

Conference Report

The Labour Market in Times of Population Ageing and Decline

20 June 2013, Utrecht, The Netherlands

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Context

The "The Labour Market in Times of Population Ageing and Decline" conference was held on 20 June 2013 in Utrecht. This topic was discussed by some 100 participants with different backgrounds (government, education and business) from population decline areas and anticipated population decline areas.

The conference focused first on several different aspects of labour market policy using a number of inspirational examples. It then examined how effective initiatives such as these can be translated into regional partnerships within population decline regions.

The conference was prompted by the publication of the report entitled "Demographic Change in the Netherlands: Strategies for Resilient Labour Markets" by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The report was presented on the same day as the conference and handed over to Stef Blok, Minister for Housing and the Central Government Sector. The study was carried out together with the provinces of Groningen, Drenthe, Limburg and Zeeland, and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

The full report can be found at http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/demo_change_netherlands.pdf along with a summary in the highlights document at http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/demo_change_netherlands_highlights.pdf

The presentations are available at <https://community.oecd.org/community/demographicchange>.

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Plenary session

Mark Frequin, Director-General for Housing and Building of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, opened the conference in his capacity as chair of the day and stressed the importance of implementing good ideas from other countries within the Netherlands at a regional level. Responses to demographic changes must be sought jointly and implemented at a local and regional level.

Presentation of OECD report

Cristina Martinez Fernandez, OECD/LEED

The OECD reveals that the Netherlands scores high in relation to many indicators that demonstrate the resilience of local labour markets for issues such as training, economic growth and labour participation. The Netherlands also leads the way when it comes to formulating policy on demographic transition. At the same time, the OECD underlines the need for efforts aimed at preventing the deterioration of the labour market situation in population decline areas. Emphasis is placed on three aspects:

- Intergenerational responses to labour market challenges. This relates particularly to labour participation among the elderly, life-long learning and the organisation of employment processes that ensure available skills are used more intensively.
- Cooperation models for a dynamic and responsive labour market. A great deal can be gained through an integrated approach in which aspects such as training, innovation and reintegration are linked by employers' and employees' organisations, training institutions and government authorities.
- Place-based development for resilient and dynamic communities. An attractive residential environment that motivates citizens and businesses to look after the area they live and work in and demonstrating entrepreneurship are vital for the region's future.

All these aspects require commitment on a national, regional and local scale. The presentation cited several examples from abroad.

Minister Blok's response to the report

Minister Blok was delighted with the OECD's outstanding research. The report provides a detailed insight into population decline. He stressed the importance of general economic policy, for example on the incentive to work longer and the coordination of education in the labour market. Specific policy entails a tailored approach and focusing on the region's possibilities. He also referred to a number of good initiatives from population decline areas geared to tackling problems in the labour market, such as the recent atlases of cross-border opportunities in the provinces of Limburg and Zeeland, the stimulation of technical training in the port of Delfzijl and investment in tourism in the province of Zeeland. He pointed out that complacency is more dangerous than decline. We can and must take decisions together and seize opportunities. In short, there is life after population decline.

Keynote speech: resilient labour markets

Professor Ed Blakely, University of Sydney

Professor Blakely demonstrated that regional development is occurring along new lines. Small, innovative businesses will drive growth in the future, a role that large-scale industrial production is fulfilling less and less.

His argument revolves around the use of all available resources in the region to establish an ecosystem of innovation and value creation. Ideas must be allowed to circulate freely, which requires active social networks that are strongly embedded within the region yet able to operate worldwide at the same time. Nurturing and developing a local identity upon which inclusive social networks can build is important. Professor Blakely states that a "magnet infrastructure" is a crucial aspect, i.e.; reasons for people to move to a specific location. The "incubator concept" must be expanded from a single building to the entire community: everyone contributes to regional networks. "Quality of life" is an essential component for the development of a vital, place-based economy. The integration of policy sectors is a necessary requirement for making this transition a reality.

Workshop round 1: Regional responses for a resilient labour market

The first workshops were devoted to six key themes from the OECD report. Using an inspirational example, each group delved further into specific aspects of resilient labour markets.

Elderly people in the labour market

Presented by Jaap Snip from IM-ACES (<http://www.im-aces.com/>)

During his introduction Jaap Snip provided various examples of inspirational older workers, such as master craftsmen in the past. It is important to focus on the vitality of older workers. An administrator from a university medical hospital, for example, recently indicated that he wished to pass on his knowledge. Reference was made to the report of the Council for Work and Income (RWI) on the return of people who had taken early retirement.

An experienced man/woman can offer significantly more than what he or she costs. IM-ACES endeavours to create added value through the low-threshold use of unutilized potential. This involves a pool of highly educated technical and commercial talented people (often with work experience at multinationals) who are deployed within SMEs. This can help create crosslinks between different technologies, applications, markets and countries. IM-ACES is active in the Dutch municipalities of Venray and Venlo, including within the agricultural sector. The deployment of such individuals entails benefits such as lower development costs, a quicker return on investment and higher revenues. Reduced rates are charged. These people help with the acquisition of patents, the application of high-tech within mid-tech apparatus engineering and the separation of hazardous materials from waste. Compensation may occur on a "no-cure-no-pay" basis.

The business model comprises a private limited liability company structure, not a foundation. An hourly rate, a no-cure-no-pay basis, variable rates or shares in revenues can be selected if there is an assignment. IM-ACES currently employs 35 people, but obtaining enough assignments is proving to be a problem.

The following questions were discussed during the workshop:

Question 1: what exactly is the problem with older employees?

- They are finished, burned out;
- They are fairly expensive;
- It concerns the conditions under which the elderly are deployed. For example, they are not salaried employees;
- Speed, the use of ICT;
- Older workers desire flexibility; duration of the employment period;
- Obstruction of internal mobility.

Question 2: are there other examples involving the employment of older people?

- Example of a foundation that assists new businesses;
- Special employment agencies;
- West-Brabants Transfer Centre. From work to work;
- Deployed as a self-employed worker on one's own initiative;
- Initiative for unutilised labour potential in the Achterhoek region in the eastern part of the province of Gelderland.

Question 3: name between one and three actions:

- The deployment of older unemployed people who pass their experience onto young people; can also apply to pensioners;
- Bottleneck: job guarantee requirement of the UWV Jobs Centre;
- Allowing older people to train craftsmen;
- Pairing older entrepreneurs with potential younger successors;
- Pool of older, experienced people who are used for administration and via matchmaking;
- Employers' organisations must also have a role, the importance of deploying older people and maintaining a sufficient supply of labour over time;
- The government must assist with conditions.

Inclusive labour organisations: redistribution of tasks

Presented by Henny Mulders, UWV

The presentation focused on the target group of disabled young people.

The new social security system as well as the new labour market require that everyone who can must work and continue to do so. Access to labour organisations is therefore crucial.

An inclusive organisation is *adaptive*, i.e. it constantly adjusts the division of work and supervision/management to deal with differences and changes in labour potential (external and internal). This therefore enables the organisation to:

1. Take on people with work restrictions and to also keep them in long-term employment;
2. Prevent employees from leaving prematurely due to work restrictions caused by illness or ageing.

The degree of occupational disability is determined by the difference between the salary that someone previously earned and the salary the person earns after occupational disability. However, this says nothing about what people can and want to do.

Approximately a quarter of young people with a disability work, around half of whom have long-term employment. The concentration of such workers is particularly high in the provinces of Groningen, Drenthe and Limburg, followed by Friesland and Overijssel. This is due primarily to selective migration.

Access to labour organisations is crucial. Everyone who can must get a job and remain in it, which implies that companies must be able and prepared to take on people who have work restrictions. Existing labour organisations are generally exclusive. This is a cultural issue for the most part.

With regard to young disabled people and people eligible for statutory sheltered employment, 90% of cases do not involve physical impediments but neurological, mental and developmental disorders. That is why easy work must be sought for them. Labour analyses are being performed and job profiles are being designed to this end. Tasks are being separated from existing positions and combined into new positions that can be fulfilled by young disabled people and people eligible for statutory sheltered employment. This creates a win-win situation: more expensive workers can utilise their work time more efficiently and effectively and young people with a disability and people who make use of sheltered employment are given meaningful work. The methodology has been developed together with the University of Maastricht.

An example of such a new position is the departmental assistant in a geriatric medical ward. The job entails feeding, cleaning, making beds and providing linen. This position does require supervision at the place of work. Various pilots have already started. One of these involves Slotervaart Hospital, Calibris and ROC-Amsterdam (learning/work-oriented programme for assistants with a job market qualification [AKA] and assistant training [MBO Level 1]). An in-company training programme is being carried out here.

Other pilot programmes include: McDonalds (Zaandam, Amsterdam Noord), A-Ware Food Group (cheese), INEOS Styrenics, Vitalis Wissehaege in Eindhoven. There are already several examples, but the task is greater than the pace at which implementation is taking place.

The employment of young people with a disability produces a positive business case for companies through the use of government incentives. A common obstacle is that people dread the hassle that this entails. Staff who can be deployed in a variety of positions are easier from the perspective of companies. The positions offered by the UWV Jobs Centre in this area will be widely available soon.

What can this concept signify for regions affected by population decline? It has already been observed that population decline regions are home to a relatively large number of young disabled people and those who make use of sheltered employment. The following suggestions were put forward:

- The companies located in some population decline areas are often smaller. That can complicate things in terms of scale, but solutions can be devised to this end. This implies, for example, that: you have to coordinate on a greater scale;
- Choose a community approach;
- Work with a pool for multiple companies or a larger region;
- Turn it into a matter that concerns social partners;
- Make it part of a wider approach. This methodology is also applicable to the elderly for example;
- The position of logistical assistant exists in Belgium and companies are working with diversity plans focusing on integrating target groups within companies.

Link between education and the labour market

Presented by Pieter Van Der Helm, Ministry of Economic Affairs, on the Technology Pact.

The following passage from the Coalition Agreement inspired the Technology Pact: "*We want to enter into a Technology Pact for 2020 with businesses and educational institutions. This pact is based on the mutual interest of companies and educational establishments and the ambitions that the sector formulates for itself.*"

The Technology Pact follows these basic principles:

- "Do agreement";
- No new analyses, but an acceleration agenda and building upon properly functioning initiatives;
- Strengthening cooperation;
- Technology across the board;
- Concrete actions!

And an important role for the region, via the five geographical areas:

- A tailored approach for each region: accelerate prioritisation/expand what works well;
- Tailored to the needs of the regional labour market and economic spearheads;

This resulted in a Technology Pact consisting of two parts:

- A. National agreements (22 in total)
- B. Regional action agendas

These are based on three lines of action:

1. Going for technology: greater focus on sciences/technology in primary education;
2. Learning in technology: higher intake and improving the quality of technology-related (vocational) educational programmes through public-private partnerships;
3. Working in technology: labour market - increase the entry of people from another career background, attract and retain (international) technical staff.

The National Technology Pact for 2020 was signed by 60 parties on 13 May 2013. The entire text and all measures can be found at www.techniekpact.nl.

More specifically, in areas affected by population decline:

- A lack of technologists throughout the Netherlands is an issue that also impacts on areas affected by population decline due to the unfortunate combination of aging and a low birth rate;
- In such areas, the importance of effective coordination between education and industry is even greater than elsewhere:
 - Avoid unnecessary competition between educational institutions;
 - Make agreements to ensure a 'macro-effective' range of study programmes;
- Areas affected by population decline can link up with the national action agendas of top sectors, regional technology pacts and sector plans.

Flexible and enterprising labour market

Presented by Anita van Gils and Wijnand Bodewes (University of Maastricht) on the Social Innovation Network (NSI).

The University of Maastricht has launched the Social Innovation Network (NSI).

Social Innovation:

- Work more intelligently;
- Develop talent and make maximum use of the competencies of staff members.

Starting point:

- Innovation requires knowledge sharing between companies and universities;
- Work together with a think-tank (jointly review which problems are urgent) and write opinion articles.

Examples of several completed projects:

- ABN AMRO: smart jobs (task rotation). Creation of a database for employees who wish to expand their horizons;
- IBM: training employees for customers;
- SMEs: innovation in family companies.

The university offers a master's degree programme: an M.Sc. Integrated Bachelor's in Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management.

Examples of projects that are being carried out:

- Setting up a student company in a team;
- Establishing a new business with an academic entrepreneur;
- Developing a strategic plan for an SME and implementing recommendations.

Task: making students aware of their talents and competencies; developing an e-portfolio. The Centre of Entrepreneurship focuses on students from all faculties who realise that you can still always create your own job. Starting an own business in Maastricht and also continuing this company in the city (and possibly expanding it).

Challenges:

- Getting talented students involved in business;
- Challenging enterprising students to be more ambitious in business (not self-employed workers but winners of a Gazelle, an award for the fastest growing companies in the Netherlands);
- Retaining talented individuals for the region (unfamiliarity with the region, regional cross-border opportunities).

The ensuing discussion yielded several recommendations/tips for population decline areas and anticipated population decline areas:

- Intertwining entrepreneurship with education (secondary vocational education, higher professional education and higher education at research universities);
- 'Grey' economy: allowing the transition (by pensioners) to the formal economy;
- Binding entrepreneurial talent to the region. Ensuring graduates remain in the region;
- Giving young people more encouragement to create jobs themselves through entrepreneurship.
- High-quality entrepreneurship.

Resilient Communities

Presented by Diet Hensums (KAW)

This workshop looked at examples of resilient communities. Diet Hensums referred to the brochure *Zorg door dorpskracht* (Care via village power), which contains inspiring examples from areas affected by population decline: In Groningen - and also in other population decline areas - residents and municipalities, housing corporations and care and welfare organisations are jointly seeking alternatives to maintain the level of care in their villages. Alternatives that match current financing and the existing zeitgeist: take care of more together with less assistance from professionals. (See: www.kcwz.nl).

Diet Hensums indicates that vital is not entirely the same as "healthy". The traits of a vital community, in her opinion, are:

- Adaptability (the ability to change);
- Self-awareness (belief in own possibilities);
- Trigger (reason to change).

A powerful trigger exists in population decline areas: an ageing population and a falling birth rate.

Elsendorp (Brabant) and Warffum (Groningen) are successful examples of villages where the community has taken it upon itself to maintain the level of care in the village. The success factors here are:

- Powerful initiators;
- Entrepreneurship and creativity;
- Professionals who provide room;
- Municipalities with the courage to let go;
- Healthcare parties willing to let the greater good prevail over their own interests.

Discussion

The discussion centred primarily on what is needed to take action. What must the government do in order to facilitate instead of hinder with regard to regulations? And what should it not do in particular? In fact, we want communities to make their own decisions and organise things in their own way. How can you ensure this happens?

Recommendations

- New forms of local entrepreneurship are needed - the government can encourage and facilitate using experiments, thereby allowing people to also learn from each other;
- Mobilise the social capital of the elderly and young people in communities - intergenerational approach;
- Communities must personally desire it and want to do it - grant them the space to do so.

Smart specialisation

Presented by Jan Degenhart (Springboard)

Jan Degenhart discussed the closure of Cordis (formerly Johnson & Johnson). A multinational's decision led to the closure of a large R&D site that accounted for 20% of employment in the region of Roden (Groningen). Employees established a platform (Springboard) to keep the sector in the region by actively applying available knowledge in related SMES in the region and by fostering personal entrepreneurship. Practically no government funds were used to do so.

The initiative has been immensely successful: 92% of staff had a job on 1 July 2012. Crucial success factors included the willingness to share knowledge with other companies (open innovation), linking local and international networks, learning from experiences elsewhere (Limburg) and fostering a functional network.

A number of points arose during the discussion:

- A crisis (closure of a large company) forces people to take action. The choice: a high severance payment or an investment in sustainable businesses and employees;
- Clusters are only successful if they are initiated by the business sector. The government plays a facilitatory role in this. It can be more dominant if the business sector demonstrates little initiative. The concern in such a case is that businesses do not appropriate the network;
- Network meetings must be focused and small scale;
- Aging and population are not such a problem at Springboard - highly skilled workers come from everywhere. This is different to jobs for people with a low and medium level of education. The transition of companies with a large number of manufacturing jobs is crucial (example of a company in Emmer-Compascuum);
- A key success factor involves appealing to individuals' sense of professional pride.

Panel: Regional cooperation models for resilient labour markets

This panel discussed two national and two international partnerships relating to the labour market and the economy.

Territorial Employment Pacts (TEP)

Bernice Ecke (national coordinator of the TEP programme in Austria, Zentrum für Soziale Innovation - ZSI).

Territorial Employment Pacts are concluded at regional level in order to match labour market policy more effectively to other policy areas and thus improve the local and regional labour market situation. The aim is to ensure a sustainable labour market by using human capital efficiently, enhancing the quality of support for target groups, working on guaranteeing and expanding the number of jobs, and raising funds for the region. Each region determines its own goals and accompanying strategy.

The key to success for TEPs is the stimulatory effect of taking a coordinating role. The high proportion of long-term unemployed who found a permanent job is a resounding success.

Regional Employment Pacts for older workers

Daniela Luster-Hagedorn (Regional Employment Pacts for older workers, Federal Employment Agency, Stuttgart, Germany).

The aim of the programme is to promote employment opportunities for people over the age of 50. To this end, regional solutions are being sought by businesses and employers to convince the public about the benefits of using older workers and to eliminate barriers preventing the employment of such workers. The approaches taken by the various regions is very diverse. Some projects seek improved cooperation between regional actors in order to generate more jobs. Others focus directly on employers and encourage them to hire older workers. And there are also some projects that try to link policy goals in other areas to the deployment of older workers, for example in the fields of housing or renewable energy.

West-Brabant Transfer Centre

Andreas van den Goorbergh (Decision-maker at ACE, ACE+, West-Brabant Transfer Centre, President of LPWC (nationwide network), General Director of Human Business Support)

One thousand employers and 65,000 employees in West-Brabant have been working together since 2008 within ACE, the Labour Mobility Centre. The mission of ACE is to boost the region's employment participation rate. Within ACE, employers share HR knowledge and exchange employees from job to job within the network, regardless of the duration or reason.

ACE+ was established in 2012. It is the HR knowledge network in the region where all HR service providers are invited to work together on developing better solutions for the current labour market. The West-Brabant Transfer Centre opened on 1 May 2013. It is a collaboration between ACE employers, workers and ACE+ service providers. It is supported by the government and forms part of the Integrated Network Model. The Transfer Centre is the bridge from job to job. From push to pull: the demand for work is the guiding principle. Staff no longer end up in a situation where they can claim benefits. Instead, the network provides them with training, counselling, work experience and income. On the way towards sustainable employment in the region with a win-win-win situation for all parties concerned.

The transfer centre was presented as a successfully functioning alternative to the classical approach taken by the UWV Jobs Centre. (Potential) unemployed people are served on a more individual basis and have easy access to an extensive network of training programmes and jobs, facilitated by the companies themselves.

Innovation Network of GreenTechAlliances

Joost Franssen (GreenTechAlliances-powered) by kiEMT).

The province of Gelderland wants to turn the Energy and Environmental Technology Sector (EMT) into a true top sector, which will give the necessary energy transition a push. That is why it is prepared to provide a structural boost to organisational capacity within this sector. With its network of 200 participants, the kiEMT Foundation has already laid the foundation over the past few years by creating the knowledge-expertise-money chain, acting as an intermediary and bringing people together. The creation of GreenTechAlliances has expanded and strengthened this foundation. The kiEMT Foundation takes care of the programme for GreenTechAlliances. The model is based on a resolute, administrative commitment among businesses, governments, and educational and knowledge institutions (Triple Helix) in the province of Gelderland. GreenTechAlliances powered by kiEMT will help also help the province attain its objectives by serving affiliated companies and knowledge institutions (through knowledge matches and networking events, for example), scouting, screening and guiding innovation opportunities, stimulating new business activities in the Energy and Environmental Technology sector and establishing innovation labs. "Competition is the past and co-creation is the future for change".

Workshop round 2: Potential partnerships and follow-up actions within regions in the Netherlands affected by population decline

The second workshop round focused on how to foster cooperation within the economy and the labour market in population decline areas.

Groningen/Drenthe

Chaired by Arjen Edzes

Three key questions were addressed using several slides detailing the policy of the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe and recommendations made by the OECD:

- Are the OECD's conclusions shared?
- Do they offer pointers?
- Should the policy of the provinces be adapted?

Answering the aforementioned questions proved to be difficult since the participants were not informed in advance about the OECD's policy recommendations and were only given a brief overview of the policy pursued by the provinces (due to time constraints). Arjen Edzes (University of Groningen) therefore asked the participants to come up with recommendations/tips that could be presented to administrators. The following recommendations/tips were made:

- Administrators should be more pioneering;
- Prevent the 'loss' of knowledge due to an ageing population by introducing mentorship (linking an older worker to a younger one);
- Connect generations to the work of a father/mother (give children the opportunity to visit the companies where their parents work);
- Eastern Groningen has a relatively large number of people eligible for statutory sheltered employment, so perhaps tasks should be redistributed more (job carving). It should be noted that this will be very difficult, especially in the area of Eastern Groningen where they are relatively few large companies;
- Cross-border work (Germany). Proper information must be provided about the advantages and disadvantages of cross-border work (the implications for pensions, unemployment benefits, etc.). Advice: do not reinvent the wheel. Look, for example, at the approach and initiatives taken in the province of Limburg;
- Try to create an employment pool with disabled young people and elderly people so that this target group also remains engaged in society (social renewal);
- Ask whether focusing on the top sector will actually yield many jobs;
- Invest in sustainability;
- Decentralise O&O funds (sectoral training and education funds);
- The region needs a director for coordination purposes. Who will assume responsibility for coordination?
- Greater visibility among national and regional government authorities. Employers/sectors must also assume more responsibility. Further cooperation between regional partners. The regional government must take the lead in this regard;
- Excessive project financing, the project stops when it is completed.

Limburg

Chaired by Ben van Essen

1. Presentation by Ingrid Wildhagen, Province of Limburg, Provincial Labour Market Policy

The key question in this presentation was: are we on the right track?

Several main points from this presentation:

- Up until a few years ago, population decline was a separate policy line for the province of Limburg. Today, it is integrated within overall policy, including labour market policy. Remarkably, an urban area in the province of Limburg is affected by a declining fertility rate and ageing population, in contrast to most other population decline regions in the Netherlands;
- A key aspect of labour market policy is how we can obtain and retain enough, sufficiently trained human capital to meet the needs of the business sector so that it can innovate and grow;
- With regard to solutions, three lines of action are used as the starting point, with the emphasis placed on top sectors:
 - ensure better harmonisation between supply and demand;
 - increase labour market participation;
 - learn and work without borders.

2. Presented by Laury van den Ham , Province of Limburg, Atlas of Opportunities for Cross-Border Cooperation

This presentation described a study carried out by the research agency "Atlas for Municipalities" and commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. The study was carried out due to the location of the province of Limburg, in the middle of the Euregio. Several main points from this presentation:

The study highlights opportunities for cross-border cooperation for South Limburg, Tongeren, Aachen and Liege. It is about potential, the ideal situation if no impediments to cross-border cooperation existed, in whatever form. The study was based on the theory of agglomeration benefits. The benefits that a spatial concentration of people and businesses offers in particular for career opportunities, the range of available services for potential customers and employees for companies.

The disadvantage of border regions is that they benefit less from their close proximity to one another compared to similar municipalities that are centrally located in a country. This is due to border obstacles, ranging from legislation and regulations to a limited knowledge of language and culture. The removal of such obstacles could give South Limburg a competitive position comparable to parts of the Amsterdam-Utrecht-Rotterdam conurbation. In theory, approximately 700,000 additional jobs could be reached, with an acceptable travel time. The removal of border obstacles would gradually also decrease unemployment in all four regions, which is currently higher than the average within each country (with a short-term increase in the city of Aachen).

With the support of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, a type of cross-border intermediary may be deployed in the Euregio shortly, tasked with handling these obstacles in a highly practical manner. The conclusions are:

- reducing the number of border obstacles will provide opportunities for all regions;
- the greatest potential lies in the labour market;
- the appeal can be increased further by eliminating obstacles in the area of facilities.

3. Brief introductions coupled with some recommendations

The chair asked everyone to indicate "where steps still need to be taken". The following points were discussed.

Atlas of Opportunities

- Who are the stakeholders in the removal of border obstacles? These are employers, both in the Netherlands and across the border. Employers' associations are under consideration as a way to reach them;
- The figures from the Atlas of Opportunities should be shown more widely and "sold" more effectively. In this case, especially in order to raise awareness among employers;
- Things are happening in relation to cross-border intercultural exchanges. Examples can be found in sport or within families;
- Networks and social relationships are important. Another improvement is also possible here.
- Institutions for senior secondary vocational education have difficulty attracting students from Germany. This is an example of restrictive regulations because these students must have a certain level of proficiency in Dutch (unlike in higher professional and university education). Senior secondary vocational education is a possible point of entry for students from across the border to start working on the Dutch labour market later on;
- It would be best if the proposed cross-border intermediary were to focus on specific themes and set to work in a concrete, targeted manner;
- The level of the working population in the east of South Limburg is very low and unemployment is high, these people do not cross the border;
- Employers must be involved personally, and not only through organisations, as well as educational institutions, on both sides of the border. They must start thinking in terms of a single labour market, something that a cross-border intermediary must focus on. Specific sectors of industry could be selected, and attention could be devoted to organising cross-border traineeships;
- To truly abolish border obstacles, it is crucial that children/young people from the Euregio learn the language and culture of neighbouring countries (German, French, Dutch). In them lies the future;
- Awareness among employers and employees is important.

Broad labour market policy

- It is important to preserve the work experience of older workers. The creation of additional traineeship positions for older people would be a good way to ensure this. This also means that the "mindset" of businesses must change and regulations should provide openings;
- The role of family companies in a region must not be underestimated. They are usually tied to a region and do not go away. They often already do a great deal locally, such as within the context of target groups that are difficult to place;
- Family companies frequently have many problems with succession, something that should merit greater attention;
- Numerous students from abroad (mostly from Germany) pursue their studies in Limburg. The challenge lies in ensuring that more of them also actually work in Limburg. It is strange that local businesses, such as APG, CBS or Chemelot do not recruit more specifically from this group.

The chair concluded overall that:

- Several potentials do exist, but something must be done with them;
- Network building is important, but must be concrete.

There are also a few specific points that require attention, such as the low level of education, specific issues relating to family companies and bottlenecks within senior secondary vocational education when it comes to recruiting students from abroad.

Anticipated population decline areas

Chaired by Mark Reede, Province of South Holland

The "Krimpdeler" (Share decline) is the name of the approach taken by the province of South Holland to raise awareness about decline. Mark Reede, the Demographics Programme Manager of the province of South Holland, explained why the province has opted for such an approach.

Creating an awareness of decline in general and of the effects within regions in particular is very important because competition among municipalities serves no interest whatsoever in the development of all kinds of economic activities. Municipalities should adopt a common approach on the basis of a joint awareness of the effects on a regional scale.

This is also the reason why Xplorelab, the province's innovation workshop, has been called in to assist. They have developed this process approach whereby three scenarios must be drawn up using a basic document entitled "Facts & Figures & Trends". The collective result is the "Krimpdeler" with the opportunity to make choices.

An explanation of the process was provided. Facts, figures and past and current trends will be used to study trends for 2030 and 2050. First of all, discussions will be held with specialists from all kinds of specific policy fields and knowledge institutes during an expert meeting in order to identify and consider ideas. This is the first part of the study. The second part is a similar process in regions with their own study.

These two studies will facilitate awareness and the discussion on how population decline can be tackled and who will play what role. This approach clarifies what municipalities, the province and central government can mean for one another.

After researcher Joop Buunk explained the facts, figures and trends in the province, Iris Goedhart from North Holland gave a short presentation on how this province is addressing this problem.

The second half of the workshop was interactive. Everyone present was asked to write down DOs, DON'Ts and their e-mail address on stickers and then place these on sheets. Everyone was also given the opportunity to mark the biggest DOs and DON'Ts with a green and red dot. The multiple stickers created a picture of warnings and recommendations. What lies in-between can be considered as tailor-made solutions.

At the conclusion of the workshop it was promised that the sheets will be worked out and e-mailed around. This will provide the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences relating to this topic with people whose tip or warning is of interest to the participant.

International examples

Chaired by Aldert de Vries

The key question is which experiences abroad can serve as inspiration for regions in the Netherlands affected by population decline.

Universities in Japan are very involved in such regions. The University of Kyoto has entered into an alliance with local authorities and business associations to boost services and economic activity in population decline areas. This is done not only via concrete actions such as the creation of a social programme or entrepreneurship training, but also by actively contributing to the region's overall strategy.

The "entrepreneurial university" can offer prospects for areas affected by population decline. Good examples were discussed, such as in Sweden where part of the curriculum includes drawing up a business plan for a company. This can help increase the number of students entering SMEs. The question is whether universities are encouraged correctly to make a significant contribution to local development. Producing academic publications is far more important for now.

The question was raised what the success of one region means in relation to another (Turin vs. Detroit). Good administrative leadership is a pivotal factor. Much can be achieved by providing direction and activating local stakeholders. Territorial Employment Pacts can be used for this purpose. It is important to focus on the growth potential of a region (innovation networks) as well as on the activation of the bottom of the labour market. This certainly does not occur all the time, as indicated by an example from the Upper Rhine valley.

Finally, the question was posed whether investments in labour markets within population decline areas do not conflict too much with market competition, thus making them highly inefficient. A response was that good investments in diverse regions are not a zero-sum game.

Concluding panel

Under the leadership of Mark Frequin, the chair for the day, a lively discussion was held with the concluding panel as the conference drew to a close. Here are some noteworthy statements and conclusions made during this discussion:

- Provincial Executive Member Marianne Besselink from the province of Groningen pointed to the existence of two worlds: the system world of policy and the world in which citizens live. The system world must operate more in service of the initiatives of citizens themselves. We must agree on creative solutions. This requires leadership and cooperation. The challenge is who will demonstrate leadership in relation to labour market problems.
- Harry van Waveren, chair of the economic vitality and labour market working group from the National Network on Population Decline (NNB), declared that he was pleased with the OECD study. In particular, people should not sit back and relax. They must establish connections and make choices, although the latter is difficult and can therefore generate resistance. The OECD report can help advance economic vitality and the labour market in the debate about population decline.
- The OECD dashboard can assist in diagnosing the labour market situation in the region.
- Employers could do more, now that the Chamber of Commerce and the government are withdrawing more and more. The question is how to stimulate them to this end. An example from Austria can serve as inspiration: why don't employers and employees take control themselves to tackle certain problems instead of leaving everything to the UWV Jobs Centre? Someone in the room commented that the most successful initiatives came from workers themselves and not so much from representative organisations higher up.
- People lagging behind with few job opportunities are a major problem in population decline regions. Promoting the mobility of this group is important. That can already start at a young age given that children have to travel further to school if small schools are closed.
- The importance of assuming the directive role was underline on many occasions.
- Finally, Robert Strauss of the European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion stated that is no magical solution to the problem of population decline, but that we can learn from each other and that networks may perhaps cost time, but not a considerable amount of money.

Cristina Martinez Fernandez from OECD/LEED concluded the panel discussion by rightly pointing out that it is now about implementation and the follow-up of the study.