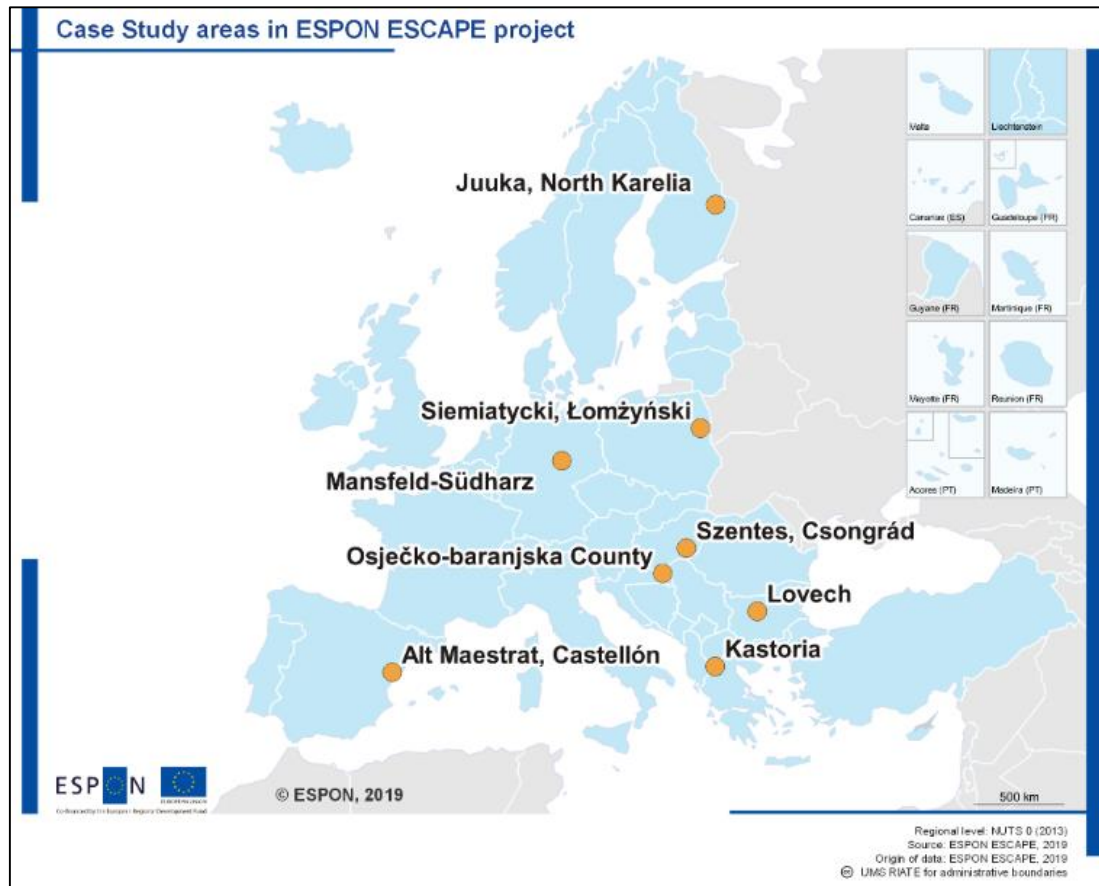
The eight case studies carried out by the ESCAPE project team (Figure 3) were carefully selected using a two-stage procedure which ensured inclusion of both “active” and “legacy” shrinking, urbanisation and globalised migration, and different “macro regions” of the EU (Kovacs et al., 2020). Each of these case studies represents a rich and intricate narrative, highly conditioned by geographical and historical context. It is impossible to do justice to such complexity in within the limitations of this paper (the reader may consult the individual case study reports online), but it is hoped that some comparative observations will be helpful.

All four types of shrinking process described above were clearly seen in the case studies, though perhaps unsurprisingly, it is often hard to disentangle them. Here we distinguish those which are inherently geographical (2), from those which are a consequence of temporal processes of change. These may be driven by long-term restructuring trends (1), more rapid “peripherization” processes (3), or short-term events or transitions (4).

Geographic peripherality sets considerable limitations in nearly all case study areas. In most cases (especially Siemiatycki (PL), Szentes (HU), Mansfeld-Südharz (DE)),

remoteness from urban centres has been a decisive factor in shrinkage. Poor connectivity may be exacerbated by the mountainous characteristics of the area, as in Kastoria (EL), Juuka (FI), Alt Maestrat (ES), and (partly) in Lovech (BG). On the other hand, relative proximity to wealthier urban areas seems to have acted as a migration pull factor, exacerbating poor economic connectivity, and leading to weakening of economic and human potentials in Szentes (HU), Mansfeld-Südharz (DE), Alt Maestrat (ES) and Lovech (BG).

Figure 3. The ESCAPE Project Case Study Areas



4.1. Wider socio-economic processes associated with shrinking

With the exception of the Bulgarian, Hungarian and Spanish cases, all the case study areas experience some degree of disruption to their economic and social development due to proximity to national or EU borders. Siemiatycki (PL), became peripheral due to the shift of Poland's borders after World War II and is now an EU-border, Mansfeld-Südharz (DE) still experiences challenges for being a border area, and Osječko-baranjska (HR) lost much of its gravitational influence and previous connections with Serbia after 1991. Kastoria (EL) is a gateway to/from Albania and other Balkan countries, and Juuka (FI), although located in an EU-border region, experiences a relatively low interaction with Russia due to its long distance from the border.

Agriculture accounts for a high share of the economy of most case study areas. This is associated with generally lower salaries and more (physically) demanding work. In such contexts, future prospects for the youngest population cohorts are hindered by the

increasing unprofitability of agriculture, which in some cases is coupled with industrial decline, and the seemingly limited economic alternatives. The low level of entrepreneurship, narrow business networks and absence of a diversified spectrum of jobs, are negative experiences common to peripheral rural areas, especially in Finland, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Spain.

All these locational disadvantages occur in a cumulative manner through reduced opportunities for young people. Such push factors, together with the attraction of “better” living conditions of urban areas, result in selective out-migration (with very low rates of return). A vicious cycle, driven by the poorly qualified workforce, and the lack of young people, is a painful consequence, which deprives peripheral rural areas of adequate human and social capitals, and makes dealing with shrinkage all the more difficult.

Turning to the temporal processes, the three variants described above are, in practice, difficult to distinguish; since major political events such as the fall of socialism, and EU accession have released a pent-up demand for economic restructuring and spatial reorganisation, of which peripherization represents “the dark side”.

The gradual long-term decrease in birth rates is a factor contributing to shrinkage in all case study areas, coupled with ageing as the legacy of earlier rounds of out-migration (with a lower importance of legacy effects in the Croatian, Bulgarian and Hungarian case studies).

Rural areas have generally been affected by out-migration in the past, driven by under-employment due to the mechanisation of agriculture and forestry, and the search for better educational opportunities, or industrial jobs in cities. During 1950s and 1960s urbanisation developed rapidly, fuelled by industrialisation and urban lifestyles inducing intensive outflow from rural areas. In Eastern Europe forced industrialisation was launched by the Communist regimes, and was, in Bulgaria and Hungary, for example, accompanied by the strong push effect of collectivisation. Post-Socialist development models have largely favoured investments in industry and services in urban areas, while rural areas have remained on the margins of national and regional development plans, leading to increased territorial imbalances.

During the years of transition, the collapse of socialist economies led to de-industrialization and high unemployment in all Eastern European case study areas. The sudden and extended loss of agricultural jobs was also a universal pattern here. More recently, a globalised, “active” type of shrinkage, accelerated by EU accession, played a key role in Croatian and Bulgarian territories, and to a lesser extent in the Hungarian, Polish and East German case study areas. The scale of the transition crisis, exacerbated by the impact of the Global Financial Crisis and, paradoxically, by consequences of EU accession, resulted in irreversible, and still ongoing, shrinkage in the Eastern European case study areas. This has increased territorial imbalances, out-migration, and territorial disparities, which coupled with the impacts of globalisation, has been termed “peripherization”. The age structure legacy of massive outmigration at the beginning of the 1990s is still identifiable among the causes of rural shrinkage in these countries.

4.2. Two Pathways to Shrinking

The forgoing discussion of the main features, causes and triggers of rural shrinking, seems to have hidden within it a broad macro-scale contrast between the pathways taken by the Northern and Southern case studies (within the EU15), and those of the East (New Member States):

- i. The first pathway (illustrated by the Finnish and Spanish case studies) involves long-standing issues of peripherality and locational disadvantage, consolidated by several rounds of urbanisation, or by gradual spatial restructuring (concentration of resources in the coastal areas), which delivered intense selective out-migration, leading to distorted age structures and strong legacy effects.
- ii. The second pathway is characterised by many of the same processes, but in a compressed chronology, with political “events and transitions” causing rapid and systemic changes in social and economic structures. This pathway could be termed “disrupted rural development”. It has its roots in the radical political shift in Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War II. Communist industrialisation of the 1950s and 1960s almost immediately induced waves of outmigration from rural areas in each Eastern case study country. The push was even stronger and more selective in countries where industrialisation was coupled with hard-line collectivisation of the peasant property and establishment of large-scale collective farms (Hungary, Bulgaria). The robust population loss of the 1950s-1960s was followed by continued rural outflow in the next decades, driven by both pull effects from urbanisation, and the push effects of the restructuring of the rural economy. Finally, since German unification and rounds of EU accession in 2004, 2007 and 2013, an ongoing outmigration wave, driven by opportunities for making a better living in the West, has depleted “deep” rural areas beyond the suburbs. Such ‘globalised flows’, together with the increased attraction of urban centres, especially metropolitan areas, threaten rural areas with further labour and population drain in all investigated cases.

Despite structural differences between these two pathways, they do have commonalities such as high rates of legacy (demographic) effects, ongoing selective outmigration filtering young people out of shrinking rural regions resulting in interrelated issues of “critical mass” and “qualifications”, so that the economies of these rural spaces are usually too weak (and too small) to be able to attract significant fresh investments, keep their own qualified people or attract professionals from outside. A vicious circle is clearly evident in each case study through intertwined and accelerated outmigration, ageing and worsening fertility rates.

5. UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: PAST EU POLICY APPROACHES AND THEIR IMPACTS

Before examining the evolution of EU policy towards shrinking rural areas it will be helpful to make the basic distinction between *mitigation* policies, which seek to break the cycle of demographic decline, and deliver population growth, and *adaptation* which accepts the inevitability of continued shrinking and focuses instead upon the goal of increasing individual wellbeing.

5.1. The shift from Exogenous to Endogenous approaches and Lisbonisation

Looking back over the past half-century, and considering the “story” of shrinking in rural Europe, the changing technological, political and social context, the evolution of our understanding of processes, and the changing policy response, are intimately interwoven. Space will not allow us to present in detail the paths that EU policy (the CAP and Cohesion Policy in particular), has taken to reach the current situation (Copus and Dax,

2020). It is nonetheless very important that we mention here some key elements of that story, without which it is not easy to understand the legacy effects which are so prominent in the evidence from the case studies. Although there are some common threads running right through from the 1970s to the present day, it is helpful to divide the story into two broad periods; before and after about 2005. The key distinction between these two periods was the role of *exogenous* and *endogenous* approaches.

Before the turn of the century both the academic discourse and policy favoured “exogenous” approaches, in the sense that rural economies and populations were considered to require inputs (whether in terms of funding or economic activity) from outside. Thus, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) used the livestock headage payments to support farmers in the Less Favoured Areas (LFA), with the explicit objective of population retention. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), addressed rural depopulation in this period through integrated programmes focusing on specific rural areas (Objective 1, 5b and 6), often implicitly relying upon spread effects from (urban) growth centres.

In the new century, at least prior to the recent upsurge of interest, both CAP Pillar 2 and Cohesion Policy have been less focused upon demographic trends in rural areas. At the same time the emphasis upon external inputs to support the worst affected areas has been superseded by initiatives to harness potential strengths and development opportunities within shrinking rural areas themselves. A number of factors have contributed to this:

- Budgetary implications of successive enlargements, and later on, austerity, challenged the affordability of the established approaches. Furthermore, the need to address the impacts of unforeseen external events, such as the 2008 financial crisis, and the migration crisis of 2014-15, has tended to demand the attention of policy makers at the expense of longer-term rural demographic issues. Nevertheless, CAP Pillar 2 (Rural Development), which emerged in preparation for enlargement, incorporated some “territorial” measures which considered the needs of the rural economy (and population) as a whole (rather than agriculture as a sector).
- The academic rural development discourse has increasingly stressed the need for rural areas to look for solutions *within*, building on “territorial capital”, through “endogenous” and neo-endogenous approaches (Ray, 2006). However, the limited human, social and institutional capital of many depleted rural regions resulted in the ascendancy of the concept of “neo-endogenous” approaches, incorporating support (guidance, and finance), from national or European sources.
- Since the turn of the century the menu of rural development measures has evolved, and the degree of flexibility accorded to the Member State (MS) - in terms of the way in which measures are combined within Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), - has gradually increased. This framework has allowed some of the “older” member states to focus their RDPs upon agri-environment measures to the exclusion of territorial measures to counter depopulation. Measures which have more relevance to depopulation (village renewal, basic services etc.) have consistently received a higher proportion of Pillar 2 expenditure in the “New” MS in the east and south (Dwyer, 2008; Copus, 2010). However overall expenditure on territorial measures has always been relatively low.
- EU “meta strategies” (Agenda 2000, Gothenburg/Lisbon, and EU 2020), have resulted in both Rural Development and Cohesion Policy directing their efforts towards other issues than population trends. The Lisbon Strategy, with its focus upon (economic) growth, jobs and innovation, resulted in the objectives of the (neo-endogenous)

territorial measures within CAP Pillar 2 being expressed (and later evaluated), more in terms of employment and economic activity, than the maintenance of rural communities and population. Later, EU 2020 added an emphasis upon sustainability and inclusion.

- Furthermore, the “Lisbonisation” of Cohesion Policy shifted attention away from “negative” demographic issues, towards supporting potential, in accordance with the “jobs, growth and innovation” focus. These goals - and boosting regional GDP - are most easily achieved in the context of cities, towns or villages. Interventions to improve infrastructure, and nurture the economy of settlements, whilst reducing inter-regional disparities, have had a polarising effect *within* regions – exacerbating rather than ameliorating rural shrinking.
- Cohesion Policy has continued to allocate most of its resources to regions with a GDP per capita below 75% of the EU average, successively termed “Objective 1”, “Convergence” and then “Less Developed” regions. The accession of Central and Eastern European (CEEC) countries has increasingly meant a focus upon the East and South of Europe, at the expense of shrinking rural regions in the North and West of Europe.

5.2. The quest for more effective policy approaches

For much of the post 2000 period, LEADER has promised considerable potential to address rural shrinking, but has remained outside the two mainstream policies discussed above, as a “Community Initiative”. In the current programming period, it has become part of Community Led Local Development (CLLD).

It is perhaps in recognition of the limitations of the “Lisbonised” CAP and Cohesion Policy that “policy-driven analysis”, sponsored by various EU institutions has explored a number of approaches very relevant to the problem of rural shrinking. For example, the idea that territorial diversity and endogenous assets/capacity can be drivers of development is a recurrent theme (Copus et al., 2011). Within the Cohesion Policy discourse, it was termed “smart specialisation” (Da Rosa Pires et al., 2014). More recently the same concepts, combined with an emphasis upon information technology and “green” development, have formed the basis for the ENRD’s “Smart Villages” initiative (Copus and Dax, 2020). The emphasis upon local assets and community action is certainly appropriate to shrinking rural areas.

Another area explored by policy driven research has been rural-urban linkages/partnerships (OECD, 2013), on the assumption that improving the functional relationships between towns and their hinterlands could enhance “spread effects”. Those rural areas in which such interaction seems least beneficial have been singled out for special consideration, as “Inner Peripheries”. Urban-rural relationships from a rural perspective are also fundamental to the OECD’s Rural Policy 3.0, and are the subject of analysis in the recent DG Agriculture “Functional Rural Areas” initiative (Copus and Dax, 2020).

6. REFLECTIONS ON THE CURRENT EU POLICY AND GOVERNANCE LANDSCAPE

There is, in one sense, no shortage of competent EU policy instruments to address rural shrinking. As we have already described, these have “traditionally” formed elements of the CAP (Pillar 2), and to a lesser extent Cohesion Policy. In addition, a number of “multi-fund” activities, notably CLLD and the Smart Villages initiative, have been seen as part of the EU response. ESCAPE researchers reviewed the attitudes of stakeholders at all levels, from the Commission to Municipalities, both through the Case Studies and through a number of key informant interviews (Kahila et al., 2020; Weber et al., 2020; Meredith, 2020a). It is not easy to represent the wealth of anecdotal evidence which emerged. However, the following generalisations reflect the key themes:

- Since full “repopulation” is usually an impracticable objective, and abandonment is politically unacceptable, most policy approaches will be hybrids of mitigation and adaptation.
- Policy for shrinking rural areas needs to reflect broader societal objectives than economic growth, such as inclusion, spatial justice, and wellbeing; and support a Just Transition.
- Holistic, integrated, and locally-tailored strategies are required, which reflect the unique local processes and pathways which lie behind demographic trends.
- At the European and national levels these should be supported by the clear articulation of a constructive, forward-looking, medium/long term vision for shrinking rural areas.
- Translation of the vision into practical guidance and support for local action, across a wide menu of interventions will increase its potential for real change.
- A shared vision, ESIF coherence, and simplified administrative procedures, together with a framework for continuity of support (rather than short-term projects) will be essential.
- Governance frameworks, more specifically high-functioning multi-level governance structures, are crucial to successful implementation of policies to address shrinking.
- In the context of ESIF policy, strategic and innovative policy making capacity at the National level is essential.
- At the same time, devolution of appropriate strategy making and implementation capacity to local and regional levels is also foundational.
- Good communication across the governance system, and innovative (place based) partnership arrangements can strengthen policy impact.

6.1. A critical juncture – unprecedented opportunities...

During the past five years there has been strong renewal of interest across the EU institutional framework, including the European Parliament (García Pérez, 2016; Margaras, 2016, 2019), the Committee of the Regions (Gløersen et al., 2016; Herrera, 2017), and the Economic and Social Committee (Stenson, 2017). It is also reflected in the activities of an Intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas (RUMRA), and the appointment of Commissioner Dubravka Šuica, Vice President for Democracy and Demography.

A reassessment of the logic, implementation and effectiveness of European policy approaches is timely. We are at a critical juncture: rural shrinking has become a very visible phenomenon, fuelling popular discontent. Simultaneously, there is increasing awareness of new opportunities associated with changes in technological, market and social contexts. The COVID-19 crisis will accelerate change and stimulate further debate. Repopulation of depleted rural areas, or at least better adjustment to the demographic status quo, are probably more feasible now than they have been for many decades. This is a “one off” opportunity. How can shrinking rural areas, together with policy and governance frameworks which support them, make the most of it?

Some answers, in terms of implementation processes and governance frameworks, have already been suggested above. In this final discussion we will focus upon the fundamental issue of the links between evidence, vision and intervention logic.

The key point here is that interventions to mitigate or adapt to rural shrinking need to reflect an explicit and coherent appreciation of the processes which drive negative population trends. Only then can they successfully disrupt the spiral. This implies a close, and up-to-date, link to evidence. Otherwise actions risk reflecting misjudgements or anachronistic assumptions, and this will, at best, result in sub-optimal outcomes, and at worst a local sense of being misunderstood and neglected.

Within the context of rural development, the link between evidence and policy is usually referred to as the “intervention logic” (EC, 2017b). We find the Theory of Change approach (UNDG, 2018; Copus et al., 2019), more helpful. This allows us to identify four generic policy rationales in the discourse: compensation for territorial disadvantage, relocalisation, global reconnection and smart shrinkage.

According to Valters (2015, p.6) Theory of Change “can give practitioners the freedom to open up the ‘black box’ of assumptions about change that are too often side-lined”. It thus allows us to identify the weak or false assumptions of policy which have undermined the effectiveness of European (and national) attempts to address rural shrinking. It also helps us to better understand examples of good practice – how and why they work – and provides a basis for evaluating outcomes – going beyond quantifying final outcomes by exploring underpinning processes (Dax and Copus, 2020).

The development of practical policy for EU, MS, regional or local level involves a number of contributions from a range of sources and numerous actors. Ideally the task should be a collaborative one. In general, interventions are best designed with local knowledge of the complex shrinking process. However, the same broad principles may be adapted to EU, MS, or regional level.

Whilst it is very important to keep in mind the overall goal of mitigating or adapting to shrinking, it is also necessary to reflect upon the complexity of the socio-economic context within which the demographic process is situated. Just as the processes which power the downward spiral extend far beyond the components of demographic change, so mitigating interventions must be cognisant of many related vectors of change. Patterns and trends of economic activity are the most obvious starting points, but migration reflects broader issues of wellbeing, which are in turn driven by a constantly evolving technological context, shifting social aspirations, and mores. Neither is it safe to ignore the governance and institutional framework. The complex nature of shrinking processes calls for a cautious framework, and “soft” ties between problems and solutions. This points to the need for a paradigm shift whereby multilateral approaches (including adaptation) supersede simplistic, linear, mitigation logics in pursuit of conventional growth objectives (Garretsen et al., 2013).

It is also very important to be clear about the long-term goals of demographic policy. Given the strength of legacy effects, full mitigation or trend reversal may not be realistic. Partial (strategic) mitigation, and adaptation should be considered. However, it is not just a question of distinguishing between mitigation and adaptation. In reality, and especially in the case of adaptation policies, these are usually “nested” within wider aspirations, such as those associated with the Lisbon and Europe 2020 strategies. Neo-liberal economic/competitive/efficiency priorities (jobs, growth and innovation) are increasingly questioned. Addressing the needs of shrinking rural areas may well be facilitated by a recognition of these shifts in societal values. For example, concerns over climate change seem likely to valorise some of the intrinsic and hitherto “public good” territorial assets of shrinking rural areas. Similarly, the COVID-19 crisis may have shifted perceptions of distance working and work-life balance in ways which may accelerate trends in the spatial re-organisation of economic activity, which had previously been rather cautious in realising new technological opportunities for “re-localisation” and dispersal.

As our analysis of the history of relevant policy domains (Copus and Dax, 2020) underlines, many past and present strategies remain at an abstract, horizontal, level, lacking commitment to place-sensitive details of implementation, and for this reason fail to achieve their high expectations in terms of mitigation.

At the same time, although it is evidently very important for policy which addresses rural shrinking to be “place sensitive”, taking account of local or regional conditions and trends, this needs to be complemented by full awareness of the ubiquitous impacts and implications of globalisation. Again, this underlines the need for future-oriented interventions, which “ride the wave” of change, rather than attempting to lock it out. In view of on-going changes of technologies, socio-economic systems, institutions, and regional dynamics, are evolving rapidly, and reveal a wide range of possible spatial consequences, individual behaviour and social change. Social norms and values are evolving, with significant repercussions for spatial notions and concepts.

These considerations suggest four elements are important in the process of developing evidence-based policy; diagnosis, elaboration of an intervention logic, learning from best practice, and appraisal (Dax and Copus, 2020). Designing regional strategies and operational programmes requires an understanding of the complex drivers and relationships of actions, linked to a profound assessment of the cause-effect analysis of spatial changes.

The discussion of (new) intervention logics should also refer to the basic foundation and reasons for spatial concentration processes, peripherization and shrinkage. Questioning the economic growth paradigm is essential and will have immediate consequences on the relevant narratives, the opportunities and awareness of options, inclusiveness of future policies and realization of transition towards sustainable development pathways. As international experts to the OECD New Economic Approach discourse point out (OECD, 2019), it won't be sufficient to replace current economic schemes just by “green economy” growth terminology as long as inherent values and views on socio-economic objectives have not changed. Pressing social and ecological needs have implications for the spatial organisation of the rural economy and society, and necessitate a refreshed approach to intervention in shrinking rural regions.

6.2. Key Messages for a Refreshed Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas

The key messages of ESPON ESCAPE underline the timeliness of a renewed vision for rural Europe. A very substantial share of rural regions is experiencing depopulation,

others are projected to move into negative territory during the next couple of decades. It is therefore extremely important that such a vision recognises the contrasting needs of depleting and accumulating rural areas, acknowledging the specificities of both, building upon existing strengths, and responding early to new opportunities. In doing so we recommend a broadening of goals, beyond economic growth, to address (territorial) inclusion, spatial justice, and well-being (OECD, 2019, 2020). Furthermore, a Just Transition to a decarbonised economy and society presents opportunities for many shrinking rural regions (Meredith, 2020b), although many would benefit from strengthened capacity to respond.

It is impossible to exaggerate the need to strengthen the ties between evidence and policy approaches, avoiding “one size fits all” interventions, expressing sensitivity towards regional and local environments and pathways, and at the same time building upon signs that the future is likely to present new opportunities. In essence we are arguing for a policy environment which nurtures tailored neo-endogenous approaches driven by rationales which are explicitly derived from an understanding of the local processes of demographic change. A necessary corollary of the wider goals mentioned above will be the need to find better ways to measure success. Demographic indicators, together with a place-sensitive appreciation of the processes behind them, can add value to conventional economic measurements.

We reiterate calls which have been heard through several decades, regarding the need for systemic, integrated and coherent approaches, at all levels (EU, National, Regional, Local), and for greater continuity when tackling inherently long-term demographic issues. We propose a departure from established principles of EU Rural Development policy involving the formal recognition of differentiation between depleting and accumulating rural areas, so that the former may be more consistently the subject of the most appropriate interventions.

Finally, in the realm of governance, empowerment and capacity building, we point to the widely held impression that shrinking presents challenges in terms of capacity for territorial adjustment and development, and the maintenance of sufficient influence in institutional terms.

7. REFERENCES

- Amcoff, J. (2006). Rural population growth in Sweden in the 1990s: unexpected reality or spatial–statistical chimera? *Population, Space and Place*, 12(3), 171-185. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/psp.407>
- Bański, J., and Flaga, M. (2013). The Areas of Unfavourable Demographic Processes in Eastern Poland – Selected Aspects. *Barometr Regionalny*, 11(2), 17-24
- Brown, D., and Wardwell, J. (eds.) (1980). *New Directions in Urban-Rural Migration. The Population Turnaround in Rural America*. New York: Academic Press.
- Champion, T. (2001). The continuing urban-rural population movement in Britain: trends, patterns, significance. *Espace Populations Sociétés*, 19(1), 37-51. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3406/espos.2001.1975>
- Copus A., Courtney, P., Dax, T., Meredith, D., Noguera, J., Shucksmith, M., and Talbot, H. (2011). Final Report, ESPON 2013 project *EDORA (European Development*

Opportunities for Rural Areas), Project 2013/1/2. Retrieved from: <https://www.espon.eu/programme/projects/espon-2013/applied-research/edora-european-development-opportunities-rural-areas> (16/06/2021)

- Copus, A. (2010). *A Review of Planned and Actual Rural Development Expenditure in the EU 2007-2013*, Deliverables D4.1, 4.2, 5.1, and 5.2, RuDI, Assessing the impact of rural development policies (incl. LEADER), EU Framework 7 Programme Project no. 213034
- Copus, A., and Dax, T. (2020). *Policy Context. Annex 1 to the Final Report of ESPON ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas: Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance)*. Retrieved from: <https://www.espon.eu/escape> (16/06/2021).
- Copus, A., Dax, T., Machold, I., Mantino, F., Forcina, B., Weck, S., and Beißwenger, S. (2017a). *PROFECY – Processes, Features and Cycles of Inner Peripheries in Europe. Inner Peripheries: national territories facing challenges of access to basic services of general interest, Strategies for Inner Peripheries Annex 19*, Version 07/12/2017. ESPON Project EE/SO1/013/2016. ESPON EGTC, Luxembourg.
- Copus, A., Kahila, P., Fritsch, M., Dax, T., Kovács, K., Tagai, G., Weber, R., Grunfelder, J., Löfving, L., Moodie, J., Ortega-Reig, M., Ferrandis, A., Piras, S., and Meredith, D. (2020). *ESPON ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas: Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance) Final Report*. Retrieved from: <https://www.espon.eu/escape> (16/06/2021).
- Copus, A., Mantino, F., and Noguera, J. (2017b). Inner Peripheries: an oxymoron or a real challenge for territorial cohesion? *Italian Journal of Planning Practice*, 7(1), 24-49.
- Copus, A., Piras, S., Tobiasz-Lis, P., Dmochowska-Dudek, K., Wójcik, M., and Napierał, T. (2019). *Synthesis Report: Towards an Operational Concept of Spatial Justice*, Deliverable 8.2, RELOCAL Project. Retrieved from: <https://relocal.eu/deliverables/> (16/06/2021).
- da Rosa Pires, A., Pertoldi, M., Edwards, J., and Hegyi, F. (2014). *Smart Specialisation and innovation in rural areas*. S3 Policy Brief Series, 9. Retrieved from: https://scholar.google.com/scholar_url?url=https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fatime_Hegyi/publication/338170530_Smart_Specialisation_and_Innovation_in_Rural_Areas/links/5e04949b299bf10bc3797c5b/Smart-Specialisation-and-Innovation-in-Rural-Areas.pdf&hl=en&sa=T&oi=gsga&ct=res&cd=0&d=6276098690344350154&ei=d-jJYK_CMcSsywSBmKRw&scisig=AAGBfm3m_FQBGhcBFvdOWzcQCvLbjXwZnQ (16/06/2021)
- Darques, R. (2004). L'Albanie en transition: mutations démographiques et recomposition territoriale (1989–2001). *Espace, populations, sociétés*, (3), 559-575 <http://dx.doi.org/10.4000/eps.390>
- Dax, T., and Copus, A. (2016). *The Future of Rural Development, Chapter 3, p221-303, in Reflections on the Agricultural Challenges Post 2020 in the EU: Preparing the Next CAP Reform*, European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Agriculture and Rural Development. Retrieved from:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2016\)585898](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2016)585898) (16/06/2021).

- Dax, T., and Copus, A. (2020). *How to achieve a transformation framework for Shrinking Rural Regions*. Annex 13 to the Final Report of ESPON ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas: Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance). Retrieved from: <https://www.espon.eu/escape> (16/06/2021).
- Dwyer, J. (ed.) (2008). *Review of Rural Development Instruments: DG Agri project 2006-G4-10* Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/evaluation-policy-measures/rural-areas/review-rural-development-instruments_en (16/06/2021).
- ESPON (2010). DEMIFER, *Demographic and Migratory Flows affecting European Regions and Cities. Final Report*. ESPON 2013 project. Luxembourg.
- ESPON (2017). *Policy brief: Shrinking rural regions in Europe*. Luxembourg: ESPON EGTC. Retrieved from: <https://www.espon.eu/rural-shrinking> (16/06/2021).
- European Commission (EC) (2017a). *Economic Challenges of Lagging Regions - Final report*. Brussels: European Commission. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/challenges_lagging/econ_challenges_lagging_en.pdf (16/06/2021).
- European Commission (EC) (2017b). *Technical Handbook on the monitoring and evaluation framework of the Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020*. Brussels. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/cmef_en (16/06/2021).
- European Opinion (2005). *The Low-Fertility Trap*, posted by E. Hugh (July 20, 2005) Retrieved from: <http://fistfulofeuros.net/afoe/the-low-fertility-trap/> (16/06/2021)
- Farole, T., Goga, S., and Ionescu-Heroiu, M. (2018). *Rethinking Lagging Regions, Using Cohesion Policy to Deliver on the Potential of Europe's Regions*, World Bank
- Fondation Robert Schuman (2018). *Europe 2050: Demographic Suicide*. Retrieved from <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0462-europe-2050-demographic-suicide> (16/06/2021).
- Franklin, R. (2019). *What we talk about when we talk about depopulation*. Blog of the regional Studies Association. Posted 2 April 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.regionalstudies.org/news/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-depopulation/> (16/06/2021).
- García Pérez, I. (2016). *Report on the deployment of cohesion policy instruments by regions to address demographic change*. European Parliament Committee on Regional Development. Retrieved from: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0329_EN.html (16/06/2021).
- Garretsen, H., McCann, P., Martin, R., and Tyler, P. (2013). The future of regional policy. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, (6), 179-186. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rst013>
- Gløersen, E., Drăgulin, M., Hans, S., Kaucic, J., Schuh, B., Keringer, F., and Celotti, P. (2016). *The impact of demographic change on European regions*. Report for the Committee of the Regions. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication->

detail/-/publication/73bac530-ecd4-11e5-8a81-01aa75ed71a1/language-en
(16/06/2021)

- Grasland, C., Ysebaert, R., Corminboeuf, B., Gaubert, N., Lambert, N., Salmon, I., Baron, M., Baudet-Michel, S., Ducom, E., Rivière, D., Schmoll, C., Zanin, C., Gensel, J., Vincent, J., Plumejeaud, C., Van Hamme, G., Holm, E., Strömngren, M., Coppola, P., Salaris, A., Groza, G., Muntele, I., Turcanasu, G., and Stoleriu, O. (2008). *Shrinking Regions: A Paradigm Shift in Demography and Territorial Development*. Study for Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policy, European Parliament. Brussels: European Parliament. Retrieved from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL-REGI_ET\(2008\)408928](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL-REGI_ET(2008)408928) (16/06/2021).
- Grimsrud, G. (2011). How well does the ‘counter-urbanisation story’ travel to other countries? the case of Norway. *Population, Space and Place*, 17(5), 642-655. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/psp.655>
- Herrera, J. (2017). Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — The EU response to the demographic challenge, *Official Journal of the European Union*, 2017/C 017/08.
- Kahila, P., Fritsch, M., and Sinerma, J. (2020). *Structures and Practices for Governance*. Annex 14 to the Final Report of ESPON ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas: Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance). Retrieved from: <https://www.espon.eu/escape> (16/06/2021).
- Kovács, K., Tagai, G., and Ortega-Reig, M. (2020). *Case Study Synthesis Report*. Annex 4 to the Final Report of ESPON ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas: Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance). Retrieved from: <https://www.espon.eu/escape> (16/06/2021).
- Kukovič, S. (2018). Coping with Demographic Challenges: Case of Slovenian Local Communities. *Journal of Comparative Politics*, 11(2), 83-100.
- Lang, T., and Görmar, F. (2019). Regional and Local Development In *Times of Polarisation: Re-Thinking Spatial Policies in Europe* (p. 382). Springer Nature.
- Lukić, A. (2013). Tourism, farm diversification and plurality of rurality: case study of Croatia. *European Countryside*, (4), 356-376.
- Margaras, V. (2016). *Sparsely Populated and Under Populated areas*. European Parliament Briefing, Retrieved from: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2019\)633160](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2019)633160) (16/06/2021)
- Margaras, V. (2019). *Demographic Trends in EU Regions*. European Parliament Briefing, Retrieved from: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2019\)633160](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2019)633160) (16/06/2021).
- Martínez-Fernández, C., Kubo, N., Noya, A., and Weyman, T. (2012). *Demographic Change and Local Development: Shrinkage, Regeneration and Social Dynamics*. OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED), Paris.
- Meredith, D. (2020a). *High Level Stakeholder Interviews*. Annex 3 to the Final Report of ESPON ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas: Challenges, Actions and

- Perspectives for Territorial Governance). Retrieved from: <https://www.espon.eu/escape> (16/06/2021).
- Meredith, D. (2020b). *Just Transition and EU Policy: A brief Overview of the Implications of the Green Deal for Rural Regions*. Annex 16 to the Final Report of ESPON ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas: Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance). Retrieved from: <https://www.espon.eu/escape> (16/06/2021).
- Milbert, A. (2015). *Wachsen oder Schrumpfen?* BBSR Analysen KOMPAKT 12/2015. Bundesinstitut für Bonn: Bau-, Stadt- und Regionalforschung (BBSR).
- Moss, L. (ed.) (2006). *The Amenity Migrants: Seeking and Sustaining Mountains and their Cultures*. Wallingford, UK, and Cambridge, MA: CABI Publications.
- Müller, B., and Siedentop, S. (2004). Wachstum und Schrumpfung in Deutschland; Trends, Perspektiven und Herausforderungen für die räumliche Planung und Entwicklung. *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Kommunalwissenschaften*, 43(1), 14-32.
- Nikitović, V. (2016). Demographic limits to sustainable development of mountain regions in Serbia. In G. Zhelezov (ed.), *Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions*, (pp. 241-251). Springer, Cham.
- OECD (2017). *OECD Territorial Reviews: Northern Sparsely Populated Areas*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2019). *Beyond Growth: Towards a New Economic Approach*. Report of the Secretary General's Advisory Group on a New Growth Narrative. SG/NAEC(2019)3. Paris.
- OECD (2020). *Rural Well-being: Geography of Opportunities*, OECD Rural Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1787/d25cef80-en> (16/06/2021).
- Oedl-Wieser, T., Fischer, M., and Dax, T. (2019). Bevölkerungsrückgang in ländlichen Regionen Österreichs: Lebensphasen- und geschlechter-spezifische Wanderungsbewegungen vor dem Hintergrund von Motiven und Lebensqualität. *Austrian Journal of Agricultural Economics and Rural Studies*, 27(1), 151-159. DOI 10.15203/OEGA_27.19.
- ÖROK (2019). *Kleinräumige Bevölkerungsprognose für Österreich 2018 bis 2040 mit einer Projektion bis 2060 und Modellfortschreibung bis 2075 (ÖROK-Prognose)*, Wien.
- Oswalt, P. (2008). *Hypothesen zum städtischen Schrumpfen im 21. Jahrhundert*. Project Shrinking Cities, Berlin. Retrieved from: <http://www.shrinkingcities.com/hypothesen.0.html> (16/09/2021)
- Oswalt, P. (ed.) (2006). *Shrinking Cities: Complete Works 1 and 2, Analyse/Analysis*. Aachen: ARCH+ Verlag GmbH.
- Piras, S., Tagai, G., and Grunfelder, J. (2020). *Measuring, mapping and classifying simple and complex shrinkage*. Annex 2 to the Final Report of ESPON ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas: Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance). Retrieved from: <https://www.espon.eu/escape> (16/06/2021).

- Ray, C. (2006). Neo-endogenous rural development in the EU. *Handbook of rural studies*, (1), 278-291.
- Sánchez-Sánchez, A. (2016). *Rural development policy and the effects of depopulation on the preservation of Spanish heritage*. Master's thesis. Columbia University. Retrieved from: <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D83N23H7> (16/06/2021).
- Sepp, V., and Veemaa, J. (2017). *Shrinking regions and innovative solutions: entrepreneurship, employment and the accessibility of services*. Study report was commissioned by the Estonian Ministry of Finance, Department of Regional Development, Tartu.
- Šimon, M., and Mikešová, R. (eds.) (2014). *Population Development and Policy in Shrinking Regions: the Case of Central Europe*. ADPT2DC project report.
- Stenson, E. (2017). *Revitalisation of rural areas through Smart Villages. Opinion: European Committee of the Region: 126th plenary session – 30 November/1 December 2017*. Retrieved from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52017IR3465&from=EN> (16/06/2021).
- Stockdale, A. (2016). Contemporary and 'messy' rural in-migration processes: Comparing counterurban and lateral rural migration. *Population, space and place*, 22(6), 599-616.
- Tanović, M., Golijanin, J., and Grmusa, M. (2014). The impact of relief on the distribution of the population in the area of East Sarajevo. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(22), 176. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n22p176>
- The Guardian (23 August 2015). *Europe needs many more babies to avert a population disaster*.
- Ubarevičiene, R., van Ham, M., and Burnieka, D. (2016). Shrinking Regions in a Shrinking Country: The Geography of Population Decline in Lithuania 2001–2011. *Urban Studies Research*, Article ID 5395379. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n22p176>
- United Nations Development Group – UNDG (2018). *Theory of Change. UNDAF Companion Guidance*. Retrieved from: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/theory-change-undaf-companion-guidance> (17/06/2021).
- Valters, C. (2015). *Theories of Change. Time for a radical approach to learning in development*. London: Overseas Development Institute. Retrieved from: <https://odi.org/en/publications/theories-of-change-time-for-a-radical-approach-to-learning-in-development/> (17/06/2021).
- Verwest, F., and van Dam, F. (2010). *From combating to managing: Demographic decline in the Netherlands*. The Hague: Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency. Retrieved from: https://www.pbl.nl/sites/default/files/cms/publicaties/PBL_2012_From-combating-to-managing-demographic-decline-in-the-netherlands.pdf (16/06/2021).
- Weber, R., Moodie, J., and Löfving, L. (2020). *EU, National and Regional Policy Reporting*. Annex 15 to the Final Report of ESPON ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas: Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance). Retrieved from: <https://www.espon.eu/escape> (16/06/2021).

- Wiechmann, T. (2003). Zwischen spektakulärer Inszenierung und pragmatischem Rückbau - Umbau von schrumpfenden Stadtregionen in Europa. In G. Hutter, G. I. Iwanow, I. and Müller, B. (eds.), *Demographischer Wandel und Strategien der Bestandsentwicklung in Städten und Regionen*, (pp, 103-126). Dresden: IOR-Schriften.
- Wiest, K., and Leibert, T. (2016). The interplay of gender and migration in Europe's remote and economically weak rural regions: Introduction to a special issue. *Journal of Rural Studies*, (43), 261-266. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.01.007>.

CONTRIBUCIÓN SEGÚN AUTORES

	ITEM	Andrew Copus	Petri Kahila	Thomas Dax	Katalin Kovács	Gergely Tagai	Ryan Weber	Julien Grunfelder	David Meredith	Mar Ortega-Reig	Simone Piras	Linnea Löfving	John Moodie	Matti Fritsch	Adrián Ferrandis
1	Conceptualization	17%	15%	15%	15%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	2%	2%	2%	2%
2	Data curation	0%	0%	0%	0%	35%	5%	40%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	Formal analysis	0%	0%	0%	0%	30%	0%	30%	0%	0%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	Funding acquisition	30%	40%	10%	5%	0%	5%	0%	5%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	Investigation	0%	5%	10%	10%	10%	5%	5%	10%	10%	5%	10%	10%	10%	0%
6	Methodology	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%
7	Project administration	25%	50%	5%	5%	0%	5%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%
8	Resources	10%	5%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
9	Software	5%	5%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	5%	5%	10%	5%	5%	5%	5%
10	Supervision	40%	35%	10%	10%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
11	Validation	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%
12	Visualization	15%	0%	0%	10%	30%	10%	30%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
13	Writing – original draft	32%	5%	8%	8%	8%	5%	8%	5%	8%	5%	3%	3%	3%	3%
14	Writing – review & editing	75%	10%	10%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Para más información, visitar CRediT: <https://casrai.org/credit/>