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Work-related trends & De Achterhoek

Which opportunities for population growth does it provide?

Author: Rianne Weide (S4626575)

Supervisor: prof. dr. A. Lagendijk

Radboud Universiteit



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Author:

Rianne Weide

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Supervisor university:

Prof. dr. A. Lagendijk

Radboud University

Nijmegen School of Management

Supervisor internship:

D. Schierboom

Province of Gelderland

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Preface

This thesis was written during a research internship at the province of Gelderland from February 2021 to August 2021. This research is conducted to complete the master's program in Economic Geography at the Radboud University Nijmegen. This thesis could not have been accomplished without the support of the Province of Gelderland. The province of Gelderland offered me the opportunity to carry out this research and gave me a lot of freedom to conduct it.

In particular, I would like to thank Babine Scholten and Dick Schierboom for their pleasant guidance during my research process. Dick Schierboom supervised me during most parts of my research process. The weekly meetings were very pleasant and always offered more interesting insights to continue writing. With great enthusiasm, Dick taught me a lot about housing policies and De Achterhoek.

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Rianne Weide

Nijmegen, August 2021

Summary

De Achterhoek region has been designated as a “shrinking region” since 2015. In 2040, the expectation is that the population will drop by 5,5 percent. The home-working trend, which currently arises due to the covid-19 pandemic, may have a positive influence on the shrinkage in De Achterhoek. Because households may make different decisions about the physical characteristics of the private home given the changing role of housing as a workplace. In addition, the home-working trend can partially sever the geographical link between the house and the workplace. A second trend that may offer opportunities for De Achterhoek is the labour shortage in the region. In 2025, De Achterhoek needs an estimated 27,000 additional workers. However, this labour shortage may also offer opportunities to attract new people to the region. People looking for a place to live and work may opt for the region through the many job opportunities. This research investigates which opportunities the labour shortage and the home-working trend can provide for population growth and how these opportunities can best be utilised. The research is conducted based on desk-research, literature study and semi-open interviews with various respondents. The respondents are working within the province of Gelderland, De Achterhoek municipalities, the regional cooperation 8RHK, an employment agency, a business organisation or a real estate agency.

The policy framework has identified three major challenges De Achterhoek region is facing, namely the labour shortage, the changing population composition and the mismatch in the housing market. The policy framework indicated that the industrial sectors, agricultural professions and ICT professions are likely to face shortages of skilled people. The population of De Achterhoek has increased by 247 people during the period 2015-2020. However, the decrease in population between 2007 and 2015 has been stronger than the increase in the past five years. Despite the slight population growth in recent years, the region is suffering from an ageing population and dejuvenation. This also has a negative effect on the labour force of De Achterhoek in the future. Not only is attention needed to the shrinking and changing population of De Achterhoek, but also the regional housing market needs attention. There is a shortage of housing types for starters and seniors and there is also a major risk of a housing surplus for certain housing types in De Achterhoek. To tackle these problems in the housing market, municipalities can build according to necessity. The question remains whether the home-working trend and the labour shortage can provide opportunities to attract more residents and if the two trends can help tackle the three major challenges De Achterhoek is facing.

The theoretical framework describes the reasons why people are moving to rural areas and how the home-working trend affects relocation. The theoretical framework argues that the major cause of migration is economic and that young people are more likely to move for economic motives. This means that the availability of a sufficient regional labour market is a driver of migration. In addition, it appears that a mixed group of migrants migrate to rural areas for various reasons. Also, three so-called “household strategies” emerged to deal with the new relocation opportunities of the home-working trend. The stay-putters will stay in the same city even if they work from home full time. The lifestyle migrants will migrate for lifestyle aspirations because of disappeared commuting restrictions. The nomads will take locational freedom because of the ability to do their work from every available location worldwide. It is expected that the labour shortage can provide opportunities to attract new people to De Achterhoek because the regional labour market is considered to be a driver of migration. Additionally, working from home can (partly) sever the geographical link between the house and the workplace location, which makes living in De Achterhoek and working elsewhere in the country possible according to the literature. Whether these opportunities, derived from the literature, are also perceived in practice, will be investigated in the results chapter.

The results chapter confirmed that the labour shortage brings opportunities to attract new residents, based on the economic binding it provides and the fact that the home-working trend also provides opportunities to attract new residents to De Achterhoek. In addition, the findings of this research have confirmed that the ageing population and the labour shortage are the biggest challenges the region is facing. Therefore, it is important that the two work-related trends, besides population growth, also contribute to combating the ageing of the population and reducing the labour shortage. The labour shortage, as already mentioned, brings opportunities to attract new residents. In addition, attracting workers will also help to combat the ageing of the population because workers are under 67 years of age. The home-working trend brings opportunities to attract new residents in the short-term and long-term. In the short-term, De Achterhoek can attract new residents based on the rural idyllic. Also, opportunities can be found in maintaining De Achterhoek youth in the region. In the long-term, the expectation is that home-workers may look for a job in De Achterhoek after some years. In addition, children of home-workers may continue to work or live in De Achterhoek because of their ties to the region. These long-term opportunities may be beneficial for countering the ageing population and the labour shortage.

After having identified the opportunities of the work-related trends, the next step is to explain how the opportunities of the two trends can be utilised and which (policy) adjustments are needed. To utilise the opportunities from the labour shortage, De Achterhoek must present itself in its best light and should change the image of not having any facilities. Also, De Achterhoek must show that there are lots of attractive vacancies to be filled and residents can live and work comfortably in De Achterhoek. Additionally, mobility must also be improved. Return migration is, furthermore, seen as an easy way to attract new residents. Also, more homes should be built, for example by better distributing the construction areas across the country and flexible homes, from which workers can look for a permanent place to live, need to be built in the region. To utilise the opportunities of the home-working trend, it is important to build homes not too small and to avoid the overbuilding of nature. Additionally, even for the few days that home-workers must go to the office, they want to do it within a short timeframe. So, it is important to improve mobility by road and rail. Moreover, to utilise the opportunities of the two trends for the entire region, the different municipalities must collaborate better with each other and coordinate their plans more often. Because growth in one city can result in population decline in the other city. The cooperation within the region between the different parties is, however, considered to be relatively good. But small remarks are that aldermen at the thematic roundtables all “want to score” for their own municipality and that a more integrated approach is required.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research objective

De Achterhoek region has been officially designated as a shrinking region since 2015¹. A shrinking region is a region with an (expected) substantial and structural decline in population and households (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). De Achterhoek estimates that the population will drop by 5,5 percent in 2040 (Achterhoek Board, 2020). The designation of De Achterhoek as a shrinking region means that the region will receive more money from the central government to tackle the shrinking problem. In 2020, despite a slight population increase between 2018 and 2020 of 792 new residents, De Achterhoek region will still be considered as a shrinking region (CBS, 2021). Population growth is not something to expect in a shrinking region. Are there any chances of continuing population growth in De Achterhoek?

1.2 Research problem

According to the regional population and household forecast provided by Het Centraal Planbureau (Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis) and Het Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving (Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency) (CBS, 2016a), the number of shrinking municipalities and shrinking regions will increase in the coming years. It is expected that one out of five municipalities have to deal with a population shrinkage of more than 2,5 percent. These shrinking municipalities are often located at the edges of the country. In the so-called “shrinking regions”, there is not only a population decline but also a changing population composition. The proportion of over-sixties is higher than the national average and the number of young people up to 19 years of age is lower. De Achterhoek is one of nine shrinking regions in the Netherlands.

The question is, what does this shift to demographic decline and shrinkage mean for local and regional authorities such as municipalities and provinces and how do they respond in their policy? (Verwest, Sorel & Buitelaar, 2009). Do they focus on national trends to make their region more attractive, and if so, on which ones and what is the effect?

The home-working trend, which currently arises due to the covid-19 pandemic, may have a positive influence on shrinkage in De Achterhoek. According to urban economics professor Eveline van Leeuwen (2020), shrinking regions, such as De Achterhoek, can benefit from the pandemic. Van Leeuwen expects that working from home becomes the standard. The distance between the private home and the workplace becomes less important for the choice of residence. According to research conducted by Nieuwsuur (2021, January 31st), half of the 25 biggest employers of the Netherlands expect to need less office space, as their employees will work from home more often. Before the covid-19 pandemic, employees worked in the office four to five days each week. After the pandemic, this is expected to be about two or three days. The rest of the week, employees work at home or at a customer.

According to Doling & Arundel (2020), households may make different decisions about the physical characteristics of the private home given the changing role of housing as a workplace and given a decoupling from required daily travel to the employer. Traditionally, working involved commuting from home to the workplace. This implies that the initial search for a job was limited to an acceptable commuting distance (Anderstig & Mattson 1991).

¹ The following municipalities are part of the shrinking region De Achterhoek: Aalten, Bronckhorst, Berkelland, Doetinchem Montferland, Oost Gelre, Oude IJsselstreek and Winterswijk

Nowadays, working from home can, according to Doling & Arundel (2020), partially sever the geographical link between the house and workplace location. Whereas commuting distance, with their (time) costs, no longer structure the decision about where to seek a job or in which city to live. In addition, Kleinman (2020) states that skilled workers may choose to live at locations that are relatively distant from their workplace if their daily commuting is replaced by working from home.

A second trend that may offer opportunities for De Achterhoek is the labour shortage in the region. The working population in De Achterhoek is declining faster than elsewhere in the Netherlands (Achterhoek Board, 2019). In 2030, it is expected that the working population drops by 12 percent and De Achterhoek needs an estimated 27,000 additional workers in 2025. From this group approximately 7,000 workers with a university degree or college degree, 14,000 workers with a secondary vocational degree and 6,000 workers with a pre-vocational degree are needed (Achterhoek Board, 2019). There are, especially, many vacancies in the technology branch (Achterhoek Board, 2020). The Dutch and De Achterhoek labour market have been tight for several years until the start of the covid-19 pandemic. The tightness of the labour market increased between the beginning of 2017 and the end of 2019. During this period, it was harder for employers in De Achterhoek to fill vacant posts than for their colleagues in the rest of the Netherlands.

Even if the labour shortage turns out to be lower in the post-corona era, the challenge remains gigantic. Demographic developments such as dejuvenation (young people moving out of the region) and ageing (share of older people in the composition of the population increases) add to this challenge. This labour shortage may also offer opportunities to attract new (young) people to the region. People looking for a place to live and work may opt for the region through the many job opportunities. To bind these workers to the region, the housing needs must match the supply in De Achterhoek and therefore insights into the housing needs of the potential workers are needed.

The home-working trend and the labour shortage in the region are two current work-related trends that may offer opportunities to attract new residents to De Achterhoek. If the two trends provide opportunities to attract new residents, there is of course a need for sufficient houses that meet the housing needs of the new residents.

The population of De Achterhoek has grown between January 2020 and January 2021 with 511 new residents (De Gelderlander, October 10th 2020). This population growth seems to stem from the migration of *Randstedelingen* to De Achterhoek (De Gelderlander, January 16th 2021). Domestic migration from De Achterhoek showed a departure surplus for a long period of time (Achterhoek Board, 2020). This means that more people from De Achterhoek move to elsewhere in the Netherlands than people from other Dutch regions move to De Achterhoek. Since 2017, there has been a reversal. Every year, more people from elsewhere in the country settle in De Achterhoek than leave. As a result, the domestic migration balance has been positive for the past three years. Research by RIGO (2019) showed a growing influx from people from De Randstad and mainly from people over 45 years of age. A reason for migration from De Randstad to the countryside may be the availability of space. The countryside is seen as attractive because there is more space inside and outside the private house. Moreover, the covid-19 pandemic has shown that working from home gets simpler and has some major benefits.

These benefits can also be exploited in De Achterhoek, which has recently been supplied with a fibre-optic network (De Gelderlander, September 28th 2019). Another reason for the migration from De Randstad towards De Achterhoek seems to be the housing prices in De Achterhoek, which are lower compared to De Randstad.

Should De Achterhoek respond to the two work-related trends and show how working and living can take place in De Achterhoek? Which opportunities do the two trends offer and how can these opportunities best be utilised? And are there any adjustments needed? These questions are the focus of this research.

1.3 Research questions

In short, this research investigates which opportunities the two work-related trends, the labour shortage and home-working trend, offer for De Achterhoek. And how these opportunities can best be utilised.

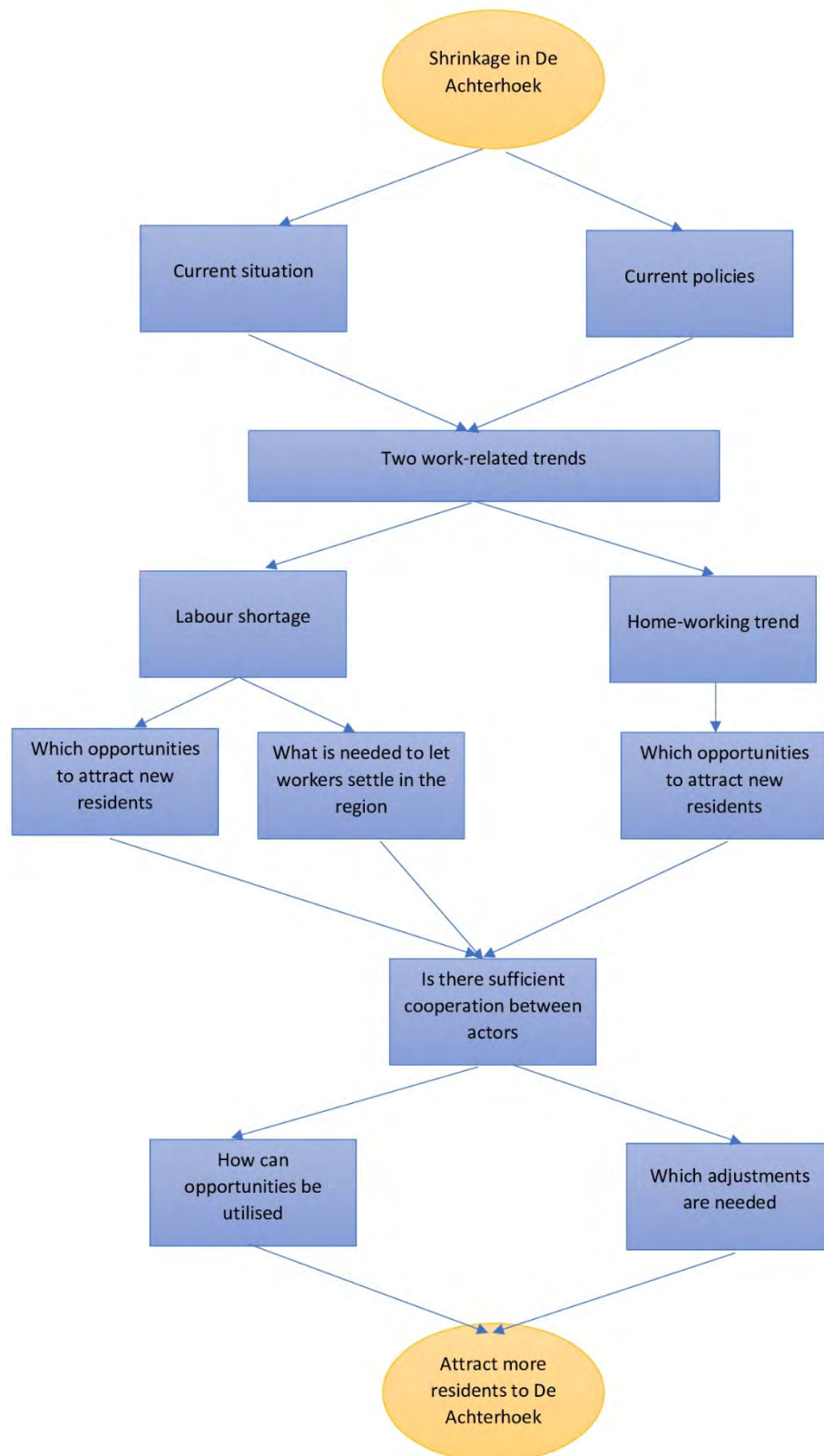
Main question

Which opportunities does the labour shortage and home-working trend offer to attract more residents to De Achterhoek and how can these opportunities best be utilised?

Sub-questions

1. What is the current situation in De Achterhoek regarding shrinkage and which policies are currently executed?
2. Which opportunities does the labour shortage offer for De Achterhoek to attract new residents and what is needed to let the workers settle in the region?
3. Which opportunities does the home-working trend offer for De Achterhoek to attract new residents?
4. Is there sufficient cooperation between the actors to utilise the opportunities of work-related trends?
5. How can the opportunities offered by the two work-related trends be utilised and which adjustments are needed?

The research questions leading to the research model, which is displayed in figure 1, on the next page.



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Figure 1: Research model

1.4 Research relevance

1.4.1 Societal relevance

According to the authors Carbonaro, Leanza, McCann & Medda (2018) and the United Nations (2018), shrinkage and demographic decline in rural areas is a cumulative process in multiple places all over the world. The move of people out of a shrinking area is perturbing governments on the local and national scale. Ideally, young people start their adult life in the shrinking region where they were born and buy a house and build a social network. Loss of especially young adults in the region is seen as a failure for the region according to Thissen, Fortuijn, Strijker & Haartsen (2010). In De Achterhoek the age group between twenty and forty years old is, according to CBS (2021), under-represented.

In addition, the shifting focus towards knowledge-intensive industries and the service sector is a boost for bigger cities. This shift puts pressure on the periphery and smaller cities (Bontje & Mustard, 2012). There is a growing gap between rural less-favoured areas and popular well-connected places with a more urban character. This research investigates trends that may help De Achterhoek to attract new residents. It will thereby try to close the growing gap between popular urban spaces and rural areas.

Research on migrants' motivations to move to rural areas often focuses on those rural areas which are already popular and attractive to live in. While research into rural areas, which are less popular to live in, remains relatively under-researched (Bijker, 2013). The characteristics and preferences of people willing to move to rural areas, in general, have been investigated for numerous years (Van Dam, Heins & Elbersen, 2002). But the influence of work-related trends on the preferences of people has not been investigated. Understanding the preferences of people considering moving to rural areas and how these preferences may change because of the work-related trends, may help to attract new residents to De Achterhoek.

There is a realistic fear that demographic shrinkage will lead to vacancy and degradation in the spatial area (Van Nimwegen & Heering, 2009). Shrinkage is seen as a signal that things are "not so good" in a particular area. Population decline can also put pressure on the support base of (local) facilities. In addition, once an exodus from a certain area gets underway, it will perpetuate itself or strengthen itself because the area will become less and less attractive for those who stay behind (Van Nimwegen & Heering, 2009). Even in a small-scale country such as the Netherlands, where distances are relatively short, the accessibility of services and thus the welfare of citizens, can be threatened by population decline. This research aims to have a positive influence on the shrinkage in De Achterhoek and thereby tries to diminish the negative processes of shrinkage for the residents and living environment of De Achterhoek.

1.4.2 Scientific relevance

The current substantial shift towards the increased use of the home as a workplace implies significant outcomes for our current analysis of housing and home according to Doling & Arundel (2020). Literature on the specific topic of working from home exists but there has not been much attention to this phenomenon from housing researchers and urban researchers.

Meanwhile, rural areas and smaller cities had more modest declines and sometimes even population gains. Like the slight population increase between 2018 and 2020 of 792 new residents in De Achterhoek. Kleinman (2020) states that the current covid-19 pandemic accelerates this trend and perhaps points towards a flatter hierarchy of cities. He also expects a stronger role for smaller cities where urban benefits can be better balanced with the increased demand for space both externally and internally.

De-urbanization is a relatively new phenomenon. This is partly the case because cities are becoming increasingly crowded and expensive. Rural areas, on the other hand, are a suitable alternative. Rural areas are, according to Ter Heide & Smit (2016), relatively less crowded and less expensive, also there is more greenery present. In addition, today's technology makes it easier to choose a village in a rural area. People can nowadays easily work from home due to improved technology, which makes it less necessary to live in a city, where often more job opportunities are present (Peters & Batenburg, 2004). This de-urbanization process is a recent phenomenon in the Netherlands. After a long period of growth of only cities, several villages in rural areas are nowadays growing in terms of population (CBS, 2016a). On the one hand, Dutch villages in rural areas are successfully developing into prosperous residential villages. On the other hand, a part of the Dutch villages is facing a decline and a population decrease (Steenbekkers & Vermeij, 2013). Migration from De Randstad to regions beyond has intensified in the past years (NOS, February 24th 2021). Since 2015, more people have been moving out of De Randstad to other areas of the country, which includes Flevoland and large parts of Gelderland, Overijssel and North Brabant, than the other way around (NOS, February 24th 2021). So, for this reason, a key question for planners and urban researchers is, what influence does this de-urbanization trend have on residential preferences in rural areas (Sturzaker, 2020).

The quality of the residential environment is often seen as the critical pull factor of rural areas (Van Dam et al., 2002). Return migration is also a special motive for rural migration. Return migration refers to people who are moving back to a place where they lived previously. Return migrants are more recurrently motivated by social reasons compared to non-return migrants according to Niedomysl & Amcoff (2011). The above-mentioned motives for moving to rural areas have been well investigated in recent years but two uninvestigated work-related trends are currently emerging. This research will focus on those new trends and investigate which opportunities it creates for population growth in the shrinking region De Achterhoek.

1.5 Reading guide

In chapter two, the policy framework, De Achterhoek region will be described. This chapter will discuss the cooperation within the region and discuss the regional labour market. Also, the shrinkage situation and the shrinkage policies will be discussed in chapter two. In chapter three, the theoretical framework, various migration theories will be discussed, specifically looking at rural migration. Also, the influence of the home-working trend on relocation will be explored. Among others, the theories of Halfacree (1994), Toffler (1980) and Doling & Arundel (2020) will be discussed. The methodology of this research will be explained in chapter four. This chapter describes how this research was conducted and which methodological choices were made. In chapter five, the results chapter, the sub-questions are answered one by one and the findings of the study are presented. Finally, the conclusion provides the answer to the main question of this research.

2. Policy framework

De Achterhoek is the central case in this study. Therefore, it is essential to have some background information that relates to the central theme in this research and on topics related to the main question namely population growth, the labour shortage and the home-working trend. Section 2.1 introduces De Achterhoek region, which includes explaining the cooperation between the involved parties in the region: business organisations, governmental organisations and educational organisations. Also, the regional economy and the policies to reduce the labour shortage will be described. Paragraph 2.2 explains the shrinkage situation in De Achterhoek region. It describes the demographic developments of the region. Section 2.2.2 explores the situation in the housing market because if a region wants to attract people, there must be enough houses available. To provide recommendations for attracting more residents to De Achterhoek, it is important to know what is already being done in the region and which policy choices are being made. Therefore, paragraph 2.3 will describe the shrinkage and real estate policies in De Achterhoek. First, the national policies are discussed, subsequently, the regional policies are presented and lastly the municipal policies are discussed. The conclusion of this chapter follows in paragraph 2.4.

2.1 Case description

De Achterhoek region is located in the east of the Netherlands and close to the German-Dutch border. The region is part of the province of Gelderland but does not consist of a clear geographical border (IJzerman, 1957). In this research, De Achterhoek region consist of the following municipalities: Winterswijk, Oude IJsselstreek, Doetinchem, Oost Gelre, Bronckhorst, Berkelland and Aalten. In 2020, the seven Achterhoek municipalities consist of 262,793 inhabitants (Achterhoek Board, 2020).

The region has an (overall) rural character and most municipalities cover a large surface area. The municipalities contain multiple villages with often a quite distance between them (Sterk Bestuur in Gelderland, 2015). While the Netherlands has an average of 517 inhabitants per square kilometre, De Achterhoek consists of 236 inhabitants per square kilometre (Achterhoek Board, 2020). Options for higher education are not present in the region. Therefore, lots of young people are leaving the area to study somewhere else in the Netherlands (Sterk Bestuur in Gelderland, 2015).

2.1.1 Regional collaborations

De Achterhoek works together in three cooperative structures namely the Region Achterhoek, De Achterhoek Board and De Achterhoek Raad. These corporations' control and steer each other but also support each other.

De Achterhoek Raad is a democratically legitimised body consisting of 49 council members from the seven municipalities (Achterhoek Board, 2019). All political parties of the municipalities delegate one representative. De Achterhoek Raad defines, at an early stage, the frameworks and themes which De Achterhoek Board should work on. De Achterhoek Raad determines the overall course of De Achterhoek. However, De Achterhoek Raad has no formal public-law powers (Achterhoek Board, 2019).

In contradiction to De Achterhoek Raad, De Achterhoek Board does not consist solely of members of political parties but consists of representatives of entrepreneurs, social organisations and a representative of the province of Gelderland (Achterhoek Board, 2019). The members of De Achterhoek Board are nominated by the various organisations. De Achterhoek Board focuses on the spatial-economic agenda of the region, this vision is described in *De Achterhoek Vision 2030*².

² Achterhoek vision 2030, through <https://8rhk.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/achterhoek-visie-2030.pdf>

The Board supervises the progress and implementation of *De Achterhoek Vision 2030*. The content of *De Achterhoek Vision 2030* and the actual implementation is allocated to the six thematic roundtables of the 8RHK organisation. All kinds of different parties work together at the thematic roundtables to achieve the goals of *De Achterhoek Vision 2030*. Each thematic roundtable has its own theme on which it is working. These themes are: Smart Work & Innovation, Education & Labour Market, Housing & Real Estate, Mobility & Accessibility, Circular Economy & Energy Transition and the Healthiest Region (8RHK, n.d.).

De Region Achterhoek consists of a General Board and an Executive Board (8RHK, n.d.). The General Board consists of the seven mayors of the participating municipalities. The Executive Board is elected out of the seven mayors and consists of three members. De Region Achterhoek is responsible for the implementation of *De Achterhoek Vision 2030* and the realisation of the annual plans and the accompanying investment agenda. Another task of the Region Achterhoek is to advise De Achterhoek Board and De Achterhoek Council (8RHK, n.d.).

Besides the three cooperation organisations, the 8RHK ambassadors are committed to the region. There are over 250 ambassadors and they take part in De Achterhoek Raad, Achterhoek Board or thematic roundtables (8RHK, n.d.).

2.1.2 Regional economy

Almost 75 percent of the companies in De Achterhoek are family businesses, which makes them the backbone of the regional economy (Achterhoek Board, 2020). This share of family businesses is considerably higher than the national average. These, mostly locally rooted small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), provide the regional economy with stability and continuity. The industry sector is, with a share of almost 20 percent in total employment, the main driving force of the regional economy. In 2020, 2.7 percent of the working population in De Achterhoek was unemployed which corresponds to about 3,700 people. Unemployment in De Achterhoek is significantly lower than in the Netherlands as a whole (3.4 percent).

The Dutch labour market and De Achterhoek labour market have been tight for several years until the start of the covid-19 pandemic (Achterhoek Board, 2020). The tightness increased between the beginning of 2017 and the end of 2019. For employers in De Achterhoek region, it is harder to fill vacancies than for their colleagues elsewhere in the Netherlands. In De Achterhoek, as well as in the Netherlands, there is a growing employment and a lagging labour force. New workers are partly found outside the Netherlands. But it should be noted that due to the current covid-19 pandemic, there is hardly any influx of foreign workers and it is uncertain whether and how quickly patterns, from before the pandemic, will recover (Achterhoek Board, 2020).

Peeters & Cörvers (2018) have established the *Labour Market Forecast Achterhoek 2017-2022*. They found that the industrial sectors, which are important for Achterhoek, are likely to face shortages of technically trained people (Peeters & Cörvers, 2018). Furthermore, it appears that, in proportion to the Netherlands, there are clearly more low and middle-skilled people in Achterhoek than higher educated people. All categories of academic educated employees are underrepresented in De Achterhoek and the share of academic educated employees is only half of the Dutch average. This means that employers who are looking for university graduates have to deal with a limited labour supply, especially in the engineering sector (Peeters & Cörvers, 2018). Table 1, on the next page, shows the labour market tension per professional class in De Achterhoek and the Netherlands.

Table 1: Labour market tension Achterhoek & Netherlands, 2nd quarter 2020 (Achterhoek Board, 2020)

Professional class	Achterhoek	The Netherlands
Agricultural professions	Tight	Average
Business and administrative professions	Average	Average
Commercial professions	Average	Average
Service professions	Average	Average
ICT professions	Tight	Tight
Managers	Average	Average
Public administration, security and legal professions	Average	Average
Pedagogical professions	Average	Average
Technical professions	Average	Tight
Transport and logistics professions	Average	Average
Care and welfare professions	Average	Average

Table 1 shows that there is a labour tightness in the agricultural professions and ICT professions in De Achterhoek. We need to further zoom in on the jobs which are labelled as very tight in De Achterhoek labour market. We can find those “tight” jobs by looking at the tension indicator. The tension indicator measures the tightness (tension) in the labour market. Low tension means that it is easy for employers to fill a vacancy (Achterhoek Board, 2020). High tension means that unemployed people have a very large choice of jobs. If the tension indicator is 1, the labour market has reached an equilibrium. A labour market tension between 0.25 and 0.67 is labelled as spacious, between 0.67 and 1.5 the tension is labelled as average and between 1.5 and 4.0 as tight (Achterhoek Board, 2020).

The tightness on the labour market has increased between the beginning of 2017 and the end of 2019 for the Netherlands by 1.0 points and for De Achterhoek by 1.6 points (Achterhoek Board, 2020). For employers in De Achterhoek, it has become harder to fill vacancies than for their colleagues elsewhere in the Netherlands. Table 2 shows the professions with a very high-tension indicator in De Achterhoek.

Table 2: Professions with very high labour shortages in Achterhoek, 2nd quarter 2020 (Achterhoek Board, 2020)

Professions	Tension indicator
Machine technicians	8.8
Nurses (secondary vocational education)	5.7
Engineers (non-electrical)	5.2
Specialised nurses	4.9
Software and application developers	4.9
Construction workers	4.9
Production managers in industry and construction	4.8
Accountants	4.4
Transport planners and logistics workers	4.2
Plumbers and pipe fitters	4.1

2.1.3 Current policies regarding labour shortage

The labour shortage in De Achterhoek may cause companies to open a second business location elsewhere in the Netherlands or companies may decide to leave the region completely according to Arthur Jansen (chairman of Collaborative Industrial Centres in De Achterhoek) (De Gelderlander, April 15th 2021).

In order to fill the labour shortage of 27,000 jobs in 2030, the following policies, among others, are being implemented in the region (8RHK, 2020a):

- Match education as closely as possible to the labour demand
 - Offering Associate Degree (AD) programs at the Grensland College
 - Smart hub: With this project, De Achterhoek will be represented as “the internship and graduation region of the Netherlands” and as the “Smart Industry region”. De Achterhoek region will be promoted among young students throughout the Netherlands. The project will show young people that De Achterhoek has a lot to offer to students who are looking for a first full-time job or an internship.
 - Smart technical education region Achterhoek (STERA): A network of training places where secondary schools can offer students technical elective courses. With the help of the “STERA learning route”, De Achterhoek region can educate more students for different technological jobs and can show students what the technology sector has to offer for them.
- Increase labour productivity
 - SME deal: aims to increase labour productivity by at least 5 percent at 100 companies in De Achterhoek region within two years. The goal is to keep companies attractive for qualified employees.
- Retraining people
 - Life-Long Development Project: facilitating different training and development opportunities to reach a future-proof workforce.
 - Talent Development Fund: investing in the retraining of employees who are threatened with discharge.

In addition, efforts are being made to bring back people to De Achterhoek who were born in the region but have moved elsewhere in the country to study. According to Mark Boumans (chairman Achterhoek Ambassadors), this is an easy step because these people already have affinity with the region (De Gelderlander, April 15th 2021). According to professor population decline Bettina Bock, the main focus should be on returning working people to the region who are also in their twenties and thirties so that the population composition of De Achterhoek changes as well.

However, this approach will not solve the entire labour shortage. As described earlier in paragraph 2.1, there are no options for higher education in De Achterhoek. According to Bettina Bock, young people from De Achterhoek move to bigger cities in the Netherlands for their higher education, because there are no opportunities for higher education in De Achterhoek. There is a major chance that those students will stay in or around their student city, after finishing their higher education because the jobs that match their obtained education are limited in De Achterhoek (De Gelderlander, April 15th, 2021). To tackle this problem, De Achterhoek ambassadors have started a project to match education in the region with the regional labour market. Two part-time associate degree courses have been started in Winterswijk at the Grensland college.

In this way, secondary vocational education students who want to continue their studies at a higher level can now stay in the region for several higher education courses (De Gelderlander, April 15th 2021). In addition, according to the 8RHK (2021), an attractive and suitable housing stock is very important for attracting and retaining workers in the region. How the region intends to realise this attractive and suitable housing stock is described in section 2.3.2.

One of the policies “increase labour productivity” can ensure that a company needs fewer workers to carry out its operations. But, when a company works more efficiently, and can therefore manufacture cheaper and faster, there is a major possibility that the company will get more demand for its products and needs to grow as a result. Growth, however, will mean that the company will have to recruit employees to make the growth possible. De Achterhoek is a region with many successful and innovative companies. However, it remains difficult for companies to attract enough employees, even if the company is a global leader in its sector. The question then remains: is it part of the “system” that De Achterhoek is not attractive for employees? Although this is an interesting question, it will not be addressed in this research due to the short time period of this research.

2.2 Shrinkage situation in De Achterhoek

This paragraph describes the shrinkage situation in De Achterhoek. To interpret the current shrinkage situation in the region, section 2.2.1 will focus on the demographic figures. There must be enough houses available in De Achterhoek to attract new residents, therefore section 2.2 describes the current situation in the housing market. After all, without a home, people will not move to De Achterhoek.

2.2.1 Demography

The total population in De Achterhoek region decreased by 1.2 percent between 2007 and 2020 (Achterhoek Board, 2020). If we zoom in on the different municipalities, we discover large differences. Between 2007 and 2020, the number of inhabitants decreased in six municipalities: Winterswijk, Oude IJsselstreek, Oost Gelre, Bronckhorst, Berkelland and Aalten. Whereas the municipality of Doetinchem had a population increase of 3.1 percent. This trend is displayed in figure 2.

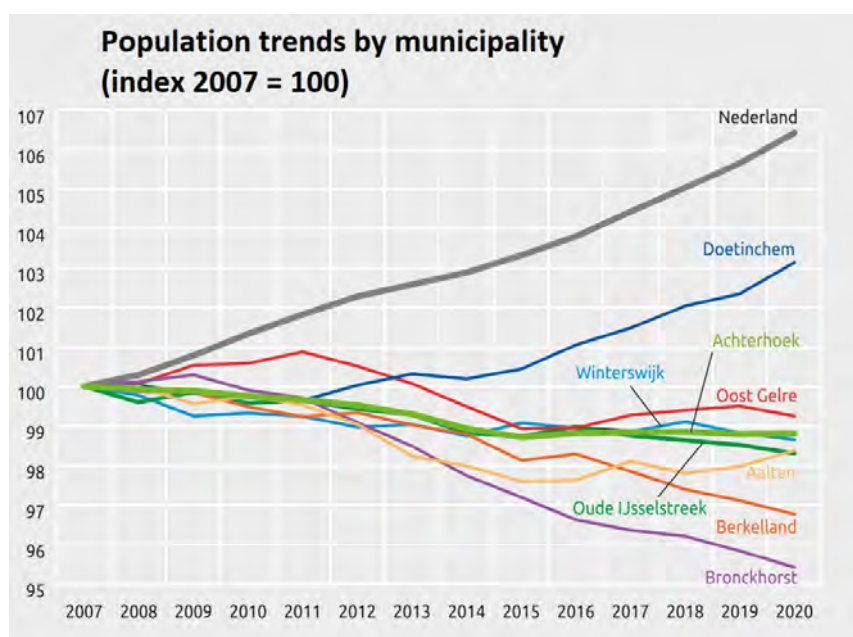


Figure 2: population trends by municipality (Achterhoek Board, 2020)

After a years-long period of population decline, there has been a slow turnaround since 2015. During the period 2015-2020, De Achterhoek population has increased by 247 people. Yet, the decrease in population between 2007 and 2015 has been stronger than the increase in the past five years (Achterhoek Board, 2020). This trend is displayed in figure 3, on the next page.

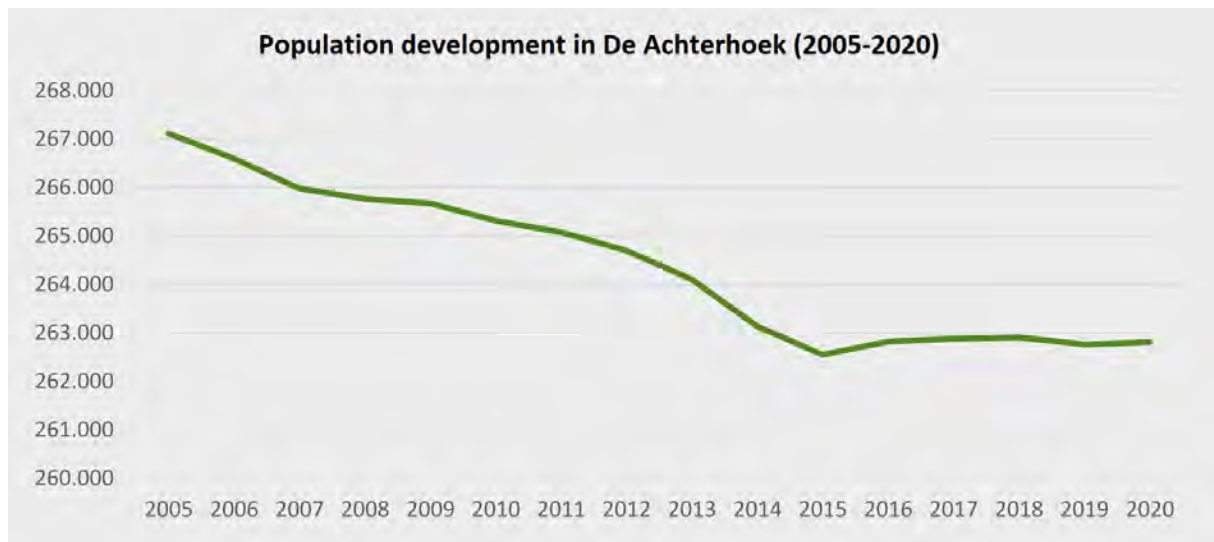


Figure 3: population development (8RHK, 2020b).

Not only the size of the population of De Achterhoek is changing, but its composition is changing as well (Achterhoek Board, 2020). The relative increase of older people in the region, also known as ageing, is taking place rapidly. This is partly caused by a decreasing number of births and an increased life expectancy. The ageing population is going on in large parts of the Netherlands, but in De Achterhoek this trend is developing faster. The group of people aged 50 years or older, increased from 37 percent to 47 percent over the period 2007-2020. In the Netherlands as a whole, the group of people aged 50 years or older, has increased from 34 percent to 40 percent during the same period. At the beginning of 2020, a total of 123,700 people were 50 years or older and living in De Achterhoek. In 2007, this number was approximately 100,000 (Achterhoek Board, 2020).

At the same time, the number and proportion of young people in De Achterhoek is decreasing (Achterhoek Board, 2020). This is also referred to as dejuvenation. In 2007, the proportion of inhabitants under 18 years of age was 23 percent, in 2020 this number decreased to 18 percent (Achterhoek Board, 2020).

Dejuvenation and aging will continue in the coming years (8RHK, 2020b). The number of children (0-15 years) has decreased by 20 percent in the last ten years. Simultaneously, the number of elderly people (65+) has increased by almost 30 percent in the past ten years (8RHK, 2020b). Figure 4, on the next page, shows the development of the age structure in De Achterhoek.

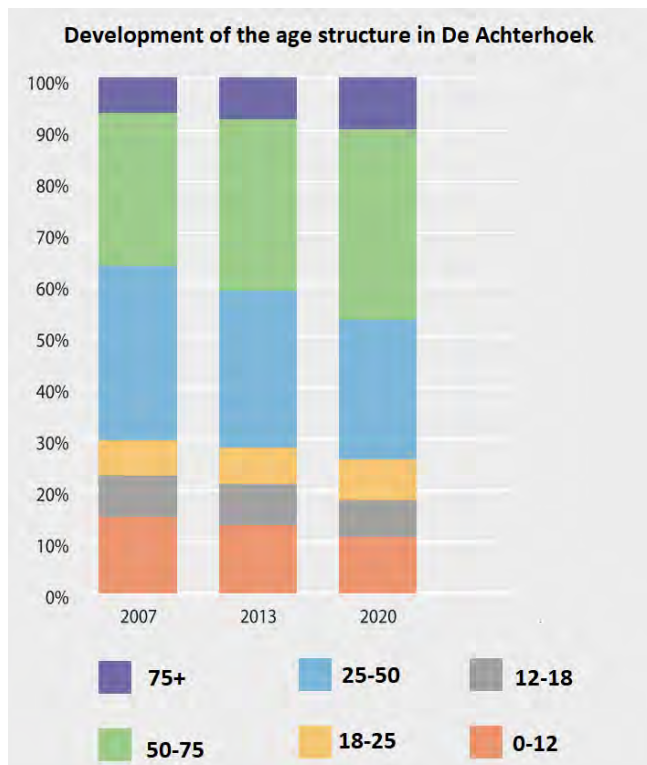


Figure 4: Development of the age structure in De Achterhoek (Achterhoek Board, 2020)

The population in De Achterhoek is expected to fall by 5.5 percent in the next 20 years (Achterhoek Board, 2020). In 2040, De Achterhoek will have approximately 248,000 inhabitants. This population decline contrasts with the national trend. The Dutch population is expected to increase by more than 9 percent until 2040, while De Achterhoek expects a decrease of 5.5 percent.

Figure 5 shows the expected Dutch and Achterhoek population in the coming 20 years.

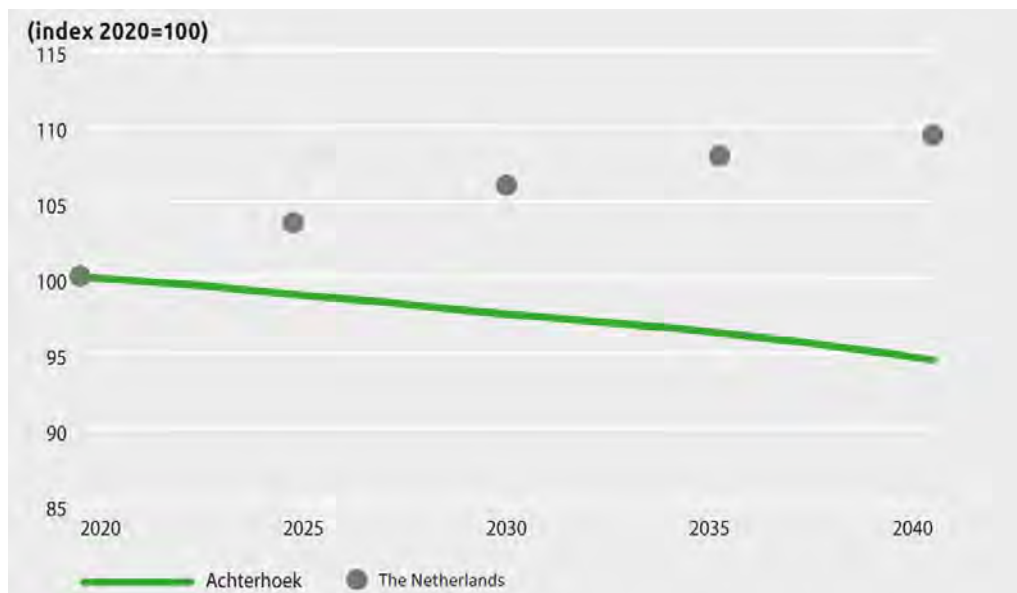


Figure 5: Forecast population development Achterhoek and the Netherlands, 2020-2040 (Achterhoek Board, 2020)

2.2.2 Situation on the housing market

De Achterhoek Board (2020) states that the housing market is under pressure. Since mid-2018, all municipalities in De Achterhoek must deal with a tense housing market where the supply is lower than the demand. The current pressure is partly caused because young people under the age of 30 are less likely to leave De Achterhoek. In addition, there is a greater influx of people aged 45 years or older (Achterhoek Board, 2020). Due to the shortage of homes, the circulation of houses is stagnating and prices are rising. Especially for first-time buyers it is increasingly difficult to enter the housing market. This is also partly due to the mortgage rules and the consequences of the social loan system (Achterhoek Board, 2020).

In a shrinking region, housing vacancy levels are always looked at with great attention. The total house vacancy rate in De Achterhoek is 2.9 percent (8RHK, 2020b). This concerns both rental and owner-occupied properties. Almost all municipalities show a decreasing trend in the number of vacant houses, only the municipality of Winterswijk shows an increase of vacant houses in 2019. This is partly caused because houses in Winterswijk are more often used as a second home or used for other purposes (8RHK, 2020b).

In every municipality in De Achterhoek there is a shortage of housing types in price segments which starters and seniors are looking for (8RHK, 2020b). The current housing stock is also insufficiently responsive to new home seekers on the market. In contrast to the housing shortage, there is also a major risk of housing surpluses for certain housing types in De Achterhoek. Figure 6 shows the housing mismatch in De Achterhoek.

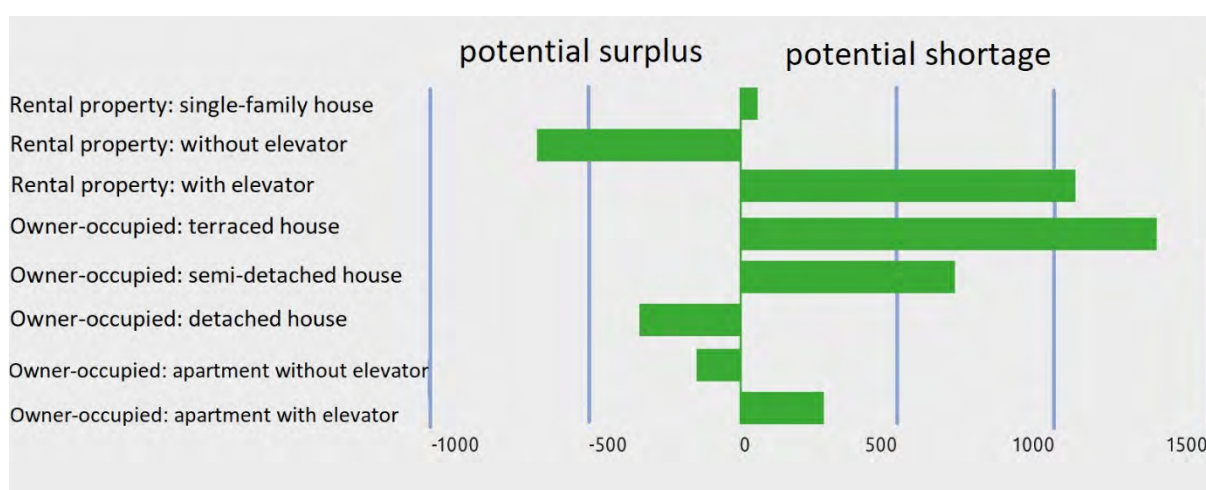


Figure 6: Housing supply and demand balance, Achterhoek 2018-2023 (8RHK, 2019)

In addition to housing vacancy levels, new construction numbers are also important to analyse in a shrinking region. In 2019, 673 new homes were added; this is 6 percent less than in 2018, while the pressure on the housing market has increased. This is partly due to the long delivery times of raw materials as well as a shortage of qualified staff in the construction and installation industry (8RHK, 2020b). Table 3, on the next page, displays the net increase of houses per municipality in 2019. A subdivision is made of the following categories: newly built houses, splitting of houses, demolition and merging of houses.

Table 3: Net increase houses 2019 (8RHK, 2020b)

	Newly build houses	Splitting of houses	Demolition	Merging of houses	Net increase in 2019
Aalten	81	2	-7	0	76
Berkelland	73	3	-52	0	24
Bronckhorst	15	1	-10	-6	0
Doetinchem	338	7	-15	-3	327
Oost Gelre	65	9	-19	-3	52
Oude IJsselstreek	47	1	-62	0	-14
Winterswijk	54	4	-6	-1	51
Achterhoek	673	27	-171	-13	516

The “political arena”, concerning housing vacancy and housing scarcity, is a sensitive one. Multiple relationships are at odds with each other. For example, it appears that for provinces, the importance of affordable housing is often secondary to the preservation of open space (Michielsen, Groot & Veenstra, 2019). Provinces limit the number of housing units that municipalities can build, fearing a lack of local demand. In addition, provinces are often concerned when municipalities, in less well-populated areas or shrinkage areas, make too many building plans without guidance from the province. They fear that the newly built homes will be sold but will cause vacancy and impoverishment in the towns next door. New construction in one place can result in vacancy and impoverishment in the place next door (Michielsen et al., 2019).

2.3 Shrinkage and real estate policies in De Achterhoek

This paragraph describes the shrinkage policies and real estate policies that affect De Achterhoek. To provide recommendations for attracting more residents to De Achterhoek region, it is important to know what is already being done in the region and which policy choices are being made. Section 2.3.1 will therefore focus on the national policies; section 2.3.2 will describe the regional policies and section 2.3.3 will focus on the municipal policies.

2.3.1 National policies

The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations is responsible for the policies regarding housing & building and is also responsible for “effective public administration” in the Netherlands. In 2018, the Ministry established the *National Housing Agenda 2018-2021*³. The aim of this agenda is to reduce the housing shortage while keeping an eye on both the quality of the houses and the quality of the environment in which they are located. The consequences of regional population decline for the housing market are addressed in the regional agendas. For De Achterhoek this is the *Regional Housing Agenda Achterhoek 2015-2025*⁴.

The Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations is responsible for the integral control of the national shrinkage policies and the minister has a steering role regarding the regional approach to shrinkage issues. The Ministry identifies when regional cooperation with the national government is required and sends orders to other ministries when national-regional cooperation is needed.

On March 18th, 2016, the *Population Decline Action Plan*⁵ was established. This action plan contains ambitions and goals for population decline. In addition, the Action Plan contains cooperation agreements between shrinking regions, provinces and various ministries. The objective of this Action Plan is “to promote quality of life in areas that are now or will soon be confronted with substantial and structural population decline and other demographic changes” (Population Decline Action Plan, p.6). The aim is to achieve a joint approach among governments, civil society organisations, entrepreneurs and residents.

The action plan offers customized programmes to the regions. The customised projects focus particularly on “from shrinkage to strength” and less on shrinkage as a negative trend. De Achterhoek region is also part of a customised project.

In addition to the customised projects, various expert-projects have been started. These expertise projects aim to offer and exchange knowledge between shrinking regions. The expertise projects “housing market in shrinking regions” and “energy transition and climate adaptation” have been started in 2019.

The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations is also committed to the dissemination of (scientific) knowledge on shrinkage and population decline. For example, the knowledge platform “knowledge for shrinkage” (Kennis voor Krimp) has been established. This platform tries to ensure the dissemination of knowledge on population decline and regional development.

³ National Housing Agenda 2018-2021, through

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/publicaties/2018/05/23/nationale-woonagenda-2018-2021>

⁴ Regional housing agenda 2015-2025, through <https://achterhoek2030.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Regionale-Woonagenda-Achterhoek-2015-2025.pdf>

⁵ Population Decline Action Plan, through

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2016/03/18/actieplan-bevolkingsdaling>

Apart from the *Population Decline Action Plan*, De Achterhoek region is supported by a Region Deal⁶. A Region Deal aims to tackle regional problems. To live well in a region, themes such as healthcare, education, safety and entrepreneurship are important. The national government and De Achterhoek Region are jointly investing 40 million euros to keep De Achterhoek attractive for the future. This “Achterhoek Region Deal” aims to make the regional economy, housing stock, facilities and mobility future-proof. Besides financial support, the Region Deal also offers intensive guidance from the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom relations. The box below illustrates the challenges and goals of De Achterhoek Region Deal.

Challenges and goals of De Achterhoek Region Deal:

- The challenge in De Achterhoek is to attract workers from outside the region and to ensure that young ‘Achterhoekers’ want to continue living and working in the region.
- De Achterhoek will have to make a major effort to retain sufficient qualified workers and a suitable housing stock. The working population is declining faster than elsewhere, which means that there is a growing threat of a shortage of qualified staff.
- Improving the living environment contributes to keeping the region attractive. In so doing, the region will remain future proof

⁶ Region Deal Achterhoek, through <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/region-deals/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/07/15/region-deal-achterhoek>

2.3.2 Regional policies

In 2015, the *regional housing agenda 2015-2025*⁷ was drawn up in consultation with civil servants, public directors, entrepreneurs and social organisations. This agenda has been approved by the seven Achterhoek municipal councils, as well as by the housing corporations and the province of Gelderland. The *regional housing agenda* is the framework for the housing policies in De Achterhoek region and is in line with the *regional housing vision 2010-2020*. The box below illustrates the conclusions and objectives of the regional housing agenda.

Conclusions and objectives *regional housing agenda 2015-2025*:

- Since 2008, the population in De Achterhoek has been decreasing. When comparing the population forecasts from 2007 with actual developments, it is noticed that the population has decreased faster than would have been expected based on the forecasts. In addition, household growth will come to a halt in 2025. So, it is not without reason that De Achterhoek is considered as a “shrinking region”.
- In 2025, the existing housing stock will meet the needs of house seekers
- The previously agreed number of net homes to be built will be reduced by 10 percent. This means that only 3,145 net homes will be built between 2015 and 2025. However, the housing corporations believe that fewer houses need to be constructed.
- In the near future, from the moment that the decline in households sets in, demolition of houses is needed. Between 2015 and 2025, however, there will also be a need for the destruction of houses in some villages.

As a consequence of *De Achterhoek Housing Needs and Liveability Survey 2017*⁸ (AHLS), the *regional housing agenda 2015-2025* has been partially revised. The AHLS showed that there is a mismatch between supply and demand for housing. There are qualitative shortages and surpluses in the supply of housing in the region. In addition, there is an insufficient housing supply for starters and seniors, in every municipality there is a shortage of housing types in price segments that starters and seniors are looking for (8RHK, 2019). Also, the current housing stock does not sufficiently respond to new home seekers on the market. In addition, the *Primos prognosis of 2019*⁹ (prognosis of the number of inhabitants or households) showed that the number of households in De Achterhoek region will continue to grow until 2030 and thereafter will start to shrink. The previously described conclusions and objectives of the *regional housing agenda 2015-2025* are proven to be incorrect.

Therefore, the *regional housing agenda 2015-2025* no longer meets the actual housing needs and population growth. For this reason, *regional qualitative assessment criteria*¹⁰ (regionale kwalitatieve toetsingscriteria) have been drawn up for the evaluation of additional housing construction. In short, these assessment criteria must ensure that only new construction is added which contributes to solving the mismatch in the local housing market.

⁷ Regional housing agenda 2015-2025, through <https://achterhoek2030.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Regionale-Woonagenda-Achterhoek-2015-2025.pdf>

⁸ Achterhoek Housing Needs and Livability Survey 2017, through <https://8rhk.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/awlo-2017-eindrapport-definitief-12-maart-2018.pdf>

⁹ *Primos prognosis Gelderland 2019*, through https://actieplanwonen.gelderland.nl/toolkit/downloads_getfilem.aspx?id=1168434&forcedownload=true

¹⁰ Qualitative assessment criteria for housing development in Achterhoek, through <https://8rhk.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/8rhk-kwaliteitscriteria-woningbouw.pdf>

Three *regional quality assessment criteria* have been drawn up. In addition to the three regional quality assessment criteria, the municipalities can add their own criteria for additional building. The regional quality assessment criteria will be explained below:

- The first regional quality criterion is: *The necessity has been demonstrated*. Each municipality or village can determine which housing types are needed to build. The necessity can be proven in several ways, through the results of the AHLS, quantitative research and in consultation with housing corporations.
- *Priority for transformation of vacant properties* is the second quality criterion. This means that vacant houses are preferably converted into suitable housing. In addition, building on locations with existing property takes precedence over building on other locations without existing property. Also, locations, where houses have previously been demolished, take precedence over uncultivated land.
- The third quality criterion is: *expansion in existing areas takes precedence over new expansion locations*. This means that building takes place within existing urban areas and building outside an existing urban area is only permitted in exceptional cases.

There are no quantitative measures for the building of new houses, which means that there are no minimum or maximum houses to be built in the region. After all, houses are built according to necessity. However, a finger is kept on the pulse through these three quality criteria and an annual monitor, which checks the number of homes built per housing type (8RHK, 2019). This monitor will be compared to the number of households and the vacancy rate in the region. The goal is to check whether enough houses have been built for necessity. If this is not the case, the policy can be adjusted by the province.

De Achterhoek aims to create a housing stock that follows the demographic developments and meets the qualitatively and quantitatively housing demand (8RHK, 2021). In addition, an attractive and appropriate housing stock is also important for retaining and attracting workers according to the 8RHK (2021). The region indicates that it faces three major challenges. The first challenge is that the current housing stock does not meet the quality requirements of the future. The second challenge is the mismatch between supply and demand in the regional housing market, especially for young people and elderly people. And the last challenge is that vacant properties in the region are a source of irritation to residents. To address these issues, the 8RHK is focusing on the following policy measures (8RHK, 2021):

- Fitting new homes

- In the regional housing market, supply and demand are not sufficiently matched. There are not enough suitable and affordable homes for young people and elderly people. De Achterhoek is paying special attention to this group. De Achterhoek is open to new housing concepts and forms of living and supports initiatives in which empty properties are converted into homes.

- Improving the quality of the existing housing stock

- Most of the homes for the future are already built in De Achterhoek. These homes do not yet meet the quality requirements for the future. With quality, the region means: sustainable, lifetime-compatible and comfortable. The region will work on improving the existing housing stock in the coming years.

- Transformation and demolition of vacant properties (including shopping areas)

- According to a panel of Achterhoek residents, vacancy levels are the biggest issue that needs to be addressed. De Achterhoek is focusing on taking rapid action when properties are vacant.

The national policies are mainly reflected in the regional policies on the following two points. First of all, the *national housing agenda 2018-2021* aims to reduce the housing shortage. In De Achterhoek there is also a housing shortage. Which is partly caused by a mismatch in supply and demand of starter homes and senior homes. Remarkably, in the *regional housing agenda 2015-2025* plans were made to demolish houses and to reduce the number of houses to be built. This has been adjusted by the regional qualitative assessment criteria in 2019. Houses can now be built according to necessity in order to tackle the housing shortage and the mismatch on the housing market. Secondly, the *population decline action* plan prescribes a joint approach among governments, civil society organisations, entrepreneurs and residents. At the regional level, this is implemented by the 8RHK organisation where municipalities, businesses and educational institutions work together at various thematic roundtables. The various parties also work together in the field of housing.

2.3.3 Municipal policies

The *housing act 2015* (Woningwet 2015) obliged every municipality in the Netherlands to draw up an up-to-date vision on housing. The regional policy plans of the province of Gelderland and the 8RHK are partially implemented in the local municipal policies. Each municipality translates the regional policies into municipal policies in a different way or focuses on certain regional policy points and does leave other policy points untouched. In this paragraph, the housing policies of three municipalities in De Achterhoek region are briefly described to show how regional policies are implemented at the local level. The municipalities described are: Aalten, Doetinchem and the centres of Groenlo & Lichtenvoorde (municipality of Oost Gelre).

Because describing the policies of all seven municipalities would be too lengthy and would deviate too much from the core of this study, the choice was made to describe the policies of these three municipalities. These three municipalities were chosen based on their different population sizes and municipal classification. Aalten, Doetinchem and the centres of Groenlo & Lichtenvoorde have respectively 27,000, 58,000 and 22,000 inhabitants. Doetinchem is seen as the centre of De Achterhoek and is also the largest city in terms of inhabitants. Aalten, on the other hand, is the second smallest municipality in De Achterhoek. To get an impression of the housing policies on a village level as well, the villages of Groenlo and Lichtenvoorde will be described. Groenlo & Lichtenvoorde are villages within the municipality of Oost-Gelre and are not two independent municipalities. To discover how the national policies and regional policies affect the housing policies on an even smaller scale than the municipality, namely the village level, the villages of Groenlo & Lichtenvoorde will be described.

Municipality of Doetinchem

The municipality of Doetinchem (58,000 inhabitants) has drawn up a local housing agenda for the years 2015-2025. According to the municipality, this housing agenda is a local elaboration of the *regional housing agenda Achterhoek 2015-2025*. The local housing agenda has an “agenda-setting function” and gives direction to the housing policy for the coming years in the municipality of Doetinchem (Gemeente Doetinchem, 2016). According to the municipality, the housing agenda serves as a basis for making performance agreements with housing corporations and as a basis for assessing housing initiatives. The housing agenda has been created with the input of various parties outside the municipality namely: healthcare organisations, housing corporations, senior citizens associations, tenants’ associations, the village council and inhabitants (Gemeente Doetinchem, 2016).

The municipality of Doetinchem has drawn up some ambitions in its local housing agenda. Several ambitions are set out below (Gemeente Doetinchem, 2016):

- The adding of new homes where both qualitative and quantitative alignment is found with the current housing demand and to improve the quality of the living environment.
- A housing stock that contributes to the sustainable energy consumption of the municipality and a housing stock with a high level of “lifetime-compatibility” to enable longer independent living for elderly people.
- Everyone who wants to buy or rent a home in the municipality of Doetinchem will find a home that fits his or her financial situation within a foreseeable time.

The points mentioned above are, of course, pure ambitions. The way the municipality of Doetinchem intends to realise these ambitions is not described in the document. It should also be noted that these ambitions are obviously very general. Which municipality does not want every potential resident to find a suitable home within a reasonable time and within his or her budget? So, the above points could be better classified as “aspirational”.

Additionally, the first and second ambitions correspond with the regional policy of the 8RHK to build houses that meet the current demand for housing and to make the current housing stock future-proof by making it more sustainable and adaptable. The housing policy of Doetinchem also corresponds with the national policies. The population decline action plan, namely, prescribes a joint approach among governments, civil society organisations, entrepreneurs and residents. When shaping the local housing agenda of Doetinchem various parties outside the municipality participated such as healthcare organisations, housing corporations and senior citizens associations.

Municipality of Aalten

Unlike the municipality of Doetinchem, the municipality of Aalten (27,000 inhabitants) has not drawn up a housing agenda but a housing vision for the years 2021-2026. This housing vision contains the challenges the municipality faces regarding housing policies and the solutions they envision.

According to the municipality, the vision provides: *"the framework within which we work through various measures, instruments and agreements to achieve our ambitions for the municipal housing market in the next five years (2021-2026)"* (Gemeente Aalten, 2021, p.3). Like the housing agenda of the municipality of Doetinchem, the housing vision of the municipality of Aalten serves as a basis for making performance agreements with housing corporations. The ambitions in the housing vision are also translated into an assessment framework for new housing initiatives. The regional quality criteria are an integral part of this assessment framework.

The municipality of Aalten follows the regional framework but *'within that framework we will, of course, focus on themes that will be the most important for our municipality (and the various villages) in the coming years'* (Gemeente Aalten, 2021, p.4).

The municipality of Aalten focuses on five key points in its housing vision 2021-2026 (Gemeente Aalten, 2021):

1. Flexible implementation of housing demand
2. Working towards a sustainable residential and living environment
3. Sufficient affordable housing
4. Special attention to living with care
5. Liveable and vital villages

Regional policies are also reflected in these key points. Key point 1, for example, focuses on building homes that consider the needs of older people, such as building a downstairs bedroom. In addition, new construction projects will focus on starter homes, which is also a regional policy measurement. Moreover, the municipality is focusing on transforming venues within the village centres, thereby fulfilling the second regional quality criterion. In contrast, building on undeveloped land is considered a possible building location, while this is not in line with the regional policy. National policy is reflected in point two of the key points. The national policy aims to reduce the housing shortage while considering the quality of the environment. Aalten aims to maintain a sustainable residential and living environment. As with Doetinchem, these key points also involve noncommittal expressions of interest. Liveable and vital villages are, of course, something every municipality wants to achieve but this cannot simply be achieved by implementing a few policy points.

Villages of Lichtenvoorde & Groenlo (municipality of Oost Gelre)

The villages of Lichtenvoorde (12,000 inhabitants) and Groenlo (10,000 inhabitants) are part of the municipality of Oost Gelre (30,000 inhabitants in total). The municipality of Oost Gelre has chosen not to draw up a housing vision or housing agenda for the two villages Lichtenvoorde & Groenlo, but to develop a “menu card for housing”.

For building initiatives, the regional quality criteria form the basis for the consideration of the initiatives. In line with the regional quality criteria, municipalities can draw up their own local criteria, the menu card provides this local framework for the centres of Lichtenvoorde & Groenlo (Gemeente Oost Gelre, 2019).

A menu consists, of course, of different courses. So, does the menu card for housing (Gemeente Oost Gelre, 2019). The guiding principles for building initiatives are:

1. “Vooraf een goed gesprek” (A good conversation beforehand)
2. The right locations
3. The right quality
4. The weighing of qualities

In the first course, there is a conversation between the municipality and the initiators. In the second and third courses, the municipality assesses the qualities of the building plans. A building plan is assessed on eleven ingredients. The scores of the eleven ingredients are added up, which then leads to one score per plan. The various housing initiatives can then be ranked (Gemeente Oost Gelre, 2019).

For example, menu course number two, “the right locations”, focuses on the transformation of existing buildings to keep undeveloped land free of new buildings. The aim is also to prevent vacant properties in the centres as much as possible to preserve the vitality of the centres (Gemeente Oost Gelre, 2019). The menu further applies the regional quality criteria to its own local circumstances and describes, for example, when the transformation of a shop into a home is desirable and when it is not. In doing so, it adds its own local quality criteria for the assessment of housing initiatives.

As described above, the municipalities of Doetinchem and Aalten and the villages of Groenlo & Lichtenvoorde each apply the regional policies to the local situation in their own manner. Those local policies have all been given a different format, from a housing vision to a housing agenda or even a housing menu. However, the regional quality criteria of the province, the regional policies of the 8RHK and even the national policies remain the guiding principles.

2.4 Conclusions

In short, the policy framework established that:

De Achterhoek region consists of an overall rural character and most municipalities cover a large surface area. In addition, the municipalities of De Achterhoek contain multiple villages with a quite distance between them. Concerning the governance structure of De Achterhoek, De Achterhoek works together in three cooperative structures namely the Regio Achterhoek, De Achterhoek Board and De Achterhoek Raad. The economy of the region mainly consists of family businesses. Almost 75 percent of the companies in De Achterhoek are family businesses and the industry sector is the driving force of the regional economy. The industrial sectors are likely to face shortages of technically trained people. In addition, there is a labour tightness in the agricultural professions and ICT professions in De Achterhoek. For employers in De Achterhoek it is harder to fill vacancies than for their colleagues elsewhere in the Netherlands

During the period 2015-2020, De Achterhoek population has increased by 247 people but the decrease in population between 2007 and 2015 has been stronger than the increase in the past five years. In addition, the composition of De Achterhoek is changing, aging and dejuvenation are setting in. Not only is attention needed to the shrinking and changing population of De Achterhoek also the regional housing market needs some attention. The housing market is under pressure, there is a shortage of housing types in price segments which starters and seniors are looking for and there is also a major risk of a housing surplus for certain housing types in De Achterhoek. As a consequence, the *regional housing agenda 2015-2025*, no longer meets the actual housing needs and population growth. Thereby regional qualitative assessment criteria have been drawn up to tackle the mismatch in the regional housing market. These qualitative assessments are: the necessity has been demonstrated, priority for transformation of vacant properties and expansion in existing areas takes precedence over new expansion locations.

The responsibility of the national shrinkage policies lies with the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Minister also has a steering role for the regional approach to shrinkage issues. The national government supports the shrinking regions through customised projects, expert-projects and a knowledge platform. De Achterhoek is also supported with a Region Deal.

For the remainder of this study, it is important to remember that the biggest labour shortages occur in the industry, agricultural professions and ICT professions. Therefore, people who practice these professions are most sought after. In addition, the region is growing again, but ageing and dejuvenation are setting in, which also causes a limited supply of employees in the region. The region is also allowed to build according to necessity, so in theory, the opportunities of the work-related trends can be utilised by building additional houses.

The next chapter discusses the reasons why people are moving to rural areas. Also, the influence of the home-working trend on relocation will be explored.

3. Theoretical framework

This research focuses on the question: How can De Achterhoek, as a rural region, attract more residents with the help of the two work-related trends? It is thereby important to know which groups of people move to a rural region and for which purposes they move. In addition, it is meaningful to know which role labour and job opportunities have in this process and to investigate whether classical motives for migration to rural areas can link with current work-related trends. Thereby, rural migration theories will be described in paragraph 3.1, with a focus on classical motives and modern views. Section 3.1.3, will focus on labour and economic motives for moving to rural areas.

The home-working trend is one out of two trends that will be investigated in this research. Working from home is not a new trend that evolved because of the covid-19 pandemic. Around 1970, working from home became possible and scientists predicted a shift towards working from home like the early cottage industry. It is meaningful to know how this process of working from home evolved and to investigate the connection with the cottage industry. In addition, it is crucial to know how the home-working trend will affect the relocation of people. For these reasons, literature about the cottage industry will be described in paragraph 3.2, with a focus on the history of the cottage industry and the new “electronic cottage”.

3.1 Rural migration theories

Suburbanisation processes and de-urbanization processes have brought new residents to rural areas. These migration flows to rural areas are according to Milbourne (2007) primarily viewed as movements of middle-class people from urban areas in search of a rural lifestyle. At the same time, migration has become more complex and diverse, according to Smith & King (2012), due to developments in IT and mobility. The “classical” view of suburbanisation and de-urbanization has recently been questioned by rural scholars because it does not acknowledge that rural areas can differ in their population (Bijker, 2013). Furthermore, they also lack to acknowledge that rural areas can attract other types of migrants with different motives and that mobilities have become much more diversified. This paragraph describes the classical views and modern views on motives for moving to rural areas. In addition, section 3.1.3 describes the importance of labour motives and economic motives for moving to rural areas.

3.1.1 Classical views

Migration flows from urban areas to rural areas consist, in the Netherlands, for a large part of elderly migrants and middle-aged migrants (Atzema & Van Dam, 1996). Smith & Phillips (2001) endorse this finding and claim that middle-aged migrants are often retired or are commuting to nearby urban areas for employment. According to Steenbekkers, Simon, Vermeij & Spreuwers (2008), fifty percent of the migrants to rural areas moved from urban areas and middle-class groups and the high-income groups are overrepresented. On the other hand, migration from rural areas to urban areas is primarily attributed to people between 18 and 25 years old. This group of young people leave the rural area in search of an education or a job in urban areas, where there are often more opportunities present (Atzema & Van Dam, 1996).

The attractiveness of the rural has been repeatedly portrayed as the rural idyllic (Van Dam et al., 2002). Much of the current literature on rural migration has emphasised this role of the rural idyllic. The counter-urbanisation trend is also closely linked to the rural idyllic. The desire for greenery, safety and space can motivate people to migrate from urban areas to rural areas (Champion, 1989; Boyle, Halfacree & Robinson, 1998). Greenery, safety and space are seen as intrinsic qualities of rural areas and characteristics which distinguish rural areas from urban areas.

The rural idyllic is mentioned, after housing characteristics, as a reason for moving to a rural area. Housing characteristics are, thus, an important reason for migration to rural areas. A bigger home or garden are important pull factors (Steenbekkers et al., 2008).

We can divide the rural migration motives into three categories namely: residential motives, household motives and employment & education motives (Van Dam et al., 2002):

Residential motives are the first category, it refers to the quality of the residential environment and the quality of housing. This is often seen as the most significant pull factor according to Halfacree (1994). The features of the residential environment can be divided into social and physical features. Social features consist of peaceful living, a lower crime rate and a friendly neighbourhood while physical features consist of an attractive landscape, enough fresh air and space around the house (Halfacree, 1994).

Household motives are the second group of categories. It focuses on the moves that are motivated by life events, for example, getting married or starting a family (Van Dam, 2000). Also, the desire to live closer to family and friends fits into this category. Eleven percent of the rural migrants mentioned proximity to family and friends as an essential reason for moving (Van Dam, 2000).

The third category is connected to employment and education. Migration, which is motivated by a job change or the desire to live close to the work location, fits into this category (Van Dam, 2000). Work motives play a particularly important role in rural migration and, according to Halfacree (1994), are often associated with long-distance moves. Section 3.1.3 will particularly focus on this theme.

Return migration is a special motive for rural migration. Return migration means the migration to a place where a person lived previously. Return migrants are more often motivated by social reasons compared to non-return migrants (Niedomysl & Amcoff, 2011). Feijten, Hooimeijer & Mulder (2008) demonstrated that people who had formerly lived in a rural area in the Netherlands have a significantly higher probability of migration back to a rural area in comparison to people who did not live in a rural area before.

3.1.2 Modern views

Previous research has emphasized the importance of residential motives, household motives and employment & education motives for migration to rural areas. By contrast, recent studies have revealed a wide range of motivations for migrating to rural areas (Grimsrud, 2011; Bijker 2013). Not only middle-class people, in search of the rural idyllic or people seeking for a green environment, migrate to rural areas. Recent research found that there are other motivations for migration to rural areas. For instance, people between the age of 18-25 are moving to rural areas because of the lower housing prices and because they want to live close to family and friends (Bijker, 2013). According to Bijker (2013), rural idyllic motives, which are related to both social and physical features of the residential environment, do not explain all rural migrations. Rural migrants may have other motives like specific housing characteristics, lower housing prices and work-related reasons. In addition, research by Andersen (2011) showed that the group of migrants who moved to rural areas, do not consist solely of middle-class people but range from low-income groups to a mixed group of migrants.

In general, recent research has revealed that rural migrants are a more diversified group than the classical researchers have taught us. In addition, something that is often forgotten by classical researchers is rural to rural migration (Gkartzios and Scott, 2009). But, short distance relocations, inside the rural area, form a noticeable share of rural migration (Walford, 2007). Additionally, according to Halfacree (2008), a considerable number of “working-class counter-urbanisers” move to rural areas and not solely middle-class people.

In addition, when investigating the migrants who moved to rural areas in the Netherlands, Steenbekkers et al. (2008) found that younger people are in the majority and only sixteen percent of the actual movers to rural areas are 65 years or older. When moving, older people are comparatively more likely to move to rural areas, but older people only reproduce a small percentage of the comprehensive flow of movers to rural areas (Steenbekkers et al., 2008).

Table 4 displays a summary of the classical views and modern views of rural migration theories.

Table 4: summary classical views and modern views

	Classical views	Modern views
Who is moving to rural areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elderly migrants and middle-aged migrants often move to rural areas - Middle-class groups and high-income groups are overrepresented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Range from low-income groups to a mixed group of migrants - Younger people are in the majority and 16 percent is older than 65
Motives for moving to rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The rural idyllic - Residential motives, household motives and employment & education motives - Return migration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wide range of motivation for migrating to rural areas like lower housing prices & specific housing characteristics

3.1.3 Labour and economic motives for moving to rural areas

Ravenstein (1876) stated in his “law of migration” that the major cause of migration is economic. Sections so far explained that people migrate for different reasons, but it appears that specific categories of people are more likely to move for economic motives. For instance, in the Netherlands, many young people move from outlying areas to the economic centres in De Randstad, where there are relatively more jobs and more opportunities for education present (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2010). The implication is that these young people contribute to a large extent to the depopulation and shrinkage of rural areas (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2010).

Besides the fact that (young) people migrate outside the rural area, in search of a job or an education, people or households also migrate into the rural area because of the regional labour opportunities. Stockdale (2006), concludes that household motives, like marrying and divorcing, are the most important motive to migrate to depopulating areas closely followed by employment motives. The importance of economic motives or economic features for rural migration has been a research object for a long time. Early additions to the literature (Carlino & Mills, 1987; Greenwood & Hunt, 1989), tend to focus on economic features like labour opportunities as the driving force of interregional migration. Greenwood & Hunt (1989), claim that the effect of a “good regional labour market” is substantially more important than the effect of location-specific amenities in explaining the migration of working people. Storper & Scott (2009) endorse this statement and claim that the availability of labour is the main driver of interregional migration. In addition, the role of a thick labour market and sufficient labour opportunities seem to outperform non-pecuniary factors according to Brown & Darren (2012).

3.2 Cottage industry

According to Davies & Frink (2014), the standard across Western societies is that most working people live in one place and work in another place. Thus, for most people, there is a clear distinction between the private home and the public space of the workplace. Since 1970, scientists have challenged this view and predicted a shift towards working from home like the early cottage industry. Cottage industries were very common in agriculture-dominated times and before the industrial revolution took place. People were, for example, sewing or lace-making from home. Nowadays, electronic developments made it possible to work from home, researchers like Martin & Norman and Toffler predicted this trend in the second half of the 20th century. Toffler (1980) labelled this trend as the *electronic cottage*. Paragraph 3.2.1 discusses the history of the electronic cottage. Section 3.2.2 describes the three generations of working from home and section 3.2.3 describes the new electronic cottage and the expected influence on current housing.

3.2.1 History of the electronic cottage

In the second half of the 20th century, personal computers (PC) were first entering our everyday life. This development was a new topic of speculation for many scientists (Winner, 2001). Some scientists predicted that the PC would enable people to do much of their work at home. The PC would establish electronic cottages, which eliminate long commutes to the work location (Winner, 2001). Martin & Norman wrote in 1970 that there may be a return to the cottage industry. According to them, the spinning wheel will be replaced by the computer terminal. According to both authors, there will be a time when the computer terminal is a natural adjunct to daily life and daily living. In addition, in the future, some businesses will function with almost no offices (Martin & Norman, 1970).

Ten years later, Toffler (1980) spoke about his future event, the electronic cottage. In which we are revolutionising our homes because of the new mode of production. The electronic cottage is based on a new, higher, electronic basis and with a new emphasis on the private home as the centre of the community. Alvin Toffler explains in his book *the third wave* (1980), the fact that the electronic cottage raises once more the possibility that husbands, wives and children can work together as a unit on a mass scale. He predicted a decline in the need to commute to work and an increase in the ability to change jobs without having to migrate to a new location. Toffler (1980) also foresaw “greater community stability” and a renaissance among voluntary organisations like churches, women’s groups, lodges and youth organisations. He expected that technological developments would bring about a new model, in which the old, pre-industrial home-work cottage, would be transmuted into a “post-industrial electronic cottage” (Toffler 1980).

The electronic cottage theorists (Toffler, Martin & Norman) are predicting an increased work-related activity in the private home (Forester, 1989). In addition, they believe that there will be increased consumption of IT-based services in the private home, which will lead to a fundamental change in lifestyles. The fact that most people, in the second half of the 20th century, lived in very small houses which are often unsuitable for working from home was conveniently overlooked (Forester, 1989). Martin and Norman (1970) dismissed these housing obstacles, but they did see some obstacles at other terrains. For instance, the management could be reluctant to offer employees the home-working essentials and demand a desk presence between “nine to five”.

Over recent decades, one of the main enablers of flexible home-working has been technological developments (Doling & Arundel, 2020). Although some within the professional classes, such as doctors, authors and artists, had been working from home for a long period of time. The recent covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in a major uptake in working from home, has been a significant catalyst in accelerating the home-working trend worldwide (Doling & Arundel, 2020). The next paragraph describes the evolution of home-working.

3.2.2 Three generations of working from home

Messenger & Gschwind (2016) have, in their article *Three generations of Telework: New ICTs and the (R)evolution from Home Office to Virtual Office*, divided home-working into three generations.

The first generation is the home office generation. Around 1980, companies like Yahoo promoted home-working under the term telecommuting or telework (Nilles, 1988). The main focus of telework was the reduction of commuting time by relocating the workplace close to or inside the employee's home. The first generation of working from home is concentrated on one mode of work namely the home office. These workplaces, close to or inside the employees' homes, are cheap and ecological but also stationary (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016).

The mobile office is the second generation of home-working. The emergence of smaller and lighter laptops and mobile phones helped to enable employees to work from anywhere and not solely from home. This second generation of home-working did not gain much attention from researchers, it was just seen as a new attitude towards working (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). But the mobile office did break with the classic structure of work. Working became detached from fixed places. Researchers had to admit that working could be done at different locations, at home, at an office and at different locations in between (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016).

The third generation is the virtual office. Devices like smartphones, tablets and computers are smaller and cheaper and accompanied by a vast dispersion of the internet. These "new ICT" devices enable employees to stay in touch with their colleagues at any time from any place in the world (Golden & Geisler, 2007). Information within the new ICT devices is stored in clouds and even the smallest devices can access this information. At every moment, one can check emails or the latest work information. Also, working from a different country than the boss's office is possible (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016).

Table 5 summarises the three generations of home-working.

Table 5: summary of three generations of home-working

	1. Home office	2. Mobile office	3. Virtual office
Location	Private home	Third spaces	Intermediate places
Communication technology	Landline telephone	Mobile phone	Smartphone
Information technology	Personal computer	Laptop	Tablet or computer

3.2.3 New electronic cottage

The new electronic cottage has made the home not just a domain of domestic life but also a base where people can earn a living (Doling & Arundel, 2020). Toffler (1980) predicted a decline in the need to commute to work and an increased ability to shift between jobs without the need to move to a new location. Nowadays, working from home can, according to Doling & Arundel (2020), partially sever the geographical link between the house and workplace location. Whereas commuting distance, with their (time) costs, no longer structure the decision about where to seek a job or in which location to live.

While considering the nexus between the private home-location and home-working, Doling & Arundel (2020) identified three general household strategies namely: the stay-putters, the lifestyle migrants and the nomads.

The stay-putters are the first group and represent the households that will stay in the same city even if their work shifts from working outside the home to working from home. The reasons for this choice, to “stay put”, are for example social ties and existing networks. According to Doling & Arundel (2020), many people, who use the home as a workplace, will not migrate to another city. They will often undertake adaptations to the physical form of the private home to meet the new home-working necessities.

The second group are the lifestyle migrants. This group of people choose to migrate for lifestyle aspirations because they are free from commuting restrictions due to working from home (Doling & Arundel, 2020). The rise of home-working is allowing an increasing number of people to migrate. According to Moeckel (2017), the more frequent households will work from home, the greater the chance of migration from urban cities to suburban and rural locations within the same country. Motivated by the prospect of a better work-life balance, easy access to lots of greenery and cheaper housing prices, more people are taking advantage of the flexible work practices and are moving out of urban centres to rural areas (BUPA global, 2019).

The nomads are the third group and are more disconnected from the residential location than the two previously mentioned groups. This group of nomads is taking locational freedom and sometimes even without having a permanent home at all. These digital nomads embrace a location independent lifestyle which is enabled through the technology of working from home. They travel around the world and work remotely (Kannisto, 2017). *“In practice, digital nomads have pursued a range of options including living in motor homes (i.e. “van lifers”) to globetrotting, spending a few months in one city before moving to another, all the while undertaking remote work. There are growing industries built around supporting them”* (Doling & Arundel, 2020, p.11).

According to Doling & Arundel (2020), housing needs may be more influenced by lifestyle considerations and less influenced by external employment location. They claim that the: *“Changing demand in housing form and location could imply a reversal of a decades-long dominant trend in the concentration of population and housing market capital in urban centres”* (Doling & Arundel, 2020, p.13).

3.3 Conclusions

In short, the theoretical framework established that:

Classical rural migration views and modern rural migration views differ. Classical views claim that elderly and middle-aged people often move to rural areas. Their decision to move is determined by the rural idyllic and by residential motives, household motives and employment & education motives. While modern views claim that a mixed group of migrants move to rural areas, including younger people. This mixed group of migrants is moving for a different range of motivations such as lower housing prices. The theoretical framework also established that the major cause of migration is economical and young people are likely to move for economic motives. Thus, the availability of a sufficient regional labour market is a driver of migration.

Working from home has made major developments in the past decades. Home-working has developed from working solely inside the private home towards working from a different country than the boss's office and is made accessible for a wide range of jobs. As a result, the predicted return to the cottage industry appears to be coming true. This return is encouraged by the rise of home-working during the covid-19 pandemic, which forced employees to work from home.

The theoretical framework states that the electronic cottage made the home a base where people earn a living. The electronic cottage also (partially) severs the geographical link between the house and workplace location. Three household strategies, to deal with the electronic cottage, emerge. The first group are the stay-putters, who are staying in the same city even if they work from home full time. The second group are the lifestyle migrants, who are migrating for lifestyle aspirations because of disappeared commuting restrictions. And the third group are the nomads, who are taking locational freedom because of the ability to do their work from every available location in the world.

For the remainder of the study, it is important to remember that the regional labour market is the driver of migration and that the main cause of migration is economic. This means that, according to the theory, the labour shortage can provide opportunities to attract new people to De Achterhoek. Additionally, working from home is partly severing the geographical link between the house and the workplace location, which makes living in De Achterhoek and working elsewhere in the country possible according to the literature. However, many people who use the home as a workplace will not migrate to another city, those stay-putters, will not move because of existing ties. Thus, the home-working trend will provide opportunities to attract new residents, but it will not convince everyone to relocate.

The next chapter is the methodology chapter. This chapter describes the research methods that are used in this study.

4. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate which opportunities the two work-related trends offer to attract more residents and how these opportunities can be utilised. This chapter explains how the empirical material was collected to achieve the research objective. Paragraph 4.1 will explain the used research design. Paragraph 4.2 will describe which data collection methods are used. The quality requirements of this study, which are focussing on reliability and validity, will be described in paragraph 4.3. Finally, the operationalisation is presented in paragraph 4.4.

4.1 Research design

To investigate which opportunities the two work-related trends, offer to attract new residents to De Achterhoek and how these opportunities can be utilised, a qualitative research approach has been chosen. Qualitative research, according to Bleijenbergh (2015), is research that aims to collect and interpret linguistic material to make statements about a certain phenomenon. Qualitative research is described by Baarda & De Goede (2001), as research that is about describing and understanding empirical reality and thereby takes into account the context in which phenomena and aspects occur. This research is conducted by consulting qualitative sources such as internal documents, interviews, news articles and literature. The sources consulted in this study were coded in a systematic manner with the use of the programme ATLAS.ti. When coding, the qualitative data is interpreted by the researcher and a code or label is assigned (Van Thiel, 2010). Because coding is used in this research, the selected qualitative data is structured.

In addition to qualitative sources, this research also used quantitative sources. The quantitative sources are consulted to gain insight into the migration-flows to municipalities in De Achterhoek. Quantitative research focuses on collecting numbers to be able to make a statement about the relationship between different variables (Bleijenbergh, 2015).

This study can, in its first phase, be characterised as a descriptive study in which the current situation and current policies regarding shrinkage are described. Sub-questions two, three and four are exploratory in nature and examine the opportunities offered by the two work-related trends and the collaboration in the region. It is important to remember that the two trends, the home-working trend and the labour shortage, are not specifically examined in this study but are assumed to be true. Sub-question five is an advisory question and indicates how the opportunities of the work-related trends can best be utilised and which adjustments are needed to fully benefit from the two trends. All questions are focusing on De Achterhoek. This means that this research is a case study. The next section will explain a case study design.

4.1.1 Case study

A case study can be characterised as research in which the researcher tries to gain insight into one or more objects or processes (Vennix, 2011). A case study is characterised by a small number of research units, a labour-intensive approach, more depth than breadth, a selective or strategic sample and qualitative research methods (Vennix, 2011).

Within the domain of the case study, two main variants can be distinguished. Namely the single case study and the multiple case study. The single case study focuses on one individual case, whereas the multiple case study compares different cases (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2007). This research uses a single case study because of the unique character of De Achterhoek, no other region in the Netherlands is similar in terms of characteristics. In addition, the single case study offers more possibilities to delve deeper into the two work-related trends and their opportunities for De Achterhoek.

An important advantage of a case study design is, according to Yin (2003), the in-depth description of a phenomenon that would otherwise be lost or not investigated with a pure quantitative research or a survey. A case study is a type of study with a high level of flexibleness. According to Verschuren & Doorewaard (2015), the studied fact or phenomenon guides the researcher. A disadvantage of a case study is the fact that generalisation is difficult because the research investigates a specific phenomenon.

4.1.2 Demarcation of the research area

In this research, De Achterhoek region consists of the following municipalities: Winterswijk, Oude IJsselstreek, Doetinchem, Oost Gelre, Bronckhorst, Berkelland and Aalten. Other municipalities, like Zutphen, Montferland, Brummen and Lochem, which by some indications (for example the COROP region) are allocated to the region, will not be examined in this research. The time span of this study dates from February 1st, 2021 till August 30th, 2021. However, all relevant information on work-related trends and housing preferences will be included in this study, including information before the research period.

4.1.3 Conceptual model

Figure 7, on the next page, presents the conceptual model of this research. This model is based on the policy framework and the theoretical framework.

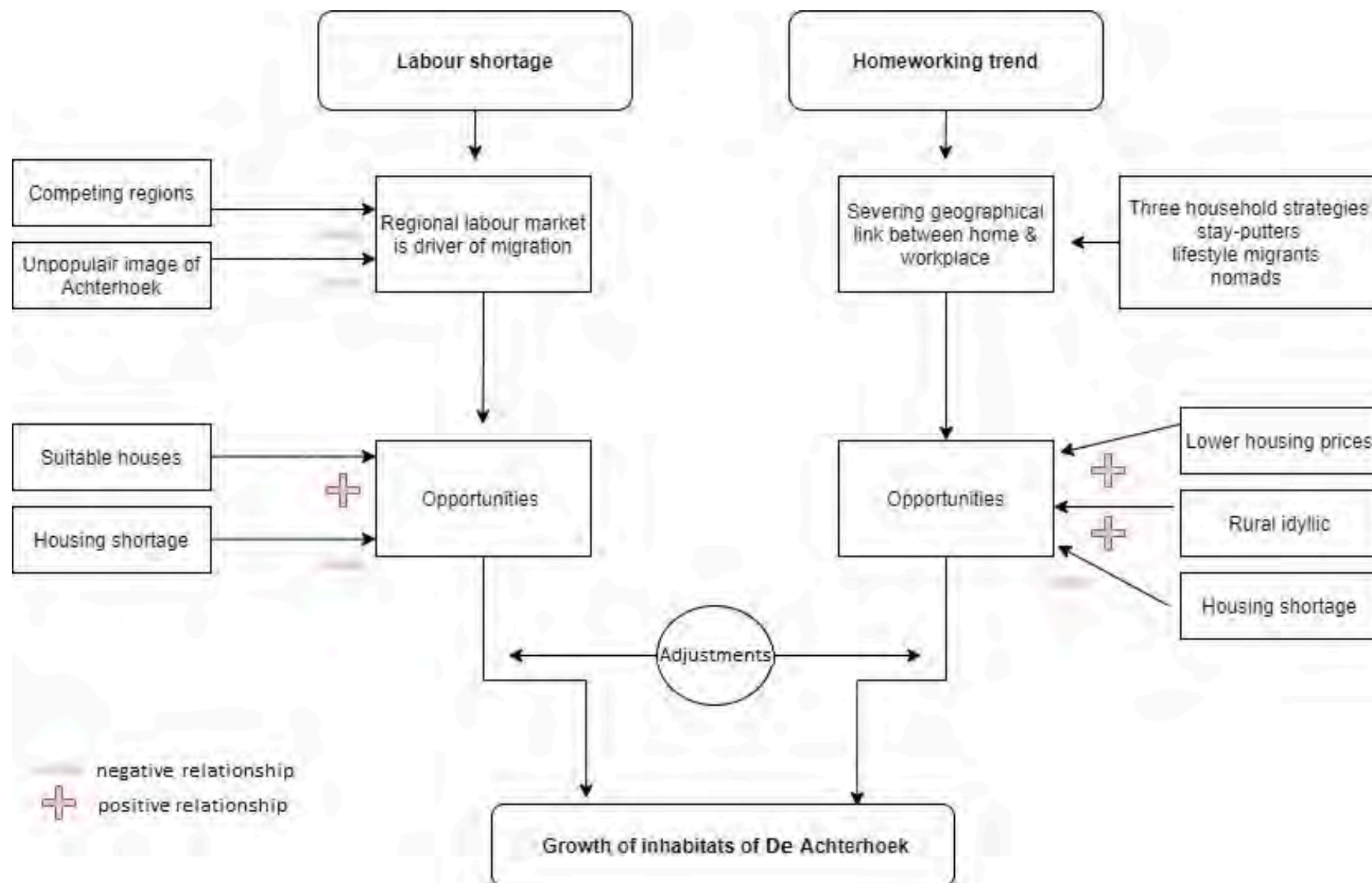


Figure 7: Conceptual model

4.2 Data collection

This research used different methods of data collection namely desk research, literature study and semi-structured interviews. This leads to triangulation. Triangulation analyses a problem from different perspectives using different data collection methods (Van Thiel, 2010). The used data collection methods will be explained one by one.

4.2.1 Desk research

Desk research is an approach where material produced by others or existing material is used. Through conducting desk research, documents were consulted as sources. These sources were selected based on reliability and relevant content. Desk research is used to answer descriptive sub-question number one and to write the policy framework. In doing so, an attempt was made to achieve a certain spread of data sources. Desk research has been selected as one of the methods of this research because of the abundance of available information on different themes of this research.

4.2.2 Literature study

Literature research is the collection and study of produced professional literature. It is usually a qualitative content analysis (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2015). While writing the theoretical framework, literature was consulted to describe migration theories and cottage industry theories. The consulted literature was selected based on relevant content. In addition, all the consulted articles must either be peer-reviewed or published by a credible author or journal.

4.2.3 Semi-structured interviews

In this research, semi-structured interviews are used. Semi-structured interviews make use of a standard interview guide with closed-ended and open-ended questions. This setup of the interview allows the researcher to adjust and add questions if needed and depending on the responses of the actor (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

Based on the operationalisation and research model, several pillars for the interviews have been drawn up. This provided some structure to the content and wording of the questions. According to Robson (2002), the advantage of a semi-structured interview is that the interview can be steered, but the respondent still has room to express his or her views. Semi-structured interviews are used in this research, to provide a clear structure during the interviews and gather all the needed information, while at the same time it provides the opportunity to ask for additional information or clarifications.

In order to interview respondents, the snowball method was used. This means that the researcher recruits new respondents through the contacts of those who have already been interviewed (Baarda, & De Goede, 2007). This method is characterised by respondents assisting the researcher in finding other respondents (Kleemans & Staring, 2008). When using the snowball method, the target population must not consist of isolated individuals, but rather of social networks (Kleemans & Staring, 2008).

All respondents in this study were interviewed face-to-face or digitally¹¹. An interview guide was set up to provide a clear structure and guidance during the interviews. This interview guide is presented in appendix 1. The interviews are recorded and a transcript was made of the literal course of the interview. According to Van Thiel (2010), a transcript is the most accurate and complete representation of an interview. During the interviews in this study, the researcher took a neutral role and insights from literature, sources or previous interviews played a minimal role.

¹¹ This research is carried out during the covid-19 pandemic

By elaborating on the interviews and comparing them with each other, a clear picture of the opportunities provided by the two work-related trends emerged.

Table 6, on the next page, lists the interviewed respondents of this research.

Table 6: List of respondents

Respondent ¹²	Respondents' organisation	Respondent's function	Member thematic roundtable 8RHK
Employee of Gelderland A	Province of Gelderland	Programme-manager education, labour market & economy	Education & labour market
Employee of Gelderland B	Province of Gelderland	Information support housing & monitoring	-
Employee of Gelderland C	Province of Gelderland	Regional advisor Achterhoek	-
Employee of Gelderland D <i>* Different conversations</i>	Province of Gelderland	Advisor housing region Achterhoek & Foodvalley	Housing & real estate
Employee of 8RHK A	8RHK	Programme employer thematic roundtables housing & real estate and circular economy & energy transition	Housing & real estate and circular economy & energy transition
Employee of 8RHK B	8RHK	Programme-manager education & labour market	Education & labour market
Employee of 8RHK C	8RHK	Programme-manager smart working & innovation	Smart working & innovation
Employee of 8RHK D	8RHK	Marketing & communication advisor	-
Employee of Berkelland	Municipality of Berkelland	Policy advisor on housing	-
Employee of Winterswijk A	Municipality of Winterswijk	Alderman housing, economy, business & leisure economy, nature and finance	Housing & real estate
Employee of Winterswijk B	Municipality of Winterswijk	Policy officer on public housing & spatial development	-
Employee of Aalten	Municipality of Aalten	Policy advisor on housing	-
Employee of an employment agency	JAWS employment agency	Director of JAWS	Education & labour market
Employee of a business organisation	Business circle Berkelland	Booster for business circle Berkelland	-
Employee of a real estate agency	Ten hag real estate agency	Director of ten Hag	Housing & real estate

¹² The names used in this research are fictitious names to safeguard the actual identity of the respondents and are thus used throughout the text as if they were the actual names of the respondents.

4.3 Quality requirements

4.3.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the influence of observations by chance or unsystematic errors (Boeije, 2008). If the data collection is carried out in a reliable manner, a repetition of the same observation will lead to the same outcome. According to Korzilius (2008), a reliable study is a study where the found results are independent of the time and moment the study was conducted, the investigator who studied the phenomenon and the used instruments.

In this research, attention is paid to reliability in various ways. By using desk-research, exploring literature & news articles and conducting semi-structured interviews, different types of sources were consulted, which increased the reliability of this research. These sources were also explicitly selected based on reliability and the relevance of the content. This ensures that the chance of random errors is reduced. Also, the methodological choices have been described and justified in this methodological chapter, which increases the replicability of this research. Finally, the sources consulted in this study have been coded in a systematic manner. Because coding was used in this research, a structure was created in the selected qualitative data.

4.3.2 Validity

Validity shows the extent to which a measuring instrument is valid or credible (Vennix, 2011). Validity can be divided into internal validity and external validity.

Internal validity

Internal validity focuses on the question: do you measure what you actually want to measure? According to Vennix (2011), research is internally valid when the chosen research methods draw the right conclusions. Internal validity measures the quality of the research (Vennix, 2011). In this study, several forms of data collection are used such as desk research, literature study and semi-structured interviews, which increased the internal validity by providing a large amount of available data. Due to the careful way in which the operationalisation was carried out (described in section 4.4), the opportunities, which the two work-related trends offer to attract new residents to De Achterhoek, can be measured in the same way, which increases the internal validity of this study.

A general concern, about the internal validity of a case study design, is the problem of making “inferences”. Every single time a phenomenon cannot be observed, a case study design involves an inference. When the researcher of a case study “infers” a certain phenomenon, this is the result of a previous thought, based on documents or interviews (Yin, 2003). This study consists of an iterative process to overcome the issue of inferences. So, in this study, there is a continued reflection on the findings of this study which made this study more internally valid.

External validity

External validity evaluates whether the results of the study can be generalised to another situation or place than the situation in which the research was originally conducted (Bleijenbergh, 2015). This study focuses on De Achterhoek region, so the information obtained is only applicable to this region. As a result, the generalisation to other regions is small and the external validity of this study is low. Nevertheless, this study arose from trends taking place in many (shrinking) regions. As a result, insights from this study might still provide insights for other regions. Also, the results of this study may give rise to a larger study or provide a starting point for other regions to carry out a similar study.

4.4 Operationalisation

Table 7, on the next page, presents the operationalisation of this research.

Table 7: Operationalisation

Variables	Indicators	Data sources	Interview questions
Shrinkage region	A region with an (expected) substantial and structural decline in population and households (Rijksoverheid, n.d.).	Demographic data from Statistics Netherlands	If you reflect from your field of work, how do you notice that De Achterhoek region is shrinking?
Opportunities	Chances for De Achterhoek region to attract people from outside the region		Do you think the work-related trends can also bring new inhabitants to De Achterhoek region? Which opportunities do the work-related trends offer for De Achterhoek?
Growth of inhabitants of De Achterhoek	Attract more residents from outside the region in the coming five years than the increase of 247 new residents in the past five years (2015-2020).	Relocation data from Statistics Netherlands	Do you think that the work-related trends bring opportunities for population growth?
Settle	To start living in a place where you intend to stay for a long time (Cambridge dictionary, n.d.).	Relocation data from Statistics Netherlands	Is there any information available on the housing preferences of workers and their motives for settling or not settling in the region? What do you think is essential for workers from Achterhoek companies to settle in De Achterhoek?
Sufficient cooperation	Adequate and proper cooperation between the involved parties in order to utilise the opportunities of the two work-related trends	Cooperation arrangement Achterhoek Region (Samenwerkingsregeling Regio Achterhoek)	Do you think there is enough sufficient cooperation between relevant parties to utilise the opportunities of the work-related trends?
Utilise opportunities	Fully exploiting all the opportunities offered by the work-related trends		How can the opportunities that the work-related trends offer for population growth best be utilised? In an ideal situation, with sufficient resources, how would you utilise the opportunities of the work-related trends to bring more residents to the region? What added value can your organisation offer to take advantage of the work-related trends
Adjustments	a small alteration or movement made to achieve a desired fit, appearance, or result (Oxfordlanguages, n.d.)	Best practices from other regions or countries	What adjustments or policies are needed to utilise the opportunities offered by the work-related trends

5. Results

This chapter presents the results of this study. The results are based on interviews, literature and other sources like newspaper articles. Each sub-question will be answered individually and structured based on the research model in figure 1.

5.1 What is the current situation in De Achterhoek regarding shrinkage and which policies are currently executed?

This paragraph describes the current situation regarding shrinkage in De Achterhoek. It describes how the various respondents perceive the term “shrinking region” and whether people encounter shrinkage in the course of their work. Section 5.1.2 describes the current policies on shrinkage and building and will describe the respondents’ opinions on them.

5.1.1 Current shrinkage situation

Paragraph 2.2.1 discussed the demography of De Achterhoek region. This paragraph stated that De Achterhoek had a declining population since 2007. A turnover happened in 2015 and the population of De Achterhoek has been growing ever since. Thus, in practice, De Achterhoek has not been shrinking during the past five years. While the region is still expected to shrink in the future, namely by 5.5 percent over the next 20 years. The Dutch population is, by contrast, expected to increase by more than 9 percent during the same time.

Besides the changing number of inhabitants of De Achterhoek, the composition is changing. The group of people aged fifty years or older increased from 37 percent to 47 percent over the period 2007-2020 while the number and proportion of young people is decreasing. So, dejuvenation and ageing take place side by side. These findings are supported by figures, but how are they experienced in practice and how do the respondents experience shrinkage during their work?

This section will explain that the label “shrinking region” evokes different reactions. For example, some respondents feel that De Achterhoek is no longer a “shrinking region” while others feel that a discussion on this topic is necessary. The label “shrinking region” is often avoided in conversations but the label, however, brings economic benefits. In addition, each respondent experiences shrinkage differently in their daily work. Remarkably, population shrinkage is not seen as the biggest problem of being a “shrinking region”. What is the biggest problem of being a “shrinking region” is namely the ageing of the population.

The term “shrinking region” encountered different reactions from the respondents. According to the figures, the number of inhabitants has grown in recent years. Some respondents think that De Achterhoek is no longer a “shrinking region” while others think that it is time to discuss to what extent the region should still be considered as a “shrinking region”. Also, a comparison is made with, in their eyes, “real shrinking regions” like North-East Groningen and Zeeland. *“The shrinkage was presented in a very extreme way. But if you actually looked into the figures back then, you would already see that you lose few inhabitants compared to the prognoses and if we shrink, it is in a gradual way. If you bring it back at a district level, then there are really no empty streets. It is not a comparable picture with North-East Groningen”* (Employee of Aalten, June 28th 2021). Employee of a real estate agency endorses this finding and is also comparing De Achterhoek with “real shrinking regions”: *“you cannot compare De Achterhoek with Groningen and Zeeland, we are situated very centrally. Between the Ruhr area and De Randstad. We have an excellent living climate and many facilities. In addition, we have theatres, professional football and educational institutions. We are a promising region* (Employee of a real estate agency, June 25th 2021).

Like Employee of a real estate agency mentions, De Achterhoek has various facilities. But this cannot be compared to the facilities the city of Arnhem has to offer or the region of Twente has. What should not be overlooked is that the largest city in De Achterhoek region, Doetinchem, has 58,000 inhabitants and Arnhem and Enschede (which is the largest city in the Twente region) have respectively 162,000 and 160,000 inhabitants. So, these large cities near De Achterhoek, have twice as many inhabitants as Doetinchem. Therefore, De Achterhoek cannot compete with these cities in terms of facilities.

Many respondents would prefer to avoid the term "shrinking region". Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021) describes this as follows: *"But the term 'shrinking region' is not positive for De Achterhoek inhabitants either, because you do not want to live there. The word 'border region' is much nicer. We avoid the word 'shrinking region' as much as possible"*. In line with this argument, Employee of Gelderland B (June 2nd, 2021) claims: *"The term 'shrinking region' is not really allowed to say"*. On top of that, the term "shrinking region" also brings some disadvantages. According to Employee of a business organisation (June 29th, 2021), the term "shrinking region" will, when it is constantly repeated in conversation, cause a region to be gloomy and automatically act as a "shrinking region" and, thus, become a "shrinking region". In addition, the term "shrinking region" also led to the idea that every newly built home is perhaps one too many (Employee of Aalten, June 28th 2021). Which, in the end, will cause property values to decrease according to Employee of Aalten.

However, a few advantages of the label "shrinking region" come to the fore. As expected, the economic benefits are mainly mentioned here. For example, De Achterhoek region has received 40 million euros from the national government on behalf of the Region Deal (Rijksoverheid, 2020). A Region Deal is a cooperation between the region and the State to strengthen the region. Various regions in the Netherlands have received financial support from the State. The challenges which these regions are facing are often the same: population decline, ageing, the effects of climate change, energy transition, too much or too few suitable housing, a mismatch in the labour market, unequal opportunities and crime (Rijksoverheid, 2020). The Region Deal is intended to keep De Achterhoek attractive for its residents in the future (Rijksoverheid, 2020). It involves investments in the housing supply and investments in the countryside, for example by transforming vacant agricultural property (Rijksoverheid, 2020). Besides obtaining additional money to stimulate population growth, the region is part of a customised project from the population decline action plan. Also, several expert projects have been started to offer and exchange knowledge between shrinking regions. Additionally, a knowledge platform "Knowledge for shrinkage" has been launched. These projects were (almost) all started because of the "shrinking region" label that has been assigned to De Achterhoek (Employee of Gelderland D, July 13th 2021). The economic benefits of the label "shrinking region" are a great benefit for the region and this advantage should be taken into account according to Employee of an employment agency (June 9th, 2021). Even though De Achterhoek is hardly a "shrinking region", it is according to Employee of an employment agency *"better not to let go the label of a 'shrinking region' yet"*. Because, according to Employee of an employment agency (June 9th, 2021), without the label "shrinking region" you will not receive all the additional money from the central government. *"If you build just too little houses to still be considered shrinking, you might still get money. But on the other hand, we do want to get rid of the label 'shrinking region'. But if you get rid of that label, then you are less interesting for stimulating programmes"* (Employee of employment agency, June 9th 2021).

Interestingly, the disadvantages of the shrinkage label are mentioned while, at the same time, the benefits of the label are referred to and seen as helpful. Even as the region is seen as hardly shrinking. Employee of an employment agency (June 9th, 2021) thinks that the label "shrinking region" is benefitting the region because of the additional budget from the central government. And if the region is building new houses, which attracts new inhabitants and this causes population growth, the additional budget will maybe be cut. According to Employee of an employment agency (June 9th, 2021), the additional budget is needed and helpful: *"Maybe you do need the money to be able to solve the problem structurally"*. On the other hand, Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021) claims that the label "shrinking region" costs the region far more money than it generates money. *"Politicians made the choice to accept the label "shrinking region" with the wrong reasons, they thought, we will get some facilities and a few million, but they are peanuts, because you are imposing a stigma on the region"* (Employee of a real estate agency, June 25th 2021). Thus, there are different views on whether the additional money that comes with the label "shrinking region" has an overall positive effect on the region.

If asked how the respondents experience shrinkage in their daily work, lots of different answers were given. Every respondent experiences the population shrinkage differently in their daily work even if they are working at the same organisation. Employee of 8RHK C (June 30th, 2021) experiences shrinkage in the local labour market: *"It is difficult to find employees, especially highly qualified technical staff. That is actually the main factor in how you feel the shrinkage"*. Additionally, she notices that the villages are becoming weaker and urbanisation is taking place. The fact that the region is shrinking is according to Employee of 8RHK B (June 16th, 2021) mainly supported by figures: *"It is really difficult to feel it in my work"*. She notices it mainly based on data and *"I encounter many old grey men in suits in my work, more than ever before"*. For Employee of a real estate agency, the shrinkage has a major impact on his daily work. It has brought his real estate agency only misery. According to him, the reason why the housing market in the region is overheated is because almost no houses have been built in the past ten years. *"The so-called shrinkage scenario has just cost us a lot of money. We have no room for foreign workers, for "status holders" or for our own people at all, let alone for people coming in from other regions. All in all, a very black scenario"* (Employee of a real estate agency, June 25th 2021).

What is remarkable to notice is that the population shrinkage is not seen as the biggest problem of being a "shrinking region". The biggest problem, according to many, is the ageing of the population. According to Employee of 8RHK A (June 2nd, 2021), there are plenty of voices saying that De Achterhoek is not going to shrink anymore but the ageing of the population is on the horizon and an upcoming problem. This is in line with Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021), who is also experiencing the ageing of the population. According to her, the ageing of the population is the biggest challenge De Achterhoek is facing. Employee of Berkelland does not see shrinkage as *"such a problem if it is accompanied by a balanced population structure. If you have a balanced population structure you can remove houses that are not needed anymore in your municipality"*. Thus, a balanced population structure is very important to her especially when the municipality is shrinking. At this moment the municipality of Berkelland has approximately 44,000 inhabitants. According to Employee of Berkelland, the municipality had 40,000 inhabitants a few decades ago. *"Was life here bad then? No. But the population structure that is out of balance is a much bigger problem"* (Employee of Berkelland, June 4th 2021)

The ageing of the population is partly caused by the migration of young people. The theoretical framework (paragraph 3.1.3) states that many young people in the Netherlands move from outlying areas to the economic centres in the western part of the Netherlands, where more job opportunities and education opportunities are present (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2010). The consequence of this migration is that young people contribute, to a large extent, to the depopulation of rural areas according to Haartsen & Venhorst (2010).

The assertion that ageing and depopulation is partly caused by young people who are migrating is, according to Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021), incorrect. According to him, young people moved out of the region because they could not find a suitable home in the region or they are temporarily studying in other parts of the country. However, so claims Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021), lots of young people will move back to the region eventually. Thus, contrary to the literature, Employee of a real estate agency claims that young people are currently leaving the region because they cannot find suitable housing and not because they started studying elsewhere in the country. Because, according to him, lots of students will move back to De Achterhoek after finishing their studies.

In conclusion, the term “shrinking region” encountered different reactions from the respondents, often negative. Many respondents would prefer to avoid the term “shrinking region”. However, the economic advantages of the label “shrinking region” are still mentioned. The question raises to what extent it is helpful to be labelled as a “shrinking region” for De Achterhoek, if it provides the region with a negative stigma but also helps to gain economical support from the central government. Additionally, depopulation is not perceived as the biggest challenge. But the ageing of the population is seen as the biggest challenge the region faces.

After discussing the current situation of shrinkage, it is important to look at the policies that have been implemented to counteract the shrinkage. Because policies are, of course, written down on paper and their implementation must be demonstrated in practice. The next section will explore how the policies have been implemented in practice and what the respondents think about them.

5.1.2 Current policies

There is a mismatch between supply and demand for housing and an insufficient housing supply for starters and seniors in De Achterhoek. Regional qualitative assessment criteria have been drawn up for the evaluation of additional housing construction. These criteria must ensure that only new construction is added which contributes to solving the mismatch in the housing market in De Achterhoek. This means that there is no minimum or a maximum number of houses to be built in De Achterhoek but houses are built according to necessity. A finger is kept on the pulse through three regional qualitative assessment criteria: the necessity has been demonstrated, priority for the transformation of vacant properties and expansion in existing areas takes precedence over new expansion locations.

In addition, De Achterhoek indicates that it faces three major challenges, namely: the current housing stock does not meet the quality requirements of the future, the mismatch between supply and demand in the regional housing market and vacant properties are a source of irritation for inhabitants. To address these issues the 8RHK focuses on the following policy measures. Firstly, fitting new homes: the region is paying special attention to seniors and starters and is open to new housing concepts and forms of living. Secondly, improving the quality of existing housing stock: most of the homes for the future are already built in De Achterhoek but these homes do not meet the quality requirements for the future. In the coming years, the region will work on improving the existing housing stock. The last policy measurement is the transformation and demolition of vacant properties (including shopping areas). This includes taking timely action on vacant properties such as schools, stores and agricultural properties.

This section will explain that the population shrinkage led to rigorous measures with a cautious approach to the construction of houses. In addition, the construction of houses today seems to be hampered by the old shrinkage doctrine. When making plans to construct houses, the question remains: should the houses be built or should De Achterhoek be careful because of the expected population decline in the future. The freedom to build according to necessity is not always handled well by the municipalities. Cooperation between different municipalities and the mutual information exchange is considered to be problematic.

When the region was considered as a “real shrinking region” between 2007 and 2015, the region was very careful with building new homes. The biggest fear according to Employee of 8RHK A (June 2nd, 2021) are the vacant houses. Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021) explains this cautious approach as follows: *“But several years ago, when we were thinking about housing in particular, we thought: what if we will be building all these houses and it will cause having empty properties. And then for a few years, there was a real slowdown in building new houses. If you ran out of house numbers, you were not allowed to build any more”*. The careful approach of the region has, according to Employee of Aalten, led to the fact that the region *“van de krimp in de kramp geschoten is”* (has gone from shrinkage into cramping). In addition, it has led, according to her, to overly rigorous measurements. Which at this moment, with slight population growth, takes time to rectify. According to the work of Hospers (2010), there are three common responses to shrinkage by administrators: they start to cramp, they deny the shrinkage or act powerfully to combat the shrinkage. Administrators usually get nervous when population shrinkage is on the agenda according to Hospers. It is difficult to gain control because population shrinkage affects the entire municipality and is related to developments elsewhere (Hospers, 2010). According to Employee of Aalten (June 28th, 2021), the administrations of the region started to cramp. However, this reaction to shrinkage is, according to Hospers (2010), often a narrow-mindedness reaction. He wonders how bad it is if the school is one kilometre further away and why the neighbourhood supermarket must stay open at all costs, while most residents go to the large supermarket in the neighbouring city anyway? According to him, shrinkage is nothing more than a mental challenge. Growth and shrinkage belong together, but we have forgotten this because of the ongoing growth since the Industrial Revolution (Hospers, 2010).

As described above, there was a cautious approach to the building of new homes during the first years of population decline in the region. Employee of a real estate agency has never been a supporter of the label “shrinking region” and calls for the construction of more houses in the region. But he notices that the “shrinkage doctrine” may hamper the construction of new homes: *“If you have been indoctrinated for ten years by thinking in terms of shrinkage and now you have to show ambition for growth. Public servants always needed to see the glass half empty and now suddenly it is half full, and that is difficult”*. Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021) thus thinks that the construction of houses in the region will be hampered by the shrinkage doctrine. Public servants, he says, have always looked at construction plans in a negative light and now suddenly have to look at them in a positive light and also must show ambition for growth. This major transition in ways of thinking will hamper the construction of houses according to Employee of a real estate agency. His opinion seems realistic; however, this argument is not mentioned by other respondents who are also in favour of rapid housing development

Because of the mismatch and shortages in the housing market as well as the two trends that may offer opportunities for De Achterhoek region, the question remains: should houses be built or should De Achterhoek be careful because of the expected population decline in the future?

Els Birkenhäger, director of Sité Woondiensten in Doetinchem, indicates in the Gelderlander (March 29th, 2021) that carefulness is needed when examining the construction of new houses to avoid problems in the future. In addition, she mentioned that more people are passing in De Achterhoek than people being born in the region.

These facts could lead to some caution around building new houses. In addition, de Gelderlander (March 29th 2021) speaks of the following dilemma: should De Achterhoek build immediately to reduce the housing shortage or is it wise to see if the migration from the western part of the Netherlands will continue? But a cautious approach and the termination of construction work is not what is needed at this moment according to Employee of Winterswijk A: *"We say: if we do nothing, it will not go well, so we will do something. But we will not go too crazy. I do not expect 500 new residents all of a sudden but the situation on the housing market is currently allowing us to develop 200 homes at a time"*.

It is also important, according to Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021), to keep building new homes to maintain a liveable village with enough facilities. *"If we only have fewer inhabitants or only old people, you have to close facilities. We do not want that"* (Employee of Winterswijk A, June 14th 2021). In line with this argument, it is important to start building houses in the region within a short timeframe according to Employee of an employment agency: *"We really need to do something quickly about the shortage in the housing market to keep people here and that people are able to move to De Achterhoek. We just need to start building here"*. In addition, it is important not to look only at infill areas to build new homes, because you cannot build enough homes on infill areas according to Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021). Larger building sites such as expansion areas are needed according to him. On expansion areas, the municipalities can build for several target groups, which will, according to Employee of a real estate agency, also improve the circulation. In his opinion, building houses for multiple target groups is essential and necessary for the region.

However, Gert-Jan Hospers warns against too much optimism about the construction of lots of houses (De Gelderlander, October 10th 2020). The shrinkage may be gone in absolute numbers in De Achterhoek, but there is a difference between the city and the countryside according to Hospers. Moreover, the ageing of the population is increasing and the decline of the young population continues according to Hospers.

At this moment, municipalities can build according to necessity, there is no limit to the number of homes that municipalities can build. This led to a lot of freedom for the municipalities which they do not always handle well. *"Because of the regional quality assessment criteria, municipalities thought: now we can go and build a lot of homes. But they must coordinate it between other municipalities. So, they must also look at the liveability of the surrounding villages"* (Employee of Gelderland D, 13 July 2021). According to Employee of Gelderland D, the precondition for building is mutual coordination between municipalities. Municipalities need to exchange information and show their building plans to each other but in practice, this is not happening (Employee of Gelderland D, 13 July 2021). The danger of not collaborating is that villages that are not able to build, may lose their inhabitants to the newly built neighbourhood and the village is losing its liveability and attractiveness (Hospers, 2010). Which may cause population shrinkage in the village while the surrounding municipality is gaining lots of inhabitants. The municipality of Doetinchem has the ambition to grow to 70,000 inhabitants by 2036. While in 2021 approximately 58,000 inhabitants were living in Doetinchem (De Gelderlander, 24 September 2020). However, Employee of Aalten (June 28th, 2021) is not concerned about the possible adverse effects of Doetinchem's growth ambition on her municipality Aalten. *"An ambition is one thing, of course, but constructing plans are a different matter. I think that in terms of building pace, we are proportionally on a par with Doetinchem in practice. In three years, there will be another municipal executive committee, so let it go"* (Employee of Aalten, June 28th 2021). Besides the opinion of Employee of Aalten, the other respondents did not seem to be impressed by the growth ambitions of Doetinchem either. They seem to perceive it mainly as a political ambition that still has to be proven.

To summarise, rigorous measures have been taken to prevent vacant houses in the region. This brought a halt to the construction of new houses in the region. Because of the growth of the population, the region is allowed to build houses according to necessity, but the construction of new houses is hindered by, among other things, the old shrinkage mindset. But the question remains whether to build more houses in the region or to be careful with the construction of houses. Supporters for the caution approach are pointing to the mortality surplus, the differences in growth between urban and rural communities and the ageing of the population. While the supporters of quick building point to the importance of retaining facilities, retaining residents and attracting people from outside the region.

Having explained the current shrinkage situation in De Achterhoek, it is time to examine the opportunities that the labour shortage and the home-working trend may offer for population growth. The next paragraph discusses the opportunities of the labour shortage.

5.2. Which opportunities does the labour shortage offer for De Achterhoek to attract new residents and what is needed to let the workers settle in the region?

This paragraph describes the opportunities of the labour shortage for population growth. In addition, section 5.2.2 describes the conditions for binding workers to De Achterhoek region. Among other things, the differences between migration movements between people with different education levels are presented.

5.2.1 Opportunities to attract new residents

The labour shortage can, according to the literature, provide opportunities to attract new people to the region. People who are looking for a place to live and work may choose De Achterhoek because of the many available jobs. In addition, employment is an important motive for moving to a region that is experiencing a population decline. Domestic motives such as marriage and divorce are the biggest reason for moving to a declining region, followed by labour motives.

Some respondents see opportunities to attract new residents to De Achterhoek because of the labour shortage, while others do not think the labour shortage brings opportunities for population growth. An often-mentioned barrier for attracting new residents through the opportunities of the labour shortage is the tightness in the housing market. Also, the disadvantages of the labour shortage are often mentioned by the respondents such as business relocation and the deterioration of liveability. Moreover, the “good” quality of living in De Achterhoek is likely to attract home-workers rather than workers for De Achterhoek companies according to some respondents.

The theoretical framework (paragraph 3.1.3) states that household motives are the most important motives to migrate to depopulation areas, closely followed by employment motives (Stockdale, 2006). Hence, the importance of economic binding to the region is often mentioned by the respondents. This is described by Employee of 8RHK C (June 30th, 2021) as follows: *“If you have job vacancies, you can attract people and bind them economically to your region, and they are more likely to live here. Economic bonding is the first step. First, find work instead of first moving and then finding work”*. Also, Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021) is seeing opportunities for her municipality. Winterswijk has lots of facilities and a large nature area which attracts workers. Moreover, Employee of a business organisation also thinks that the labour shortage will bring opportunities for population growth. *“We think it is a good story to attract inhabitants through the many job vacancies, especially in a region as beaten to death as this one. For years, De Achterhoek story was synonymous with a “shrinking region”. And nobody likes that. Now that has clearly changed, I hope we can pick up the growth”* (Employee of a business organisation, June 29th 2021). Attracting employees is seen as desirable by Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021). In her opinion, it is important to focus on attracting people who are still in the labour force and who are, if possible, part of a family with children.

On the other hand, not everyone is seeing the opportunities that a labour shortage could provide for population growth. *“I have no idea why the vacancies are not being filled. I do not think it is because they can't find a home here. It could be another problem. Maybe they do not want to work here because they would rather live somewhere else”* (Employee of 8RHK A, June 2nd 2021). Thus, Employee of 8RHK A states that workers prefer to live somewhere else and that the availability of houses in the region is not a barrier. The housing market in De Randstad is considered to be very overheated and also the housing market in De Achterhoek is under pressure. According to Employee of 8RHK C (June 30th, 2021): *“You can attract many people through the labour market opportunities but you cannot house them. The housing market is the obstacle here”*. Employee of a business organisation (June 29th, 2021) endorse this: *“It is going well for most companies who see growth coming and they need more working people but then they run into housing problems”*.

Moreover, Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021) wonders why workers would go to De Achterhoek if there is enough work everywhere. *"You have good work elsewhere with a good salary, why would you move to De Achterhoek?"* (Employee of a real estate agency, June 25th 2021). He states that workers may only come to De Achterhoek for a better quality of living. But this "quality of living motive" is, according to Employee of a real estate agency, more attributable to people who can work from home and are looking for a new environment and therefore choose to move to De Achterhoek. Thus, the chance that workers, who can find a job anywhere, including close to their current place of residence, will move to De Achterhoek is low, according to Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021).

The labour shortage may cause opportunities to attract new residents to De Achterhoek. However, the labour shortage can also lead to adverse effects for the region. These adverse effects are mentioned by the respondents. *"Those job vacancies exist and will continue to exist. If they are not filled, a company has to look at other things, such as innovation, or it has to move away from the region to fill the vacancies elsewhere. And we really do not want the second scenario"* (Employee of 8RHK B, June 16th 2021). With the move of a company to another region, the labour market tightness is likely to decrease but the problem of ageing and the concerns about the liveability of villages are remaining according to Employee of 8RHK B. *"Then you get those issues you see in the French countryside"* (Employee of 8RHK B, June 16th 2021). Mark Boumans, Mayor of Doetinchem, also mentioned in the Gelderlander (April 15th, 2021) the importance of maintaining companies in the region. He states that the region has every interest in filling the 27,000 vacancies to keep the region vital. Even if this is quite an ambitious target it needs to be achieved. Because, if those vacancies are not filled in time, some of the companies will move to other regions, according to him. This will not benefit the liveability of De Achterhoek according to Mark Boumans. Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021) endorses these concerns: *"Because it would, of course, be very unpleasant if the beautiful companies we have here, were to leave because they cannot find employees here. That is a concern, really a concern"*. Furthermore, Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021) also endorses these concerns and wants to prevent companies from moving to, for example, Arnhem where more potential workers live. Crucial to maintaining the companies in De Achterhoek is the availability of sufficient housing for workers according to Employee of Winterswijk A.

In summary, the opportunities provided by the labour shortage for population growth are seen and experienced. It is attractive to attract workers because they help to reduce the labour shortages, ensure population growth and workers are under 67 years of age. These opportunities are hampered by the tightness in the housing market and the fact that the entire country is struggling with labour shortages, making it very difficult to attract these workers. The adverse effects of the labour shortage are also mentioned, namely the risk of companies moving out of the region, deterioration of liveability and the exacerbation of the ageing population.

The previous section discussed the opportunities of the labour shortage for attracting new residents to De Achterhoek. However, it is also important to know how to bind the workers to the region. This topic will be discussed in the next section.

5.2.2 What is needed to let the workers settle in the region

The many vacancies in the region may be attractive for people looking for a job. To achieve population growth, workers need to settle in De Achterhoek. To realise this, it is important to know what housing needs workers have and whether they are willing to move to De Achterhoek.

Employees with a high level of education are more likely to move in comparison to employees with a low level of education. Additionally, to attract higher educated employees it is necessary to have different types of facilities such as theatres and shopping centres but also in terms of mobility, the presence of a railway station and a connection to a motorway. The presence of foreign workers and their impact on the region should also be considered.

In general, there seems to be a proper picture of the housing needs of employees and in particular the differences between education levels. For example, many respondents indicate that employees with a low level of education are less likely to move than those with a high level of education. This can be explained according to Bijker (2013) because the availability of jobs that require a high level of education is not equally distributed across the country. According to Employee of a business organisation (June 29th, 2021), De Achterhoek knows exactly what kind of houses workers want in this region, namely: *“A three-bedroom house with a small front garden and larger back garden. They do not want lofts or flats in this area. 225-275 thousand euros approximately. And they want 120 square metres”* (Employee of a business organisation, June 29th 2021). As well as Employee of a business organisation, other respondents also state that it is important to build starter homes for workers.

According to the respondents, to attract highly educated people to the region, it is necessary to have more facilities rather than just good housing. Employee of an employment agency indicates that the highly educated often have a highly educated partner who wants to have the possibility to work nearby or have the possibility for easy work travel. Higher educated people are more inclined to commute longer distances (Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, 2017). This makes accessibility by road and rail very important for this group. This is also supported by statistics from the Statistics Netherlands. Highly educated people travel on average more for work than medium and low educated people. This is explained by the fact that highly educated people usually live further from their workplace (CBS, 2016b). Highly educated men travel an average of 35 kilometres to work, in contrast to less-educated men who travel an average of 26 kilometres to work (CBS, 2016b). As previously stated, mobility is important for higher educated people. But mobility is sometimes a barrier to attract higher educated people in De Achterhoek. Employee of an employment agency explains this problem with attracting higher educated people:

“The higher educated, they often have a partner who is also highly educated. And if you are going to live here, your partner should also be able to find work here. And that is often a problem, I hear from companies. Those groups often say: let's live in a place where accessibility by train is good, and then you might come to the cities around us - Zutphen, Enschede, Hengelo and Lochem. Because you can easily get on a train there to go to Utrecht or Amsterdam or Nijmegen. That is a more pleasant connection than if you live in Neede. It is not easy for a highly educated couple to find a job around here” (Employee of an employment agency, June 9th 2021).

Consequently, Employee of Gelderland A (May 26th, 2021) indicates that the municipalities with reasonable facilities and good travel possibilities, such as a railway station and a connection to a motorway or highway, will be popular especially among workers. In addition, the higher educated people want, according to Employee of a business organisation (June 29th, 2021), more than just work and a nice home. They also want attractive content of work and career prospects as well as a job for their partner and proximity to theatres and shopping facilities. This is in contrast to the needs of low and medium educated people, where housing is the most important factor for moving.

Employee of a business organisation (June 29th, 2021) explains this as follows: *“Housing is one thing, but then there are other things that play a big role for high educated people, but in the lower functions, where the more regionally active people operate, housing is a really important issue”*. The Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (2017) endorses these findings and states that the labour opportunities and salary level of a region are more important for higher educated people than housing characteristics. In addition, residential characteristics related to regional culture, quality of life and facilities also play a major role in the choice of living for the higher educated.

Lastly, the importance of sufficient housing in De Achterhoek is also approached from an employment perspective. *“We must ensure that there is enough housing, otherwise we will not get those workers”* (Employee of 8RHK A, June 2nd 2021). Thus, the availability of enough sufficient housing is not only viewed from a population growth perspective but also an employment perspective.

A factor that is often underexposed in studies is the presence of foreign workers. According to Employee of an employment agency, more foreign workers will have to work in De Achterhoek in the coming years. Companies must continue to produce their products and if not enough Dutch workers can be found, foreign workers will have to be recruited. *“And foreign workers also need to have a home and this is actually not looked at in many studies. We also do not have a clear picture of how many people work here and where they live”* (Employee of an employment agency, June 9th 2021). This statement seems to be true. There are no statistics available on the exact number of foreign workers. In the entire province of Gelderland, 53,720 foreign workers were working in 2017, according to the Expertisecentrum Flexwonen. The expected number of foreign workers in 2030 in the province of Gelderland will be between 63,000 and 123,600 (Gelderlander, April 29th 2021). Which is a very broad estimation.

Moreover, Employee of an employment agency states that these foreign workers are not always temporarily employed in the Netherlands. They sometimes settle for a long period of time or permanently.

I think there are still opportunities for the region to recruit people from abroad. Including higher-educated people from abroad. We just do not have a choice. SME companies will eventually switch to employees from abroad. We are looking for people from abroad who have max two, three years of experience and who really want to settle here, who wants to build their future here. They want to live here temporarily for six months and then see whether both parties are satisfied and eventually stay here” (Employee of an employment agency, June 9th 2021). In line with this argument, Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021) claims in the Gelderlander (29 April 2021) that municipalities should take a more active role regarding the housing of foreign workers. According to her, more houses should be built because new employees are needed. Not only for foreign workers but also for others who come to De Achterhoek to work here.

In conclusion, there is a proper picture of the needs of employees. Workers with a low education level are less likely to move than people with a high level of education. To let workers settle in the region it is important to have a sufficient number of starter homes available within a short timeframe. In addition, to attract higher educated workers, not only house characteristics should be considered, but also more factors. Namely, accessibility by rail and road so that the partner has the possibility for easy work travel and proximity to theatres and shopping facilities. Moreover, it is important not to forget the presence of foreign workers. It is expected that the region will have to rely more on this group. Also, a part of the foreign workers will settle permanently in the region.

After discussing the opportunities of the labour shortage, the following paragraph discusses the opportunities of the home-working trend.

5.3 Which opportunities does the home-working trend offer for De Achterhoek to attract new residents?

This paragraph discusses the various opportunities for population growth offered by the home-working trend. The introduction of this research claimed that, based on literature, the home-working trend could have a positive influence on shrinkage in the region. Shrinking regions may benefit from the home-working trend because the distance between the home and the workplace is considered less important. The pandemic has also made people realise that it is pleasant to have space in and around the home and the pandemic has underlined the advantages of a green environment. It is expected that, even after the pandemic, people will continue to work at home for two to three days a week. De Achterhoek offers space in and around the home, a green environment and lower housing prices compared to the western part of the Netherlands. These residential advantages are easier to combine with working elsewhere in the country through working from home.

The opportunities of the home-working trend are seen and experienced by almost all respondents. However, these opportunities are divided into short-term opportunities and long-term opportunities. The short-term opportunities can be found in maintaining De Achterhoek youth in the region and attracting new residents from other regions. Whereas the long-term opportunities are found in the expectation that home-workers may look for a job in De Achterhoek after some years and that the children of the home-workers may stay to live or work in De Achterhoek when they are old enough. Not every respondent sees the opportunities in the short-term and the long-term. Some respondents have doubts about the possible opportunities of the home-working trend. They fear that the home-working trend will not bring the right (young) people to the region and that the trend will not help to solve the labour shortage in the short-term. Additionally, the connection between the home-working trend and the west-to-east migration trend will be discussed. The home-working trend is namely seen as a reinforcement of the west-to-east migration trend. Which is not perceived positively by everyone because it drives up housing prices.

Short-term opportunities

Almost all respondents think that De Achterhoek will benefit in the short-term from the opportunities of the home-working trend. *“We definitely believe in these opportunities”* (Employee of Winterswijk A, June 14th 2021). In addition, respondents think that home-workers, especially from the western part of the country, will come to the region because of the green environment and larger houses that are available for lower prices. This group of people, who move to De Achterhoek for the green environment and lower housing prices, is indicated as lifestyle migrants (as described in paragraph 3.2.3). This group chooses to migrate for lifestyle aspirations because, due to the possibilities of working from home, they are free from commuting restrictions. They decide to move out of the urban centres to rural areas because of the prospect of a better work-life balance, easy access to lots of greenery and lower housing prices.

However, the respondents not only see opportunities to attract people, who work from home with lifestyle aspirations but even more opportunities for retaining De Achterhoek youth. Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021) explains this opportunity as follows:

“I think the development of home-working gives opportunities to stay here even if you work further away, many highly educated people look for work in big cities, there is nothing we can do about that, we do not have a provincial government or very large industries here, it is all small-scale companies that are here. And that is a different kind of work than in the Western Netherlands, but at the moment you can work at home half the time, then people accept commuting time that is longer for two days in the week”. This is in line with the view of Doling & Arundel (2020), who state that working from home can partially sever the geographical link between the house and workplace location. Commuting distance will, according to Doling & Arundel (2020), no longer structure the decision about where to live or seek a job.

Additionally, Toffler (1980) claims that working from home would increase the ability to change jobs without having to migrate to a new location.

But the question remains whether young people actually want to work from home. Kilian Wawoe, a researcher at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, claims that young employees are looking for contact while working, but also for knowledge because they are often still inexperienced in their field of work. He fears that young people are less likely to learn "the job" if they have to work from home a lot (NOS, June 9th 2021). On the other hand, research by Okta & Censuswide (2021) indicates that young people would like to work very flexibly. Ten thousand office workers from several countries were part of this survey. The results showed that age is a determining factor. The younger the employee was, the less likely they are to go back to the office full-time. The survey also pointed out that young employees have a greater need for flexible working hours.

Having discussed the short-term opportunities, the next section discusses the long-term opportunities of the home-working trend.

Long-term opportunities

In addition to the short-term opportunities, the long-term opportunities are also often mentioned. The expectation is that home-workers may eventually look for a job in De Achterhoek, which may contribute to the reduction of the labour shortage according to Employee of 8RHK D. In addition, the children of home-workers may, according to Employee of 8RHK D, continue to live or work in De Achterhoek because they have become connected to the region. In line with his, Employee of 8RHK C (June 30th, 2021) describes both opportunities as follows:

"If you are going to live here, there is a good chance that you will work here in the long-term. That would be a logical sequence. So, working from home offers an immediate opportunity for population growth, but then the housing market is your obstacle. But in the long run, it can be a solution for the labour shortage, because then the children of home-workers are settled and go to work in the area"

Additionally, it is important to "look after" the children of the home-workers according to Employee of 8RHK D (June 9th, 2021), so that these children feel connected to the region and therefore remain in De Achterhoek when they leave their parental home. In addition, binding children and young people is beneficial for schools and community life (Hospers, 2010). Moreover, Employee of an employment agency (June 9th, 2021) states that the opportunities in the long-term are stronger than the short-term opportunities. According to him, the children of home-working parents are an important labour force for the future. Which is, according to him, a very interesting opportunity because it may help to solve the labour shortage in the future.

Not everyone sees the opportunities in the long-term and short-term. Some respondents have some doubts about the possible opportunities of the home-working trend. The following section describes these doubts.

Doubts about opportunities

Some respondents have doubts about whether the home-working trend brings the "needed young inhabitants" to the region. *"We really see this trend coming here very strongly, but there is a downside: we are actually looking for residents who would also like to stay here and who also want to build a life here. So not 60 or 65-year-olds who want to finish something here, they do not bring much life into De Achterhoek. However, they do bring some purchasing power"* (Employee of a business organisation, June 29th 2021). Thus, according to Employee of a business organisation, the home-working trend will only bring opportunities if it attracts people to De Achterhoek who want to build their lives there, not people that move to De Achterhoek to spend their last days there. On the other hand, Employee of Aalten (June 28th, 2021) states that everyone in the country is seeing opportunities in the context of the home-working trend. *"So the question is whether it makes sense"* (Employee of Aalten, June 28th 2021).

To utilise the opportunities, it is important, in her opinion, to approach the opportunities together as a region. Which is already done in De Achterhoek campaign “Onverwachte Hoek”. The website onverwachthehoek.nl shows that both working and living in De Achterhoek is perfectly possible. The website shows the advantages of the region and gives the floor to people who have previously moved to De Achterhoek to talk about their experiences. The desire for the campaign came from the companies in the region, to fill the large number of expected vacancies in the coming years. The Onverwachte Hoek campaign is an online campaign and is aimed at the target group of 25- to 45-year-olds who are currently living outside De Achterhoek region.

To return to the subject, Employee of Gelderland A (May 26th, 2021) states: *“It is an assumption that, as a “shrinking region”, you might benefit from more home-working”*. It depends, according to Employee of Gelderland A, on the type of work people have and if people might fall back into the old pattern when they can go to the office every day. In addition, many people, according to Doling & Arundel (2020), who work from home will not migrate to another city. This group of people, the stay-putters, will stay in the same city even if their work shifts from working at the office to working from home. They, as described in paragraph 3.2.3, decide to “stay put” because of their existing networks and social ties.

After discussing these doubts, the next section will discuss the connection between the home-working trend and the west-to-east migration trend.

Connected to west-to-east migration trend

The home-working trend is, according to some respondents, also connected to the west-to-east migration trend in the Netherlands. The migration from the western part of the Netherlands to the eastern part of the Netherlands has been increasing in recent years according to Statistics Netherlands (CBS, 2021). Since 2015, more people are moving from the western part of the Netherlands to the eastern part of the Netherlands than vice versa. Furthermore, De Achterhoek is one of the most popular regions for people from the western part of the Netherlands to move to (Gelderlander, February 26th 2021). The migration from west-to-east, is according to the literature (paragraph 3.1.1), closely linked to the rural idyllic. The desire for a green environment, safety and space can motivate people to migrate from urban areas to rural areas (Champion, 1989; Boyle et al., 1998).

Some respondents consider the home-working trend as a stimulator for the west-to-east migration trend. In line with this argument, Ben Hiddinga, alderman of Oude IJsselstreek, speaks in the Gelderlander (November 8th, 2020) about the migration from west-to-east. According to him, the migration from west-to-east is partly due to the covid-19 pandemic. People work from home more often and realise that in De Achterhoek larger properties are available for lower prices and that these houses are surrounded by lots of greenery. This, he says, is a blessing for the region because, for many people, it is no longer necessary to live near their work in the western part of the Netherlands because they can work from home (Gelderlander, November 8th 2020). Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021) endorses this, he claims that the home-working trend stimulates the west-to-east migration in the Netherlands. In addition, Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021) does not see the home-working trend as an independent trend at all: *“We are not talking about the working from home trend, but about a broader trend. We see a migration from west-to-east”*.

However, the migration from west-to-east also has its disadvantages. In the western part of the Netherlands, housing is considerably more expensive and the arrival of wealthy people from Western Netherlands is driving up housing prices in De Achterhoek (Employee of a real estate agency, June 25th 2021).

In combination with the fact that there is a large housing shortage, this makes it harder for people who are born in De Achterhoek, to buy a house in De Achterhoek or to move within De Achterhoek. There is a particular fear that young people from De Achterhoek will no longer be able to live in the region and will be forced to leave the region (Employee of Berkelland, June 4th 2021). According to Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021), the inhabitants of De Achterhoek are often overbid by people from the western part of the Netherlands. While Employee of 8RHK D (June 9th, 2021) states that it is “nice” that people from other regions are coming to De Achterhoek, she states that it does not make the inhabitants of De Achterhoek very happy. *“They will sell their house for more money, but it is also not very pleasant for the young people who want to live in De Achterhoek”* (Employee of 8RHK D, June 9th 2021).

In addition, Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021) considers the migration from west-to-east only attractive under certain conditions: *“I like the migration from west-to-east in terms of younger age groups who are working and having children who will grow up here. From the point of view of work opportunities and from the point of view of compensating for the unpleasant population structure. But when it comes to older people, I think our problem is only intensified then”*. Employee of Aalten (June 28th, 2021) agrees with this. *“More expensive houses are often bought by people from De Randstad, people who have a house there, a terraced house worth six tonnes, and who think they can buy a quiet detached house in De Achterhoek. They are also often elderly people, not that we say we do not want them because they do have purchasing power but they are not the future of this region”* (Employee of Aalten, June 28th 2021).

In line with these mixed feelings, towards the west-to-east migration, are the comments on news articles. Among the news articles about the new campaign, the Onverwachte Hoek, there were many negative reactions about the arrival of people from the western part of the Netherlands or “import” as this group is called by some. A newspaper poll also showed that few people from De Achterhoek are positive about the arrival of people from the western part of the Netherlands. According to the Gelderlander (January 16th, 2021), most negative reactions concerned the opinion that people from the western part of the Netherlands are not familiar with the customs and traditions of De Achterhoek, have a big mouth, whine about the slightest things and drive up the housing prices. However, people who have recently moved to De Achterhoek were surprised by this negative tone. They think that this negative tone comes from a significant minority. In addition, the (outnumbered) positive reactions suggest that the arrival of people from the western part of the Netherlands can provide a boost for small centres and villages in De Achterhoek (De Gelderlander, January 19th 2021).

Besides the fact that the home-working trend is seen as an intensifier of the west-to-east migration, which brings some negative effects, the home-working trend also causes more direct disadvantages according to some respondents. This will be described in the following section.

Disadvantages of the home-working trend

According to Employee of Aalten (June 28th, 2021), the home-working trend will result in a decrease in the number of working people in De Achterhoek. As is well known, De Achterhoek faces a labour shortage of 27,000 unfilled vacancies in 2025. When only home-workers settle in De Achterhoek and hence stay working for companies outside De Achterhoek, the labour shortage will not be solved. Employee of an employment agency (June 9th, 2021) agrees with this. He states that if people from the western part of the Netherlands buy houses in De Achterhoek and continue to work in the western part of the Netherlands *“this does not help our companies to find new employees”*.

Conversely, the home-working trend could, in theory, also help to reduce the labour shortage. Although most labour shortages are found in the sectors; technology, ICT and care, where working from home is often not an option.

There will be scarce professions that are suitable for working from home. This means that people, who live outside De Achterhoek, can work for companies in De Achterhoek through home-working. But according to Employee of 8RHK C (June 30th, 2021), these opportunities will actually be very small because there is a shortage in these sectors everywhere in the country. This means that those people can, according to him, always find a job close to home. *“As an employer, you really have to show why someone should work in De Achterhoek through home-working; someone from Utrecht can also find plenty of jobs nearby. We are more a region where you can settle and live and work from home for a company in Western Netherlands rather than living elsewhere and work from home for a company in De Achterhoek”* (Employee of 8RHK C, June 30th 2021) Also, Employee of 8RHK C (June 30th, 2021) states that the opportunities, which the home-working trend brings to De Achterhoek, do not exist in living outside De Achterhoek and working in De Achterhoek but rather the other way around.

To conclude, the opportunities in the short-term are found in maintaining De Achterhoek youth in the region. This will keep the population numbers up, but above all, it will help to counteract the ageing of the population. The short-term opportunities are also found in attracting new residents from outside the region. Respondents think that home-workers from the western part of the country will come to the region because of the green environment and larger houses that are available for lower prices. The home-working trends also bring some opportunities in the long-term. The expectation is that home-workers may, after some years, look for a job in De Achterhoek, which may help to reduce the labour shortage. In addition, the children of home-workers may continue to live and work in De Achterhoek because of their ties to De Achterhoek. This is beneficial for countering the ageing population and the labour shortage. There are also some doubts about the opportunities and especially whether the trend will bring the right (young) people to the region. In addition, the home-working trend will not help to solve the labour shortage in the short-term. The home-working trend is also reinforcing the migration from west-to-east. This form of migration is not perceived positively by everyone because it drives up housing prices, which makes it harder for young people from De Achterhoek to find suitable housing in their region.

After discussing the opportunities of the labour shortage and the home-working trend, it is important to examine whether the cooperation in De Achterhoek is sufficient to utilise these opportunities. The next paragraph examines the cooperation in the region.

5.4 Is there sufficient cooperation between the actors to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage and work-related trends?

To utilise the opportunities from the labour shortage and home-working trend, the different partners in the region (business organisations, governmental organisations and educational organisations) must collaborate with each other. This is partly facilitated by the 8RHK organisation and its six different thematic roundtables. At a thematic roundtable, all kinds of different parties work together to achieve the goals of *De Achterhoek Vision 2030* and each thematic roundtable has its own theme on which it is working. The thematic roundtable “housing & real estate” is most suited to the subject of this research. This paragraph discusses the cooperation between the various parties in De Achterhoek region. The collaboration between the parties will be evaluated and some remarks will be noted. Like the need for a more integral approach and the fact that aldermen often want to score only for their own municipality. The municipal cooperation seems to be a concern because municipalities need to collaborate and show their construction plans to each other, but in practice, this does not happen.

In general, cooperation within the region between the various parties is considered relatively good. Employee of Gelderland C (June 7th, 2021), who works as “regional advisor Achterhoek” for the province of Gelderland, states: *“I think De Achterhoek is very much ahead when it comes to cooperation. If you look at all the other regions, De Achterhoek is the most well organised and structured. Everyone knows where to find each other”*. All respondents claim that the cooperation is good but some do have some small remarks. For example, Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021) mentioned that the cooperation is good but that the aldermen at the thematic roundtables all “want to score” for their own municipality. In addition, a more integrated approach is required according to Employee of Gelderland A. *“There is a real effort to find each other, there is willingness and there is cooperation. The goal and the hunger to tackle it in a truly integrated way could be improved, I think”* (Employee of Gelderland A, May 26th 2021). Also, Employee Achterhoek B endorses this finding. She claims that conversations are being held but concrete plans and joint project formations are the next steps the 8RHK must take.

The broad cooperation within De Achterhoek region is well reflected in the campaign Onverwachte Hoek. This campaign, initiated by the business community, attempts to attract employees. Employee of 8RHK D (June 9th, 2021) is a marketing & communication advisor and works on the campaign Onverwachte Hoek. When asked how many parties are collaborating in the campaign, she did not know the exact number. *“Lots of parties. I had to send a “we are going live email” to 150 people. VNO NCNV, SIKa but also to Achterhoek Tourism and Heritage Pact. The municipalities participating in the campaign. And also, the province, not very strong and they are not physically but financially involved. All ambassadors and many parties and groups of people who have a stake somewhere”* (Employee of 8RHK D, June 9th 2021).

However, the collaboration between municipalities seems to be a concern. In sub-question one, the precondition of the regional quality assessment criteria is discussed. Municipalities need to collaborate and show their construction plans to each other. The discussion about the growth ambitions of municipalities should be held at the thematic roundtable housing & real estate. This collaboration is important, according to Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021), because: *“What if all those houses are built there and I do not build as a municipality, will I then have an exodus from my own village? This is a game that we are now mainly playing with each other. Some municipalities are more cautious, others more progressive. We have to get it clear with De Achterhoek municipalities first before we can go to the province and say: help us with this”*. Hence the province has already called for more coordination among municipalities (Employee of 8RHK A, June 2nd 2021).

Another concern, that is mentioned by the respondents, is the need to implement regional policies at the local municipal level. According to some respondents, this is not carried out properly. *“The moment you establish a policy as a region, you should not make another sidestep within your own municipality. They need to learn to think bigger. They need to think out of the box and look beyond their municipal boundaries. However, the new generation of civil servants and aldermen are doing a good job”* (Employee of a real estate agency, June 25th 2021). In addition, some people have, after the regional meeting of the thematic roundtable is over, the tendency to focus on their own wellbeing (Employee of a real estate agency, June 25th 2021). While they, according to Employee of a real estate agency, actually need to conform more to the policy which is established together at the thematic roundtable. In line with this argument, Employee of Gelderland D (July 13th, 2021) claims that De Achterhoek appears to be united, but when push comes to shove, it is every municipality for itself. According to him, it is a case of “church tower politics”. The administrators look no further ahead than four years (new elections) and not further than their own church (their own village or town).

The collaboration in the 8RHK is structured through the “3 O’s” (overheid, ondernemers en onderwijs) which means there is a collaboration between business organisations, governmental organisations and educational organisations. According to Employee of an employment agency (June 9th, 2021), who is also a member of the thematic roundtable education & labour market, housing used to be only in the hands of the government but due to the collaboration in the 8RHK, other parties now also have a say in this matter. This is seen as an advantage. However, the major presence of governmental parties at the thematic roundtable is experienced as “too much” according to him. *“We are one Achterhoek, but those eight aldermen on housing want all to be involved in the decision-making process. It is not the case that one alderman can decide for those eight. They prefer to be present, so there are eight aldermen at the roundtable and then you have a heavy representation of the government”* (Employee of an employment agency, June 29th 2021). According to Employee of a business organisation (June 29th, 2021), the contact with the municipality is good *“but really substantial influence... We often get “yes, but” stories. On the one hand, we understand that the municipality is bounded by rules, but on the other hand, we think that the work should be done a few steps harder and faster”* (Employee of a business organisation, June 29th, 2021). On the one hand, it is understandable that entrepreneurs think that the government representation at the thematic roundtables is somewhat excessive. But on the other hand, the aldermen are responsible for the housing policies in the municipalities and are (indirectly) democratically elected. A lot of presence and influence of non-governmental parties would give the feeling that the collaboration does not respond to the democratic choice of inhabitants. Moreover, inter-municipal collaborations are often criticised for their non-democratic character. Therefore, it is wise to carefully consider the presence and influence of non-governmental parties.

In addition, Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021) states that the entrepreneurs are happy to have the opportunity to participate in the discussion. But they come into a culture where things do not happen as quickly as they used to. Additionally, entrepreneurs must talk about all different subjects which some of them are not familiar with according to Employee of a real estate agency. This results in a field of tension between different cultures which is difficult for entrepreneurs (Employee of a real estate agency, June 25th 2021). Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021) also noticed these differences between governmental organisations and entrepreneurs. *“Entrepreneurs think in terms of opportunities and they have the feeling that the municipality thinks in terms of limitations. Well, that is true, of course, because when we get a plan, we have to examine it in terms of environmental policy and all kinds of other things, including policy from the national and provincial level and from the region”* (Employee of Berkelland, June 4th 2021).

As a final point, the cooperation within the region between the different parties is considered to be relatively good. Small remarks are that aldermen at the thematic roundtables all “want to score” for their own municipality and that a more integrated approach is required. The collaboration between municipalities seems to be a concern because municipalities need to collaborate and show their construction plans to each other. Because growth in one city can result in population decline in the other city. Also, the implementation of regional policies is a concern, this is often not carried out properly and municipalities tend to focus on their own wellbeing. The major presence of governmental parties is felt to be too much but the businesses are happy to be part of the discussion, especially on housing. To exploit the opportunities of the two trends for the entire region, the different municipalities must collaborate better with each other and coordinate their plans more often. And above all, to think more in the interests of the region.

Sections so far discussed the opportunities, which the labour shortage and the home-working trend offer, for population growth and whether there is sufficient cooperation between the involved parties. The next step is to examine how the opportunities of the two trends can be utilised and which adjustments are needed to achieve population growth.

5.5 How can the opportunities offered by the two work-related trends be utilised and which adjustments are needed?

Sections 5.5.1 and 5.5.2 will discuss, respectively, the ways to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage and the home-working trend. Subsequently, section 5.5.3 describes the needed adjustments to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage and the home-working trend.

5.5.1 How can the opportunities of the labour shortage best be utilised

The opportunities to attract new residents offered by the labour shortage can be utilised in various ways. According to the respondents, De Achterhoek must present itself in its best light and should change the image of not having any facilities in the region. Also, they must show that there are lots of attractive vacancies to be filled and residents can live and work comfortably in De Achterhoek. Additionally, mobility must also be improved. It is important to improve mobility for workers because their partner must have the possibility for easy work travel and ways to visit family on the weekends. Return migration is, furthermore, seen as an easy way to attract new residents. In addition, more homes should be built, for example through the better distribution of the construction areas across the country. And flexible homes, from which workers can look for a permanent place to live, need to be built in the region. These recommendations, to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage, will be explained one by one.

Representing De Achterhoek

According to Employee of Gelderland A (May 26th, 2021), the image of De Achterhoek is that there are no facilities in the region. But this perception is false according to him. In addition, it is important to maintain these facilities and especially to show them to the public. In line with this argument, Employee of 8RHK D (June 9th, 2021) claims that when people think of De Achterhoek they mainly think of farmers and “Zwarte Cross” (music and motor cross festival). The problem that De Achterhoek region faces, according to Employee of Gelderland A (May 26th, 2021), is not being able to make it clear that De Achterhoek is a wonderful place to live and work. In order to attract employees and bind them to the region, the jobs must, first of all, be attractive according to him. This means that companies must show the outside world that attractive vacancies are waiting to be filled in De Achterhoek (Employee of Gelderland A, May 26th 2021). Why this is not an easy task for companies in De Achterhoek is explained in the following quote:

A challenge is that the entrepreneur in De Achterhoek is very much of the type “I just do my thing”. That went well for years because there was always enough staff but that is no longer the case. And then they also have to represent themselves and they are not very good at it. And I hope that the companies will realise that they have to represent themselves to people from outside De Achterhoek region (Employee of 8RHK D, June 9th 2021). In line with this argument, Employee of an employment agency (June 29th, 2021), states that “Achterhoekers” are very modest and do not tell others about the excellent companies in the region and the achievements of these companies. *“If this company was situated in Amsterdam, the entire country would have known about it”* (Employee of an employment agency, June 29th 2021). In addition, Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021) claims that lots of people do not know which excellent smart industry businesses are located in De Achterhoek.

Thus, according to the respondents, the companies in the region are too modest and should be more visible to other people. In addition, there is also a wrong image of De Achterhoek, that it is a region with few facilities and where only farmers are living. The 8RHK has, during this research, started the campaign “Onverwachte Hoek”. The experts by experience, the people who recently moved to De Achterhoek, are seen as an important aspect of this campaign according to Employee of 8RHK D (June 9th, 2021).

“We found it important to let the experts by experience speak for themselves, so we are not going to tell them how wonderful De Achterhoek is. The experts by experience will do this. We are not doing any self-congratulation” (Employee of 8RHK D, June 9th, 2021). Here we see another example of modesty. Even in the campaign about De Achterhoek, it is important not to appear too boastful. According to the region, it is important to attract people to De Achterhoek who fit into the region. *“We want people to get involved in the region, to come and live here as well as just work here. Many people who work in De Achterhoek also live here. Then you must become part of the community, so that you develop a bond with the region”* (Employee of 8RHK D, June 9th, 2021). According to Employee of 8RHK A (June 2nd, 2021), the campaign does not focus on certain job sectors but on *“people who fit here, that is what we are looking for”*.

There is also a “zachte landing” (soft landing) component to the campaign. Which is not immediately visible online. According to Employee of 8RHK D (June 9th, 2021) it works as follows: *“If you contact us via the website or the mail, we will contact you to help you further. There is a team of “Achterhoekers” behind this campaign who help you on a non-profit basis and they do this from their own knowledge and feeling. They also explain that De Achterhoek is not for everyone. Occasionally you drive behind a tractor or it smells of manure”*. The “zachte landig” will not buy a home or put a person on top of the rental list, but it will make sure that the new inhabitant has a friend in the neighbourhood which explains certain habits. *“We make sure you have a friend in the neighbourhood which explains that you should get to know your neighbours. All small things that are very much appreciated here. If you come from a big city where you live very individualistically, that is possible, but in De Achterhoek it does not work like that”* (Employee of 8RHK D, June 9th 2021). On the one hand, attracting people who effortlessly fit into the region sounds logical, which region would not want this? But the question remains whether it is also feasible. People will also move to De Achterhoek without the intervention of the campaign Onverwachte Hoek and therefore not be part of the “zachte landing” approach. In addition, as a municipality, you have no (or limited) influence on who is moving to your municipality. Also, it sounds like something a region with “enough” inhabitants could focus on and not something a region, which recently had to deal with a shrinking population, should focus on. But in light of the arrival of large groups of people from the western part of the Netherlands, it does not seem a redundant activity to preserve the culture of De Achterhoek a bit or to show the own population that the culture of De Achterhoek is important to maintain. In conclusion, a topic with different perspectives.

However, the campaign shows that the region is an attractive place to live and work, and thus introduces the region to a wider public. The campaign is not about chest-beating and it has a clear goal. It seems that De Achterhoek mainly wants to attract the young target group that wants to work and live here. But it is important that this group fits into the region and is assisted if necessary.

Besides presenting De Achterhoek in its best light, it is important to improve the mobility in the region in order to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage. The following section will discuss this in more detail.

Improving mobility

Often both partners in a family are working, if the husband or wife wants to live and work in De Achterhoek, the partner must also be able to work in the region or have the opportunity to travel to the workplace (Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, 2017). This requires good road and rail connections. In addition, people want to be able to visit relatives on the weekends which also makes mobility important. According to Employee of 8RHK B (June 16th, 2021), mobility is an important component, she, therefore, claims that: *“The accessibility of the region has a great influence on living and working, especially if you move away from the area where you grew up and want to continue visiting your family.”*

Employee of Gelderland A (May 26th, 2021) endorses this view and states that it is important that people can easily travel to other parts of Gelderland and the Netherlands. However, according to Employee of Aalten (June 28th, 2021), mobility is not the only solution: *"Take Venlo, for example. It has been constructed as a whole intersection route with motorways and public transport, and it is fantastically accessible. But not a single additional person has moved there. You have to keep in mind that there are more factors involved"*. In line with this argument, Employee of Gelderland A (May 26th, 2021) states that it is important that the "whole package" is beneficial for people who consider moving to De Achterhoek. This means that the other conditions must be within reach, like sufficient facilities. *"It is good to have a bit more of a... I do not want to say total package... but to pay attention to that"* (Employee of Gelderland A, May 26th 2021). Also, it is important to look at the coherence of factors according to Employee of Winterswijk B (June 4th, 2021). *"It is work and living and the road network. And working from home, it is all connected. You also have to look at it coherently"* (Employee of Winterswijk B, June 4th 2021).

Representing the region and improving mobility is a frequently mentioned way of utilising the opportunities. But the simplest way to utilise the opportunities remains, according to respondents, to focus on return migration. The next section discusses the opportunities of return migration in more detail.

Return migration

Return migration is seen as an easy opportunity to attract more people to De Achterhoek. According to the respondents, it is easier to attract people who have ties to the region because they were born or grew up here. For this purpose, it is first of all, important to show them what kind of excellent companies there are present in the region. According to Employee of 8RHK C (June 30th, 2021), you have to show people who have a connection with the region which companies are present in De Achterhoek. *"I lived in Nijmegen for a long time but I was born and raised in De Achterhoek and only when I came back I realised which great companies there are present in De Achterhoek. There are so many great things happening here but people really do not know about them"*. (Employee of 8RHK C, June 30th 2021). Moreover, the labour shortage is the biggest problem De Achterhoek is focusing on and the easiest step to solve this shortage is to get people back who left De Achterhoek according to Mark Boumans. Because those people have, according to Mark Boumans, affinity with the region, they do not need to be convinced of the beauty of De Achterhoek and all the things De Achterhoek can offer (Gelderlander, 15 April 2021).

Employee of Gelderland C (June 7th, 2021) endorses this view, according to her the best way to utilise the opportunities offered by the labour shortage is to *"at least, encourage people who were born in De Achterhoek and live in De Randstad to return to De Achterhoek"*. Focusing on return migration is, according to the theory, a wise choice. As described in the theoretical chapter, people who had formerly lived in a rural area in the Netherlands have a significantly higher probability of migrating to a rural area in comparison to people who did not live in a rural area before (Feijten, Hooimeijer & Mulder, 2008).

Still, you have to remain realistic as well according to Employee of 8RHK C (June 30th, 2021). Some people who moved away from De Achterhoek may want to return to the region at a later date. This is something you must actively facilitate as a region according to him. However, you also must realise that you are not going to get everyone back, some people simply do not want to return to De Achterhoek (Employee of 8RHK C, June 30th 2021).

The next section discusses whether building more houses in the region is the right point of action in order to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage.

Building houses in the region

At the moment, there is a housing shortage throughout the Netherlands and also in De Achterhoek. Therefore, large-scale housing locations are being designated by the province and sometimes even by the State. Considering these large-scale housing locations, De Achterhoek must also be looked at when making these building plans, according to some respondents.

"Then I read those pieces in the newspaper about Gelderland. 40,000 houses might be built between Arnhem and Nijmegen... But from the point of view of a good living environment, I do not think you want anything but residential towers in a city. But why not try to distribute it a little better? And help a "shrinking region", like De Achterhoek or Groningen, by building more houses here, where there is still space and therefore also new employees come to live here" (Employee of Winterswijk A, June 14th 2021). Also, Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021) states that the construction plans should focus on shrinking regions. Because, according to Employee of Winterswijk A, there is enough space to build in shrinking regions and the construction of new houses will support those regions that are suffering from population shrinkage and ageing.

Additionally, Employee of a business organisation (June 29th, 2021) wants to take a very proactive approach to the construction of housing. *"In Berkelland, 85 percent of the land is agricultural. And I know that many farmers are willing to stop if it is financially viable. Find something adjacent to the village centres and open up housing areas there and put a nice new neighbourhood there with houses that people want"*. In fact, De Achterhoek region is aware of the problems in the housing market according to Employee of 8RHK D (June 9th, 2021). Due to the "shrinking region label", the housing construction has come to a standstill for the past ten years. Housing construction is now being attempted to resume, but of course, this takes a long time after all those years of stagnation (Employee of 8RHK D, June 9th 2021). However, according to Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021), action must be taken within a short timeframe in the housing market, to be able to attract other people. In addition, according to Employee of an employment agency, good housing is a requirement for attracting workers: *"It is a requirement, if we ask people to come and work here, that finding a good home is not a problem"* (Employee of an employment agency, June 9th 2021).

According to Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021), the business sector has a high need for starter homes so that employees can live and work in De Achterhoek. *"If you are going to work here, of course, you want a house right away, but the problem is there is not a house right away"* (Employee of Berkelland, June 4th 2021). According to her, the municipality tries to find housing for workers quickly. But this group ends up among the "spoedzoekers" (people who are immediately looking for housing) and the socially disadvantaged, and the question is whether this is a solution for workers. However, flexible forms of living could be a solution for workers according to Employee of 8RHK A (June 2nd, 2021). When people find work in De Achterhoek they can live in a flexible home and from there look for a permanent home according to her. By way of contrast, companies are not inclined to invest in residential construction according to Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021). But it may be an opportunity according to her. *"Suppose you just have several houses owned by a circle of employers where they can house people for the first two years. I would certainly see an opportunity in that, but you need an investor for that. A municipality does not build, investors do"* (Employee of Berkelland, June 4th 2021).

In conclusion, to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage, people need to know which excellent companies are present in De Achterhoek and they need to know how pleasant the living environment is. People also wrongly believe that there are no facilities in the region. It is, thus, important to represent De Achterhoek well, and this is currently being done by the "Onverwachte Hoek" campaign. Yet the region remains very modest. In addition, sufficient road and rail connections are important to attract workers and their families.

Because often both partners in a family are working and the other partner, who is not working in the region, needs to travel to the work location.

Also, workers want to be able to visit relatives on the weekends. Additionally, return migration is seen as an opportunity to attract more people to De Achterhoek. It is easier to attract people who have already ties to the region. The jobs are available, but the housing market is often cited as an obstacle for utilising the opportunities of the labour shortage. Flexible housing, from which workers can look for a permanent place to live, could be a solution to this problem. Respondents also indicated that construction areas could be better distributed across the country so that shrinking regions also get opportunities for the construction of houses.

The previous section described the ways to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage. The next paragraph discusses the ways to utilise the opportunities of the home-working trend.

5.5.2 How can opportunities of the home-working trend best be utilised

The opportunities to attract new residents, offered by the home-working trend, can be utilised in various ways. According to the respondents, it is important not to build too small, people who work from home need space. This space can be created by building lifetime-compatible. In addition, it is important to keep the countryside beautiful and green, because this will attract new residents. Furthermore, improving mobility is important because home-workers still need to travel to their office two or three days a week. Additionally, representing the region is also seen as important. Especially, to change the image of De Achterhoek as a farming area. However, some respondents doubt the manufacturability of policies. These recommendations to utilise the opportunities of the home-working trend will be explained one by one.

Not building houses too small

Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021) indicates that her municipality is very careful about building too small. *"If many people are going to work from home, you need space and you also put more value on a green living environment and where you can go outside for a moment"* (Employee of Berkelland, June 4th 2021). Additionally, the municipality of Aalten already takes the lifetime-compatibility of houses into account according to Employee of Aalten (June 28th, 2021). This means that semi-detached houses have a bedroom on the ground floor. This downstairs bedroom can also be used as a workroom. If, according to Employee of Aalten (June 28th, 2021), studies demonstrate that there is a real need for a workroom at home, the municipality is willing to adjust the quality requirements for houses according to this need. But, she says, by building lifetime-compatible, they are in fact already creating a workroom for home-workers. Besides the idea of not building too small, Employee of a real estate agency states, that it is important to build not only "affordable houses" with a small surface and hence a low-price range so that starters can buy these houses. But to build all kinds of houses to keep the circulation going and that people can move from a terraced house to a semi-detached house. A municipality can give permission to build new houses, with an additional room for home-workers which are intended for starters, but a municipality can also choose to build all different types of houses so that, according to Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021), circulation is possible and the starter homes become available for new starters on the housing market.

In addition to building houses that are not too small, it is important to avoid building too many houses in the countryside.

Keep the countryside beautiful and green

According to Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021), it is important to keep the countryside attractive to attract potential movers and to maintain people in the region. *"Ensure that our countryside remains beautiful; that is the recreation you can easily access from the village centre. Make sure you keep beautiful villages with a beautiful countryside; I think that is our calling card"* (Employee of Berkelland, June 4th 2021). Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021) agrees with this, she states that the countryside of Winterswijk attracts new residents to her municipality. In paragraph 3.1.1, the importance of the rural idyllic has been described. According to Steenbekkers et al. (2008), rural migrants emphasise the importance of the rural idyllic like space, a green environment and quietness. Furthermore, the rural idyllic is mentioned as an important reason for moving to a rural area.

Although there is an enormous housing shortage, the countryside is seen as important and as an attraction. The construction of lots of houses in the countryside, to meet the huge demand for housing, is therefore not mentioned as a suitable solution either. However, other respondents mentioned that it is important to build houses and, more specifically, not to build houses too small. This means that more (building)space is needed. This, of course, contradicts the idea that it is better to keep the countryside beautiful and green in order to attract potential movers.

The dilemma at stake is that one wants to build and especially build not too small while on the other hand, one does not want to build in the countryside. As a result, a compromise should be made or alternative building locations should be considered.

Besides keeping the countryside attractive, improving mobility is also important to attract home-workers. The next section discusses this in more detail.

Improving mobility

As with the labour shortage, the improvement of mobility around De Achterhoek region is seen as a recommendation. Even for the few days, home-workers must go to the office, they want to do it within a short timeframe. Thus, the recommendation is to improve mobility by road and rail.

According to Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021), it is important to improve the public transport and the motorways to ensure that home-workers are not stuck in a traffic jam for hours or travelling many hours by public transport. Employee of 8RHK A (June 2nd, 2021) endorses this and states: *“For those few days when people still have to travel, it should also be possible to do so by train and car. For a few days a week, home-workers also want to have a good connection”*.

Not only is it important to improve mobility for home-workers because they still have to travel to the office some days. But also for attracting workers because their partner must have the possibility for easy work travel and workers want to visit family on the weekends. This means that, for the home-working trend and the labour shortage, the same recommendation applies for utilising the opportunities: improving mobility. But the motives for this recommendation are different.

An example of what a successful mobility improvement can mean for a village is Neede (municipality of Berkelland). According to Employee of a real estate agency (June 25th, 2021), Neede was not a popular place to live. But the upgrade of the N18 motorway has made Neede's accessibility better. According to him, the connection with Twente is especially good, which made Neede flourish and attract more residents. This example shows that mobility can have a quick effect on the attractiveness of villages.

Improving mobility seems to be a desire shared by all regions. The border regions want a better connection to De Randstad and the rest of the country. While De Randstad wants more and frequent trains and a reduction of the traffic jams on the roads. The question is whether the improvement of mobility is realistic for De Achterhoek region. According to Employee of Gelderland D (July 13th, 2021), the improvement of mobility in De Achterhoek is realistic. It can help to ensure that De Achterhoek does not become an “Achterland” (hinterland) according to him.

A feasibility study is currently underway to explore the feasibility of an intercity train running through De Achterhoek region (Province Gelderland, 2021). At the moment, only stopping trains run between Arnhem-Doetinchem- Winterswijk. With the arrival of an intercity train, the Regio Express, travellers from and to De Randstad, will have a shorter journey, have more seats available and have better transfer options (Province Gelderland, 2021). For this, however, a doubling of the railway track is necessary. In addition, the accessibility by road also needs to be approved. The region would like to improve the N18 highway between Varsseveld and Enschede by partially doubling the road from one to two lanes, removing traffic lights and level crossing intersections to allow faster travel (Tubantia, October 1st 2020).

However, the digital accessibility of the region is well in hand. The region is connected to a fibre-optic network. Even the outlying areas are connected to this high-speed internet network (De Gelderlander, September 28th 2019).

According to Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021), digital accessibility is the basic prerequisite for exploiting the opportunities of the home-working trend. *“Imagine if you had no connection to the fibre-optic network, then you would have a big problem. Fortunately, the digital basis for accessibility has been established”* (Employee of Berkelland, June 4th 2021). Moreover, a fibre-optic network is essential for working at home according to Employee of Winterswijk A (June 14th, 2021). According to her, it is due to the active and involved residents of the outlying areas that there is a well-functioning fibre-optic network present, which makes working from home possible nowadays.

Representing De Achterhoek is also mentioned as a recommendation for utilising the opportunities of the home-working trend. The next section stresses the importance of representing De Achterhoek.

Representing De Achterhoek

A recommendation that recurs in both the labour shortage and the home-working trend is to present De Achterhoek in its best light. Representing De Achterhoek to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage is mainly about changing the image of not having any facilities in the region and showing that there are lots of attractive vacancies to be filled. As well as being able to live and work comfortably in the region. Whereas, representing De Achterhoek to utilise the opportunities of the home-working trend, is about changing the image of De Achterhoek as a farming area. This is, to be honest, a minimal difference. But it seems particularly clear that De Achterhoek suffers from a “not very popular image” and that the region would like to change this.

To change this “not so popular image” it is important to represent the region and show that it is an attractive region according to Employee of 8RHK B (June 16th, 2021). Because people from other regions see De Achterhoek as a farming area, so there is still a lot to change according to Employee of 8RHK B (June 16th, 2021). Additionally, all regions are competing with each other to attract new residents according to Employee of Aalten (June 28th, 2021). That is why she believes in the strength of the region as a whole and not just as a municipality alone. Two groups of people, she believes, can be properly addressed as De Achterhoek. *“The affordability refugee, who cannot afford to live elsewhere in the country and starts to consider where I can live and where I would like to live. And people who make a considered lifestyle move”* (Employee of Aalten, June 28th 2021). The latter group, as described in paragraph 3.2.3, are recognised as lifestyle migrants. Which are, according to Doling & Arundel (2020), moving by the prospect of a better work-life balance, easy access to lots of greenery and cheaper housing prices. This group is supported by the opportunities of working from home.

However, the campaign Onverwachte Hoek does not actively target the home-workers or lifestyle migrants. According to Employee of 8RHK D (June 9th, 2021), the region would like to attract people who work in the region and who would want to live here. Home-workers often continue to work outside the region and only come to live in De Achterhoek. This does not lead to filling the vacancies in the short-term. According to her: *“We are not going to specifically promote working from home. We want them to come and work here”*.

The campaign Onverwachte Hoek, thus, does not focus on the home-working trend. But it does focus on the other recommendations from the respondents to utilise the opportunities of the work-related trends. It shows which companies are present in the region and how working and living can be combined. On the website, there is even a link to a job vacancies page specifically for De Achterhoek. This page mentions that some Achterhoek companies operate on a global scale. Without boasting about this, of course. So, attention is paid to the highlighting of companies and jobs in De Achterhoek, which was an often-mentioned recommendation. Also, the facilities in the region are shown on the website. In addition, the region is mainly represented as an innovative region where you can live, work and recreate well. So, representing De Achterhoek, which many respondents recommended, is implemented in the campaign as well as highlighting the facilities.

Maybe not entirely surprising, the word “shrinkage” is not mentioned a single time on the website. It seems to have been a clear choice not to mention “shrinkage” on the website. By not naming the “shrinkage label” at all, one does not have to explain that one does not see itself as a “shrinking region”. Even if the central government has given you this name and people may know about it. The campaign also seems to be very focused on return migration. Experts by experience who used to live in De Achterhoek or were born in De Achterhoek, talk about their return to the region and how happy they are to be back in the region. However, mobility does not seem to be a theme on the website. Although it is described that your “next chapter is no more than 2 hours away”. Thus, the respondents' recommendations seem to be partially reflected in the campaign. The website also seems to be constructed in a sufficient and well-considered way. However, no specific action points for the municipalities or region have been linked to this campaign. So, there are no policies or action points directly linked to this campaign to, for example, build or transform more houses, improve mobility or offer temporary housing for workers.

Besides the many recommendations, there are also some doubts about whether the recommendations will be effective. The next section discusses these doubts.

Manufacturability of policies and the long-term process

Some respondents doubt the manufacturability of policies. Employee of Berkelland (June 4th, 2021) states: *"I do not really believe in the manufacturability of those policies. I think that, ultimately, people can make their own choices"*. According to her, it is up to the people, the municipality cannot influence people to move, other than to show people how beautiful Berkelland is. Furthermore, not everyone wants to live in De Achterhoek according to Employee of 8RHK C (June 30th, 2021). *"People do want to live here, yes, but not everyone. People who are seeking lots of liveliness do not choose this region"* (Employee of 8RHK C, June 30th, 2021). So, according to Employee of Berkelland and Employee of 8RHK C, policies will not be able to attract everyone to De Achterhoek and De Achterhoek is not suitable for everyone. Moreover, attracting more residents to De Achterhoek is also seen as a long-term process according to Employee of Gelderland A (May 26th, 2021). He states that lots of sufficient actions are taken but it is “all a matter of time”. *"I think it is a matter of perseverance, and hopefully one day the breakthrough will come and people will recognise how beautiful the region is"* (Employee of Gelderland A, May 26th, 2021). According to him, the numerous policies will truly show their value after a certain time.

To conclude, to utilise the opportunities of the home-working trend it is important to build homes not too small. An option is to build lifetime-compatible, by which you create a bedroom or workroom downstairs. Avoid the overbuilding of nature. People move to De Achterhoek to live and work in beautiful, peaceful surroundings. Building in the countryside will make the region less attractive. Even for the few days that home-workers must go to the office, they want to do it within a short timeframe. So, improve mobility by road and rail. Additionally, some respondents doubt the manufacturability of policies and they state that policies will not be able to attract everyone to De Achterhoek.

5.5.3 Adjustments that are needed

This section discusses the adjustments that are needed to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage and the home-working trend. The recommendations of this study will follow in the conclusion. These recommendations will focus on a broader perspective (by looking at the whole system) to achieve population growth through the two work-related trends.

5.5.3.1 Adjustments to utilise opportunities of the labour shortage

The biggest challenges for De Achterhoek, based on the interviews, seem to be the ageing population and the labour shortage. Therefore, De Achterhoek must continue to focus on attracting workers, this is already being done through the campaign Onverwachte Hoek. This campaign tries to reduce the labour shortage by attracting new residents to De Achterhoek. As a result, the campaign focuses on attracting young and middle-aged workers (<67). This group of people can contribute to the social life in De Achterhoek, which improves the liveability and above all this group counteracts the ageing of the population. Additionally, workers may also bring children with them, which also helps to counteract the ageing of the population.

Therefore, it is important to continue with the campaign Onverwachte Hoek because this campaign tackles the two biggest challenges, the ageing of the population and the labour shortage, of De Achterhoek region. In addition, this campaign is also representing the region. Respondents often spoke about the “wrong image” people have about De Achterhoek. Therefore, it is important to show that the image of a facility-poor region, where only farmers live, is not true. The campaign Onverwachte Hoek is representing the region as a place where you can live spaciouly in a green environment with a pleasant job. However, there are currently no concrete action points or policies linked to the campaign. Whereas, due to the scarcity in the housing market, there is not a house available for every worker. Companies also indicate that the housing market is a barrier for attracting workers. Therefore, it is important to link the following actions directly to the campaign to fully utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage. These action points emerged during the interviews with the respondents.

Realise flexible housing forms

In flexible homes, workers can live temporarily and can, from this flexible home, seek for permanent housing. This will ensure that housing is not a barrier to attract workers. In addition, it will attract more residents in the short-term. It is recommended to involve employers in the realisation of these flexible forms of housing. Perhaps employers can jointly pay a part of the costs of this project. In this way, the region attracts more inhabitants, which is positive for population growth, combating ageing and the employers can attract more workers because housing is immediately available. In other words, a win-win situation. In addition, De Achterhoek states that the region is open to new housing concepts and forms of living (8RHK, 2019). So, on paper, the region is open to flexible housing forms, but in practice, it is not yet implemented on a large scale.

Take the housing needs of workers into account and build or transform houses specially for this group

The target group “workers” is attractive because it is a relatively young group that can help to counteract the ageing of the population and it also helps to reduce the labour shortage. Because of the housing shortage, it is hard for this group to find a home, so specifically, take this target group into account when making new construction plans. In addition, make sure to frequently consult companies to see where the bottlenecks lie in terms of employee accommodation.

Continue to focus on return migration

Both the literature and the respondents indicate that attracting new residents through return migration is the easiest way. In addition, the reactions to the arrival of people without ties to the region (people from the western part of the Netherlands) are not always positive. Return migration is therefore a suitable way to attract new residents and also to meet the needs of a part of the inhabitants of De Achterhoek.

Take the housing and recruitment of foreign workers into account

This group is often forgotten, but this group of foreign workers is necessary in order to reduce labour shortages. Foreign workers also need housing, sometimes even on a structural basis. When making building plans, authorities should also focus on this group. In addition, it is also important to examine what kind of housing is needed for this group. Especially since exact data of foreign workers is often lacking, while it is important to have an insight into how much and what kind of housing is needed.

Continue to focus on the improvement of mobility to make the region more attractive for workers and their families

A common recommendation from the respondents to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage is the improvement of mobility. Therefore, keep in mind that improving mobility will also help to attract workers. Make this link, between mobility and the labour shortage, explicit to underline its importance within the region and towards the provincial and national authorities. Besides the importance of mobility for workers, mobility is also important for home-workers who must go to the office two or three days a week. So, improving mobility is important for both trends, thus a key focus will have to be placed on mobility.

5.5.3.2 Adjustments to utilise opportunities of the home-working trend

The home-working trend offers opportunities for both the short-term as well as the long-term. The short-term opportunities can be found in attracting new residents from other regions and being able to maintain young people in De Achterhoek. Because through home-working, young people can continue to live in De Achterhoek while working elsewhere in the country. Additionally, the long-term opportunities can be found in the chance that home-workers may look for a job in De Achterhoek after some years and in the binding of children of home-workers to the region. Because children who have lived in the region for several years are more likely to opt for a job or home in De Achterhoek. The following adjustments will help to utilise the opportunities of the home-working trend:

Make sure not to build new houses too small

Take into account the need for a workroom when building new homes. If a workroom is placed on the ground floor, it can also function as a bedroom, making the house suitable for all stages of life. As a result, the house is also lifetime-compatible, which is in line with regional policy.

Avoid building in the green countryside

This is needed because the presence of these green areas actually attracts home-workers. On the one hand, the housing shortage means there is a need for more housing, but on the other hand, the pandemic has also increased people's appreciation for green environments. Take this appreciation for green environments into account when making building plans.

The campaign Onverwachte Hoek should also partly focus on home-workers.

The campaign Onverwachte Hoek does not focus on the home-working trend because the arrival of home-workers does not lead to the filling of regional vacancies. This may be correct in the short-term, but not in the long-term. Home-workers may eventually choose to work in De Achterhoek, or their children may look for work in the region. Have an eye on these long-term opportunities and consider whether the home-working trend can be linked to the campaign.

6. Conclusion

This chapter answers the main question of this research: *Which opportunities does the labour shortage and home-working trend offer to attract more residents to De Achterhoek and how can these opportunities best be utilised?* This will be done based on the five sub-questions. Section 6.1 presents the recommendations of this research.

The first sub-question is: *What is the current situation in De Achterhoek regarding shrinkage and which policies are currently executed?*

The data of Statistics Netherlands illustrates that De Achterhoek had a declining population between 2007 and 2015. In 2015, a turnover happened and the population of De Achterhoek has been growing ever since. But still, De Achterhoek is considered as a “shrinking region” according to the national government and receives several subsidies and stimulation programs like a customised project and a Region Deal. Despite officially being a “shrinking region” and getting an additional budget, the feelings of being a “shrinking region” are abandoned by many respondents. Some respondents feel that De Achterhoek is no longer a “shrinking region” while others feel that a discussion on this topic is necessary. The data of Statistics Netherlands also showed that the composition of the region is changing. The group of people aged fifty years or older increased from 37 percent to 47 percent over the period 2007-2020 while the number and proportion of young people are decreasing. These statistics are seen and experienced as the biggest problem by the respondents. This means that the population shrinkage is not seen as the biggest problem of being a “shrinking region”. The biggest problem is the ageing of the population according to the respondents.

The population shrinkage led to a cautious approach to the construction of houses. Because of the current population growth, the region is allowed to build houses according to necessity, but the construction of new houses is hindered by the old shrinkage mindset. The policy framework stated that there is a mismatch in the housing market and also a housing shortage in the region. However, the two trends may offer opportunities for De Achterhoek region. The question remains whether to build more houses in the region or to be careful with the construction of houses. Supporters for the caution approach are pointing to the mortality surplus, the differences in growth between urban and rural communities and the ageing of the population. While the supporters of building point to the importance of retaining facilities, retaining residents and attracting people from outside the region.

The second sub-question is: *Which opportunities does the labour shortage offer for De Achterhoek to attract new residents and what is needed to let the workers settle in the region?*

The theoretical framework states that the regional labour market is the main driver of migration. This is partly confirmed by the respondents. The importance of economic binding is often mentioned as an opportunity to attract new residents. In addition, an additional positive point when attracting workers, came to the fore. Workers are under 67 years of age, thus attracting workers will help to combat the ageing of the population. However, not all respondents think that the labour shortage will bring opportunities for population growth. Because, for some professions, there is a nationwide labour shortage so workers can find jobs anywhere, including close to home. Also, the tightness of the housing market is a barrier for attracting new residents. In addition, the disadvantages of the labour shortage are often mentioned. The biggest fear is that companies move out of the region.

In order to let workers settle in the region, it is important to have a sufficient number of starter homes available within a short timeframe. In addition, to attract higher educated workers not only house characteristics should be considered but also more factors. Primarily, accessibility by rail and road so that the partner has the possibility for easy work travel and proximity to theatres and shopping facilities.

Moreover, a group of workers which is often forgotten in the literature and policy plans are the foreign workers. However, foreign workers are necessary to reduce the labour shortages in De Achterhoek and therefore also need housing, sometimes even on a structural basis.

The third sub-question is: *Which opportunities does the home-working trend offer for De Achterhoek to attract new residents?*

The theoretical framework states that shrinking regions may benefit from the home-working trend because the distance between the home and the workplace is considered less important. The pandemic has also made people realise that it is pleasant to have space in and around the home and to live in a green environment. De Achterhoek offers space in and around the home, a green environment and lower housing prices compared to the western part of the Netherlands. These residential advantages are now easier to combine with working elsewhere in the country by working from home. The respondents confirm these opportunities for population growth, but they have divided these opportunities into short-term and long-term opportunities.

The opportunities in the short-term are found in maintaining De Achterhoek youth in the region and attracting new residents from outside the region. Respondents think that home-workers from the western part of the country will come to the region because of the green environment and larger houses that are available for lower prices. This is in line with the literature about the rural idyllic. The home-working trend also brings some opportunities in the long-term. The expectation is that home-workers may, after some years, look for a job in De Achterhoek, which may help to reduce the labour shortage. In addition, the children of home-workers may continue to live or work in De Achterhoek because of their ties to De Achterhoek. This may be beneficial for countering the ageing population and the labour shortage. However, these findings are not supported by any literature.

Some respondents have doubts about the possible opportunities of the home-working trend. They fear that the home-working trend will not bring the right (young) people to the region and the trend will not help to solve the labour shortage in the short-term. The home-working trend is also reinforcing the migration from west-to-east according to the respondents. This corresponds to the findings in the introduction, which shows that since 2017, more people have moved from the western part of the country to De Achterhoek region than the other way around. This form of migration is not perceived positively by everyone because it drives up housing prices, which makes it harder for young people from De Achterhoek to find suitable housing in their region.

The fourth sub-question is: *Is there sufficient cooperation between the actors to utilise the opportunities of work-related trends?*

The policy framework explained that the different partners: governmental organisations, business organisations and educational organisations all work together within the 8RHK structure on different thematic roundtables. This cooperation is considered to be relatively good. Small remarks are that the aldermen at the thematic roundtables all “want to score” for their own municipality and that there is a need for a more integral approach. Additionally, municipalities need to collaborate and show their construction plans to each other. Also, the implementation of regional policies is a concern because municipalities tend to focus on their own well-being. The major presence of governmental parties at the thematic roundtable is felt to be too much. However, the businesses are happy to be part of the discussion. To utilise the opportunities of the two trends for the entire region, the different municipalities must collaborate better with each other and coordinate their plans more often. And above all, to think more in the interests of the region.

The last sub-question is: *How can the opportunities offered by the two work-related trends be utilised and which adjustments are needed?*

To utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage De Achterhoek must present itself in its best light and should change the image of not having any facilities in the region. Also, people need to know which excellent companies are present in De Achterhoek, and they need to know how pleasant the living environment is. In addition, sufficient road and rail connections are important to attract workers and their families. Return migration is cited in the literature as an easy way to attract residents. This has been confirmed in this study, respondents indicate return migration as the best way to attract new residents and that the region should respond to this. In addition, jobs are available in the region, but the housing market is often considered as the barrier for utilising the opportunities of the labour shortage. Thus, more houses should be built for workers.

To utilise the opportunities of the home-working trend it is important not to build too small, people who work from home need space to work. Also, it is important to keep the countryside beautiful and green because people move to De Achterhoek to live and work in beautiful, peaceful surroundings. In addition, improve mobility by road and rail because home-workers still need to travel to their office two or three days a week. Representing the region is also seen as important. Especially to change the image of De Achterhoek as a farming area. However, some respondents doubt the manufacturability of policies and state that policies will not be able to attract everyone to De Achterhoek.

In conclusion, based on the answers to the sub-questions, the main question can be answered. Once again, the main question of this study is: *Which opportunities does the labour shortage and home-working trend offer to attract more residents to De Achterhoek and how can these opportunities best be utilised?*

First of all, the biggest challenge De Achterhoek is facing is the ageing of the population and the labour shortage. Therefore, it is important that the two work-related trends, besides population growth, also contribute to combating the ageing of the population and reducing the labour shortage. The labour shortage brings opportunities to attract new residents based on the economic binding it provides. Also, attracting workers will help to combat the ageing of the population because workers are under 67 years of age. However, the labour shortage does not only bring opportunities for population growth. For some professions, there is a nationwide labour shortage and the tightness of the housing market is seen as a barrier for attracting new residents. Also, there is a fear that companies will move away from the region.

The home-working trends bring opportunities to attract new residents but these opportunities are divided into short-term and long-term opportunities. In the short-term, De Achterhoek can attract new residents based on the rural idyllic. In addition, the short-term opportunities can be found in maintaining De Achterhoek youth in the region. Which helps to combat the ageing of the population. In the long-term, the expectation is that home-workers may look for a job in De Achterhoek after some years, which helps to reduce the labour shortage in De Achterhoek. Also, children of home-workers may continue to work and live in De Achterhoek because of their ties to the region. This may be beneficial for countering the ageing population and the labour shortage.

The opportunities of the labour shortage can be utilised by representing the region and improving road and rail connections. In addition, return migration is an easy way to attract residents. Because the housing market is often seen as a barrier for attracting new workers, more houses should be built for workers in De Achterhoek. Lastly, the housing of foreign workers should be taken into account.

To utilise the opportunities of the home-working trend the region should avoid the overbuilding of nature. In addition, it is important not to build homes too small. Even for the few days that home-workers must go to the office, they want to do it within a short timeframe. So, the recommendation is to improve mobility by road and rail. Also, the campaign Onverwachte Hoek should focus on home-workers because it brings opportunities in the long-term.

The two work-related trends, the home-working trend and the labour shortage, are, in a certain aspect, at odds with each other. Because due the shortage in the housing market, it is difficult to attract both groups of people (workers and home-workers) to the region. In addition, workers will work for companies in the region and the other group, the home-workers, will work for companies outside of the region. When a home-worker settles in the region, he or she will occupy a house that cannot be used by a worker. This may have negative consequences for the labour shortage. Attracting workers seems to offer more opportunities for the region in the short-term, but in the long-term, the home-working trend also offers opportunities for reducing the labour shortage and the ageing population. In this time of severe housing shortage, a decision must be made on which group to focus on most. This is a policy choice, and it appears to have been decided in favour of the workers. This group is primarily the focus of the Onverwachte Hoek campaign.

Besides the fact that the two work-related trends are at odds with each other, other difficult spatial choices arise. The respondents want to build, but not too small, while on the other hand, the respondents do not want to build in the countryside. As a result, a compromise should be made or alternative building locations should be considered. Building more houses in the region is needed according to a large portion of respondents, but the population of De Achterhoek is expected to shrink in the near future. The dilemma remains: should houses be built or should De Achterhoek be careful because of the expected population decline in the future? Monitoring the two work-related trends will probably make this choice easier.

The next paragraph presents the recommendations of this research.

6.1 Recommendations

Section 5.5.3 describes several adjustments that are needed to utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage and home-working trend. The adjustments will once again be summarised. Subsequently, recommendations will be given to make the adjustments possible. These recommendations will focus on a broader perspective and examine the whole system of spatial planning including building homes, monitoring trends and cooperation.

The biggest challenges for De Achterhoek seem to be the ageing population and the labour shortage. Therefore, De Achterhoek must continue to focus on attracting workers. Which has already been done by the campaign Onverwachte Hoek. But there are no direct actions linked to the campaign. To utilise the opportunities of the labour shortage it is important to link direct actions to the campaign Onverwachte Hoek. Therefore, the following adjustments should be taken:

- Realise flexible housing forms
 - In flexible homes, workers can live temporarily and can, from this flexible home, seek for permanent housing. This will ensure that housing is not a barrier to attract workers
- Take the housing needs of workers into account and build or transform houses specifically for this group
 - Because of the housing shortage, it is hard for this group to find a home, so specifically, take this target group into account when making or approving new housing plans
- Continue to focus on return migration
 - Attracting new residents through return migration is the easiest way. It also meets the needs of a part of the residents of De Achterhoek which are not very happy with the arrival of people from the western part of the Netherlands
- Take the housing and recruitment of foreign workers into account
 - Foreign workers are necessary to reduce labour shortages. Foreign workers also need housing, sometimes even on a structural basis. When making or approving building plans, authorities should also focus on this group
- Continue to focus on the improvement of mobility to make the region more attractive for workers and their families
 - Keep in mind that improving mobility will help to attract workers. Make this link, between mobility and the labour shortage, explicit to underline its importance within the region and towards the provincial and national authorities

The following adjustments will help to utilise the opportunities of the home-working trend:

- Make sure not to build new houses too small.
 - Take into account the need for a workroom when building new homes. If a workroom is placed on the ground floor, it can also function as a bedroom, making the house suitable for all stages of life
- Avoid building in the green countryside
 - This is needed because the presence of these green areas actually attracts home-workers
- The campaign Onverwachte Hoek should also partly focus on home-workers.
 - The campaign does not focus on the home-working trend because it does not lead to the filling of regional jobs in the short-term. But in the long-term, home-workers may eventually choose to work in De Achterhoek or their children may look for work in the region. Therefore, consider whether the home-working trend can be linked to the campaign.

However, the shortage in the housing market is a barrier for attracting workers and home-workers. Building houses is, of course, easier said than done. The following recommendations can contribute to building or transforming houses more quickly. These recommendations are new elements and are not based on previous findings.

1. Municipalities are struggling with capacity problems. For years, municipalities have been unable to build anything due to the shrinking population. So, the (spatial planning) departments have been scaled down and employees have been deployed elsewhere. Now that there are more opportunities to build, there are not enough employees to process all building applications. The province has a budget available for municipalities to hire expertise and manpower for their spatial planning departments. However, this budget is not used very often. Therefore: make use of the possibilities offered by the province to tackle capacity problems in the spatial planning departments.
2. In addition to the budget for hiring expertise or manpower, the province of Gelderland also has various other subsidies and programmes available to support the municipalities of De Achterhoek with housing issues. However, these programmes and subsidies are not made use of enough. To ensure that these subsidies and programmes are used by the municipalities of De Achterhoek, a subsidy officer can be recruited at the regional level. This subsidy officer consists of knowledge and an overview of the available subsidies and can link the right subsidy to the right municipality.
3. The region holds on too tightly to traditional concrete construction. While new forms of building such as prefabricated houses and concept construction (concept bouwen) may help to solve the mismatch in the housing market. Therefore: consider the possibilities of new building forms such as concept construction and prefabricated construction.

In addition to the above recommendations, three more key aspects are important to utilise the opportunities of the two work-related trends. Namely: coordination between municipalities, the creation of scenarios and representing the region.

4. First of all, housing construction plans between municipalities must be harmonised and coordinated more effectively. There is no overall vision to utilise the opportunities of the work-related trends. A regional housing agenda should be written. Especially since the current regional housing agenda is intended for the time period 2015-2025, which is ten years. Every region is obliged, according to the province's environmental ordinance (omgevingsverordening), to draw up a regional housing agenda once every three years. Make sure that a new regional housing agenda is written, which includes the spatial plans of the region. Also, explicitly include the home-working trend and the impact of the labour shortage on housing. As described in this study, both trends offer opportunities for population growth. To utilise these opportunities, cooperation between all municipalities is necessary.
5. It is also important to know how the region wants to present itself to other governments. The region is still officially a “shrinking region” but does not consider itself a “shrinking region”. At this moment, the label “shrinking region” still provides a lot of additional budgets. After the cabinet formation, De Achterhoek must present itself to the central government once again and need to start lobbying. The Region Deal will end after December 31st, 2022. Being a “shrinking region” or region that must deal with a population decline, has helped to obtain this Region Deal. Think about how the region wants to present itself to the national government after December 31st 2022, in order to still request incentive programmes. That is why it is important to determine whether or not the region want to be labelled a “shrinking region”. In doing so, weigh the costs against the benefits.

6. The population forecast and the housing market are changing very quickly. The labour shortage and the home-working trend will change or develop in the coming years. Keep monitoring these trends and ensure that you can respond quickly and flexibly to upcoming developments. And work with different scenarios regarding the two trends at the regional level. However, this recommendation is a new element and is not based on previous findings.

7. Reflection

This chapter reflects on the research which is carried out. First of all, the representativeness of this study will be discussed. Secondly, the implications of the snowball method are discussed, followed by the two work-related trends and their impact in practice. Furthermore, the elements of the theoretical framework that were not reviewed in the results chapter are addressed. Also, this chapter addresses how the feasibility of the recommendations have been taken into account. Finally, a reflection is given on the scientific relevance and societal relevance of this research.

The researcher interviewed fifteen respondents from different organisations, therefore this study has reflected different perspectives of many different organisations. However, this choice for a wide range of respondents from different organisations meant that only four municipal employees from three different municipalities were interviewed. This means that the other four municipalities (Bronckhorst, Doetinchem, Oost-Gelre & Oude IJsselstreek) were not interviewed or consulted. As a result, the representativeness of the municipalities in this study is limited. Nevertheless, by consulting employees from the 8RHK and the province, which represents all municipalities from De Achterhoek, they are not left out of this research completely. In addition, the municipal policies of Doetinchem and Lichtenvoorde & Groenlo (municipality of Oost Gelre) have been described in section 2.3.3.

In order to interview the respondents of this study, the snowball method is used. This means that new respondents were recruited through the contacts of those who have already been interviewed. A disadvantage of this method is that many respondents come from the acquaintances of the interviewee, which means that the researcher only has a partial insight into the research population. Also, the interviewee will be more inclined to bring in a new respondent with a similar opinion rather than someone with a totally different opinion. To limit these disadvantages as much as possible, a well-considered decision was made, in cooperation with internship supervisor Dick Schierboom, whether to interview certain persons. As a result, the respondents' list is not primarily determined through the snowball method.

The two trends which are the focus of this study, the labour shortage and the home-working trend, are assumed to be true in this study. This means that no research has been conducted into the actual impact of these trends. As a result, it is unclear whether the opportunities of the two work-related trends, mentioned by the respondents, will actually come true. This research and its applicability therefore also depend on the extent to which the two work-related trends become reality. The impact of these trends will therefore have to be investigated in a follow-up study.

The theoretical framework identified various motives for moving to rural areas. Given the short time period of this research, not all elements have been reviewed in the results chapter. Therefore, it remains unclear whether these elements are valid in practice. Follow-up research should investigate whether a range of low-income groups to a mixed group of migrants are actually moving to rural areas and whether the majority of the home-workers will actually stay “put” in the same city.

In this study, respondents were asked which adjustments are needed to utilise the opportunities of the two work-related trends. The researcher also formulated recommendations to utilise these opportunities. In doing so, only limited attention has been paid to the feasibility of the recommendations and the available budgets. As a result, it is unclear whether all proposed recommendations can be implemented. A feasibility study has to be carried out on the proposed recommendations.

After answering the main question of this research, it is possible to reflect on the scientific relevance and societal relevance discussed in section 1.4. By identifying the opportunities of the two work-related trends, this research tried to have a positive influence on the shrinkage in De Achterhoek and thereby tries to diminish the negative processes of shrinkage for the residents and living environment of De Achterhoek. However, the results of this study cannot be measured yet. It will remain unclear whether this research will have a positive influence on the shrinkage in De Achterhoek. In addition, the opportunities of the home-working trend are seen in the short-term and the long-term. This means that the long-term opportunities are only visible after multiple years and can, thus, not be reviewed in the coming years.

Additionally, literature on the specific topic of working from home exists but there has not been much attention to this phenomenon from housing researchers and urban researchers. This study has made an explicit link between home-working and opportunities for population growth and housing needs. It has shown that the home-working trend provides opportunities in the short-term and the long-term and that it is thereby important not to build too small and to avoid building in the green countryside.

Literature

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

All interviews were conducted in Dutch therefore the interview guide will also be presented in Dutch.

Huidige situatie

A: Als u vanuit uw werkveld reflecteert, hoe merkt u dat de regio Achterhoek krimpt?

B: Welk beleid of welke maatregelen rond bevolkingskrimp in De Achterhoek komt u in uw werkveld tegen?

Arbeidstekort

Informatie: In 2025 heeft De Achterhoek naar schatting 27.000 extra werknemers nodig. De beroepsbevolking is in 2030 met waarschijnlijk 12% afgenomen. Er is vooral een arbeidstekort in de zorg en techniek zoals aan machinemonteurs, verpleegkundigen, ingenieurs en softwareontwikkelaars. (7.000 universitair of hbo geschoold zijn, 14.000 mbo geschoold en 6.000 vmbo geschoold)

1: Vanuit uw rol als _____ wat ziet u als het grootste probleem van het arbeidstekort voor De Achterhoek?

2: Houdt u of uw organisatie zich bezig met het arbeidstekort in de regio? (zie tabel volgende pagina)

<p><u>NEE</u></p> <p>3: Vind u het arbeidstekort een relevant thema voor u of uw organisatie om zich mee bezig te houden?</p>	<p><u>JA</u></p> <p>4: Op welke manier houdt u of uw organisatie zich met het arbeidstekort bezig?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bedenken van beleid ▪ Uitvoeren van beleid ▪ Informatie verzamelen 	
	<p><u>BELEID</u></p> <p>5: Wat voor beleid of maatregelen voert uw organisatie om het arbeidstekort terug te dringen?</p> <p>6: Wordt er ook een link gelegd met het aantrekkelijke wonen in De Achterhoek of worden arbeiders gestimuleerd om zich in de regio te vestigen?</p>	<p><u>INFORMATIE VERZAMELEN</u></p> <p>13: Welke informatie over het arbeidstekort verzamelt uw organisatie?</p> <p>14: Wat wordt er met deze informatie vervolgens gedaan?</p> <p>15: Aan wie wordt deze informatie verstrekt?</p>
<p><u>JA</u></p> <p>7: Op welke manier wordt het beleid rond het arbeidstekort gelinkt aan het laten vestigen van arbeiders in de regio?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is de bevolkingskrimp van invloed geweest op dit beleid? <p>8: Wordt er in dit beleid gefocust op specifieke arbeidersgroepen of specifieke doelgroepen mensen zoals gezinnen of jonge mensen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Waarom wel? ▪ Waarom niet? <p>9: Wordt er in dit beleid rekening gehouden met de woonwensen van arbeiders of met de regionale huizenmarkt?</p> <p>10: Is er informatie beschikbaar over de woonwensen van arbeiders en hun motieven om zich wel of niet in de regio te vestigen?</p>	<p>10. → Ja informatie beschikbaar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prijs segment/ soort woning/ koop of huur/ snel beschikbaar ▪ In welke plaatsen vestigen zij zich vaak? ▪ Waarom vestigen zij zich wel of niet? <p>10. → Nee geen info beschikbaar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vind u deze informatie relevant om wel te weten ▪ Waarom is deze informatie niet voor handen? 	<p><u>NEE</u></p> <p>11: Weet u waarom deze link tussen het arbeidstekortbeleid en het laten vestigen van arbeiders in de regio niet wordt gelegd?</p> <p>12: Vind u dat het beleid rond het arbeidstekort gelinkt moet worden met beleid rond bevolkingsgroei dus dat arbeiders gestimuleerd moeten worden zich in de regio te vestigen?</p> <p>→ Ja</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ waarom? ▪ Hoe zal u dit beleid koppelen heeft u hier ideeën over? <p>→ Nee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ waarom niet?

16: Vanuit uw rol als _____ welke invloed denkt u dat het arbeidstekort heeft op de woningvraag in De Achterhoek?

- Prijs segment/ soort woning/ koop of huur/ snel beschikbaar
- Welke plaatsen zijn populair of geschikt?

17: Denkt u dat het arbeidstekort ook kansen voor bevolkingsgroei of het tegengaan van krimp voor de regio brengt?

<u>JA</u>	<u>NEE</u>
<p>18: Welke kansen ziet u?</p> <p>19: Denkt u dat het arbeidstekort ook nieuwe bewoners naar de regio Achterhoek kan brengen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Welke soorten nieuwe inwoners? Starters, ouderen of gezinnen? ▪ Welke arbeiders dan vooral? <p>20: Hoe kunnen de kansen die het arbeidstekort biedt (voor bevolkingsgroei) in De Achterhoek het best benut worden?</p> <p>21: Welke aanpassingen of beleid is er nodig om de kansen van het arbeidstekort te benutten?</p> <p>22: Welke meerwaarde of mogelijkheden kan uw organisatie bieden om de kansen van het arbeidstekort te benutten?</p> <p>23: Denkt u dat er voldoende wordt samengewerkt tussen relevante partijen om de kansen van het arbeidstekort te benutten?</p> <p>24: In een ideale situatie, met voldoende middelen, hoe zou u de kansen van het arbeidstekort benutten om meer inwoners naar de regio te brengen?</p>	<p>25: Waarom niet?</p> <p>26: Wat moet er volgens u gebeuren of wat moet er anders wil het arbeidstekort wel kansen bieden voor bevolkingsgroei in de regio?</p>

Thuiswerktrend

Door de corona crisis werken veel mensen vanuit huis. Ook na de corona crisis is de verwachting dat werknemers nog zo'n 2 á 3 dagen per week thuis werken. Deze thuiswerktrend kan een positieve invloed hebben op de krimp in De Achterhoek. Volgens hoogleraar stedelijke economie Eveline van Leeuwen (2020) kunnen krimpregio's profiteren van de pandemie doordat de afstand tussen de woning en de werkplek wordt minder belangrijk voor de keuze van de woonplaats. Daarbij biedt De Achterhoek veel ruimte en in om de woning, ruimte voor natuur en zijn de woningprijzen lager vergeleken met het Westen. Deze woonvoordelen in De Achterhoek zijn eenvoudiger te combineren met het werk elders in het land door het thuiswerken.

27: Houdt u of uw organisatie zich bezig met de thuiswerktrend? (Zie tabel volgende pagina)

<p><u>NEE</u></p> <p>28: Vind u de thuiswerktrend een relevant thema voor u of uw organisatie om zich mee bezig te houden?</p>	<p><u>JA</u></p> <p>29: Op welke manier bent u binnen uw werk bezig met de thuiswerktrend of is uw organisatie hiermee bezig?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bedenken van beleid ▪ Uitvoeren van beleid ▪ Informatie verzamelen 	
	<p><u>BELEID</u></p> <p>30: Wat voor beleid wordt er op dit moment gevoerd rond de thuiswerktrend?</p> <p>31: Wordt er ook een link gelegd met het aantrekkelijke wonen in De Achterhoek of worden thuiswerkers gestimuleerd om zich in de regio te vestigen of in de regio te blijven wonen?</p>	<p><u>INFORMATIE VERZAMELEN</u></p> <p>38: Welke informatie verzamelt uw organisatie?</p> <p>39: Aan wie wordt deze informatie verstrekt?</p> <p>40: Wat wordt er met deze informatie vervolgens gedaan?</p>
<p><u>JA</u></p> <p>32: Op welke manier wordt het beleid rond de thuiswerktrend gelinkt aan aantrekken of behouden van mensen voor de regio?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is de bevolkingskrimp van invloed geweest op dit beleid? <p>33: Wordt er in dit beleid gefocust op specifieke type thuiswerkers of specifieke doelgroepen mensen zoals gezinnen of jonge mensen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Waarom wel? ▪ Waarom niet? <p>34: Wordt er in dit beleid rekening gehouden met de woonwensen van thuiswerkers of met de regionale huizenmarkt?</p>	<p><u>JA</u></p> <p>35: Is er informatie beschikbaar over de woonwensen van thuiswerkers en hun motieven om zich wel of niet in de regio te vestigen?</p> <p>→ Ja</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prijs segment/ soort woning/ koop of huur/ snel beschikbaar ▪ In welke plaatsen vestigen zij zich vaak? ▪ Waarom vestigen zij zich wel of niet? <p>→ Nee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vind u deze informatie relevant om wel te weten ▪ Waarom is deze informatie niet voor handen? 	<p><u>NEE</u></p> <p>36: Weet u waarom deze link tussen het beleid rond de thuiswerktrend en het aantrekken en behouden van mensen in De Achterhoek niet wordt gemaakt?</p> <p>37: Vind u dat het beleid rond de thuiswerktrend gelinkt moet worden met beleid rond bevolkingsgroei dus dat thuiswerkers gestimuleerd moeten worden zich in de regio te vestigen?</p> <p>→ Ja</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ waarom? ▪ Hoe zal u dit beleid koppelen heeft u hier ideeën over? <p>→ Nee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ waarom niet?

41: Vanuit uw rol als _____ welke invloed denkt u dat de thuiswerktrend heeft op de woningvraag in De Achterhoek?

- Prijs segment/ soort woning/ koop of huur/ snel beschikbaar
- Welke plaatsen zijn populair of geschikt?

42: Denkt u dat de thuiswerktrend ook kansen voor bevolkingsgroei of het tegengaan van krimp brengt?

<u>JA</u>	<u>NEE</u>
43: Welke kansen ziet u?	50: Waarom niet?
44: Denkt u dat de thuiswerktrend ook nieuwe bewoners naar de regio Achterhoek kan brengen? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Welke soorten nieuwe inwoners? Starters, ouderen of gezinnen? ▪ Welke arbeiders dan vooral? 	51: Wat moet er volgens u gebeuren of wat moet er anders wil het arbeidstekort wel kansen bieden voor bevolkingsgroei in de regio?
45: Hoe kunnen de kansen die de thuiswerktrend voor bevolkingsgroei biedt in De Achterhoek volgens u het best benut worden? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is de IT voorziening voldoende? • Glasvezel? 	
46: Welke aanpassingen of beleid is er nodig om de kansen van de thuiswerktrend te benutten?	
47: Welke meerwaarde of mogelijkheden kan uw organisatie bieden om de kansen door de thuiswerktrend beter te benutten?	
48: Denkt u dat er voldoende wordt samengewerkt tussen relevante partijen om de kansen van de thuiswerktrend te benutten?	
49: In een ideale situatie, met voldoende middelen, hoe zou u de kansen van de thuiswerktrend benutten om meer inwoners naar de regio te brengen?	

Afsluiting

52: Weet u nog personen of organisaties die interessant zijn voor mijn onderzoek om ook te interviewen?

53: Beschikt u nog over documenten die interessant zijn voor mijn onderzoek?

54: Heeft u interesse om de eindversie van mijn onderzoek per mail te ontvangen?