

Zeeuws-Vlaanderen from shrinkage region to a region with borderless opportunities

Shrinkage at the border region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, in the Netherlands



(PZC, 2020)

*"Van d'Ee tot Hontenisse
Van Hulst tot aan Cadzand
Dat is ons eigen landje,
Maar deel van Nederland."*

~ Anthem of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen

*"From d'Ee to Hontenisse
From Hulst to Cadzand
That is our own little country,
But part of the Netherlands."*

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Preface

Dear reader,

In front of you is my Bachelor Thesis 'Zeeuws-Vlaanderen from shrinkage region to a region with borderless opportunities'. With this Bachelor Thesis I will complete my bachelor's degree in Geography, Planning and Environment at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. Writing my thesis about Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, the region where I grew up, was very special for me. I found the situation in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen always interesting to follow. All in all, I am satisfied with the results and how the research turned out.

At last, I would like to thank some people that helped me during the process of writing my Bachelor Thesis. Firstly, my supervisor dr. Olivier Kramsch, who helped to shape my thesis in the beginning stage of the research and gave some very useful feedback. Furthermore, I would like to thank all the respondents that have filled in my survey. At last, I would like to thank Fons Dobbelaer, Robert Evers and Jos van Ginneken for allowing me to interview them and giving me a clear insight of the current situation in the municipalities.

Enjoy the reading!

Meyron Cauwels

Nijmegen, June 2021

Summary

Zeeuws-Vlaanderen has been dealing with a shrinking population for several years. The migration of young people in particular causes demographic problems. The fact that Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is a border region does not mean that it is peripheral. On the contrary, the region is located between Rotterdam and Antwerp, the two largest ports in Europe. Nevertheless, the shrinking population remains a problem in the region, and cross-border relations with Belgium could offer a solution.

The aim of this research is to find out how municipalities and regional firms can enter cross-border relationships to reduce the shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. The following main question has been formulated for this research: *'To what extent can cross-border relations reduce the shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen?'* Where shrinkage encompasses multiple dimensions, such as demographics, employment, and housing in a region.

To get an answer to this main question, councillors from the three municipalities concerned were interviewed about the municipality's vision on cross-border relations. In addition, a survey was sent to regional firms regarding their cross-border relations and their development.

The interviews showed that the labour market in the region needs to improve to keep and attract more young people to the region. But what is also an important outcome is that the differences in laws and regulations for employees across the border must disappear to make cross-border work more attractive and easier. It is also important for the municipalities to attract (Belgian) companies in the region to improve employment in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. And the survey showed that not many regional companies have employees from Belgium yet, but they do have cross-border relations with customers and trading partners. These cross-border relations of regional companies could be stimulated more by the municipality.

Based on these results, it is recommended, to reduce the shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, that more firms should be attracted to the region to make the region attractive for young jobseekers. In the meantime, municipalities can encourage the current regional firms to enter more cross-border relationships and help employees who work across the border with the administrative burden that it carries with them. A possible follow-up study could focus on how the Belgian side looks at entering cross-border relations with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

Samenvatting

De regio Zeeuws-Vlaanderen heeft al een aantal jaren met een krimpende bevolking te maken gehad. Met name het wegtrekken van de jeugd brengt demografische problemen met zich mee. Het feit dat Zeeuws-Vlaanderen een grensregio is, betekent niet dat het perifeer gelegen ligt. Integendeel, de regio bevindt zich tussen Rotterdam en Antwerpen, de twee grootste havens in Europa. Toch blijft de krimpende bevolking een probleem in de regio, waarbij grensrelaties met België een uitweg zouden kunnen bieden.

Het doel van dit onderzoek is om te achterhalen hoe gemeentes en regionale bedrijven grensrelaties aan kunnen gaan om de krimp in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen te verminderen. Voor dit onderzoek is de volgende hoofdvraag opgesteld: *'In hoeverre kun grensrelaties de krimp in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen verminderen?'*. Waarbij krimp meerdere dimensies omvat, zoals demografie, werkgelegenheid en huisvesting in een regio.

Om een antwoord te krijgen op deze hoofdvraag zijn er raadsleden van de drie desbetreffende gemeenten geïnterviewd over de visie van de gemeente op grensrelaties. Verder is er naar regionale bedrijven een enquête verstuurd met betrekking tot hun grensrelaties en de ontwikkeling daarvan.

Uit de interviews bleek dat de arbeidsmarkt in de regio moet verbeteren om meer jonge mensen te houden en aan te trekken in de regio. Maar wat ook een belangrijke uitkomst is, dat de verschillen in wet- en regelgeving voor werknemers over de grens moeten verdwijnen om grenswerken aantrekkelijker en makkelijker te maken. En uit de enquête bleek dat nog niet veel regionale bedrijven werknemers uit België hebben, maar wel de grensrelaties hebben met klanten en handelspartners. Deze grensrelaties van regionale bedrijven zouden meer gestimuleerd kunnen worden door de gemeente. Ook is het belangrijk voor de gemeenten om (Belgische) bedrijven aan te trekken in de regio om de werkgelegenheid in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen te verbeteren.

Op basis van deze resultaten wordt aanbevolen, om de krimp in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen te verminderen, dat er meer bedrijven naar de regio moeten worden aangetrokken om de regio voor jonge werkzoekende aantrekkelijk te maken. In de tussentijd kunnen gemeenten de huidige regionale bedrijven stimuleren om meer grensrelaties aan te gaan en werknemers die over de grens werken helpen met de administratieve last die het met hen meedraagt. Een eventueel vervolgonderzoek zou zich kunnen focussen hoe er vanaf de Belgische kant gekeken wordt naar het aangaan van grensrelaties met Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project orientation

Europe has been affected by a demographic transition for several decades. This demographic transition involves a low birth rate, a stable or rising death rate and a rising life expectancy (van de Kaa, 1987). This results in a greying population in Europe. However, this process of greying population differs in speed across Europe, some parts are greying faster than others. Especially border regions, which have long been seen as the periphery areas of countries, while the cities are seen as the central areas within a country (Sohn & Stambolic, 2015).

Zooming in on a specific country in Europe coping with shrinkage regions is the Netherlands. In the Netherlands there are several regions where shrinkage is a problem or will be a problem in the future. The Dutch government has named nine regions in the Netherlands as shrinkage regions. These are Noordoost-Friesland, Het Hogeland, Eemdelta, Oost-Groningen, Achterhoek, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, Westelijke Mijnstreek, Parkstad Limburg and Maastricht-Mergelland. On top of that, there are fourteen regions which are considered as regions that need anticipation to prevent further shrinkage (Government of the Netherlands, 2018).

Hoekveld (2012) subdivides three COROP-regions in the Netherlands as prominent shrinkage regions: Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, Oost-Groningen and Zuid-Limburg. COROP-regions are statistical regions used in the Netherlands for regional research (CBS, 2021a). These regions are peripherally located next to borders in the Netherlands and differ in degree of urbanisation and land use. Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and Oost-Groningen are rural areas and have fewer municipalities than Zuid-Limburg, which is a more urban region (Hoekveld, 2012).

In these shrinkage regions there have established many cross-border co-operations along the borders, especially at the Dutch-Belgian border (Kessen, 1992). On the Dutch side of the border these co-operations are located in *Euregions*. *Euregions* include municipalities and provinces on both sides of the borders and have selected state borders as a challenge for co-operations and networks (van Houtum, 1998). In the meantime, the European Commission has developed the INTERREG programme to encourage the formation of Euregional networks. One of the objectives of INTERREG is to support border regions with unique development problems and to stimulate co-operations across the borders (van Houtum, 1998).

Meier, Reverda & van der Wouw (2015) have made a division within the Netherlands. The most prosperous area in the Netherlands is called the *Randstad*, there are the big cities of the Netherlands located (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague). The other part of the Netherlands is called the *Randland*, it is more than just a geographical demarcation, it is a concept of thinking (Meier et al., 2015). This concept of thinking addresses the potential of these regions, despite of the shrinking population. With this point Meier et al. (2015) insist on the fact that shrinkage will occur in the *Randstad* in the future. The experiences and innovative practices that are made in the *Randland* now, can be leading for the future organisation of the Dutch society.

These *Randland* regions are most of the times border regions. The Netherlands has relatively a lot of borders and not a lot of hinterland. A quarter of the Dutch population lives within twenty kilometres of the Belgian or German border and a third within thirty kilometres (Cörvers & van Oosterhout, 2018). Unemployed inhabitants of these regions, most of the times do not see the opportunities of working across the border, within commuting distance. The reason for this are the big differences in laws and regulations between the countries (Cörvers, 2019).

The issues of these shrinking regions in the *Randland* are familiar with already known problems of rural areas. These problems are the migration of young people to the cities; a loss of services; and problems in the agraric sector (Hospers, 2019). The migration of the young people to the cities leads to the fact that the percentage of elderly people is increasing, or to link with a definition there will be greying in these regions (Hospers, 2019).

Within the Netherlands the province Zeeland is considered as a *Randland* region, despite the central location between the *Randstad* and the big cities in Belgium (Cörvers, 2019). On top of that, it is located between the two biggest ports in Europe (Rotterdam and Antwerp) with the most imports and exports. Although the fact that Zeeland is centrally located with this view, it is still very peripherally located in the Netherlands. For example, there is only one train track for person transport and the most southern part of Zeeland, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, is only connected with a tunnel where consumer should pay toll. When this tunnel, the Westerscheldetunnel, was introduced in 2003, there was a lot of positivism under the inhabitants of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen (Jungmann, 2003). They thought that this tunnel would lead to a more connected feeling with the rest of the province and the country. However, this positivism about the Westerscheldetunnel is slowly drifting away (de Graaf, 2020). This occlusion of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen with the other parts of the country causes the migration of young people that are going to college, which leads to an increasing percentage of elderly people (Hospers, 2019).

This greying causes the number of firms to decrease and with that the number of jobs. In that way, the region is not attractive to move to. A pressing example of a firm moving out of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is the departure of shipping company Vroon in 2016. This firm has been found in the region over 120 years ago and is one of the biggest shipping companies in Europe. It had a lot of jobs and employees were asked to move with the firm to Breda (Omroep Zeeland, 2016). The services situation in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is vulnerable and the number of services is decreasing. This decrease is a cause of a small population size and density, it support for the development of services is dropping more and more (van Dam, de Groot, & Verwest, 2006).

Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is the most southern 'island' from the province Zeeland (see figure 1). The 'island' contains three municipalities: Sluis, Terneuzen and Hulst (from west to east). The COROP-region has approximately 105000 inhabitants (CBS, 2020). With Terneuzen as biggest municipality with approximately 55000 inhabitants. Terneuzen is also the municipality with most jobs in the region, this is caused by the port at the Schelde, which is a passageway to the port of Ghent. Most of the region consists of rural area, with a couple of growth centres. The biggest towns are Terneuzen, Hulst, Axel, Oostburg and Breskens (CBS, 2014). As written before, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is connected with the mainland by the Westerscheldetunnel between Terneuzen and Borssele and a ferry between Breskens and Vlissingen.



Figure 1: The province Zeeland (Zeeland.com, n.d.)

Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is the leading region in the Netherlands if it comes to shrinking regions. It faces a challenge the coming years to keep the region liveable for the locals. The departure of young and highly educated people makes services disappear and the remaining inhabitants feel the effects. In the regions high schools are fusing together, but also primary schools and sports clubs have difficulties with the decline of population in the region. However, as Meier et al. (2015) suggest, a region like Zeeuws-Vlaanderen has a lot of possibilities. The region can be seen as the primarily example on how to handle with shrinkage in other Dutch regions.

Within Zeeuws-Vlaanderen the shrinkage is not that equal. Municipalities Terneuzen and Hulst have less shrinkage in the region than the municipality Sluis (van Dam et al., 2006). In the east of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen the population is increasing slightly the last few years, however this can not be seen in the west. Despite the slight growth of the population in the region, greying is the biggest issue that makes Zeeuws-Vlaanderen a shrinkage region (van Dam et al., 2006).

The main cause for the shrinkage in the region is the lack of high-educated jobs and/or employees. Young people choose bigger cities in the Netherlands outside Zeeland to study, but only a quarter of these students move back to Zeeland after receiving their degree (de Cuyper, 2017). The liveability of the region decreases and this is not attractive for firms to settle, in fact non of the municipalities of Zeeland is in the top-100 municipalities by liveability in the Netherlands (van der Wouw, 2015; Louter & van Eikeren, 2020). In Zeeuws-Vlaanderen there is an organisation, named Rootzz, that focusses on bringing back the students to the region. It tries to show the students and yuppies (young urban professionals) that Zeeuws-Vlaanderen has a lot to offer (Rootzz, n.d.).

The province Zeeland and the Dutch government have developed a *Regio Deal* with a focus on the living- and business climate (Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, 2018). The aim with this *Regio Deal* is to keep the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen attractive for already present inhabitants and companies. On top of that, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is targeted on the recreation and tourism sector (Cörvers, 2019). This has already led to an increase of second homes by tourists from Germany and Belgium, which has shaded the vacancy in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen (van Dam et al., 2006).

Another project that the province Zeeland wanted to bring to their region was the new base for marines. The Dutch government already made a deal with the province for the project, however, they turned it around several years later. Instead of a marine base, as a compensation the province is now becoming the *Law Delta* (de Graaf, 2020). The *Law Delta* includes a judicial complex, a prison, a courthouse, and a trainee centre for lawyers.

1.2 Scientific relevance

In the scientific field there has already been done a lot of research about shrinking regions. There are especially studies that write about the causes and effects of shrinkage. Lots of Dutch studies address the most prominent regions in the Netherlands that have difficulties with shrinkage, one of those regions is Zeeuws-Vlaanderen (Hoekveld, 2012; van Dam et al., 2006; Meier et al., 2015). However, there is barely written about the possibilities with cross-border relations for shrinkage regions and there are not many studies about Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

Furthermore, Kessen (1992) has taken a closer look at cross-border partnerships in the Netherlands and Belgium. Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is located in the *Euregio Scheldemond*. This is a cross-border partnership between the provinces Oost-Vlaanderen, West-Vlaanderen and Zeeland (Euregio Scheldemond, 2021). The research from Kessen (1992) is mainly focused on the partnership and its history and barely talks about the effect of such partnerships for the region. Henk van Houtum (1998) has done a research with a focus on cross-border co-operations in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. This research

shows that the cross-border relations can improve to be more beneficial. However, this research is mostly economical based with a focus on the co-operations. On top of that, that dissertation misses a part what the effects of cross-border co-operations are for the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and the battle against shrinkage. This thesis will try to combine the insights of existing literature from Kessen (1992) and van Houtum (1998) and add new empirical data for the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

1.3 Societal relevance

A research by a news broadcaster concluded that the inhabitants of Zeeland feel like they are disadvantaged by the Dutch government for years (Hart van Nederland, 2020). The inhabitants feel occluded from the rest of the country and think they are not heard in the national politics. On top of that, the province must deal with shrinkage, especially at the border with Belgium. The government could take more action to tackle the problem of shrinking in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. With this thesis the Dutch Government or the Province Zeeland can get an insight in the possibilities of investing in cross-border relations to make the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen more liveable. In this way, two dilemmas can get dealt with: the inhabitants of Zeeland/Zeeuws-Vlaanderen feel seen by the government and shrinkage can possibly be tackled. Firms can also get insight in the possibilities of investing in cross-border relations to gain an economical benefit or to make the region more attractive for employees from other parts of the country. These insights for the government and firms could be crucial to make Zeeuws-Vlaanderen more attractive for students to move back to their roots, this could be a first step to tackle the greying.

Furthermore, the insights that are gained for Zeeuws-Vlaanderen can be used by the Dutch government in the future approach for other shrinkage regions in the Netherlands, because shrinkage will occur in more regions of the Netherlands. Even in the *Randstad*. (Meier et al., 2015).

1.4 Research goal

The problem of shrinking in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is challenging and the sooner action is taken, the less the effects are for the region. The goal of this research can be formulated as: *Get an insight in the possibilities of cross-border relations of firms and municipalities to encourage the shrinkage region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen*. This research attempts on formulating solutions and recommendations for the government to tackle shrinkage and firms to attract employees. To prevent any confusion about the term 'encourage' in this research, it will be defined as the following: the possible positive development to support economic, cultural, and political factors (in a region).

With this research the following results will be produced:

- An insight in the possibilities for municipalities to invest in cross-border relations to encourage the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. These results can be used by the government to make the region more liveable and attractive.
- An insight in the possibilities for firms to invest in cross-border relations to encourage the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. This could be used to find ways to attract (high-educated) employees to the region.

1.5 Research questions

This research is mainly focused to get in insight for the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, so the following main question is formulated:

To what extent can cross-border relations reduce shrinkage in the Dutch region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen?

To answer this question and further divide it, the following sub-questions are drafted:

- *To what extent can municipalities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen encourage cross-border relations?*
- *To what extent can firms in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen encourage cross-border relations?*

With these questions the insight for both municipalities and firms are being studied. These two actors could be the most important in tackling the shrinkage problem of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

1.6 Structure

First, in this research there will be a theoretical frame where the most important theories that are used in this research are being operationalised. In this chapter the conceptual model is also visualised. The chapter thereafter is about the methods that are used to perform this research. In chapter 4 the results from the interviews are presented and in chapter 5 the results from the survey. The research will be concluded, and recommendations are done in chapter 6. Furthermore, in chapter 7 the reflection of performing the research is written. Following, is the reference list with the used literature in the research. And at last, there are the attachments.

2. Theoretical frame

2.1 Theory

In this research theories and approaches will be used. In this chapter these theories and approaches will be operationalised.

2.1.1 Demographic shrinkage

Demographic shrinkage is usually defined in terms of a decreasing total number of inhabitants in a certain area, and as the public discussion focuses on this, this is too narrow an approach to the phenomenon (van Dam et al., 2006). Demographic shrinkage can also be referred to when the number of households decreases or when constituent parts of the population decrease in size, for example by age (dejuvenation) or by ethnicity (discolouration). Even a decrease in the number of households with a certain income can be broadly defined as demographic decline. Therefore, demographic shrinkage can be defined in the following terms with constituent parts of the population decreasing in size (van Dam et al., 2006):

- In terms of numbers, these are inhabitants and households.
- In terms of population composition by age and ethnicity.
- In terms of household composition by size, income, and stage of life.

The causes of shrinkage in regions are an interplay of different macro-processes at the local scale. Such macro-processes are related to the demographic, economic, political, and environmental issues (Rink, Haase, & Bernt, 2009). Shrinkage occurs when these macro-processes lead to a population decline. This population decline is represented by natural decline (births and deaths) and losses by out-migration (Rink et al., 2009). This is comparable with the definition of shrinkage by Bontje & Musterd (2012): the decline of population and the decrease of local workforce. The decline of shrinkage can be seen as the demographic and the economic issues. Furthermore, there are planning factors that have a relation with shrinkage in local policy in the region.

This shrinkage is in most cases seen as a negative effect for the region. Bontje & Musterd (2012) are talking about a loss of services, the loss of spending power, the loss of tax, the loss of labour force and the loss of investments. The loss of labour force has been further explained by Hoekveld (2012). Due to an ageing population the labour population drops, which leads to problems for firms to find employees. These firms move out of the region in search of employees (Hoekveld, 2012). A negative spiral process of demographic shrinkage, housing vacancy and deterioration of the residential environment will negatively influence the presence of facilities in the region (van Dam et al., 2006).

Myrdal (1957) described another effect of shrinkage and the difference between the peripheral and central areas of a country or region. If for example a company establishes itself within a municipality, it will lead to a growth of jobs and career possibilities in that municipality. This region will get an impulse and will develop as an attractive establishment climate. However, where one region will grow another region will decline or shrink. Myrdal (1957) defines this as *backwash effects*: the price that shrinking regions have to pay for the success of growing regions.

Beside the negative effects of shrinkage there are possible positive effects. These are not direct effects for the region, but could give a vision to tackle shrinkage. In the way shrinkage is approached in current times could be very useful for approaches in the future (Meier et al., 2015; van Dam et al., 2006; Bontje & Musterd, 2012). When time passes the *backwash effects* where Myrdal (1957) talks about, could possibly change to *spread effects*. This means that the growth of central areas stagnates, due to lack of space or higher prices. People and/or businesses will move to a slight more peripheral areas, because it is cheaper (Myrdal, 1957).

2.1.2 Shrinkage in the Netherlands and Europe

In this research the focus lies on the shrinkage in the Netherlands and to be more specific, on the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. However, it is also interesting to put the shrinkage in this region in perspective with shrinkage across other countries in Europe. Some countries are already dealing with a decline in population size and composition for several years. Especially in Eastern-Europe the shrinkage is a problem. The main cause for these countries is the low fertility rate that in average fluctuates around the 1.2. In the Netherlands this is still higher with 1.7 (van Dam et al., 2006). Since the fall off the communism in the East-European countries the migration balance is negative and most of the migrants go towards countries in West-Europe, for jobs in most cases.

The expected shrinkage in the Netherlands is in contrast with the shrinkage in East-European countries like Czechia, Bulgaria, and Latvia. It is expected that in 2050 the population in the Netherlands will shrink by 1%. This number will still be higher than the current population size (van Dam et al., 2006). The shrinkage is expected to start later, which causes that the population will still be able to grow until that time. This is the fact for most of the countries in Western-Europe, except for Germany (van Dam et al., 2006).

If the shrinkage in Europe is being observed at NUTS2-regions level, the provinces, it almost sketches a same image. The most shrinkage is seen in East-Europe, however also in West-European countries the shrinkage can be seen (EPSON, 2005). Also, in the Netherlands there are regions where shrinkage will take place. This scenario is based on the trends of the period 1995-2000. It is not that reliable because 50 years is a big gap that is being forecasted, it is more a rough sketch of what could possibly happen. Following this trend, about two-thirds of all the European regions will face shrinkage, especially in East- and South-Europe (EPSON, 2005). In the Netherlands most of the shrinkage is found in the regions/provinces Limburg, Groningen, and Zeeland. However, the other regions of the Netherlands will face a (slightly) growing population in the scenario.

In short, the demographic shrinkage is yet not in every European country, and in some countries like Ireland and Denmark shrinkage will not be an issue in the future. It is expected that countries that are already facing shrinkage in current times, will have to expect more shrinkage in the future. Countries in Southern-Europe will face the biggest difference, because the shrinkage will occur in the coming years. The expected shrinkage in the Netherlands is in comparison with other European countries scarce and it is relatively starting late. The total population in the Netherlands is expected to be higher in 2050 than the current population size (van Dam et al., 2006).

2.1.3 Borders

Borders go further than just a demarcation in the space. They are not a fixed point in space or time, but borders can rather be seen as a social practice of spatial differentiation (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). The term border is most of the times fixed to a certain place, sometimes it is better to use the term bordering instead. *"This is an ongoing strategic effort to make a difference in space among the movements of people money or products."* (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002, p. 126). Furthermore, borders regulate the mobility of flows continuously and in that way reproduce places in the space.

Rumford (2006) adds to this that you need to look at borders beyond the logic of open or closed borders. The borders often take the form of political boundaries, but they are increasing in mobility and dispersity, which could possibly cause more exceeding (Rumford, 2006). Additionally, national state borders determine the way how boundaries are imagined. It divides people into the nations where they belong to. Although, borders are experienced and imagined differently per person (Yural-Davis, 2004).

Due to the presence of borders and the separation of national states, there will arise a centripetal effect at these borders. This means that borders will lead to a cut-off of possible interaction with other countries (van Houtum, 1998). The consequences can be considered twofold, mentions van Houtum (1998). At first he states that areas at the borders are considered as the edges of the community, or even as the peripheral areas. Centres of countries are trying to protect themselves of influences from the outside. This leads to the fact that big cities are rarely located at borders of a country. Secondly, the function as a barrier of a border can bother the interaction of two peripheral regions at both sides of the border (van Houtum, 1998). Barriers can be defined as obstacles that obstruct a transfer or movement of activities, communication and information. These barriers can occur physically or mentally (Nijkamp, Rietveld, & Salomon, 1990).

Borders have effect on the cross-border labour mobility. Not commuting across the border is not caused by not seeing the opportunities because of the differences. It is more an indifference for the other side of the border (van der Velde & van Houtum, 2004). In this way the borders are social frameworks that decide if people, living in the border region, get mobile across the border for the labour market. *"With respect to a durable place of work, the nation is often still conservatively and defensively incorporated in our minds; in our bodies, it is our practical logic, our modus operandi."* (van der Velde & van Houtum, 2004, p. 51).

Theorists like Christaller (1933) and Hoover (1948) suggested in their time that borders would restrict the area where firms could operate. These border regions would only attract small market firms and have limited economic activities. However, with the reduction of such international trade barriers the economic situation of these border regions could improve. As Heider (2019) writes: *"Better access to the foreign market would increase the market area of the border regions and foster the settlement of firms close to the national border. In addition to traditional location theory, trade theory argues that "exterior" regions and cities would particularly benefit from international trade."* (Heider, 2019, p. 1445).

Results from a study of the growth of European border regions in the 1970s found out that on either side of the border similar characteristics could be found (Hansen, 1976). However, in national policies and development programs these regions and the similarities were mostly ignored. The difficulty was to take the interests of both sides of the border. What was missed where the interests in the policies to improve the economic situation, which not only could develop the own nation, but also the nation on the other side of the border (Hansen, 1976). Out of this can be concluded that governments found it not attractive, or it has too many risks to invest in the border regions.

The term a globalising world is more and more common. In times of Christaller (1933), Hoover (1948) and Hansen (1976) this concept was unfamiliar. The globalisation of the world has increased cross-border relations. The movement between countries of people, goods and investments is increasing (Virtanen, 2004). On top of that, globalisation causes an increase of open borders in the world. It kind of created a world without borders, with some exceptions (Virtanen, 2004).

As the literature from above mentions, borders cause limitations for people to act across the border. The borders create a 'us and them' physically and mentally. This effects the possible chances for cross-border relations. To overcome these limitations the European Union developed new structures of governance to stimulate cross-border relations between regions and countries, these are called the Euregions (Fernández Marín, 2019).

2.1.4 Cross-border Governance

For governments, the willingness to invest in border regions is not high. Cross-border governance is too vulnerable for big economical investments (Kessen, 1992). Governments are asked to make both sides of the border attractive for people and firms, however it is complex to take each other's interests into account. On top of that, the border regions are mostly peripheral located in relative to the economical hearts of the country. This causes a lower interest in cross-border governance (Kessen, 1992). Although, since the formation of the European Union this has slightly increased.

European cross-border co-operations that include the delivery of European policies, the foundation of new multinational coalitions in border regions and new designs for the border regions, are called Euregions (Strüver, 2004). The development of the European Union was accompanied by the development of Euregions through the continent. The authorities that are part of these regions have developed interactions and conducted actions with help of European Special Funds like INTERREG (Heddebaut, 2004). In INTERREG there is a commission with experts that work closely together with other institutional actors, like municipalities, employment agencies or universities (Kramsch, 2001). Within the Euregions there are members from the regional authorities composed to deal with questions linked to planning, economic development, the environment, and its promotion for the region (Heddebaut, 2004).

The Euregions follow the *trend of governance* by implementing INTERREG involving governmental partners and other actors. Cross-border relations are mostly built on a multi-level of governance networks (Strüver, 2004). The projects that are developed by Euregions are structured and linked to the policy that the European Union has set. Furthermore, the cross-border relations have led to new forms of regional governance (at border regions) (Strüver, 2004).

Cross-border governance has been seen as the way to have interaction between authorities and the local residents/actors. However, several studies indicate that cross-border governance is not that successful. The difficulties lay in the mobility of people and the combination of transnational governance (Strüver, 2004). The importance of cross-border governance is to have an insight in the regions. Unfortunately, the participation of local actors is omitted. The Eurocrats in Brussels and the Euregional managers are too remote from the local residents in the border regions (Strüver, 2004).

Within the governance of shared space in the Euregions there are obstacles that make cross-border relations more difficult. These obstacles differ from political issues to financial issues and sometimes also cultural issues (Heddebaut, 2004). To execute governance in the shared space the most ideal situation is that both countries on the border will try to keep its local identity. The countries will also govern by their regional and national political interests and will take the benefits from cross-border cooperation in the Euregion (Heddebaut, 2004). *"The shared need for local and 'regional' representation, the demand for accountability from national governments, and the pressure of NGOs at international, national and local levels find common cause in the building of such a cross-border decision-making arena."* (Lissandrello, 2004, p. 91)

The institutional and political differences cause the obstacles in the current European cross-border governance of the shared space. On top of that, spatial planning differs a lot between the involved countries (Heddebaut, 2004). To overcome these difficulties and obstacles, countries should make clear programs with each other of the shared space. Countries should also accept that not all their interests can be performed in the shared space, it is about giving and taking if it comes to cross-border governance of the shared space.

2.2 Conceptual model

To get an overview from the theories and approaches that are written about, a conceptual model is useful. For this research, the conceptual model in figure 2 has been formed.

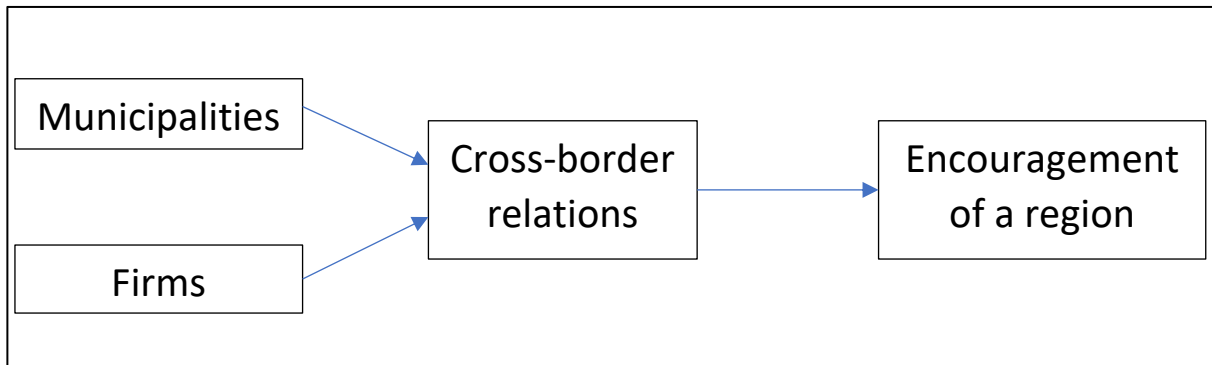


Figure 2: Conceptual model

In this conceptual model there is an indirect effect between the municipalities and the firms and the encouragement of a region (Vennix, 2019). Cross-border relations are mostly influenced and caused by the municipalities and/or the firms. The cross-border relations could eventually encourage a region. In this case the region is a shrinking region, but it could encourage any region. With this the following hypothesis of this research can be formulated: *If municipalities and firms invest in cross-border relations, it will encourage the (shrinking) region.*

3. Methodology

In this chapter the methodology of this research will be explained. At first, there will be a part about the used strategies for this research. It follows with a part about the respondents that are suitable for this research, and which are approached to participate. Finally, there will be a part about the analysis that will be done with the collected data.

3.1 Research strategy

To be able to answer the research questions of this research there are different ways of collecting data needed. At first this research will be a case study with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen as the case. With this case study it is important to perform triangulation in the process of data-collection. Triangulation will rule out every possible form of coincidence (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2015). In that way, two forms of research will be applied: qualitative and quantitative research, respectively with interviews and a survey. The interviews and the survey are held in Dutch to make it more comfortable for the respondents to take part with the research. The results are translated into English and used in the research.

At first, to get an insight in the possibilities of cross-border relations it is useful to get in contact with representatives of municipalities within Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. By interviewing the municipalities, the research can get the perspective of how these municipalities see the possibilities of cross-border relations. On top of that, these municipalities could indicate what they are already applying in their policy approach against further shrinkage of the region. This is the qualitative research method of the thesis. The questions of the interview guide are based on the concepts in literature and the theoretical frame. Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic the interviews are held with an online platform. The interview guide can be found in the attachments (Attachment 1: Interview Guide).

The quantitative approach of the research will take in account the firms in the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. To get an insight in the cross-border relations of firms, a survey is conducted. With a survey there will be a broad insight in the cross-border relations of firms (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2015). By conducting a survey there will be a good amount of data to be analysed (Korzilius, 2008). In the survey there will be questions focused on the cross-border relations that firms in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen have. These questions will be, just like the interview guide, based on literature and the theoretical frame. Furthermore, the survey is formed with on the basis on the criteria that Korzilius (2008) have set up. The survey is done with an online platform, which is very useful, because all the data will automatically be transferred into a clear table for the analysis. The answer options are formed with the Likert-scale, this has five options: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree (Vennix, 2019). With this scale the answers from the respondents have a same value, which makes the analysis easier. The questions of the survey can be found in the attachments (Attachment 2: Survey).

The third step of the triangulation can be seen as a desk research. With a desk research already existing literature will be used in combination with a reflection (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2015). This has already been done in the theoretical frame of this thesis. This available data can be applied on the cases of this research to get an insight on the possible effects of different ways of cross-border relations. This existing data can also be used in the interviews with the municipalities to see if they are familiar with these concepts. For example, Henk van Houtum (1998) has done a survey with firms in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. The questions and the from that research can also be used in the qualitative and quantitative methods of the research with formulating the questions.

3.2 Respondents

To make it more attractive for respondents to take part in the research it is important to let the respondents know the importance of the research. The approached respondents need to have interests in the subject to make the response higher (Korzilius, 2008). In this research the municipalities and firms are located in the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, so they are closely related to the subject of the interview.

At first, for the interviews the municipalities are approached. Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is divided into three municipalities: Sluis, Terneuzen and Hulst. On the websites from these municipalities there is an overview of committees within the town council. Every municipality has a commission that focus on cross-border partnerships/relations and cross-border development. When approaching the respondents, it is important to try to directly mail the representative of the commission to have a higher chance for a response. For the municipality Sluis, Robert Evers is interviewed, he is councillor and committee chairman of space and general management. Jos van Ginneken is interviewed for the municipality Terneuzen, he is a councillor at the municipality. And finally, for the municipality Hulst Fons Dobbelaer is interviewed, he is councillor and committee chairman of space.

The firms can be contacted with a list of firms in the municipalities Sluis, Terneuzen and Hulst. With a random selection of these firms there are enough respondents possible. Just like with the interviews, it is important to approach a representative with a general image of the firm. In that way, all the questions are answered more accurate. In table 1 the number of firms in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen are presented in comparison with the Netherlands (CBS, 2021b).

Sectors	Number per region		
	The Netherlands	Zeeuws-Vlaanderen	Share
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	78040	1195	1.53%
Mineral extraction	565	0	0%
Industry	75375	500	0.66%
Energy supply	1995	15	0.75%
Water companies and waste management	2675	15	0.56%
Construction	209015	785	0.38%
Trade	291805	1715	0.59%
Transport and storage	54605	440	0.81%
Hospitality	72135	670	0.93%
Information and communication	102235	235	0.23%
Financial services	137190	640	0.47%
Rental and trade of real estate	31630	220	0.70%
Specialist business services	387390	1240	0.32%
Rental and other business services	91525	400	0.44%
Culture, sports, and recreation	119645	365	0.31%
Other services	115875	755	0.65%
Extraterritorial organizations	125	0	0%
Total	1771825	9190	0.52%

Table 1: Firms in the Netherlands and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen (CBS, 2021b)

Out of this data there are 9190 firms in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. The sample calculation of this number has the following criteria:

- Confidence level: 95%
- Margin of error: 5%
- Population proportion: 50%

With a calculator on the internet and the criteria from above the sample size should be at least 369 respondents (Calculator.net, 2021). In this research a systematic sample with an a-select begin will be taken. With the calculations from Korzilius (2008), steps from 23 are needed for a systematic sample. By throwing dice the start number is 14. In the list of firms, the selection will start from the fourteenth firm in the list. By doing the systematic a-select sample the results are generalisable for the whole population (Korzilius, 2008).

3.3 Analysis

The analysis of the interviews will be done by using the program Atlas.ti. Firstly, the respondents are asked if they give permission for a recording of the interview. In this way, the chance of losing important data will be decreased. The interviews are transcribed, and these transcripts are used in the analysis of the research. With Atlas.ti codes are being formulated. The codes that stand out the most will be the main findings of the interviews. Furthermore, the codes that are being used will mainly be based on the literature and the theoretical frame. If there are subjects that stand out a lot in the interviews, there will be codes that are based on these subjects.

The results from the surveys can almost be interpreted directly. However, correlations cannot be seen directly. For some questions SPSS is used to calculate correlation between some questions or subjects. The correlation is calculated in SPSS with the *Pearson r Correlation*. This is a number between -1 and +1, with respectively no correlation and significant correlation (Field, 2018). Questions with a strong correlation can be interesting for the conclusions and recommendations of this research. On top of that, questions with a strong correlation are being tested on the cohesion, with the *Cramér's V test* in SPSS (Field, 2018).

4. Research results interviews

In this chapter the results from the interviews will be described. The most important outcomes will be mentioned in sub-paragraphs. Summaries of the interviews can be found in the attachments (Attachment 3: Summaries Interviews). On top of that, the code book of the interviews can also be found in the attachments (Attachment 4: Code Book).

4.1 Shrinkage

4.1.1 Differences within Zeeuws-Vlaanderen

At first, the current situation of every municipality in the battle against shrinkage will shortly be described. As mentioned in the theoretical frame there are differences between the municipalities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. This is what also can be reflected out of the interviews. The municipality Sluis has experienced most of the shrinkage in the region, when focussing on the demographics of the region. The population decreases and on top of that there is greying in the municipality. This was also confirmed by Robert Evers from the municipality Sluis: *“There are still people who deny that there is shrinkage, but of course there is no denying that. Because in the end it is a matter of counting the number of people. And of course, we have seen for years that the number of inhabitants is steadily but surely decreasing in the municipality Sluis. (...) And then there is also an aging population.”*

The two other municipalities in the eastern of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen experience less shrinkage. The municipality Hulst have had to deal with shrinkage in the beginning of the century, but the number of population has slightly been increased the last the ten years. Fons Dobbelaer from the municipality Hulst the relation with Antwerp has been crucial for them: *“We have experienced the shrinkage less than, unfortunately, West-Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Because our relations with Antwerp. If you see what has been built in our municipality in the last 10 years, despite the shrinkage, I cannot remember that our population decreased.”* Although, the slight increase in population size, municipality Hulst must deal with a greying population as well.

Municipality Terneuzen has experienced the shrinkage in two ways. The smaller cores in the municipality see a decrease of population and services. Although, most of the departing people are moving to the city Terneuzen. This means that the population stays in balance within the municipality. Jos van Ginneken, from the municipality Terneuzen, indicates that the port is flattening the shrinkage in their municipality: *“And that the municipality Terneuzen has a somewhat more dual role. We have smaller cores outside the city of Terneuzen where young people leave, where there are fewer services. But at the same time, of course, we have the port area and the city of Terneuzen itself, which is still growing.”*

4.1.2 The housing market

Despite the differences on the topic of shrinkage, there are also similarities within Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Every municipality addressed the problem of a lack of housing as a cause of a shrinking population. This problem is twofold in the region. At first, the municipalities do not have the possibilities to build more houses, financially or due to laws and regulations from the Dutch Government. *“In the municipality Sluis, nothing has been built in decency for years, which also has to do with national and provincial legislation.”* (Robert Evers). Within the province of Zeeland there is a program called ‘ladderruimte’, which determines how many houses can be built in a municipality. *“And at the moment there is far too little space for that, too little ladderruimte. Ladderruimte is the space you have as a municipality to build houses.”* (Fons Dobbelaer).

The second issue in the housing market is the rise of the prices. This causes a lack of affordable houses for starters to move to the region. The prices of houses are increasing because of the participation of

Belgians, tourists, and investors at the sales. *"Here at the moment a house of €250000 is for sale, and you do not bid €300000 or more, then you can no longer participate. That is how crazy it is in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen at the moment."* (Fons Dobbelaer). For Belgians, the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is cheaper, which also causes them to buy houses. They have bigger budget than starters, which makes the number of available houses for starters lower. *"You can see, of course, that a lot of houses have been sold to Belgians in recent years. That is of course not everywhere, but certainly in the border region you see more and more Belgians who come to live in the Netherlands. (...) But that also means that house prices rise and that there are hardly any homes left for starters. And that actually encourages shrinkage."* (Robert Evers). You would say that the arrival of Belgian families will possibly have positive effects for Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, in paragraph 4.2.5 the effects will be addressed.

To tackle this problem at the housing market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen the municipality Terneuzen has developed a housing policy where they move elderly people to new buildings, whereby their old houses become available for starters. *"We are currently working on a new housing policy, in which the idea is roughly based on new construction of high-quality homes for the elderly, (...) which will give you movement in the housing market again. The elderly then go to elderly apartments. People who want to live a little bigger move to those apartments, they were then in a smaller house or in a rented house, and young people and starters can move in there again."* (Jos van Ginneken).

In the municipality Sluis there has always been a regulation that should limit second homes. This regulation, however, has been abolished around eight years ago. This has caused an increase of second homes in the region. *"There used to be a second home ordinance. Then you were not allowed to just sell a house as a second home. Then you were only allowed to sell it as a second home if a year later you still have not sold it."* (Robert Evers). If it is up to Robert Evers, the second home ordinance should be reintroduced as soon as possible, to make more houses available in the region.

4.1.3 The labour market

Another cause for a shrinking population is the labour market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Especially in the municipality Sluis this is a big problem. There is a lack of diversification in the labour market. The biggest sector is recreation and tourism, but this sector is not attractive for higher educated people. *"There is of course a fairly one-sided labour market. In the municipality Sluis there is recreation and tourism, but not everyone wants to work in that sector. But if you want to, for example to work in the hospitality industry, then there is work. But not everyone wants to work there."* (Robert Evers).

The job opportunities for higher educated people are located in Terneuzen. Although, these jobs are mostly focused on firms at the port or at the chemical industries and are not future proof. *"The only problem is that in the long run there will simply be quite a lot of old industry in our port area and that is simply not the employment of the future. We now have to do something there and that is more than just educate employees, who have always worked in sulphur processing, how to assemble the solar panels."* (Jos van Ginneken).

All three municipalities are focusing on attracting firms with job opportunities for higher educated people to the region. According to the representatives this can be a crucial change in making the region more attractive for the youth or the departed students. With the arrival of firms and job opportunities, people will follow. But there should be enough houses, to make it possible. *"When it comes to a strategy to bring young people back, that (attracting high-quality companies) is indeed the focus in the municipality of Terneuzen, but also aimed at young starters and families from Belgium."* (Jos van Ginneken). As Jos van Ginneken in the citate indicates, the attraction of families can also stimulate the region. Another way of creating more job opportunities is making ground available for firms from Belgium. *"There are many hectares of land available that would normally have gone to a transshipment*

company from Belgium, without the current Covid-19 crisis. Then of course you will also get more jobs. And that also attracts young people, certainly in such an industry.” (Fons Dobbelaer).

4.1.4 Public transport

At last, an important issue in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is public transport. The connection with Belgium by public transport is there, but it is not good enough. While a public transport connection with Belgium can make working or studying across the border easier. *“We still do not really have a decent public transport connection with Ghent, train or bus. And I think that these are things that are indispensable, in addition to industrial investments, to keep the area liveable.” (Jos van Ginneken).*

In the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen there is no university present, which leads to a departure of youth. According to Jos van Ginneken a good public transport connection with Ghent can decrease the departure: *“As said, look, the fact that you have to go somewhere else to follow a university education can already be partly overcome if there were a decent public transport connection from Terneuzen to the university of Ghent. You will help some of the young people with that.”*

The municipality of Hulst would also like to see the development of a train connection with Belgium or Ghent. However, the financial support of the Dutch Government will be needed to realise it. *“In the meantime, the Dutch Government has said that more can be built in several regions. We also see stories like this in East Groningen, who also want to build more homes, but that the Dutch Government must ensure a better train connection. And we would like something like that in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen as well.” (Fons Dobbelaer).*

Meanwhile, the municipality Terneuzen is in advanced stages of developing Rail-Ghent-Terneuzen with the Belgian government and firms. In first instance it is meant for freight transport, but eventually Jos van Ginneken hopes that there also will be a public transport on the railway: *“The most important development is that of Rail-Ghent-Terneuzen. That is actually the most important project that is currently underway. But those rails are really only developed because there are firms and the fact that a passenger train can drive there one day is a nice bonus. It is in that order.”* This development of the railway will improve the cross-border relations.

4.2 Cross-border relations

4.2.1 The border as a barrier

When making cross-border relations the municipalities do not see the physical border as a barrier. The barrier is more mentally when meeting with Belgium. The problem is the different layers of government in the border region with Belgium. *“The Belgian state economy is very interesting, but there is no rope to tie. So, you really have no idea who to negotiate with. Sometimes with Brussels, sometimes you talk to the Flemish government or the Flemish community or the municipalities. It's a big mess.” (Jos van Ginneken).*

Especially the responsibilities and powers of governmental layers between the Netherlands and Belgium are an issue, according to Robert Evers: *“In Belgium you also have municipalities, but the responsibilities and powers of municipalities in the Netherlands are far from the same as in Belgium. Belgium is of course the textbook example of where they have many governmental layers. (...) Then you see that does not work very well either. I mean, they are not on the same level.”*

All in all, the different layers of government make the cross-border relations for the municipalities more difficult to succeed. *“And that is sometimes the difficulty, that is typically Belgian, that you have to deal with different authorities. And one does not know about the other. So, the collaboration doesn't work optimally.” (Fons Dobbelaer).* The border can in this way be seen as a barrier for the municipalities. Another way that the border is being experienced as barrier is the differences in laws

and regulations between the Netherlands and Belgium, especially for employees. This will be illustrated in the next sub-paragraph.

4.2.2 Differences in laws and regulations

Due to a lack of diversification in the labour market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen it would be an option for employees to work across the border. There are more than enough job opportunities in the Belgian border region with cities like Ghent, Bruges, and Antwerp. Robert Evers thinks this should give perspective for the youth in the region: *“And then I think, just across the border with us, of course you have an entire port area of Zeebrugge, and you have Bruges and Ghent. Loads of job opportunities. There should be much more interaction in my opinion. However, the regulations may also change from time to time.”*. These laws and regulations are a barrier, especially for employees to work in Belgium. Or for Belgians to work in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

Working across the border is still possible, but it gives employees more administrative work. The differences in wages, taxes, working conditions and employers are complex. However, this problem is known for a long time. Fons Dobbelaer experienced this in 2009 and together with all the municipalities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen they have tried to equal out these differences. It still has not reached an optimal situation. According to Robert Evers, this is not a problem where the municipalities are responsible for, he thinks that this problem should be tackled from above. *“And then I think, we have had a European Union since 1992 or so, that’s almost 30 years ago. But in practice it remains difficult.”* (Robert Evers).

The municipality Terneuzen has a fair number of big firms that have Belgian employees. On top of that, there are people from Terneuzen working at firms across the border. The municipality experienced the difficulties for these employees and came with a help centre. *“We also have an independent border information point for people, and then it is really purely about not even having extra municipal money or subsidies or schemes, but simply helping people figure out how to receive pension in two countries, or how to apply for childcare allowance.”* (Jos van Ginneken).

A change in these laws and regulations can improve the living- and business climate in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Jos van Ginneken therefore suggests that the municipalities get more room to experiment with more equal laws and regulations: *“I think the most important thing is that connections are made and remain with Belgium and that you should be able to build almost a kind of experimental space in the current laws and regulations, where you are now stuck in applying for benefits back and forth, pension accrual, tax, etc. That you kind of cancel it for Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. That would be the most radical thing that could be done.”*. As he already says, it is very radical to make this possible for Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Although, it could come to outcomes that are useful in the rest of the country or even Europe.

4.2.3 Co-operation with Belgium

Despite that the municipalities experience the border as a barrier in some issues, there are projects and developments across the border. For example, the project of Rail-Ghent-Terneuzen, where a train track is being developed for freight trains and later perhaps passenger trains. Other projects and developments per municipality will now shortly be described.

At first, the cross-border relations in the municipality Sluis. Healthcare is something where the municipality stumbles over. In some villages in the municipality there are no available general practitioners. On top of that, the hospital in the municipality is not extensive enough. Because of that, patients are forced to go to Terneuzen, while there is a brand-new hospital much closer, just across the border. *“Then someone came to the city council, the director of a hospital just across the border, who says they can also lend a helping hand. And then you see that care organizations in the Netherlands*

competes with them, instead of working together.” (Robert Evers). So, the municipality is willing to accept the help from the Belgian hospital, but due to the competing of the Dutch care organisations, this co-operation is not working optimal.

Secondly, the municipality Sluis is aware of their dependence of Belgian tourists in the region. They certainly experienced this during the Covid-19 crisis when the borders were closed, and the flow of tourists disappeared. *“A place like Sluis, say the shopping centre in Sluis, that is of course completely dependent on Belgians. Those Belgians all come there on Sundays and that is why there are so many shops and restaurants there. We have seen this in the past year in those periods when the borders were closed due to the lock-down. Then there is nothing at all.” (Robert Evers).* The municipality has always tried to make the region more attractive for Belgians to visit Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. And with success, because the last couple of years the presence of Belgian tourist in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen has increased.

A development where the whole region has experienced positive effects is North Sea Ports. With this the ports of Vlissingen and Ghent have merged a couple of years ago. It created job opportunities in the region and the co-operation of this project goes very well. *“The most concrete collaboration we have with the Belgian municipalities is North Sea Ports. (...) We all benefit from things that are good for the port in general, so that co-operation works well indeed.” (Jos van Ginneken).* In a project like North Sea Ports there is no competition between the municipalities and/or firms on both side of the border because it is for both sides of the border profitable. A cross-border relation like this could be very lucrative for a region like Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, economically and demographically.

For the municipality Terneuzen there are co-operations in Belgium on small scale and larger scale. An example for co-operation with Belgian municipalities on smaller scale is care and welfare. However, there are differences in responsibilities on both sides of the border, because of all the governmental layers in Belgium, as mentioned in sub-paragraph 4.2.1. The municipality of Terneuzen has more things to take care of than the Belgian municipalities. *“We also have co-operation on a much smaller scale at the care and welfare level, for example, and there you see that Belgian municipalities have very few tasks for care and welfare. And in the Netherlands a lot of tasks and there is a very large, skewed growth.” (Jos van Ginneken).* These differences make negotiating about such subjects more difficult.

Furthermore, in municipality Terneuzen the firm Dow has a lot of employees from Belgium. And likewise, the firm ArcelorMittal in Ghent has a lot of employees from Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. These two firms have given the cross-border relations in the region a boost. *“Companies that are established in the port area of Ghent also benefit our residents. You can drive there, you can just go to work and a lot of people from Terneuzen also work at ArcelorMittal, just across the border for example. And Belgians at Dow, everyone benefits from developments that happen there, so there is less competition.” (Jos van Ginneken).*

The co-operation between the municipality Hulst and Belgium has multiple aspects. An example for this is the fire service. *“We have four municipalities here that work very closely together. Three Belgian municipalities and the municipality Hulst. Those lines are very short if needed. An example of this is a collaboration with the fire service. If there is fire across the border, we'll go for it and vice versa.” (Fons Dobbelaer).* This collaboration between the municipalities gives them the feeling that they belong together, and the border disappears. So, the interaction with Belgium is good, but according to Fons Dobbelaer it could improve even more.

In the region of Antwerp there are firms that want to expand, but there is not enough ground available there. As a solution, the municipality Hulst has made land available to buy. However, the municipality did not have the funds for these projects. So, there is contact with a Dutch construction company that has accepted the offer. *“They contacted a number of large transport and transshipment companies in*

Belgium. So those contacts are there, but the first has yet to come. But it will come, I am convinced of that.” (Fons Dobbelaer). Due to the Covid-19 crisis the project is currently delayed.

Finally, a crucial development with Belgium in the municipality Hulst is the move of a Belgian firm in a vacant building. A big Dutch firm that was located in the municipality Hulst went bankrupt, with a lot of job losses as effect. Thanks to the move-in of the Belgian firm, the unemployed people could almost immediately get a new job. *“That went bankrupt. And that was taken over by a Belgian company, which ensured that people came to work here. And they have taken over part of that company, they have now bought the other part, for storage and distribution. And that will free up even more jobs. So that collaboration is going well, I am confident about that. I would like to have a few more.” (Fons Dobbelaer).* All in all, in the municipality there are a decent number of cross-border relations, but it can always be more in the future.

4.2.4 Euregion Scheldemond

There is one cross-border relation between Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and Belgium that stands out the most and which is very expensive. This is the construction of the new sea lock in the Canal Gent-Terneuzen. *“The sea lock from Ghent to Terneuzen is the most important part of this, the European Union also contributes to it.” (Jos van Ginneken).* To realise the financing of this project the European Union is needed. Most of the financing is done by the national governments from the Netherlands and Belgium. The remaining gap is being subsidized by the European Union. The municipalities are responsible for the land and the communication on location, most of this is being compensated by European Union. However, the municipalities have to pre-finance first and that could be an issue. *“The problem is, I have to tell you that. They do finance, but we have to pre-finance. (...) As a regional government, we first have to get that money from somewhere, from a bank or something similar. We then have to pay that first, but with the knowledge that you will get that money back. But you have to make sure you have that money first, and that is also a problem.” (Fons Dobbelaer).*

4.2.5 Belgian people living in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen

In sub-paragraph 4.1.2 it was mentioned that there is an increasing number of Belgian families living in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. This has as effect that the decrease population size is flattening, but for the region itself the positive effects stay away. *“Unfortunately, only the effect that was hoped for stays away, they do come to live here, but they still go to Belgium to play football and maybe also go to school there. That is not quite the intention. Because then they pay municipal tax, but no further contributions to social life in such a village are made.” (Jos van Ginneken).* The municipality Terneuzen tries to turn this around with a program that is focused on integrating these Belgian families. However, the municipality leaves the responsibility at the society. *“This is called borderless Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, and it is indeed aimed at enthusing and also helping to integrate where necessary. If you have a job, you generally integrate quite quickly of course, and it is left to the communities in those villages and cores to involve those people again.” (Jos van Ginneken).*

The municipality Sluis also experience this problem, however according to Robert Evers the municipality should take the responsibility of integrating these families. *“The municipality could also invest or stimulate a little more in that, you see a lot of Belgians who come to live in the Netherlands, but they do nothing else there. In order to really benefit from these Belgian residents as a municipality, we should encourage them more to do their daily activities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.” (Robert Evers).* In this aspect there is still a lot to profit for Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. If the Belgians would do their daily activities in the region, it can have a lot of positive effects. Although, they are currently not yet present.

4.3 Role of the government

The three municipalities sometimes experience that the Dutch Government does not have a complete image of the region. And with that do not have an idea what is needed for the region to grow and/or develop. Because of that the municipalities would like to have a more decentralised policy, especially at the cross-border relations in Belgium. *“If the central government were to interfere with this, things would certainly go wrong. Just leave that at the local level, of course the contacts between the two Prime Ministers must continue to exist. But I assume those contacts are good. But that is of course on a completely different level than we do local politics here.” (Fons Dobbelaer).* Although, a complete decentralised policy is not ideal. The Dutch Government is still needed as overarching government according to Robert Evers: *“So in that respect decentralisation is perhaps a good thing, but on the other hand I also understand that there is something overarching somewhere, which ensures that municipalities and regions do not compete with each other in every area. Because that is of course no use.”.*

While a more decentralised policy for the municipalities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen sounds very interesting, the Dutch Government will always be needed or involved in the development of programs. *“The thing remains, of course, that we do not have the financial means to build such a sea lock, to run such a bus line. That ultimately also the national government or even the provincial government is necessary and that is what I just explained, those interests and especially those views wherever they are directed, do not always go in the same direction.” (Jos van Ginneken).* With that, the problem of different interests and views on the region stays. This delays the development of projects in the region.

So, eventually for the municipalities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen the Dutch Government is with their financial support crucial. The region is in most problems united, for example the toll at the Westerscheldetunnel. However, there are also problems where not every municipality is involved. *“There are a number of things in which municipalities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen are united and have the same problem and demand the same solution. But not every municipality experiences the same problems. (...) So the diversity within a small area can be very large and I think you should also keep that in mind when we go to The Hague and say give us this, because then our problems will be solved. This does not have to apply to all three municipalities.” (Jos van Ginneken).* All in all, it is important to keep the differences within Zeeuws-Vlaanderen in mind, when asking for help at the Dutch Government.

If it is up to Robert Evers, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen should be less dependable from the Dutch Government. There are enough opportunities within the region itself and across the border. Zeeuws-Vlaanderen should step away from the Calimero-thought: *“I also do not want to have that Calimero-thinking too much, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen has been bothered by that for years, also within Zeeland. We are always a bit 'I am small, and you are big', but I think we can sometimes rely on our own strength.” (Robert Evers).*

5. Research results survey

This chapter will describe the results of the survey. At first, the validity and reliability of the survey is tested with SPSS. After that paragraph, the results will be described, and the present correlations will be shown.

5.1 Validity and reliability

5.1.1 Non-response

As noted before, the calculated sample size for this research is 369 respondents. All these respondents are contacted by e-mail. From these 369 respondents, 54 have completed the survey. This is 14.6% of the respondents. It means that this research has a non-response of 85.4% which is quite high. Due to this high non-response, there can arise bias conclusions. The results from the survey are being described in this research, but it is less reliable to answer the sub question.

The cause of this high non-response could be two ways, but this will never be confirmed. At first, it is possible that mailing to the general e-mail address of the firm might have caused that my e-mail has end up in the spam-box, at customer service or underneath more important e-mails. Secondly, during the current Covid-19 pandemic might be very busy with other cases that matter more in their interest. In order to gain more response, there has been sent a second e-mail a week after the first e-mail. This led to a slight increase of the response.

5.1.2 Representativeness respondents

From the collected data by the survey, it is important that it is representative for the whole population. That is why it is interesting to compare the actual number of firms per municipality with the number of firms per municipality from the survey. In the municipalities Sluis, Terneuzen and Hulst there are 9190 firms (see table 2).

	Municipality			
	Sluis	Terneuzen	Hulst	Total
Number of firms	2796	4118	2276	9190
Percentage	30.4%	44.8%	24.8%	100%

Table 2: Firms per municipality (CBS, 2021c)

If this is compared with the responses from the survey (see table 3), the percentage from the municipality Terneuzen is quite accurate. However, the percentages from Sluis and Hulst are less representative for the whole population. With this fact, the results from questions in this survey will not be compared between the municipalities, because it is not representative enough. Although, the data will be used for the entire region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. This makes it more representative, and it fits within the frames of this research.

		Municipality			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sluis	23	42,6	43,4	43,4
	Terneuzen	22	40,7	41,5	84,9
	Hulst	8	14,8	15,1	100,0
	Total	53	98,1	100,0	
Missing	System	1	1,9		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 3: SPSS-output Frequency municipalities

5.1.3 Reliability of the survey

To test the reliability of the survey the Cronbach's Alpha has been calculated with SPSS. With this value it is calculated if the survey consistently reflects the construct that it measures (Field, 2018). The Cronbach's Alpha of the complete survey is .543 (see table 4). According to Field (2018) there is not one value which is acceptable. It mostly differs between 0.5 and 0.8 to be acceptable (Field, 2018). This makes this survey with a value of .543 reliable enough. The reliability of the survey could have been higher if there would have been more reverse phrasing with the questions, this causes the respondent to be more alert during the survey (Field, 2018).

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.543	24

Table 4: SPSS-output Cronbach's Alpha survey

5.2 Descriptive statistics

In this paragraph the most important questions of the survey will be described. All descriptive statistics and frequencies from the responses can be found in the attachments (Attachment 5: SPSS-output). With the interpretation of the SPSS-output 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' are seen as one and this is the same with 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. This makes the responses per question clearer.

5.2.1 Shrinkage

At first, in this sub-paragraph the questions that are related to the shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen are described.

The first two questions in the survey were about the effects of shrinkage on the respondent's firm. From the respondents 7.9% experiences positive effects of shrinkage in the region. If this is compared with the negative effects of the shrinkage, it is seen that 31.5% of the respondents experience negative effects. These negative effects can be seen as the departure of young employees, a greying population, a loss of profit and a decrease in services (van Dam et al., 2006). What is remarkable with the responses at these questions is the large groups at the answer neutral. This means that around 45% of the firms do not experience any effects of the shrinkage in the region.

My firm experiences negative effects of a shrinking population in the region.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	3	5,6	6,0	6,0
	disagree	6	11,1	12,0	18,0
	neutral	24	44,4	48,0	66,0
	agree	14	25,9	28,0	94,0
	strongly agree	3	5,6	6,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 5: SPSS-output negative effects shrinkage

My firm experiences positive effects of a shrinking population in the region.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	7	13,0	14,0	14,0
	disagree	13	24,1	26,0	40,0
	neutral	26	48,1	52,0	92,0
	agree	4	7,4	8,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 6: SPSS-output positive effects of shrinkage

This large group of respondents that do not experience any effects can be supported with the answer on question 2.6 of the survey (see table 7). For firms, the most important thing is making a profit. 70.4% of the respondents in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen have not loss profit, that is why a large group have not experienced neither negative nor positive effects of the shrinkage in the region. In the theoretical frame the work of Hospers (2019) was noted about the cause of a demographic shrinkage in a region. Most shrinking regions are peripheral located, especially Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Students and young people depart from the region in search of education. This would mean that firms would experience difficulties with finding youngly educated people in the region. This is confirmed by 26% of the respondents of the survey (see table 8). However, a big group of the respondents have answered neutral on the question. This can be caused by the fact the firm have not searched for employees the last couple of years. Another 24.1% of the respondents do not experience difficulties with finding youngly educated employees. There are still schools with vocational education in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and surroundings, which leads to a supply of employees suited for several professions.

Due to the shrinkage I have made less profit the last couple of years.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	13	24,1	26,0	26,0
	disagree	25	46,3	50,0	76,0
	neutral	10	18,5	20,0	96,0
	agree	2	3,7	4,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 7: SPSS-output loss of profit

I experience difficulties with finding youngly educated employees in the region					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	3	5,6	6,0	6,0
	disagree	10	18,5	20,0	26,0
	neutral	23	42,6	46,0	72,0
	agree	9	16,7	18,0	90,0
	strongly agree	5	9,3	10,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 8: SPSS-output difficulties finding employees

A follow-up question about the search of youngly educated employees, was about the departure of the firm out of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen (see table 9). The answers from the respondents are single-minded. None of the firms have considered a departure out of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen due to a lack of youngly educated employees. The fact that the entrepreneurs have not considered to leave the region could also have something to do with the attachment to the place, as Edward Relph (1976) wrote. People are in some way connected to a place they live, which makes a decision to leave more difficult (Relph, 1976). In addition, there was asked if the respondents have placed vacancies across the border, due to a lack of employees in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen (see table 10). More than 50% of the respondents indicated they have not placed vacancies across the border. A cause for not placing vacancies across has to do with the fact of all the differences laws and regulations, which the representatives of the municipalities also mentioned in the interviews. On top of that, only 14.8% of the firms have Belgian employees, which is also deductible from the differences in laws and regulations.

Due to a lack of youngly educated employees in the region, I have considered a departure with my firm out of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	30	55,6	60,0	60,0
	disagree	14	25,9	28,0	88,0
	neutral	6	11,1	12,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 9: SPSS-output departure out of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen

Due to a lack of youngly educated employees in the region, I have placed vacancies across the border (in Belgium).					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	14	25,9	28,0	28,0
	disagree	14	25,9	28,0	56,0
	neutral	14	25,9	28,0	84,0
	agree	8	14,8	16,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 10: SPSS-output vacancies across the border

Another relevant question is question 2.7 about the location of the firm in a demographic healthy region. This can be seen as a region with enough young people for work and a growth in population. Around 50% of the entrepreneurs find it important to be located in such a region (see table 11). To be located in a demographic healthy region is favorable for firms to be more lucrative.

I think it is important that my firm is located in a demographic healthy region.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	6	11,1	12,0	12,0
	neutral	17	31,5	34,0	46,0
	agree	25	46,3	50,0	96,0
	strongly agree	2	3,7	4,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 11: SPSS-output located in demographic healthy region

The responses on the question if the entrepreneurs find themselves responsible to make the region attractive can confirm the last question (see table 12). From the respondents 43% feel responsible of making the region attractive for departed students and youngly educated employees. With attracting them there will be more employable people, but also more customers that make a larger sales market.

I feel responsible as entrepreneur to make the region more attractive for departed students / youngly educated employees.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	2	3,7	4,2	4,2
	disagree	7	13,0	14,6	18,8
	neutral	16	29,6	33,3	52,1
	agree	20	37,0	41,7	93,8
	strongly agree	3	5,6	6,3	100,0
	Total	48	88,9	100,0	
Missing	System	6	11,1		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 12: SPSS-output responsibility entrepreneurs

5.2.2 Cross-border relations

This sub-paragraph will describe the results from the questions that are related to the border and cross-border relations with Belgium.

At first, in this section of the survey there was asked if the respondents experience the border as a barrier to make cross-border relations (see table 13). Around 70% of the respondents have indicated that the border is not a barrier to get in contact with customers or trade partners. This outcome is in contrast with the theory about borders as barriers for interaction from van Houtum (1998). It can be explained with the departure of customs at the border in the 90s. This was intended by the European Union to have more cross-border interaction. The opening of the borders has made it easier for cross-border relations, in fact the border has kind of disappeared with all the interaction nowadays (Virtanen, 2004). That there are cross-border relations from firms can also be confirmed with questions 1.8 and 1.9 in the survey. More than 80% of the firms have customers from Belgium and around 50% of the firms corporates with trade partners from Belgium.

I experience the border as a barrier for my firm a to get in contact with Belgian customers or trade partners.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	13	24,1	27,7	27,7
	disagree	24	44,4	51,1	78,7
	neutral	5	9,3	10,6	89,4
	agree	3	5,6	6,4	95,7
	strongly agree	2	3,7	4,3	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 13: SPSS-output border as barrier

Without the customer contacts and/or trade partners from Belgium my firm could not exist.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	16	29,6	34,0	34,0
	disagree	19	35,2	40,4	74,5
	neutral	3	5,6	6,4	80,9
	agree	7	13,0	14,9	95,7
	strongly agree	2	3,7	4,3	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 14: SPSS-output existence without contacts from

In table 14 the response on question 3.6 of the survey is displayed. About 65% of the firms could still exist if they do not have Belgium customers or trade partners. Still, there is a about 20% of the firms that needs the contacts with Belgian side of the border. This need will differ per sector the firm is specialised in. For example, a firm in hospitality will depend more on Belgian customers, than a construction firm.

The reliance of Belgian customers for income of the firms is equally divided (see table 15). There are firms where the Belgian customers are a big source income, but there also firms in which this is not the case. This is of course also different per sector the firm is specialised, just as the existence of a firm with or without Belgian customers. In fact, there is a strong correlation between these questions which will be shown in the next paragraph.

For my firm Belgian customers are a big source of income.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	4	7,4	8,5	8,5
	disagree	10	18,5	21,3	29,8
	neutral	18	33,3	38,3	68,1
	agree	10	18,5	21,3	89,4
	strongly agree	5	9,3	10,6	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 15: SPSS-output income from Belgian customers

At last, the entrepreneurs were asked if they think cross-border relations can help to prevent more shrinkage in the region (see table 16) and if they as entrepreneur were willing to invest in the region to encourage such cross-border relations (see table 17). 40% of the respondents see cross-border relations like Belgian customers, trade partners and employees as a solution to let the population grow. In particular employees from Belgium that are going to work and live in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen can be a big influence on the growth in the region. However, a smaller group of the respondents is willing to invest in the region to stimulate cross-border relations. For example, better public transport for employees from Belgium. The entrepreneurs think this part of stimulating cross-border relations lies at the municipalities and/or the Dutch Government. This will be further confirmed and described in the following sub-paragraph.

I see cross-border relations with Belgium as a solution for shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	4	7,4	8,5	8,5
	disagree	7	13,0	14,9	23,4
	neutral	13	24,1	27,7	51,1
	agree	17	31,5	36,2	87,2
	strongly agree	6	11,1	12,8	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 16: SPSS-output cross-border relations as solution

I am, as entrepreneur, willing to invest in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, if this stimulates cross-border relations and with that let the region grow.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	4	7,4	8,5	8,5
	disagree	7	13,0	14,9	23,4
	neutral	24	44,4	51,1	74,5
	agree	12	22,2	25,5	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 17: SPSS-output willingness entrepreneurs to invest in region and cross-border relations

5.2.3 Role of the government

The last section of the survey was about the role of the government in stimulating firms to make cross-border relations. It also treated other questions with a focus on solutions for shrinkage and how firms and the governmental layers should work together.

From the responses it turns out that around 75% of the firms think that the municipality and firms should work together to make the region more attractive for employees (see table 18). The employees where this question is aiming on are the ones coming from Belgium, but also departed students. There can be several ways to make the region more attractive for employees. At first, the connection between Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, Belgium and the Netherlands could be improved. Secondly, a change in the laws and regulations will make working abroad more approachable for both Belgian and Dutch employees.

I think that the municipality and firms should work together to make the region attractive for employees.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	1,9	2,2	2,2
	disagree	1	1,9	2,2	4,3
	neutral	10	18,5	21,7	26,1
	agree	21	38,9	45,7	71,7
	strongly agree	13	24,1	28,3	100,0
	Total	46	85,2	100,0	
Missing	System	8	14,8		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 18: SPSS-output collaboration municipality and firms

In order to encourage the region, it could be crucial that municipalities stimulate the firms in making cross-border relations and/or attracting departed students. Currently, this is not happening. More than 80% of the respondents give a clear answer that the municipalities are not stimulating with subsidies. This can be seen in the SPSS-output from tables 19 and 20. The subsidies can give a boost to firms to try and find more employees from Belgium or the rest of the country, but for example to also advertise their firm across the border.

The municipality stimulates my firm with subsidies to attract departed students / youngly educated employees back to the region.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	18	33,3	38,3	38,3
	disagree	20	37,0	42,6	80,9
	neutral	8	14,8	17,0	97,9
	agree	1	1,9	2,1	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 19: SPSS-output municipality stimulates the attraction of (departed) young employees

The municipality stimulate my firm with subsidies to make cross-border relations with Belgium.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	19	35,2	40,4	40,4
	disagree	21	38,9	44,7	85,1
	neutral	7	13,0	14,9	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 20: SPSS-output municipality stimulates cross-border relations

Furthermore, the respondents were asked if they indeed would like to see an investment in their firm by the municipality or the Dutch Government (see table 21 and 22). A majority, 70%, of the firms would like to see investments in the regional firms. In this way, the firms could develop further and might employ more people. An effect of this would be that the region will be more attractive for young and educated employees. With that the population will grow and the dejuvenation will decrease (van Dam et al., 2006).

I think that the municipality should invest more money in regional firms, so that they can continue to develop and give a boost to the region.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	1,9	2,2	2,2
	disagree	3	5,6	6,5	8,7
	neutral	12	22,2	26,1	34,8
	agree	22	40,7	47,8	82,6
	strongly agree	8	14,8	17,4	100,0
	Total	46	85,2	100,0	
Missing	System	8	14,8		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 21: SPSS-output investments municipality in firms

I think that the Dutch Government should invest more in regional firms, so that they are more attractive for youngly educated employees.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	1,9	2,2	2,2
	disagree	2	3,7	4,3	6,5
	neutral	10	18,5	21,7	28,3
	agree	23	42,6	50,0	78,3
	strongly agree	10	18,5	21,7	100,0
	Total	46	85,2	100,0	
Missing	System	8	14,8		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 22: SPSS-output investments Dutch Government in firms

In table 12 of sub-paragraph 5.2.1 could be seen that 43% of the entrepreneurs feel responsible in making the region attractive for (youngly) educated employees. Although, more than 50% of the respondents lay the responsibility by the municipality, which can be seen in table 23 and 24. The firms are quite single minded and want the municipality to invest more in the region (and firms). The entrepreneurs are willing to help the region grow, but they need the help from the municipality.

The municipality should invest more in the region to make it more attractive for departed students / youngly educated employees.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	1,9	2,1	2,1
	disagree	2	3,7	4,2	6,3
	neutral	4	7,4	8,3	14,6
	agree	25	46,3	52,1	66,7
	strongly agree	16	29,6	33,3	100,0
	Total	48	88,9	100,0	
Missing	System	6	11,1		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 23: SPSS-output municipality should invest more

I think that the municipality has as job to keep youngly educated employees in the region and with that helps the firms.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	1,9	2,2	2,2
	disagree	3	5,6	6,5	8,7
	neutral	11	20,4	23,9	32,6
	agree	23	42,6	50,0	82,6
	strongly agree	8	14,8	17,4	100,0
	Total	46	85,2	100,0	
Missing	System	8	14,8		
Total		54	100,0		

Table 24: SPSS-output municipality are responsible

5.3 Correlation and cohesion

After describing the frequency results from the questions of the survey, it is also interesting to see which questions have a correlation with each other. For this with SPSS is the Pearson r Correlation test performed. The questions with a Pearson $r < -.500$ or $> .500$ are used in this research. Within this value range the correlation is the strongest (Field, 2018). On top of the correlation, the cohesion of these questions is also measured with the Cramér's V . The interpretation of these values is displayed in table 25. The questions with a strong correlation and their V -value are presented in table 26.

Cramér's V	Interpretation
$V = 0$	No cohesion
$V \approx .10$	Weak cohesions
$V \approx .25$	Fairly strong cohesion
$V \approx .50$	Strong cohesion
$V \approx .75$	Very strong cohesion
$V = 1$	Complete cohesion

Table 25: Interpretation Cramér's V (Smits & Edens, 2011)

Questions		Pearson r	Cramér's V
Positive effects shrinkage	Negative effects shrinkage	-.530	.617
Responsibility as entrepreneur	Belgian customers big source of income	-.529	.488
Municipality should invest more to make region attractive	Cross-border relations as solution	.546	.471
Belgian customers big source of income	Advertise on Belgian side of border	.610	.506
Belgian customers big source of income	Without Belgian contacts could not exist	.614	.456
Advertise on Belgian side of border	Without Belgian contacts could not exist	.590	.587
Cross-border relations as solution	Dutch Government should invest in regional firms	.519	.419
Municipality stimulation to attract departed students	Municipality stimulation cross-border relations	.896	.932
Municipality should invest in regional firms	Dutch Government should invest in regional firms	.711	.787

Table 26: Questions with Pearson r correlation and their Cramér's V

The V -values of the question are all referring to at least a strong cohesion. The cohesion at every question is (very) strong, but what does this means for the tested questions/ correlations? The most notable correlations and cohesions will be described.

- **'Positive effects of shrinkage' and 'Negative effects of shrinkage'**

The correlation of these variables is negative, which means that if a respondents experienced positive effects, it would not have experienced negative effects, and other way around. The variables are opposing with their outcomes. Afterwards, this a logic outcome for these two variables.

- **'Municipality should invest more to make region attractive' and 'Cross-border relations as solution'**

The respondents that think that the municipality should invest more in the region to make it attractive, for departed students and/or employees from Belgium, also think that cross-border relations are a solution for the region against shrinkage. The investments from municipality could also lead to the attraction of big firms from Belgium with more job opportunities.

- **'Belgian customers big source of income' and 'Without Belgian contacts could not exist'**
For firms that have Belgian customers as a big source income, could not exist if these customers would disappear. With the possible disappearance of such a big income source, it is logical that these firms rely a lot on Belgian customers. However, there are also firms that could exist without Belgian customers, for these firms the Belgian customers are not a big source of income.
- **'Cross-border relations as solution' and 'Dutch Government should invest in regional firms'**
There are also firms that think that cross-border relations could be a solution for Zeeuws-Vlaanderen if the Dutch Government will invest more in regional firms. With these investments regional firms can grow more and have more funds to make cross-border relations. These cross-border relations could be trade, but also foreign employees. This helps Zeeuws-Vlaanderen with growing demographically and economically.
- **'Municipality stimulation to attract departed students' and 'Municipality stimulation for cross-border relations'**
These two variables have the strongest correlation and cohesion. The respondent mostly disagreed with both questions. Out of this outcome it is very clear that the municipality currently do not stimulate firms with subsidies to attract departed students or to make cross-border relations.
- **'Municipality should invest in regional firms' and 'Dutch Government should invest in regional firms'**
The last two variables also have a strong correlation and cohesion. Respondents would like to see that municipalities and the Dutch government invest in regional firms. For the entrepreneurs it is not really important who is going to invest in their firm, as long there are investments from a governmental layer.

5.4 Written remarks from respondents

As final part of the survey, it is also interesting to look at the remarks that the respondents were able to give afterwards. With this a more detailed opinion of a few entrepreneurs can be seen. These remarks will not be representative of all respondents, but it could give another insight of the shrinkage issue.

There were two remarks of entrepreneurs where they deny that there is shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. To quote them shortly: *"Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is no longer a shrinking region in my opinion."* and *"As far as I know, East Zeeuws-Vlaanderen has been growing (slightly) in terms of population for several years now."* The respondents that gave this denial of shrinkage are from Terneuzen and Hulst, respectively. These two municipalities are, with respect to Sluis, slightly growing. Although, shrinkage is not just the decline of population size, it is also about the age and stage of life of the population. This only borders demographic shrinkage, but there is also shrinkage in job opportunities and housing (van Dam et al., 2006).

Another remark that was given a several times was about the toll at the Westerscheldetunnel. The respondents would like to see the toll disappear, in this way they feel more connected with the rest of the country. To quote one respondent: *"Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is still not seen as a fully-fledged Netherlands, think of the Westerscheldetunnel for which toll have to be paid in order to get to the Netherlands at all."* The issue of the toll at this tunnel is going on for several years now, there have been petitions to let the toll disappear before the planned date. But the Dutch Government have rejected the motion for now.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This research was focused on answering the main question: *'To what extent can cross-border relations reduce shrinkage in the Dutch region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen?'.* There has been a qualitative and quantitative research on cross-border relations from municipalities and firms.

The results from municipalities and firms showed that cross-border relations have positive effects for Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and with that can flatten the shrinkage. A big cause of the shrinkage is the lack of diversification of the labour market. At the labour market the cross-border relations are present, however these can still improve. The differences between the two countries make cross-border relations more difficult. For municipalities these are the responsibilities and powers per governmental layer. And the laws and regulations for employees makes working across the border less attractive, because of the administrative burden. When the municipalities want to expand the labour market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, the disappearance of different laws and regulations is needed. For firms there are possibilities in employing Belgian people, because only a small part of the asked firms has employees from Belgium.

Another result showed that the housing market is an issue in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. All the three municipalities indicated that there is a lack of housing. The causes are twofold. At first, there is not enough space available for housing, because of the limitations from the Dutch Government. And secondly, there are Belgians moving to Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. All this causes the house prices to increase more. When the region wants to grow and be more liveable it should be able to build more affordable houses for starters. And on top of that, the Belgian people that are living in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen should do their daily activities in the region, which is profitable for the society.

At last, from the results showed that municipalities have tried to attract big Belgian firms to the region. The arrival of these Belgian firms has increased the job opportunities in the region and with that Belgians and young urban professionals moving to Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Furthermore, results showed that entrepreneurs would like to see investments by the municipality or the Dutch Government in their firm to expand and be able to make more cross-border relations. When municipalities will attract more Belgian firms and invest in regional firms, the job opportunities will increase and with that a flow a people will come to Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

Out of this research can be concluded that cross-border relations based on attracting Belgian people or departed young urban professionals can reduce shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. This can best be deployed on attracting big Belgian firms to region and with that improve the job opportunities. Although, it is important to improve the housing market to make housing possible for these Belgians migrants and young urban professionals.

6.2 Recommendations

The results from this research showed that the attraction of big Belgian firms to increase job opportunities and improving the housing market can reduce the shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. That is why it is recommended to the municipalities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen to attract big Belgian firms to the region, with if needed help from the Province or Dutch Government. On top of that, the municipalities should get more permission to build houses on vacant pieces ground. In the meantime, the municipalities and regional firms should work together on attracting Belgian employees to region by offering a job at already existing regional firms and help the employees that work across the border with the administrative burden.

7. Reflection

The first part of the research was collecting literature focused on the subject. I wanted to make my literature study and theoretical frame as complete as possible, which led to a lot of used literature as a result. Looking back, I am satisfied with the found concepts and theories to start my research. However, what can be remarked is that I tried to collect too many theories about shrinkage and the effects on a region, especially literature focused on Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. This was scarcely available, but I kept trying to collect more sources. Meanwhile the real focus of my research was on cross-border relations and the effects of them on a region.

The choice of performing a qualitative and quantitative research turned out well, because of the low response on the survey. Thanks to the interviews I was still able to formulate an answer on my research question. In the beginning I thought that performing both methods would be too much work to combine, but all in all it was good to combine. This was caused by sending out my invitation for interviews and the surveys early in the research process. This gave me more time to process the collected data.

While conducting the interviews it was hard to keep neutral point of view on the subject. This is because I have spent my youth in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, and I am really connected to the region. That was why it was difficult for me to not share my opinions during the interview, especially when the respondents were asking questions about it.

All in all, the collected data was enough to make complete and representative conclusions and recommendations on the subject. Some of the results were expected to come out, but there were also a fair number of results where I learned from about the region and the subject cross-border relations.

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Attachments

Attachment 1: Interview Guide

Introduction

First of all, thank you very much for allowing me to interview you on this topic. I will first briefly explain the research. For my bachelor thesis, for my study Geography, Planning and Environment at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, I am researching the shrinking region of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. My focus is mainly on the opportunities that exist in the development of cross-border relations to reduce the shrinkage in the region. I am originally from Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and am therefore very interested in this subject and the results of the research.

This interview is only used for the results of this research.

The interview will take up to an hour.

You also have the choice to remain anonymous. Would you like to be kept anonymous in the research?

I also want to ask if it is okay that I am going to record the audio of the interview? In this way I can simplify the processing of the interview.

You may ask questions at any time during the interview and you have the right to stop it at any time.

Do you have any further questions before we start?

Questions

General:

- Were you born and raised in the Zeeuws-Vlaanderen?
- What was your choice to come / stay here?
- What does Zeeuws-Vlaanderen mean to you?
- Can you tell us something about your position within the municipality?
- Have you always worked for the municipality?

The municipality's view on the shrinkage:

- How do you experience the decline as a municipality?
- Has the contraction increased or decreased in recent years?
 - o Can you give a cause for this?
- What is the municipality investing most in to combat shrinkage?
 - o Why those investments?
- Since the development of the Region Deal Zeeland, has the municipality noticed that the region is improving?
 - o If so, how is this noticed?
- How does the municipality support an organization such as Rootzz Zeeuws-Vlaanderen that try to make the region attractive for students?
- What kind of cooperation is there with regional firms to make Zeeuws-Vlaanderen more attractive for employees / departed students?
- What does your municipality think is needed to combat the shrinkage?

Cross-border relations:

- Does your municipality experience the border as an obstacle to developments in the region?
 - o If so, how? / Can you give examples?
- How do you cooperate with Belgian municipalities?
- Which projects have been developed in collaboration with Belgian municipalities to make the region more attractive?
- Do the interests of both sides of the border collide?
 - o If so, what is the solution for this?
- What kind of cooperation takes place between firms and the municipality to stimulate cross-border relations with Belgium?
- What investments are being made to make your municipality attractive to workers / employees from across the border?
- What kinds of developments are taking place from the *Euregion Scheldemond*?
- How does the *Euregion Scheldemond* stimulate cross-border relations?

Role of the Dutch Government:

- In what way does the Dutch Government, in addition to the *Regio Deal*, invest in the Zeeuws-Vlaanderen / your municipality?
- Is investing in cross-border relations decentralized in your municipality? Or is there influence from the Dutch Government?
 - o If there is influence from the Dutch Government: Can you explain this in more detail?
- How could the Dutch Government invest (even) more in your municipality / region to combat shrinkage?
- How could the Dutch Government invest (even) more in your municipality / region to develop border relationships with Belgian municipalities?

Conclusion

We have come to the end of the interview. Thank you again for your contribution to my research, I really appreciate it. If you would like to receive the transcript of the interview, I can always send it to you. This also applies to the results and the final version of the study. Do you have any further questions about the course of the research and how your contribution will be processed?

Attachment 2: Survey

Introduction

First of all, I would like to thank you for participating in this study. First, a brief explanation of the research follows. For my education, Geography, Planning and Environment at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, I am writing my bachelor thesis about shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. My focus is on the possibilities of border relations to reduce shrinkage in the region and how firms can influence this. I am originally from Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and am therefore very interested in this subject and the results of the research.

Completing this survey will take a maximum of 10 minutes.

Your answers to this survey will be processed completely anonymously and will only be used in this research.

If you have any further questions or comments about the research or this survey, you can always send an email to meyron.cauwels@student.ru.nl.

Thank you very much for filling in!

I. General questions about your firm.

1. **At which sector is your firm specialised?** (These sectors are retrieved from CBS)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture, forestry and fishing	<input type="checkbox"/> Mineral extraction
<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Energy supply
<input type="checkbox"/> Water companies and waste management	<input type="checkbox"/> Construction
<input type="checkbox"/> Trade	<input type="checkbox"/> Transport and storage
<input type="checkbox"/> Hospitality	<input type="checkbox"/> Information and communication
<input type="checkbox"/> Financial services	<input type="checkbox"/> Rental and trade of real estate
<input type="checkbox"/> Specialist business services	<input type="checkbox"/> Rental and other business services
<input type="checkbox"/> Culture, sport and recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> Other services
<input type="checkbox"/> Extraterritorial organisations	<input type="checkbox"/> Other, namely...
2. **Is your firm originated in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen?**
☐ Yes
☐ No
3. **In which municipality in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is your firm located?**
☐ Sluis
☐ Terneuzen
☐ Hulst
4. **Is your firm a branch office?**
☐ Yes
☐ No
5. **What is location size of your firm?**
☐ 0 employed persons
☐ 1 employed person
☐ 2 till 10 employed persons
☐ 10 or more employed persons
6. **What legal form does your firm fall under?**
☐ Sole proprietorship
☐ General partnership, CV and partnership
☐ Public limited company and private company
☐ Other legal forms (foundation; association; corporation; church association)
☐ Other, namely...
7. **Does your firm have employees with Belgian origin?**
☐ Yes
☐ No
8. **Does your firm have customer contacts from Belgium?**
☐ Yes
☐ No
9. **Does your firm have trade partners from Belgium?**
☐ Yes
☐ No

II. Questions about the effects of shrinkage in the region (on your firm).

1. **My firm experiences positive effects of a shrinking population in the region.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
2. **My firm experiences negative effects of a shrinking population in the region.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
3. **I experience difficulties with finding youngly educated employees in the region.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
4. **Due to a lack of youngly educated employees in the region, I have considered a departure with my firm out of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
5. **Due to a lack of youngly educated employees in the region, I have placed vacancies across the border (in Belgium).**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
6. **Due to the shrinkage I have made less profit the last couple of years.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
7. **I think it is important that my firm is located in a demographic healthy region.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
8. **I feel responsible as entrepreneur to make the region more attractive for departed students / youngly educated employees.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
9. **The municipality should invest more in the region to make it more attractive for departed students / youngly educated employees.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree

III. Questions about the border and cross-border relations with Belgium.

1. **I experience the border as a barrier for my firm a to get in contact with Belgian customers or trade partners.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
2. **Due to the location of my firm close to the border, I feel occluded from the rest of the country.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
3. **I have consciously chosen to locate my firm near the border.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
4. **For my firm Belgian customers are a big source of income.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
5. **I advertise my firm on the Belgian side of the border.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
6. **Without the customer contacts / trade partners from Belgium my firm could not exist.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
7. **I see cross-border relations with Belgium as a solution for shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
8. **To attract employees from Belgium, I am willing to pay higher travel allowances.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree
9. **I am, as entrepreneur, willing to invest in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, if this stimulates cross-border relations and with that let the region grow.**
0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree

IV. Questions about the role of the government.

1. **The municipality stimulates my firm with subsidies to attract departed students / youngly educated employees back to the region.**

0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree

2. **The municipality stimulates my firm with subsidies to make cross-border relations with Belgium.**

0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree

3. **I think that the municipality and firms should work together to make the region attractive for employees.**

0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree

4. **I think that the municipality has as job to keep youngly educated employees in the region and with that helps the firms.**

0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree

5. **I think that the municipality should invest more money in regional firms, so that they can continue to develop and give a boost to the region.**

0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree

6. **I think that the Dutch Government should invest more in regional firms, so that they are more attractive for youngly educated employees.**

0 strongly disagree 0 disagree 0 neutral 0 agree 0 strongly agree

Do you have any further remarks?

--

End of the survey. Thanks for your participation!

Attachment 3: Summaries Interviews

Summary Interview Robert Evers

For the municipality Sluis I have interviewed Robert Evers. As group chairman of the Labour Party, he is part of the local council. On top of that, Mr. Evers is committee chairman of space and general management. With almost 20 years of involvement in the municipality, Mr. Evers has experienced the different stages of shrinkage and the development of cross-border relations.

Mr. Evers is born and raised in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, however he did not consciously chose to live in the region. He got offered a job in Terneuzen and that is the main reason to stay in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. As years passed he settled in the municipality Sluis and never considered to move from the region.

Shrinkage in the municipality Sluis

The population in the municipality is shrinking, however people are still denying this. But looking at the development of the population size it can be seen that it is shrinking. On top of that, the greying of the region is increasing. The biggest cause is the departure of students, where just a small group of students return to the municipality. Since a couple of years, a regulation that should limit the sale of second homes has been abolished. This has increased the number of Belgians moving to the region or investors that buy the houses to make available for touristic rent. Furthermore, the construction of houses in the municipality Sluis is not running steadily. This causes problems for starters families to move to the region, because the house prices are rising and rising. Another issue in the municipality Sluis is the lack of variation in the labour market. The biggest sectors in the municipality are recreation and tourism, however not everyone wants to work in that sector. This makes the region less attractive for young and high educated people to live. According to Mr. Evers this are two points of attention that need change to make the region more attractive and reduce the shrinkage.

Cross-border relations

A solution for attracting young employees is working across the border. However, the laws and regulations in the Netherlands and Belgium are so different, that working across the border is quite a hassle. Because of this the border can be seen as a barrier for employees. This difference in laws and regulations should disappear to stimulate working across the border. In this way, the municipality Sluis and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen are more attractive to live in.

In search of cross-border relations the municipality Sluis is trying to co-operate with Belgian firms or entrepreneurs. An example is the lack of general practitioners in the municipality Sluis, a solution could be general practitioners from Belgium in the region. However, organisations from the Netherlands would rather not see Belgian general practitioners in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. This competition between entrepreneurs and organisations makes cross-border relations more difficult to perform. Certainly, with a shrinking population and with that a loss of services in the region, these cross-border relations can be crucial for a region like Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

Mr. Evers also indicated that for a town like Sluis the customers from Belgium are crucial. Sluis is a town with a lot of shops and hospitality, which are attractive for Belgium customers. During the Covid-19 pandemic these firms lose a lot of income because these customers stay away.

In the municipality Sluis live a fair number of Belgian families, because in the Netherlands the houses are cheaper. These families give a growth of population in the region, but the region is getting an advantage from them. These families do their daily activities like work, sports, and shopping still in Belgium. A change of this could give an economical boost to the region. Mr. Evers thinks that the

municipality should do more to stimulate these families to do their daily activities in the region where they live.

Between the municipality Sluis and the bordering Belgian municipalities there are definitely consultations and conversations. The so-called *Zwinregio* is co-operating across the border to solve contemporary problems. The European Union is willing to support these cross-border relations financially because it is part of the Euregion *Scheldemond*.

Role of the Dutch Government on shrinkage and cross-border relations

For the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen the Dutch Government has done crucial invests in education. The high schools were about to fall over, due to a lack of pupils. Thanks to the Dutch Government the high schools were able to merge and co-operate more. Although, the construction of houses in the municipality is often slowed down because of the prohibitions of the Dutch Government. This has caused that the housing market in the municipality Sluis is becoming very scarce and expensive. A solution for this, according to Mr. Evers is to have a more decentralised policy for the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. This also counts for making the cross-border relations. The municipality itself has a better overview of what is needed in the region and how cross-border relations can help the region.

Concluding, Mr. Evers said that Zeeuws-Vlaanderen should step away from '*Calimero*'-thinking. For years, the region wanted the help from everyone, because they were a small region in the country. But according to Mr. Evers the region should go on their own strength in growing the region and making it more attractive for departed students to live in.

Summary Interview Jos van Ginneken

For the municipality Terneuzen I have interviewed Jos van Ginneken. On his 18th birthday he was elected as councillor for the municipality, which made him the youngest in the country. Nowadays he is the chairman of the party in the municipality Terneuzen. Mr. van Ginneken has dived into the cross-border relations since becoming a councillor.

Mr. van Ginneken is not born in the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen but moved there on a young age for his father's work. Although, he likes living in the region because of the landscape, rest and feel of safety in the region. He does not regret moving to Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

Shrinkage in the municipality Terneuzen

Within the municipality Terneuzen shrinkage can be seen as a double concept. The smaller cores in the municipality experience shrinkage of population and services. However, the city Terneuzen is still growing. This growth of population comes from the smaller cores in the municipality. Terneuzen is working with the concept of letting the city, which eventually leads to a spin-off effect to the smaller cores in the region. Just like in the other municipalities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, the youth departures from Terneuzen for university or college. The difference is that the municipality Terneuzen has more job opportunities for these students if they want to come back to the region. That is why the focus is on attracting firms that need highly educated employees. The lack of housing in the municipality Terneuzen is not stimulating starters to move to the region. The municipality is running several programs to make more houses available and affordable for starters.

Cross-border relations

Terneuzen is having a lot of cross-border relations with Belgium thanks to the port in the area. Big firms are located in the region which leads to interaction across the border. There are however two barriers, according to Mr. van Ginneken, that makes the cross-border relations more difficult. These are the differences in laws and regulations and the of connection with Ghent by (public) trains.

The municipality is trying to support the employees across the border that are struggling with the differences in laws and regulations. In this way the municipality tries to stimulate employees to work across the border. According to Mr. van Ginneken, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen should get room for experimentation to make these differences in laws and regulations disappear. The outcome of this could be useful in the whole country.

To most important thing to stimulate the cross-border relations more is the development of a railway between Ghent and Terneuzen. At first, it is intended for goods, which will increase the interaction between firms and industry on both sides of the borders. After the development of a freight train, a public transport train could be crucial for Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. With this it more attractive for youth to study in Ghent, instead of leaving the region.

The municipalities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen all have participated at a migration exchange to attract Belgian families to live in the region. This has led to an increase of Belgian families living in the region. This has flattened the shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. However, these families only live in the region. Their daily activities are still done across the border in Belgium. In this way the region itself does not profit from these families.

Another issue that Mr. Ginneken indicated is the different governmental layers in Belgium. This makes it very difficult to co-operate with Belgium about certain subjects. At first, the municipality Terneuzen

does not always know who they should contact in Belgium. And secondly, the rights of municipalities on both sides of the border are very different, which makes co-operating about subjects unequal.

Role of the Dutch Government on shrinkage and cross-border relations

According to Mr. van Ginneken there are two projects where the financial support of the Dutch Government is needed. At first, the diversification of the labour market in the entire region should increase. The Dutch Government should make investments to attract firms with a lot of different job opportunities to Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Secondly, an investment from the Dutch Government is needed to make more connection with Belgium. With this he aims at developing a railway between Terneuzen and Ghent which could be crucial for the demography in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

Concluding, Mr. Ginneken addressed the difference within Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Not every municipality experiences the same problems, and this should be considered if there is asked for help by the Dutch Government. Of course, there are issues that unite the three municipalities, and these will need the most attention in tackling shrinkage and stimulating cross-border relations.

Summary Interview Fons Dobbelaer

For the municipality Hulst I have interviewed Fons Dobbelaer. With 20 years as councillor at the municipality Hulst, he has a lot of experience and knowledge of the region and municipality. On top of that, he is chairman of the committee space for the municipality, and he is deputy of the council chairman. Besides the municipality, Mr. Dobbelaer is board member of the social workplace Dethon in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

Mr. Dobbelaer is born and raised in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, and he is proud of that. For him Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is a way of Burgundy living, which he really prefers. On top of that, he likes the landscape and the fact it is not so busy. As an agrarian, he has always lived in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and never had an option to depart from the region. He got inspired to be active for the municipality by his uncle, who was a councillor for the municipality.

Shrinkage in the municipality Hulst

The municipality denied the shrinkage for a couple of years, but eventually this has turned. However, this shrinkage in Hulst has been flattening. The last ten years the population size is not shrinking, but the composition of age groups is still an issue. Due to a lack of universities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, graduates move to other parts of the country. Only a few of these departed students move back to the region. A big problem in the municipality Hulst is the lack of space to build houses. The demand for houses by young families is high, but the municipality is restricted by the so-called '*ladderruimte*'. There are enough job opportunities within the municipality, only not enough houses for possible employees. To make the region more attractive for the departed students it is important to have cross-border relations with Belgium. That is why the municipality makes land available for Belgian firms to settle in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

Cross-border relations

The municipality Hulst often see the border as a barrier. Due to a difference in laws and regulations it is very difficult for employees to work across the border. Therefore, the number of employees across the border is still not so high. Another barrier from the border is the different governmental layers at the Belgian side of the border. All these layers make the co-operation not ideal. These are two problems that are not easy solvable, although in the laws and regulations lay opportunities for change.

Mr. Dobbelaer indicated on the willingness from the municipality to make land available for Belgian firms and to make cross-border relations with Belgium. For example, the municipality invited multiple Belgian firms that had a shortage of land to come their region. An Antwerp transshipment company has already settled in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, and this has increased the job opportunities in the region. Another piece of land is reserved for Belgian industry firms to settle, the plans are made, but the Covid-19 pandemic has slowed them down. The bankruptcy of a firm in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen meant a big loss of jobs for people, but not for long. Shortly after a Belgian firm moved to the building and employed a lot of people. This is also an example of a healthy cross-border relation with Belgian firms.

The European Union is stimulating cross-border relations in the Euregion *Scheldemond* with the construction of a new canal between Ghent and Terneuzen. Countries are obligated to invest in this project, but a big part of the investment comes from the European Union. With this canal the trade between Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and Belgium will improve. Although there is a side note with such investments from the European Union. Regional governments are required to pre-finance the project. When the project is realised, they will get the money back, but it is difficult to gather that much money together in the first place.

Role of the Dutch Government on shrinkage and cross-border relations

The Dutch Government leaves the responsibility for solutions against shrinkage and to let the region grow at the municipalities. The policy is decentralised, only if the interests of the Dutch Government are in danger, they will act on it. However, Mr. Dobbelaer and the municipality would like to see more investments from the Dutch Government in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. For example, the municipalities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen want to build a passenger train line through the region, but they will need the help of the Dutch Government to finance this. Although, according through Mr. Dobbelaer, the Dutch Government find investments in other parts of the country more important. This makes the municipality feel disadvantaged with respect to the rest of the country.

Concluding, Mr. Dobbelaer indicated that the Dutch Government should not interfere with the regional cross-border relations. The municipality Hulst knows best what is needed for the region and has good contacts with the Belgian municipalities. That is why Mr. Dobbelaer pleads for decentralised policy if it comes to cross-border relations. However, the Dutch Government could be necessary for investments or financial support.

Attachment 4: Code Book

Code	Code Groups
Regio Deal Zeeland is provincial policy	Activities municipality
Zeeuws-Vlaanderen should step away from 'Calimero-thinking', and use own strength	Activities municipality
disappearance of policy to limit second homes in municipality Sluis	Activities municipality
municipality Sluis should stimulate Belgians to do their activities in the region Zeeuws-Vlaanderen	Cross-border relations with Belgium Activities municipality
more co-operation with Belgium needed	Cross-border relations with Belgium Activities municipality
municipality Terneuzen developed a help station to support cross-border employees	Cross-border relations with Belgium Activities municipality
program to help Belgian families settle in municipality Terneuzen, but initiative at society	Cross-border relations with Belgium Activities municipality
no financial support for Belgian employees to live in municipality Hulst	Cross-border relations with Belgium Activities municipality
Zeeuws-Vlaanderen should get room for experimentation to make laws and regulation across borders equal	Cross-border relations with Belgium Role of Dutch Government Activities municipality
European Union supports cross-border relations, but regional governments should pre-finance	European Union support Activities municipality
housing in policy in municipality Terneuzen: move elderly people to suitable elderly houses, to make place for starters	Housing market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Activities municipality
municipality tries to attract firms with job opportunities for highly educated people, to attract departed students	Labour market Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Activities municipality
Zeeuws-Vlaanderen wants to build houses, but Dutch Government should do more on infrastructure	Role of Dutch Government Activities municipality
investments in border villages	Role of Dutch Government Activities municipality
decentralising could be solution for municipality Sluis	Role of Dutch Government Activities municipality
when asking for support the differences within Zeeuws-Vlaanderen have to be taken into account	Role of Dutch Government Activities municipality
municipality Terneuzen focusses on growing the city Terneuzen, which leads to a spin-off to smaller cores	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Activities municipality
beautiful living and landscape	Connection with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
connection with Belgium	Connection with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
Burgundian life	Connection with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
always lived in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen	Connection with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
settled in region	Connection with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen

a nice atmosphere	Connection with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
small scale living	Connection with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
job opportunity	Connection with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
a safe area	Connection with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
moved to Zeeuws-Vlaanderen for father's job	Connection with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Personal background respondents
born and raised in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen	Connection with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Personal background respondents
Belgians living in municipality Terneuzen still do their daily activities in Belgium	Cross-border relations with Belgium
lack of public transport to Belgium seen as a barrier for cross-border relations	Cross-border relations with Belgium
differences of laws and regulation for employees across the border	Cross-border relations with Belgium
co-operation in care and welfare, but difference between Dutch and Belgian municipalities	Cross-border relations with Belgium
firms from Antwerp want to settle in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen	Cross-border relations with Belgium
no competition between Dutch and Belgian firms in municipality Terneuzen, because both sides profit from it	Cross-border relations with Belgium
contact with Belgian colleagues	Cross-border relations with Belgium
development of Rail-Ghent-Terneuzen, first goods transport than person transport	Cross-border relations with Belgium
difference laws and regulation across border seen as barrier	Cross-border relations with Belgium
different layers in Belgian government makes co-operation more difficult	Cross-border relations with Belgium
public transport to Ghent will improve the region	Cross-border relations with Belgium
competition between Dutch and Belgian firms make cross-border relations more difficult	Cross-border relations with Belgium
co-operation with Belgian municipalities	Cross-border relations with Belgium
increase of Belgian families in municipality Sluis	Cross-border relations with Belgium
if the border would disappear, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen will not be seen as a shrinkage region	Cross-border relations with Belgium
development of a seaports firm in the Netherlands and Belgium	Cross-border relations with Belgium
employment opportunities in Bruges and Ghent	Cross-border relations with Belgium
Belgian customers crucial for town Sluis	Cross-border relations with Belgium
Belgians living in municipality Sluis still do their daily activities in Belgium	Cross-border relations with Belgium
employment opportunities Antwerp	Cross-border relations with Belgium

making ground available in municipality Hulst for Belgian industrial firms	Labour market Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Cross-border relations with Belgium
Belgian employees as solution to solve lack of employees	Labour market Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Cross-border relations with Belgium
the settlement from Belgian firms will increase job opportunities	Labour market Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Cross-border relations with Belgium
Dutch people working at Belgian firm	Labour market Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Cross-border relations with Belgium
Dutch Government should not interfere with regional cross-border relations	Cross-border relations with Belgium Role of Dutch Government
Dutch Government needed for financial support	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Cross-border relations with Belgium Role of Dutch Government
the arrival of Belgians in municipality Sluis has flatten the shrinkage	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Cross-border relations with Belgium
municipalities from Zeeuws-Vlaanderen on migration exchange to attract Belgian families	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Cross-border relations with Belgium
support from European Union for projects in ZwinRegion (Sluis, Knokke and Bruges)	European Union support
cross-border project supported by the European Union	European Union support
affordable housing for youth needed	Housing market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
rising house prices	Housing market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
construction in Belgium more expensive	Housing market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
not enough space to build in municipality Hulst	Housing market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
a lot of second homes make the housing market shrink in municipality Sluis	Housing market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
lack of housing for starters in municipality Terneuzen	Housing market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
Netherlands cheaper than Belgium	Housing market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
lack of affordable housing in municipality Sluis	Housing market in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
enough job opportunities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen	Labour market Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
in municipality Terneuzen job opportunities for highly educated people	Labour market Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
arrival of Belgian firm increased job opportunities in municipality Hulst	Labour market Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
lack of variation in labour market Zeeuws-Vlaanderen	Labour market Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
the new sea lock will increase job opportunities	Labour market Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
group chairman municipality Sluis	Personal background respondents
committee chairman municipality Sluis	Personal background respondents
councillor municipality Terneuzen	Personal background respondents
agrarian before connection municipality Hulst	Personal background respondents

not born in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen	Personal background respondents
committee chairman municipality Hulst	Personal background respondents
councillor municipality Hulst	Personal background respondents
deputy chairman of the council municipality Hulst	Personal background respondents
no financial support from Dutch Government to help the region	Role of Dutch Government
Dutch Government should invest in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen to realise a passenger train in the region	Role of Dutch Government
Dutch Government rejects construction of houses at some locations	Role of Dutch Government
municipality Hulst feel disadvantaged	Role of Dutch Government
central locations have preference instead of border regions	Role of Dutch Government
Dutch Government works project based and focusses on area for a short time	Role of Dutch Government
elderly people and families move from cores to city Terneuzen	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
if working from home becomes the new trend, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is very attractive to live	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
departure of younger people in smaller cores in municipality Terneuzen	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
the city Terneuzen is still growing	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
shrinkage a double concept in municipality Terneuzen	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
a greying population in municipality Sluis	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
young people move out of municipality Terneuzen for college	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
population decreases slowly but certainly in municipality Sluis	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
2009 phase of denial on shrinkage	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
denial of shrinkage	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
small part of departed youth returns to Zeeuws-Vlaanderen	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
more deaths than births in municipality Sluis	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
departure of youth for study	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
migration in balance in municipality Sluis	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
no decrease in population last 10 years in municipality Hulst	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
occlusion by the Westerscheldetunnel	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
the disappearance of toll at the Westerscheldetunnel could lead to a departure of firms in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen	Shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen Westerscheldetunnel
the disappearance of toll at the Westerscheldetunnel might also have negative effects	Westerscheldetunnel
border less as a barrier than toll at Westerscheldetunnel	Westerscheldetunnel
Westerscheldetunnel without toll in 2025	Westerscheldetunnel

Attachment 5: SPSS-output

Representativeness

		Municipality			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sluis	23	42,6	43,4	43,4
	Terneuzen	22	40,7	41,5	84,9
	Hulst	8	14,8	15,1	100,0
	Total	53	98,1	100,0	
Missing	System	1	1,9		
Total		54	100,0		

Reliability

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,543	24

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
My firm experiences positive effects of a shrinking population in the region.	50	1	4	2,54	,838
My firm experiences negative effects of a shrinking population in the region.	50	1	5	3,16	,934
I experience difficulties with finding youngly educated employees in the region	50	1	5	3,06	1,018
Due to a lack of youngly educated employees in the region, I have considered a departure with my firm out of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.	50	1	3	1,52	,707
Due to a lack of youngly educated employees in the region, I have placed vacancies across the border (in Belgium).	50	1	4	2,32	1,058
Due to the shrinkage I have made less profit the last couple of years.	50	1	4	2,02	,795
I think it is important that my firm is located in a demographic healthy region.	50	2	5	3,46	,762
I feel responsible as entrepreneur to make the region more attractive for departed students / youngly educated employees.	48	1	5	3,31	,949
The municipality should invest more in the region to make it more attractive for departed students / youngly educated employees.	48	1	5	4,10	,881
I experience the border as a barrier for my firm a to get in contact with Belgian customers or trade partners.	47	1	5	2,09	1,018

Due to the location of my firm close to the border, I feel occluded from the rest of the country.	47	1	5	2,70	1,140
I have consciously chosen to locate my firm near the border.	47	1	5	2,53	,929
For my firm Belgian customers are a big source of income.	47	1	5	3,04	1,103
I advertise my firm on the Belgian side of the border.	47	1	5	2,96	1,103
Without the customer contacts and/or trade partners from Belgium my firm could not exist.	47	1	5	2,15	1,179
I see cross-border relations with Belgium as a solution for shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.	47	1	5	3,30	1,140
To attract employees from Belgium, I am willing to pay higher travel allowances.	47	1	4	2,55	,855
I am, as entrepreneur, willing to invest in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, if this stimulates cross-border relations and with that let the region grow.	47	1	4	2,94	,870
The municipality stimulates my firm with subsidies to attract departed students / youngly educated employees back to the region.	47	1	4	1,83	,789
The municipality stimulate my firm with subsidies to make cross-border relations with Belgium.	47	1	3	1,74	,706
I think that the municipality and firms should work together to make the region attractive for employees.	46	1	5	3,96	,893
I think that the municipality has as job to keep youngly educated employees in the region and with that helps the firms.	46	1	5	3,74	,905
I think that the municipality should invest more money in regional firms, so that they can continue to develop and give a boost to the region.	46	1	5	3,72	,911
I think that the Dutch Government should invest more in regional firms, so that they are more attractive for youngly educated employees.	46	1	5	3,85	,894
Valid N (listwise)	45				

Frequencies statistics

Firm sector

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Industry	1	1,9	1,9	1,9
	Construction	7	13,0	13,2	15,1
	Trade	10	18,5	18,9	34,0
	Transport and storage	1	1,9	1,9	35,8
	Hospitality	5	9,3	9,4	45,3
	Information and communication	2	3,7	3,8	49,1
	Financial services	3	5,6	5,7	54,7
	Rental and trade of real estate	1	1,9	1,9	56,6
	Specialist business services	1	1,9	1,9	58,5
	Rental and other business services	1	1,9	1,9	60,4
	Culture, sport and recreation	5	9,3	9,4	69,8
	Other services	6	11,1	11,3	81,1
	Other, namely...	10	18,5	18,9	100,0
	Total	53	98,1	100,0	
Missing	System	1	1,9		
Total		54	100,0		

Origination firm

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	50	92,6	94,3	94,3
	No	3	5,6	5,7	100,0
	Total	53	98,1	100,0	
Missing	System	1	1,9		
Total		54	100,0		

Municipality

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sluis	23	42,6	43,4	43,4
	Terneuzen	22	40,7	41,5	84,9
	Hulst	8	14,8	15,1	100,0
	Total	53	98,1	100,0	
Missing	System	1	1,9		
Total		54	100,0		

Branch office

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	4	7,4	7,5	7,5
	No	49	90,7	92,5	100,0
	Total	53	98,1	100,0	
Missing	System	1	1,9		
Total		54	100,0		

Location size firm

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0 employed persons	1	1,9	1,9	1,9
	1 employed person	17	31,5	32,7	34,6
	2 till 10 employed persons	22	40,7	42,3	76,9
	10 or more employed persons	12	22,2	23,1	100,0
	Total	52	96,3	100,0	
Missing	System	2	3,7		
Total		54	100,0		

Legal form firm

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sole proprietorship	21	38,9	40,4	40,4
	General partnership, CV en partnership	11	20,4	21,2	61,5
	Public limited company and private company	19	35,2	36,5	98,1
	Other legal forms (foundations, association, corporation; church association)	1	1,9	1,9	100,0
	Total	52	96,3	100,0	
Missing	System	2	3,7		
Total		54	100,0		

Employees from Belgium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	8	14,8	15,4	15,4
	No	44	81,5	84,6	100,0
	Total	52	96,3	100,0	
Missing	System	2	3,7		
Total		54	100,0		

Customers from Belgium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	45	83,3	88,2	88,2
	No	6	11,1	11,8	100,0
	Total	51	94,4	100,0	
Missing	System	3	5,6		
Total		54	100,0		

Trade partners from Belgium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	28	51,9	54,9	54,9
	No	23	42,6	45,1	100,0
	Total	51	94,4	100,0	
Missing	System	3	5,6		
Total		54	100,0		

My firm experiences positive effects of a shrinking population in the region.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	7	13,0	14,0	14,0
	disagree	13	24,1	26,0	40,0
	neutral	26	48,1	52,0	92,0
	agree	4	7,4	8,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

My firm experiences negative effects of a shrinking population in the region.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	3	5,6	6,0	6,0
	disagree	6	11,1	12,0	18,0
	neutral	24	44,4	48,0	66,0
	agree	14	25,9	28,0	94,0
	strongly agree	3	5,6	6,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

I experience difficulties with finding youngly educated employees in the region

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	3	5,6	6,0	6,0
	disagree	10	18,5	20,0	26,0
	neutral	23	42,6	46,0	72,0
	agree	9	16,7	18,0	90,0
	strongly agree	5	9,3	10,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

Due to a lack of youngly educated employees in the region, I have considered a departure with my firm out of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	30	55,6	60,0	60,0
	disagree	14	25,9	28,0	88,0
	neutral	6	11,1	12,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

Due to a lack of youngly educated employees in the region, I have placed vacancies across the border (in Belgium).

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	14	25,9	28,0	28,0
	disagree	14	25,9	28,0	56,0
	neutral	14	25,9	28,0	84,0
	agree	8	14,8	16,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

Due to the shrinkage I have made less profit the last couple of years.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	13	24,1	26,0	26,0
	disagree	25	46,3	50,0	76,0
	neutral	10	18,5	20,0	96,0
	agree	2	3,7	4,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

I think it is important that my firm is located in a demographic healthy region.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	6	11,1	12,0	12,0
	neutral	17	31,5	34,0	46,0
	agree	25	46,3	50,0	96,0
	strongly agree	2	3,7	4,0	100,0
	Total	50	92,6	100,0	
Missing	System	4	7,4		
Total		54	100,0		

I feel responsible as entrepreneur to make the region more attractive for departed students / youngly educated employees.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	2	3,7	4,2	4,2
	disagree	7	13,0	14,6	18,8
	neutral	16	29,6	33,3	52,1
	agree	20	37,0	41,7	93,8
	strongly agree	3	5,6	6,3	100,0
	Total	48	88,9	100,0	
Missing	System	6	11,1		
Total		54	100,0		

The municipality should invest more in the region to make it more attractive for departed students / youngly educated employees.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	1,9	2,1	2,1
	disagree	2	3,7	4,2	6,3
	neutral	4	7,4	8,3	14,6
	agree	25	46,3	52,1	66,7
	strongly agree	16	29,6	33,3	100,0
	Total	48	88,9	100,0	
Missing	System	6	11,1		
Total		54	100,0		

I experience the border as a barrier for my firm a to get in contact with Belgian customers or trade partners.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	13	24,1	27,7	27,7
	disagree	24	44,4	51,1	78,7
	neutral	5	9,3	10,6	89,4
	agree	3	5,6	6,4	95,7
	strongly agree	2	3,7	4,3	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

Due to the location of my firm close to the border, I feel occluded from the rest of the country.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	6	11,1	12,8	12,8
	disagree	18	33,3	38,3	51,1
	neutral	10	18,5	21,3	72,3
	agree	10	18,5	21,3	93,6
	strongly agree	3	5,6	6,4	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

I have consciously chosen to locate my firm near the border.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	5	9,3	10,6	10,6
	disagree	20	37,0	42,6	53,2
	neutral	15	27,8	31,9	85,1
	agree	6	11,1	12,8	97,9
	strongly agree	1	1,9	2,1	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

For my firm Belgian customers are a big source of income.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	4	7,4	8,5	8,5
	disagree	10	18,5	21,3	29,8
	neutral	18	33,3	38,3	68,1
	agree	10	18,5	21,3	89,4
	strongly agree	5	9,3	10,6	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

I advertise my firm on the Belgian side of the border.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	5	9,3	10,6	10,6
	disagree	12	22,2	25,5	36,2
	neutral	12	22,2	25,5	61,7
	agree	16	29,6	34,0	95,7
	strongly agree	2	3,7	4,3	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

Without the customer contacts and/or trade partners from Belgium my firm could not exist.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	16	29,6	34,0	34,0
	disagree	19	35,2	40,4	74,5
	neutral	3	5,6	6,4	80,9
	agree	7	13,0	14,9	95,7
	strongly agree	2	3,7	4,3	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

I see cross-border relations with Belgium as a solution for shrinkage in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	4	7,4	8,5	8,5
	disagree	7	13,0	14,9	23,4
	neutral	13	24,1	27,7	51,1
	agree	17	31,5	36,2	87,2
	strongly agree	6	11,1	12,8	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

To attract employees from Belgium, I am willing to pay higher travel allowances.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	5	9,3	10,6	10,6
	disagree	17	31,5	36,2	46,8
	neutral	19	35,2	40,4	87,2
	agree	6	11,1	12,8	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

I am, as entrepreneur, willing to invest in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, if this stimulates cross-border relations and with that let the region grow.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	4	7,4	8,5	8,5
	disagree	7	13,0	14,9	23,4
	neutral	24	44,4	51,1	74,5
	agree	12	22,2	25,5	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

The municipality stimulates my firm with subsidies to attract departed students / youngly educated employees back to the region.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	18	33,3	38,3	38,3
	disagree	20	37,0	42,6	80,9
	neutral	8	14,8	17,0	97,9
	agree	1	1,9	2,1	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

The municipality stimulate my firm with subsidies to make cross-border relations with Belgium.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	19	35,2	40,4	40,4
	disagree	21	38,9	44,7	85,1
	neutral	7	13,0	14,9	100,0
	Total	47	87,0	100,0	
Missing	System	7	13,0		
Total		54	100,0		

I think that the municipality and firms should work together to make the region attractive for employees.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	1,9	2,2	2,2
	disagree	1	1,9	2,2	4,3
	neutral	10	18,5	21,7	26,1
	agree	21	38,9	45,7	71,7
	strongly agree	13	24,1	28,3	100,0
	Total	46	85,2	100,0	
Missing	System	8	14,8		
Total		54	100,0		

I think that the municipality has as job to keep youngly educated employees in the region and with that helps the firms.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	1,9	2,2	2,2
	disagree	3	5,6	6,5	8,7
	neutral	11	20,4	23,9	32,6
	agree	23	42,6	50,0	82,6
	strongly agree	8	14,8	17,4	100,0
	Total	46	85,2	100,0	
Missing	System	8	14,8		
Total		54	100,0		

I think that the municipality should invest more money in regional firms, so that they can continue to develop and give a boost to the region.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	1,9	2,2	2,2
	disagree	3	5,6	6,5	8,7
	neutral	12	22,2	26,1	34,8
	agree	22	40,7	47,8	82,6
	strongly agree	8	14,8	17,4	100,0
	Total	46	85,2	100,0	
Missing	System	8	14,8		
Total		54	100,0		

I think that the Dutch Government should invest more in regional firms, so that they are more attractive for youngly educated employees.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	1,9	2,2	2,2
	disagree	2	3,7	4,3	6,5
	neutral	10	18,5	21,7	28,3
	agree	23	42,6	50,0	78,3
	strongly agree	10	18,5	21,7	100,0
	Total	46	85,2	100,0	
Missing	System	8	14,8		
Total		54	100,0		