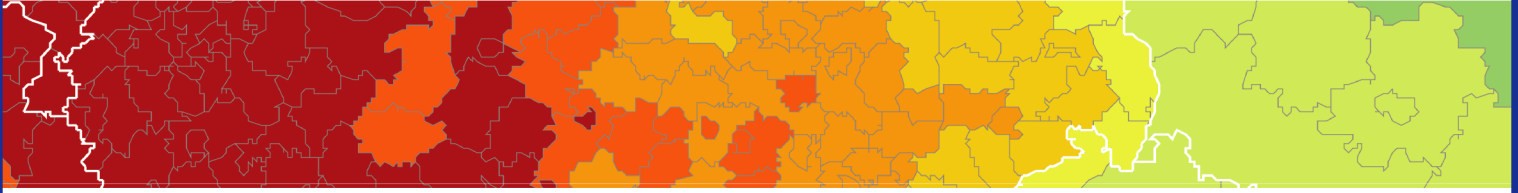


Inspire policy making by territorial evidence



ESCAPE European **S**hrinking Rural Areas:

Challenges, **A**ctions and **P**erspectives for Territorial Governance

Applied Research

Final Report – Annex 8
Case Study Mansfeld-Südharz, Germany

Annex 8

This report is one of the deliverables of the ESCAPE project. This Applied Research Project is conducted within the framework of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme, partly financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

This delivery does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the members of the ESPON 2020 Monitoring Committee.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge support in carrying out the case study field work by all the interviewed experts providing insights into views and perspectives of the case study development.

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Contact: info@espon.eu

ISBN: 978-2-919795-70-3

Final Report - Annex 8 - Case Study Report

**Mansfeld-Südharz,
Germany**

ESCAPE
European **S**hrinking Rural Areas:
Challenges, **A**ctions and **P**erspectives for
Territorial Governance

Version 21/12/2020

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Abbreviations

BBSR	Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung
BTH	Bildungs-, Technologie- und Handelsgesellschaft mbH Eisleben
BMEL	Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft
BMFSFJ	Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend
BMVI	Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur
BMI	Bundesministerium für Inneres
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CF	Cohesion Fund
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
CS	Case Study Mansfeld-Südharz
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EC	European Commission
EDORA	European Development Opportunities in Rural Areas (ESPON 2013 project)
EEN	Enterprise Europe Network
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESPON	European Territorial Observatory Network
EUROPOP	EUROSTAT population projections
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LAG	Local Action Group
LAU	Local Administrative Unit
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Development Economique Rurale
MLV	Landkreis Mansfeld-Südharz
MORO	Action programme "Modellvorhaben der Raumordnung"
MSH	Landkreis Mansfeld-Südharz
NACE	Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PROFECY	Processes, Features and Cycles of Inner Peripheries in Europe (ESPON 2020 project)
SEMIGRA	Selective Migration and Unbalanced Sex Ratio in Rural Regions (ESPON 2013 project)
SF	Structural Funds
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SRLE	Sachverständigenrat Ländliche Entwicklung

Factsheet of Mansfeld-Südharz, Germany

Map 0.0: Geographical location of Mansfeld-Südharz in Germany



Name: Mansfeld-Südharz (NUTS3 unit)

Key Indicators:

Figures refer to 2017 or 2001-2017 unless otherwise specified

Total Population (persons):	139,781
Population Density (persons/km ²):	96.5
Population Change (%):	-19.5
Net Migration (per 1,000):	-86.1
Natural Change (per 1,000):	-108.9
% aged >65:	28.3
% Employed in Agriculture:	2.8 (2011)
GDP (PPS) per Capita:	21,208

Typologies:

- Urban-rural typology: Predominantly rural region, close to a city¹
- Typology of simple shrinkage (ESCAPE project): Population decrease 1993-2033 due to decrease in both periods 1993-2013 and 2013-2033; fast shrinking rates (<-1)

¹ According to the Eurostat's urban-rural typology including remoteness, a NUTS3 region is predominantly rural if the share of population in rural areas is higher than 50%. It is considered close to a city if more than half of the residents can reach a city of 50,000 inhab. driving 45 min.

Executive Summary

The Case Study covering the county of Mansfeld-Südharz in the federal state of Saxony-Anhalt was selected as an exemplary region in Germany as it impressively depicts the long-lasting population decline history in the East of the country. Main issues related to the severe regional situation and persisting demographic challenges are the Reunification process which raised substantial expectations for a socio-economic catching-up process in this part of Germany, and the subsequent collapse of the industrial structure (in particular the copper mining industry). These political and economic changes accelerated negative demographic trends in the area, above all through immediate reactions of many inhabitants. Many of them migrated to the west of Germany (or beyond) resulting in an “ageing” local society which was hard hit by a very sharp drop in fertility rates in the 1990s from which this region never recovered.

The demographic development is representative of a large part of former East-Germany which aggravates the situation for each individual region. The case study suffers from the “legacy” effect of demographic decline since many decades, and the political restrictions for moving to the West prior to the German Unification in 1989. The breakdown of the communist system impacted strongly on the spatial dynamics, intensifying the negative trend in the immediately following period, and afterwards magnifying the unfavourable processes of peripheralization, captured by many local and regional actors in the term and image of the “vicious cycle”.

Although a high level of local attachment is expressed within the CS, actions for mitigating the demographic decline seem largely “in vain” or insufficient, and policy support is assessed as either merely helpful to some extent or failing to address regional needs appropriately. Key findings from the empirical work focus on the perception of these processes by local and regional actors, and how the huge challenges of this shrinking region is reflected by higher levels in the country:

- Nowadays, discourses are not limited to demographic concerns and simple mitigation considerations, but imply a high degree of awareness of the complex interrelations of socio-economic processes and the strong dependence of shrinking regions from “core” economic areas. Aspects discussed include the spatial interaction, the long-term nature of any policy influence and change, the limitations of general policy frameworks, the needs for local and regional strategies and innovative action, and the lack of available resources (human and financial) at this level.
- Many institutions struggle with specific facets of the challenge of population decline and the inter-linked socio-economic problems. For a decade the political agenda has aimed at enhancing place-based approaches in shrinking rural regions, supported by a multitude of thematic networks on demographic issues at national, provincial and

regional scale. Quite often, missing or limited cooperation across sectors and levels is still an obstacle.

- Despite numerous initiatives from local to national levels, the effects of pilot projects and model regions are scattered and don't represent an attractive outline or mode of conduct for the CS. Economic trends could hardly be influenced by these piecemeal approaches and don't enable an affected region to escape the widely experienced "vicious cycle".
- In Germany, regional governance places a high weight on „integrative approaches“ since more than two decades. While policy programmes like the joint "Action Plan" for Germany and numerous activities in urban planning and regional development activities are used to address the issue, the effects for regions like the CS remain limited, at best. Future policy strategies hence still build partly on an improved use of the EU Structural Funds as a general framework for regional policy. However, national, provincial and regional strategies are sought and deploy major interrelations and open issues of coordination. The main lack seen in the CS is the need for appropriate framework conditions for civil society and local development. According to that view emphasis should be put on activities to raise involvement and participation among rural actors, a sound guidance for simplified programme realization, eliminating bureaucratic obstacles, and establishing (finally) factual accountability for local authorities through sufficient resources of disposable local and regional budgets.

The main thrust of policy challenges and recommendations observed in the CS relates to the feelings of being neglected and/or the application of "project" structured support that pays attention to regional problems just for a while or as a "model" area, pretending shrinkage would just be an "exceptional period". The widespread assessment of local and regional actors is that policy schemes have to achieve a position where continuous commitment and frameworks for support without "time gaps" would be provided. Action at the CS level would have to find an appropriate place within that structure and address the multitude of psychological aspects of people living in the area, those aiming to return to it or others that might be attracted by place-based opportunities and development chances.

Even if the focus of discussions in the region is on the strategy and actions of that level and the structure and nature of interactions with other levels (provincial and national), the impact of future EU support should not be neglected. Seen from the perspective of on-going shrinkage in this area, the "retreat" of EU support through fading-out the support for "Less Developed Regions" and conceiving East-Germany as "Transition Regions" several years ago seems, in retrospect, a premature decision with adverse effects for shrinking rural regions like our Case study areas. As the reversal of that trend of EU-policies cannot be expected, it is particularly important that the framework conditions and regulations set at EU-level recognize the challenges of shrinking rural regions and enable local and regional actors to actually

engage in effective activities. This implies also the remit to work on a regulatory framework that supports (and not hampers) public service provision and shaping common life.

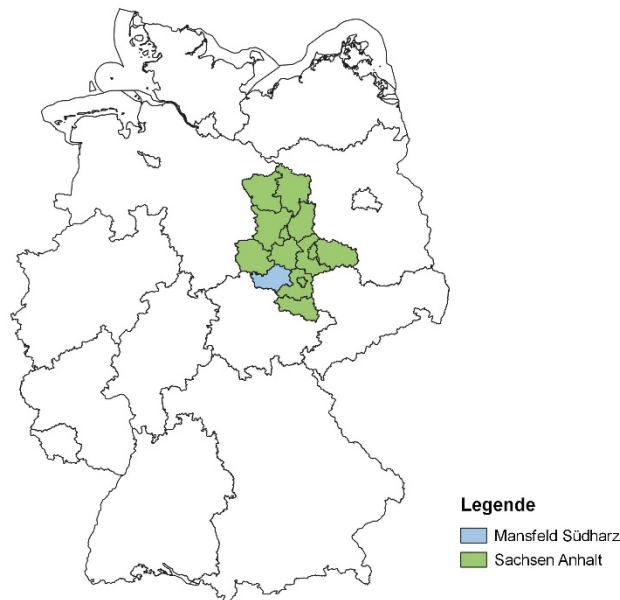
The dramatic trends in the current emergency situation underscore the need for such (wide-ranging) policy changes. However, the search for regional development policy responses to the current COVID-19 crisis is in its initial phase and the impacts on rural shrinking regions will have to be reviewed within a short period.

1 Diagnosing rural shrinkage and its contexts

1.1 The CS area: introduction

The case study Mansfeld-Südharz is an administrative district located in the south-western part of the federal state (Land) Saxony-Anhalt (Sachsen-Anhalt). In the east it borders with the agglomeration area of Halle-Leipzig, in the north and northwest with the mountains of the Harz area and in the south with the federal state Thüringen. Thus, despite located in the centre of Germany it bears characteristics of a remote place and suffers from peripheralization processes. The region is representative for the Eastern part of Germany which has been reintegrated in the German unification process since 1989. As this area experienced long-term and severe out-migration over the last decades it provides an illustrative example of a region with high population losses over a long period of time, including all its demographic, economic and social consequences. Due to the intensive shrinkage of the regional population it has served in national (e.g. BMVI 2017, BMI et al. 2019) and international studies (e.g. Leibert and Wiest 2012; Bischof et al. 2018) as reference area to analyse the downward trends in regional development processes and underpin the need for strategic renewal and policy adjustment. Since 1991 the number of inhabitants has shrunken from about 198,000 to nowadays 138,000 (2017).

Map 1.1: Geographical location of the case study area in regional and the national territory of Germany

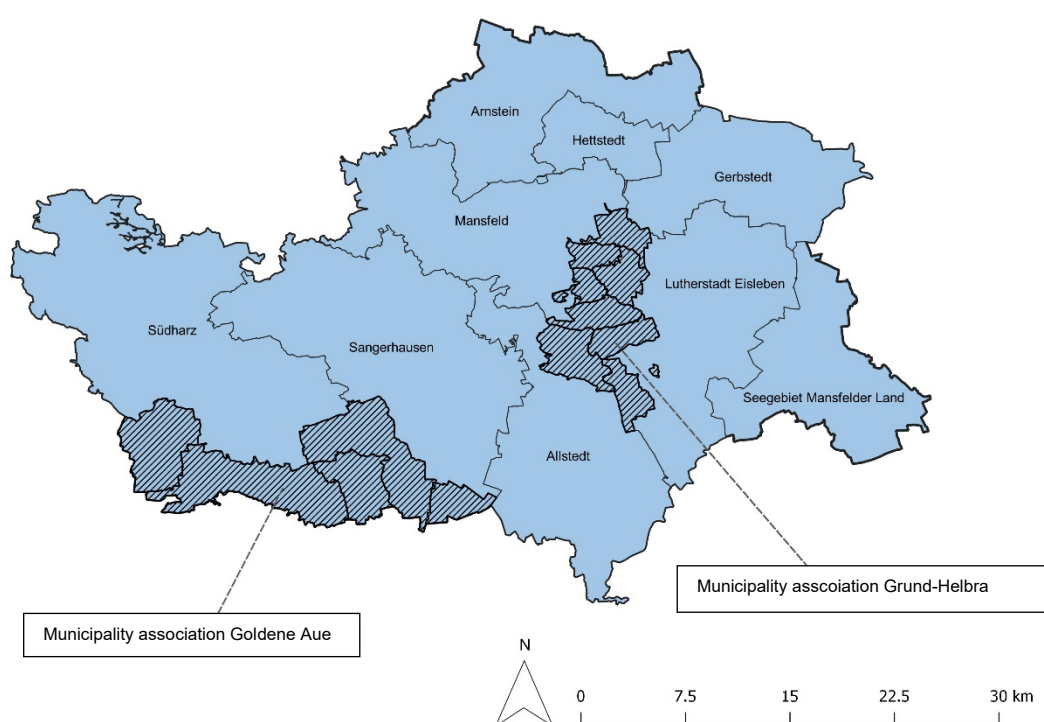


The region comprises an area of about 1,450 km² representing a county (“Landkreis”) in Germany’s administrative structure. The county Mansfeld-Südharz was created in 2007 through the amalgamation of the two former units (Landkreis Mansfelder Land and Landkreis Sangerhausen), with the county of Mansfelder Land already amalgamated in a previous

county reform in 1994 from former counties of Hettstedt and Eisleben. These former administrative structures are still apparent in today's population structure (see Map 1.1).

The county Mansfeld-Südharz is administered through 11 municipalities. At this level, also an administrative reform took place in 2010 reducing the previous much higher number of municipalities comprising overall about 120 towns, villages or parishes. Some of the new established municipalities are associations of one larger and several smaller municipalities ('unified municipalities'; in German: 'Einheitsgemeinde'), and some of which are municipality associations ('Verbandsgemeinden'), where independence in each merged municipality is still somewhat stronger (municipality associations of Goldene Aue and Mansfelder Grund-Helbra, see Map 1.2).

Map 1.2: Location of the case study area within administrative structures (internal administrative divisions).

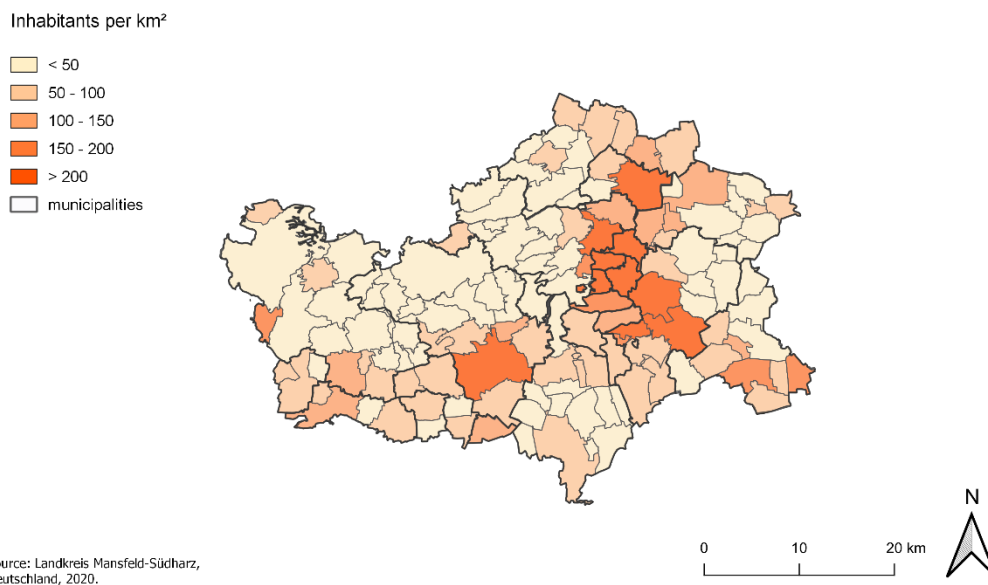


1.2 The CS area in the contexts of territorial classifications

The table below (Table 1.1) shows the position of the CS area according to different classification systems. The various typologies reveal the representativeness of the CS for East-Germany, indicating a mixed population density, a location close to cities and substantial challenges in service provision at the local level. In terms of the typology on simple shrinkage the region is a classical “shrinking” area, albeit changes in the pace of decline can be observed more recently (mitigation of demographic loss in recent years, albeit from an

already very much reduced population level). Due to the accessibility of nearby towns and cities the region is classified as intermediate area, but includes extended internal diversity with densely and less densely populated parts. The community level (villages and parishes) shows much more densely populated areas in the (former) county capital(s) Eisleben, Hettstedt and Sangerhausen, and the municipality association Grund-Helbra. The building of Highway A38 (finalised in 2009), which connects the region “Südharz” and the towns Sangerhausen and Eisleben to the western part of Germany as well as to the agglomeration area of Halle and Leipzig improved accessibility of this part of the CS area considerably and gives hope to changes in population and economic development in the near future. Additionally, the Highway A71 connects Sangerhausen with the federal state of Thüringen and southern parts of Germany.

Map 1.3: Population density at community level in the CS area Mansfeld-Südharz 2017



As the region Mansfeld-Südharz covers a rather large NUTS 3 area (compared to other German regions at this level), this internal diversity exerts a strong influence on actual socio-economic opportunities, aspects of quality of life and assessment of living conditions by local population. The various typology methods thus also highlight different aspects of the regional economic structure, i.e. the EDORA typology classifies the area as a “diversified district with strong service sector”, whereas the national classification by BBSR emphasizes the “rural” character (of large parts of the region) and its insertion “in an urbanised region”. By assessing the location of the area and the topographical situation more closely, the large east-west extension and the lowlands and hilly area within the region underpin that challenges of mountain regions, remote areas, including “Inner Peripheries” are highly relevant for some communities in the region. These characteristics signify that the CS is a useful example of rural/intermediate regions in the centre of Germany, experiencing significant socio-economic

challenges and peripheralization processes due to historic legacies (of the unification process in the East of the country) and limited civic engagement.

Table 1.1: Basic demographic and socio-economic trends behind rural shrinkage

Classifications	Positioning of the case study area
Name	Mansfeld-Südharz, Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany;
Scale and role in national administration	Yes: county level
NUTS 3 unit covered by the CS area	NUTS 3: DEE0A – Mansfeld-Südharz
Regional typologies	
Urban–rural typology	Predominantly rural regions, close to a city (OECD/EU classification); Diversified district with strong service sector (EDORA) Rural district in urbanised region (BBSR-type; national classification)
Rural regions	Predominantly rural / less advanced socio-economic situation (Thünen institute classification 2016)
Coastal regions	Other region
Mountain regions	Other region (partly hilly and mountainous)
Island regions	Other region
Sparsely populated regions	other region
Border regions	No programme area; Inner-German remote area ('Inner Periphery')
Inner peripheries (ESPON PROFECY)	Yes, partly
Shrinkage typology	Long-term shrinkage, with rising legacy effects
Typology of simple shrinkage (ESPON ESCAPE)	Population decrease 1993-2033 due to decrease in both periods 1993-2013 and 2013-2033; fast shrinking rates (<-1) Type B (long-term shrinkage and recent fast shrinkage in region)

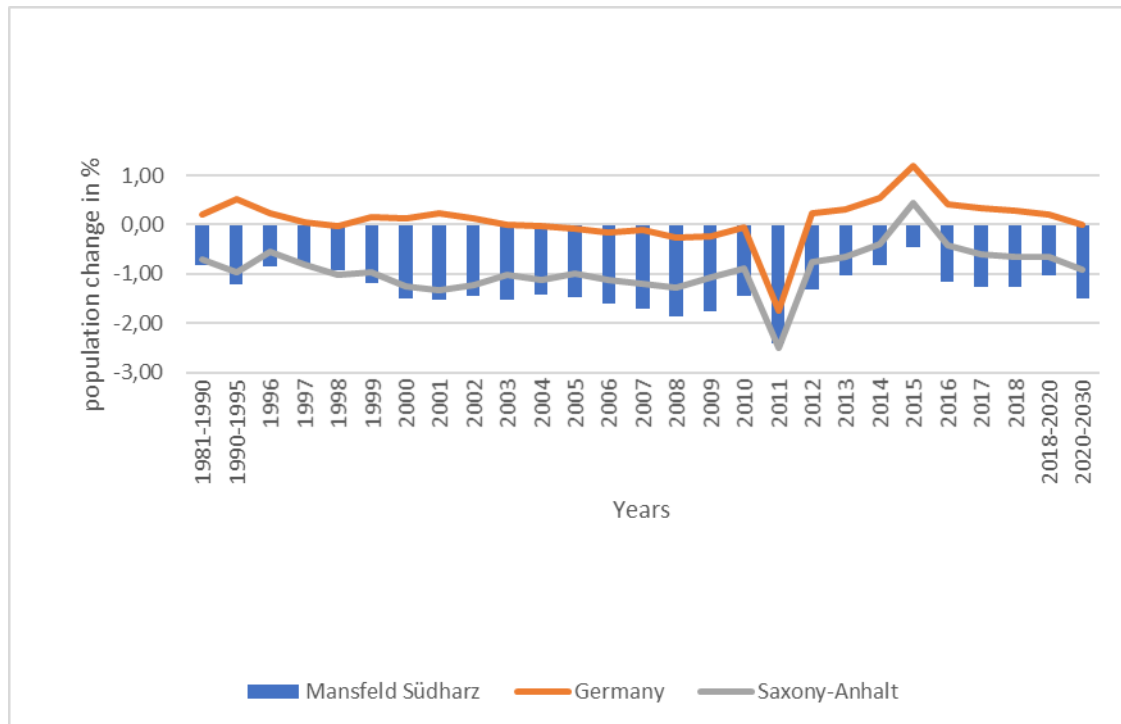
Sources: SEMIGRA, EDORA, PROFECY, Thünen institute 2016

1.3 The case study area against the region, the country and the Macro-Region

This area suffered from a particularly strong reaction to the unification process of Germany in the 1990s when out-migration increased particularly strongly and fertility rates dropped substantially. Consequently throughout the period since the unification of Germany population numbers dropped rapidly at such a high pace that the area was known as the region with the strongest population decline in Germany (see Sixtus et al. 2019). This also impacted negatively on the economic competitiveness, with a low adaptation capacity and high unemployment rates. However, more recently since about one decade, some signs of hope can be observed through emerging local and regional efforts, and (a small number of) inspiring and successful initiatives which can be depicted through recent statistical figures.

In addition, more detailed evidence for the regional situation is provided e.g. through region-specific analyses in the ESPON-project SEMIGRA which focused on age- and sex-specific migration patterns and included a regional assessment of the demographic development in Sachsen-Anhalt, as well as six detailed small-scale case studies in the federal state of Saxony-Anhalt, including the CS Mansfeld-Südharz (Leibert and Wiest 2012). This county was (together with the region Harz) an example of a “rural district in an urbanised area”, particularly due to the accessibility of Halle (a city of about 230,000 inhabitants) for the Eastern part of the region and several towns within the region (in particularly Eisleben and Sangershausen with about 25,000, respectively 30,000 inhabitants).

Figure 1.1: Population change per year in the CS, Saxony-Anhalt and Germany, 1981-2030



Source: Destatis, Statistisches Landesamt Sachsen-Anhalt 2007.

Comparing the demographic development in the CS to other counties of the federal state Saxony-Anhalt, one can clearly see the highest level of on-going demographic decline in this area (Leibert 2013, 7), continuing also for the period 2011-2018 with an average yearly decrease of -1,05% p.a for the whole case study. Only in the years 2013-2015 the overall decrease fell below -1.0% p.a. while in the last available data (2016-2018) a much higher reduction (of about -1.25% p.a.) is observed again (Figure 1.1). Despite upcoming discourse on a partial alleviation of the problem substantial negative demographic development has continued for all municipalities until now.

In the national “atlas of participation chances” of German regions, the county of Mansfeld-Südharz is highlighted under the headline of being “left behind and without orientation” (Sixtus et al.2019, 63). In a strikingly visible box of almost a full-page length, the regional situation is reviewed by addressing its challenging economic history with the closure of the copper mining industry, out-migration of young people seeking their fortune in western-Germany and a remaining ageing society, a persistently high share of long-term unemployed and school drop-outs, double-edged administrative reforms, a widespread feeling of limited perspectives and lost trust in policy “solutions” and ensuing extreme right-wing voting habits. But nevertheless some groups of people having deliberately chosen to live and move here and engage in local development.

The region has to cope with a long-term experience of “masculinisation” of the area due to a higher out-migration of female students and labour force (Leibert 2013, 24). As in other rural regions of Europe, young women in the age group of 18-24 are particularly inclined to leave their region of origin (with limited intentions to return back) while out-migration of men is higher in the age group of 25-29 (Leibert 2016, Wiest 2016). The concluding pronounced “lack” of women in the fertile age groups has led to a severe reduction in the number of births and a drastic increase in the median age of the population (e.g. +27% for the population of Saxony-Anhalt between 1991 and 2004). This ageing of the population structure could be viewed not just as a threat but also as an opportunity if care needs for future generations are realized and local employment shifts towards covering these needs.

The observation of more recent demographic indicators and changes suggest that some hope for an alleviation of the situation is emerging. These changes can be realized best when comparing earlier forecasts (e.g. the population projection through EUROPOP 2013) with forecasts of the more recent national population scenario (in Statistisches Landesamt Sachsen-Anhalt 2016 and Destatis 2018). Different assessment can be seen for the level of the federal state (NUTS 2), indicating for 2050 just 1.250 Mio (in EUROPOP 2013) against 1.700 Mio. by national scenarios. The same divergent pathways of forecasts can be seen for the regional level of the case study (NUTS 3) where the older calculation (EUROPOP 2013) counts only 104,000 inhabitants and the more recent national scenarios forecast still about 115,000 inhabitants.

The “catching-up“ process which was depicted as the big project of unification and which targeted at a vision of a new socio-economic development path and societal development in Germany proved to be much more complicated and painstaking than thought at the outset of the process. This translates directly into the regional opportunities and the development pathways of the case study. Currently a reflection discourse on the achievements and the obstacles of building an “equal” and fair society among all German regions and groups is ongoing, with regard to assessing the effects of 30 years of unification process. Terms like “recovery, downsizing, adaptation” in this discussion refer to the harmful history and the divergent experiences in this process (Mau 2019), in particular highlighting the uneven spatial development patterns still in place after such a long “adaptation period”. Contradictory assessments prevail which reveal some achievements, but also point to failures and spaces that were left out from the upturn process (e.g. Böick and Lorke 2019). One main strand in these commentaries is the need of finding appropriate “policy framing” styles that provide useful responses to local and regional challenges and adapted answers for diverse groups of actors.

Table 1.2: Basic demographic and socio-economic trends behind rural shrinkage

Indicators	Case study area (i.e. NUTS 3)	NUTS 2	Country (NUTS 0)	EU 28
Total population 2017	139,781	2,223,081	82,521,653	511 Mio.
Population change 2001-2011 / 2017	-15,5 -19,5	-11,8 -13,9	-0,6 +0,3	4.95 (2000-2017)
Population density 2001, 2011, 2017	119,9 101,2 96,5	126,2 111,3 108,7	230,4 228,9 230,8	111.9 (2000) 117.7 (2017)
Fertility rate 2001, 2011, 2017	1,18 1,46 1,67	1,24 (2001) 1,69 (2011) 1,64 (2017)	1,36 (2001) 1,39 (2011) 1,57 (2017)	1.46 (2000) 1.59 (2017)
Change of fertility rate 2011 and/or 2017 per 2001	+23.7% +41.5%	+36.3% +32.3%	+2.2% +15.4%	+8.9% (2001-2017)
Net migration rate 2001, 2011, 2017	-1,01 -0,81 -0,30	-0,90 -0,37 0,09	0,34 0,34 0,50	4.54 (2000-2017)
Population projection*)				
2020	133,457	2,179,892	83,365,000	512 Mio.
2030	114,858	2,018,000	83,341,000	518 Mio.
2040		1,851,000	82,091,000	524 Mio.
2050		1,698,000	80,200,000	526 Mio.
Working age population in the % of the population total, 2011 or 2017	63,2 60,0	64,6 61,9	66,0 65,4	67.09 (2001) 64.98 (2017)
Change of working age population 2017 per 2001	0,70	0,77	0,97	0.97
GDP per capita 2001, 2011, 2017	12,694 (2001) 17,483 (2011) 21,208 (2017)	16,687 22,858 27,754	26,500 33,065 39,715	19,800 (2000) 29,300 (2016)
Change of GDP per	2001-2011: 137	137	2001-2011: 125	2000-2016:

capita 2011 and/or 2017 per 2001	2001-2017: 167	166	2001-2017: 150	148
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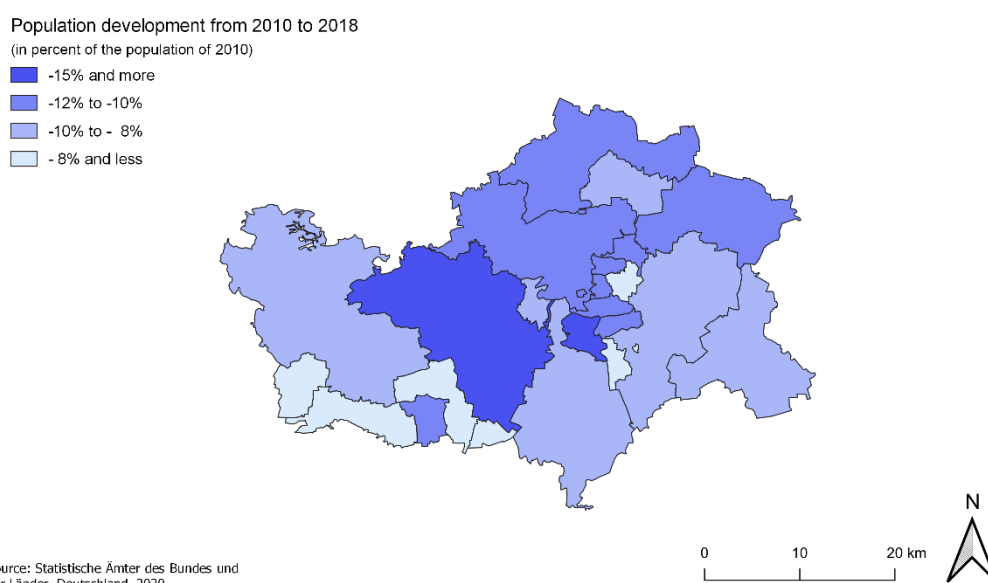
*) for Germany: figures of variante 2 of demographic forecast (Stat. Yearbook 2019, p.57), assuming moderate birth rates and migration saldi; for Saxony-Anhalt (Stat. Yearbook 2019, p.92f. and Destatis 2018); and for MSH: Statistisches Landesamt Sachsen-Anhalt 2016.

1.4 Characteristics and contexts of the shrinking process in the CS area

1.4.1 Characteristics of the CS area along demographic criteria (Simple shrinking)

As shrinkage of population numbers was an important criteria for the selection of case studies all the regions analysed as CS report long-term periods of heavy population decline. For the German county Mansfeld-Südharz the reduction of population numbers is a continuous development at least since the unification of both parts of Germany in 1989. It attains very high levels and in sum led to a reduction of more than 30% between 1990 and 2017. The reduction was particularly strong in the first two decades and is slightly less severe over the most recent years, however, population decrease is still a characteristic feature of the demographic development of the CS. There are differences between its municipalities, the more southern ones (and some exceptional cases) with a much less pronounced population decrease (see Map 1.4) profiting from better connections due to the highway A38 and a focus on touristic activities. The counties' capital Sangerhausen on the other hand is the municipality with the highest population decline since 2010, despite its favorable highway connection.

Map 1.4: Population development at municipal level in the CS area Mansfeld-Südharz, 2010-2018



Demographic figures underline the changes and its implications for age group divisions, above all leading to reduced shares of young people and a very high old age dependency ratio. The ageing index (see Table 1.3 below) is almost 'exploding' and surpassed the level of 250 (already in 2011). This development is reinforced by the strong out-migration of young people (women and men) within a large area of East-Germany. (see map in Copus et al. 2019, p.43; Schorn 2018). With an out-migration share of more than 30% of persons aged 18-29 in these regions the loss of persons in fertility age is particularly crucial and solidifies the continuously very low birth rates (about 6 births per 1000 population). However, the timeline of indicators for birthrate and share of young people suggests that the situation is not any more deteriorating, so it seems a bottom line of reduction has been achieved.

This recent change in the regional situation of migration can be highlighted by calculating the absolute reduction of population due to the negative balance of immigration vs. out-migration in the region: While in the period 1995-2001 (migration balance: - 20,838) and 2001-2011 (migration balance: - 14,935) the region lost a substantial part of its population due to migration, the most recent period (2011-2017: migration balance: - 1,318) observed an almost balanced account of in- and out-migration. The changes in the migration balance are clearly visible through the indicator "net migration rate" which was strongly negative until 2011 and then the loss was limited to some extent. For all the years of the past two decades (except for the year 2015 with the highest immigration throughout Germany) migration balance in the region was negative whereas at the national level an influx of people occurred in all these years (except in the years of the crisis 2008 and 2009).

Table 1.3: Basic demographic in the CS area and at national level

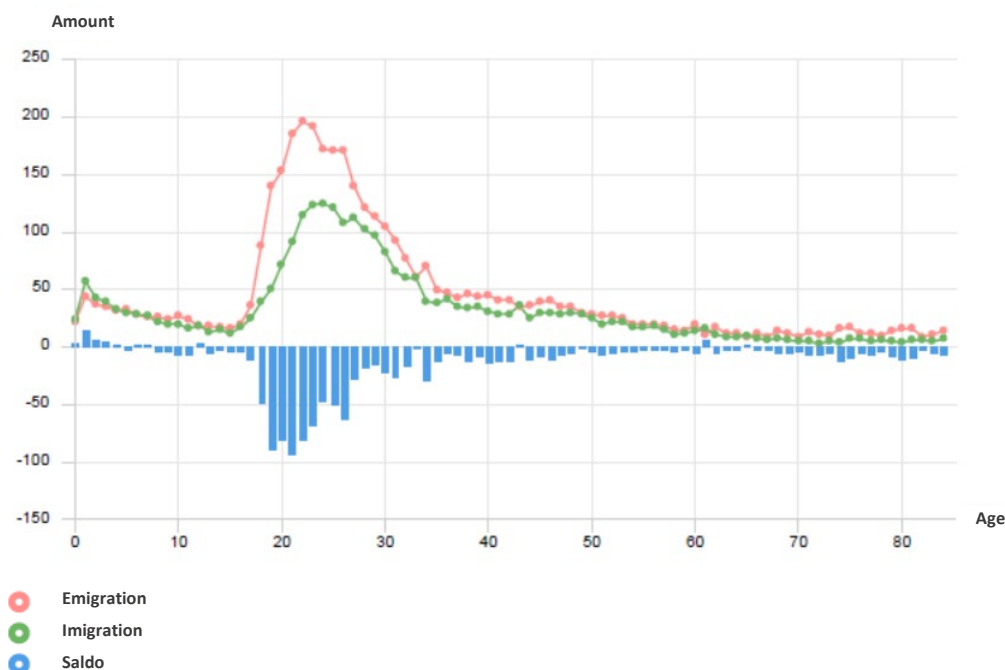
		1995(1990)	2001	2011	2017
Total population (number, in 1,000)	<i>CS area</i>	185,6	173,6	146,7	139,8
	<i>National level</i>	81,817,500	82,259,500	81,751,600	82,521,600
Ratio of 0-14 y.o. population (%)	<i>CS area</i>	15,8	11,8	10,4	11,1
	<i>National level</i>	16,2	15,5	13,4	13,4
Ratio of female population in productive age (15-45 y.o.) (%)	<i>CS area</i>	38,5	37,1	26,9	23,9
	<i>National level</i>	40,8	39,9	36,0	33,9
Population density (persons/km²)	<i>CS area</i>	128,4	119,9	101,2	96,5
	<i>National level</i>	229,2	230,4	228,9	230,8
Gender balance	<i>CS area</i>	107	105	104	103
	<i>National level</i>	105	105	104	103
Old age dependency rate (%)	<i>CS area</i>	24,2	28,7	41,9	48,1
	<i>National level</i>	22,8	24,5	31,2	32,5
Ageing index (%)	<i>CS area</i>	104,2	166,9	255,3	259,5
	<i>National level</i>	96,2	107,2	154,0	158,5

	<i>level</i>				
Crude birth rate (births/1000 persons)	<i>CS area</i>	5,77	6,32	6,43	6,46
	<i>National level</i>	9,35	8,93	8,11	9,51
Crude death rate (deaths/1000 persons)	<i>CS area</i>	13,33	11,74	13,59	16,14
	<i>National level</i>	10,81	10,07	10,43	11,19
		1995-2001 (1990-2001)	2001-2011	2011-2017	1995-2017 (1990-2017)
Population change (%)	<i>CS area</i>	-21,13	-15,53	-5,90	-25,78
	<i>National level</i>	-0,08	-0,62	0,94	0,86
Number of arrivals due to migration	<i>CS area</i>	51,774	29,781	21,163	72,937
	<i>National level</i>	54,935,232	33,447,494	26,681,902	81,617,134
Number of departures due to migration	<i>CS area</i>	72,612	44,716	22,481	95,093
	<i>National level</i>	52,938,970	32,518,962	23,278,592	76,217,562
Net migration rate (%)	<i>CS area</i>	-11,21	-8,60	-0,90	-11,91
	<i>National level</i>	2,44	1,13	4,16	6,60
Balance of migration of young persons (age group 18-25), Index (out/in-migration*100)	<i>CS area</i>	1995: 118	2000: 136	2010: 148	2017: 135
	<i>National level</i>	89	90	93	92
Balance of migration of all population, Index (out/in-migration*100)	<i>CS area</i>	104	2000: 122	2010: 121	2017: 107
	<i>National level</i>	92	96	97	92

Sources: Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder (Regionaldatenbank), Deutschland 2020

The migration profile of the CS is characterized, as for other regions, by a high incidence of migration for 18-35 year old people in both directions. Within this age-group there is also the bulk of the negative balance, i.e. those age groups where out-migration is exceeding immigration numbers (see Figure 1.2). This challenging topic of high out-migration rates of young people was also mentioned regularly by the interviewed experts.

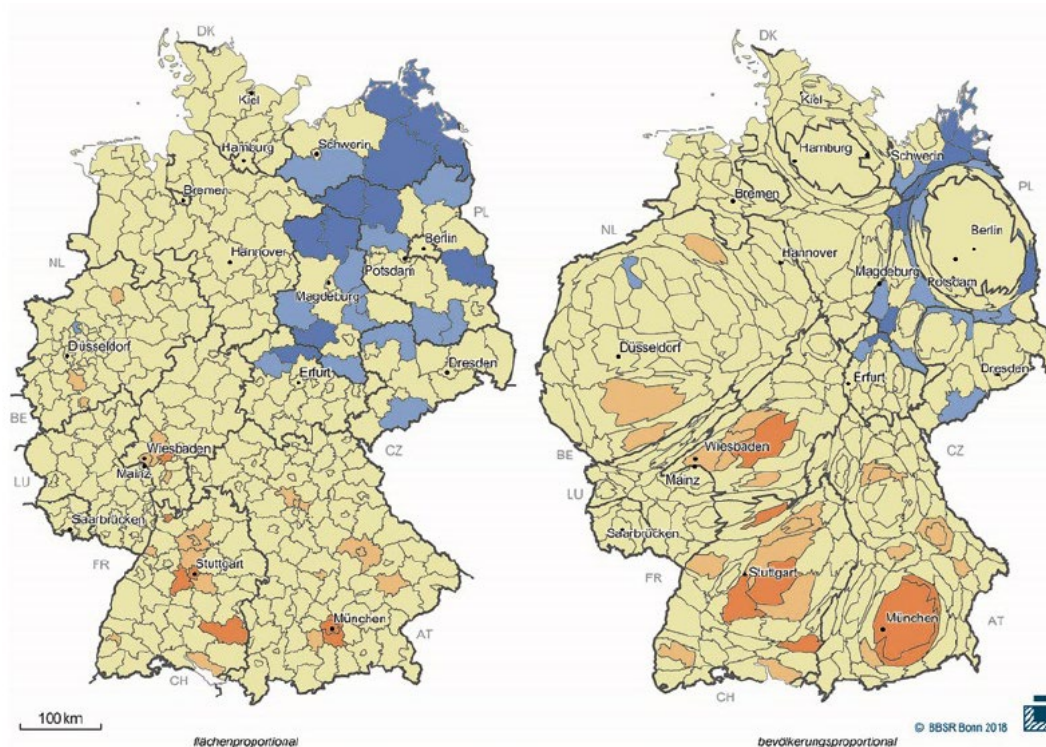
Figure 1.2: Migration profile in the CS Mansfeld-Südharz, 2009-2012



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung 2019, 5.

The literature review of Central European countries (see ESCAPE, Inception Report) has shown that experiences of rural shrinkage are visible all over the area of East-Germany, and the unification process has hardly achieved to overcome the divergent economic and demographic trends in Germany. In particular, this is not a legacy of the structures and institutional framework of the former communist period, but closely linked to the way how the unification was organized, “western” modes of governance and economic reasoning were transferred into East-Germany (Mau 2019). The re-integration of the former “German Democratic Republic” area which was separated from Western Germany for 40 years meant an abrupt shift in institutional regulations and framework and economic conditions which resulted in a rapid shrinkage of employees from 9 to 6 millions between 1990 and 1993. For many inhabitants it marked a turning point through losing their working place (1.2 mio. unemployed), moving to Western-Germany (1.7 mio.) or commuting from East to West Germany (0.5 mio). Many had to participate in job creation schemes or were directly forced to enter into pre-retirement schemes (Böick and Lorke 2019, 37). In the case study Mansfeld-Südharz living conditions are assessed as particularly low due to the spatial observation monitoring at national level (BBSR 2018 according to Milbert 2019, 30). In all dimensions of living conditions (demography, economy, labour market and well-being, infrastructure and housing market) the case study shows below average results. In the following map it is the most western/central region in Germany with the most negative attributes.

Map 1.5: Assessment of regional living conditions according to above- or below-average performance by various dimensions (2016)



Source: Milbert 2019, 30

Very often the relevance of the challenges in those regions is related to its low population impact (see right hand side of the above map which uses a presentation technique in relation to the number of regional inhabitants). We can thus see that problems experienced by local population and place-specific views are marginalized and peripheralization processes are at place (see Lang and Görmar 2019).

The European analysis of shrinking rural regions (see Inception Report, pp.73ff.) mapped the “hotspots” of shrinkage and the area of the selected German case study emerged as one of the main affected spaces. In particular, the population decrease in this area is a long-term phenomenon, with at least 4-5 consecutive decades of shrinkage since 1961 (see Map 3 and Map 4 in Inception Report, p.73f.). This population decrease attained a level of almost 1% per year over several decades (1981-2011) and underlines the crucial challenge of the regional situation (Map 5, Inception report, p. 75). The reasons for this negative population development are, as outlined above by CS indicators, also visible through European maps: Out-migration is higher than immigration (e.g. for the period 2001-2011, as shown in Map 9 of the Inception Report, p. 79) with a level of almost 10 per mille for the case study and neighbouring rural shrinking locations. Shrinking is assessed as a highly characteristic phenomenon throughout Germany, and particularly in the area of Saxony-Anhalt. While inter-relations and international movements are impacting on all regional types of West Germany this influence is less visible in the the case study Mansfeld-Südharz (Leibert 2013).

According to the demographic report (using standard methods for population forecasts throughout Germany; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018) the current trend of population decrease is continuing to 2030, with a continuingly low fertility rate of 1.41, leading to a significantly negative natural balance (of -12.8), and ongoing ageing of the society (median age of 57.6 years in 2030). Under the assumption of on-going additional migration losses for the region the case study will face a further significant population decline by more than 20% (for the period 2012-2030) and thus remaining in the group of those regions in Germany with highest population decline (more than 10%). As the national analysis reveals the case study is an example of the core of regions in Saxony-Anhalt, Thüringen and Saxony showing the most negative population forecast (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018, 10). This is also pertinent for its main town Sangerhausen which is classified as showing characteristics of “negative continuity” (with regard to demographic development (Leibert 2013, 8). Local analyses show the fine geographical differences for demographic trends, e.g. on fertility rate (Leibert 2013, 13), and an overlap of diverse problem aspects at municipality level within the case study (Leibert 2013, 40).

1.4.2 Characteristics of complex shrinkage of the CS area

The analysis of simple shrinkage in the CS area provides a telling record of the demographic changes and shifted patterns across the last decades. However these changes are embedded in a broader socio-economic background and have implications for the economic development in the region, although there is no direct linear relationship between the degree of population shrinkage and the economic ranking of the region (Interim Report, p. 10). Some basic indicators should describe in the following presentation the economic position of the CS area in greater detail.

As Table 1.2 underlines economic development measured in GDP per capita in the CS area is well below the average of the national state of Germany and the federal province Saxony-Anhalt. Despite higher increases of GDP in the region over the last decades, the catching-up process is only gradually effective, lowering the gap towards the national level from an index of 47.9% (in 2001) to currently 53.4% (2017). With an average of 21,208 EUR per capita in Mansfeld Südharz, GDP per capita just attains about half of the national value (39,715 EUR) and 76% of the provincial value (27,754), revealing the continuously marked economic disparity of the area.

The self-conception of the population and the experts in the CS area Mansfeld Südharz is still heavily characterized by its former copper mining industry and other large scale industries (the largest enterprise, the Mansfeld Kombinat with a long historic tradition, had more than 10,000 employees at the time of German unification in the area) which almost completely broke down after unification in 1989. The industrial breakdown of the major part of regional industries still is used as main explanation why the ensuing structural economic change has been so difficult a process and did not yet reach a satisfying level. Even if in the past few

years the economic situation has stabilised slightly, unemployment numbers decreased to some extent and the overall enterprise structure is now strongly dominated by SMEs similar to the national average, the above-mentioned development gap is still valid. Besides a wide range of traditional craft businesses and other SMEs, there are still about 5 enterprises with more than 250 employees, two of them engaged in copper and brown coal mining (ILE Mansfeld Südharz 2006). One of the core strategic activities of the municipalities (e.g. Sangerhausen, Eisleben) has been to revitalize the economic development through providing space for industrial estates for new industries and businesses, a strategy which proved only partly successful. Many industrial estates created in this period remain underutilized although accessibility of the area has improved a lot over the last decade, particularly through the extension and full connection to other German regions by the Highways A38 (East-West) and A71 (North-South).

With regard to the sectoral distribution within the CS area the comparable dominance of the industry and construction sector with 25% of the enterprises (against the national average of 18%) is evident. The service sector on the other hand is slightly shrinking over the past two decades (with a ratio of 70% of the enterprises in 2016) and 5% below the national average (see Table 1.4).

Unemployment has been an immediate response after the unification and characterized the regional difficulties from that time on. Despite the considerable decrease of the ratio of unemployed persons since 2001 it still reaches a share of 9.3% of the working age population. This relative mitigation in the labour market is due to some emerging job opportunities within the CS area, a trend which was also perceived and mentioned by most local interviewees. But while the overall ratio of unemployment is decreasing, the long-term unemployment challenge still at 60.5% in July 2017 (Jobcenter Mansfeld-Südharz 2018) remains the most severe problem with a series of unemployed persons and families, experiencing inability to enter into the job market even in their second and third generation. The CS area is also characterized by a considerable decrease of the working age population from 68.5% in 2001 to 60% in 2017 due to the ongoing outmigration of young and better-skilled persons which strengthens the tendency and pace of the overall ageing process. The problems of the CS are particularly compounded by the above-average out-migration of young persons and, to a large extent, women. The negative migration balance of young population (see Table 1.3 for age group 18-25 years) even increased and reaches the highest level since 2000. Up to 50% more young people leave than enter into the area, a rate which is even higher for young women. This “out-flow” of young and skilled persons is widely referred to in previous studies (see e.g. SEMIGRA report, Leibert and Wiest 2012) and in interview assessments of local experts and inhabitants.

Thus, one of the biggest challenges with regard to SMEs is the lack of skilled workforce and missing successors of these mostly small enterprises. This fact combined with the imminent, already proposed national withdrawal of brown coal mining is seen by the majority of

interviewees as the main employment challenge and a threat for the economic stability of the CS area. However, some interviewees argue that strategies which have to drawn up to respond to this challenge also offer the opportunity of new and more creative pathways (in particular, Focus Group discussion).

The perception of these problems is widespread among interviewees. They refer, in particular, to the lack of establishing “flagship projects or industries” (Interview 10) and a rather stable enterprise development which is not sufficient to close the existing gap to other German regions. However, it is taken into account that “the region nowadays has more jobs than job seekers” (Interview 3) which is mainly due to the loss of skilled inhabitants. Knowledge provision and educational programmes linked to the labour market authorities and enterprises strive to support young people and provide an interesting offer of attractive qualification so that young people can find interesting jobs in the region and consider staying there. These qualification and skill shaping activities are provided with high commitment by specialized training institutions (e.g. the education, technology and trade corporation, German abbreviation BTH, Interview 3) focusing on skills and career guidance services.

Table 1.4: Economic indicators of the CS area and at national level

		2001	2011	2017
Number of enterprises per 1000 persons	<i>CS area</i>	34,7 (2006)	37,76	37,23(2016)
	<i>National level*)</i>	48,5 (2006)	47,35	45,44
Number of small-sized enterprises per 1000 persons	<i>CS area</i>		36,87	36,34
	<i>National level</i>		46,29	44,26
Number of medium-sized enterprises per 1000 persons	<i>CS area</i>		0,81	0,80
	<i>National level</i>		0,91	1,00
Ratio of SME in the total number of enterprises (%)	<i>CS area</i>	99,84	99,80	99,77
	<i>National level</i>	99,69	99,68	99,61
Ratio of NACE.rev2 A (agriculture) enterprises in the total number of enterprises (%)	<i>CS area</i>	5,36 (2006)	4,52 (2010)	5,31 (2016)
	<i>National level</i>	9,08 (2006)	7,23 (2010)	6,84 (2016)
Ratio of NACE.rev2 B-F (industry, construction) enterprises in the total number of enterprises (%)	<i>CS area</i>	22,95 (2006)	24,18 (2010)	24,99 (2016)
	<i>National level</i>	16,95 (2006)	17,23 (2010)	18,23 (2016)
Ratio of NACE.rev2 G-U (services) enterprises in the total number of enterprises (%)	<i>CS area</i>	71,69 (2006)	71,3 (2010)	69,7 (2016)
	<i>National level</i>	73,97 (2006)	75,54 (2010)	74,93 (2016)

Ratio of working age (15-64 y.o.) population (%)	<i>CS area</i>	68,5	63,2	60,0
	<i>National level</i>	67,8	66,0	65,4
Ratio of jobseekers/unemployed persons in working age population (%)	<i>CS area</i>	16,1	11,9	9,3
	<i>National level</i>	9,4	7,1	5,7

Note: *) Statista, Anzahl der Unternehmen in Deutschland 2005-2018. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/246358/umfrage/anzahl-der-unternehmen-in-deutschland/>

Sources: Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder (Regionaldatenbank), Deutschland 2020

1.4.3 Broader socio-economic contexts of Shrinkage which may drive population decline

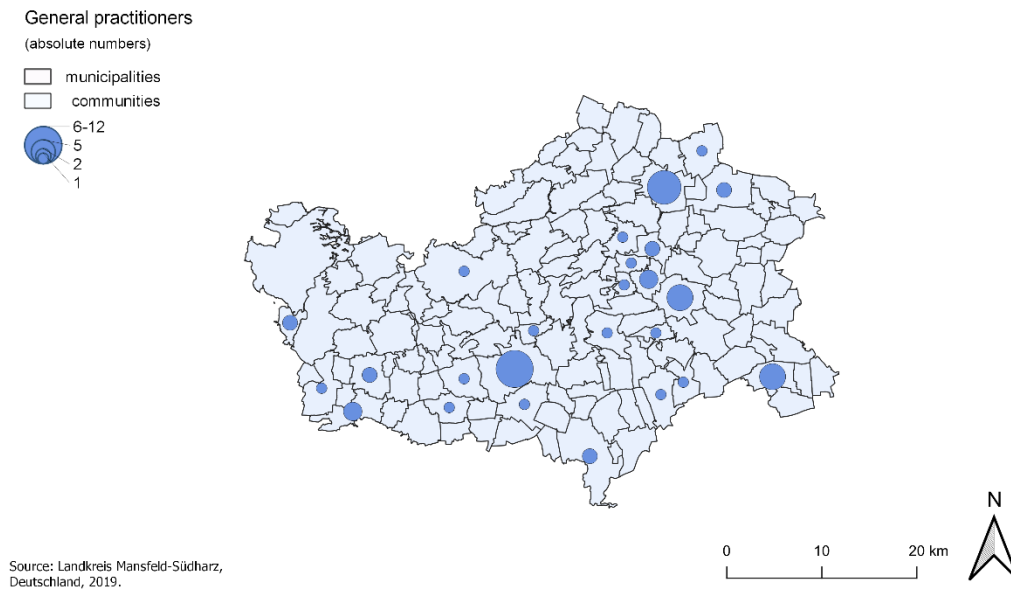
A more in-depth analysis of the geographical position, accessibility of services and qualification levels within the CS only marginally adds to the account and the assessment derived from demographic and economic indicators. Location of the CS is mainly influenced by its legacy to the Communist period and former border to West-Germany. The previous cleavage of Germany can still be observed in socio-economic data and perceived development opportunities. Adjustment has been much slower than expected or desired at the time of unification. With the linking highway A38 to the West of Germany accessibility increased drastically, but this hardly resulted in rising labour market attractiveness in the CS area. Data on broadband access, moreover, suggests that regional disparities are now sensible through differences in high-speed broadband accessibility. The lack of connection for more than one third of inhabitants in the CS reveals the local challenge, and interviewees referred to its negative impact on attractiveness of the region (particularly for young people).

The low GDP level in the region is reflected in low income levels, driving also a large share of skilled people to migrate to other places with higher income opportunities. The reverse situation, the dependance on social allowance payments, is particularly evident in the CS. In 2017, the high share of 15.4% of people aged below 65 years are dependent on such regular support. This high level ranks the area among those in Germany that are most dependent on social security measures (Sixtus et al. 2019, 33). This leads to the before mentioned consolidated long-term unemployment, a severe problem of the CS area, where some thousands inhabitants live in a so called "parallel world". Regular work in this social environment seems often to be out of perspective (ibid, 63).

The weak adjustment of infrastructures is visible particularly strongly by the very low construction activity (for the housing market), at least over the last two decades. The number of newly-built dwellings is very low (5-6 times lower than for the national level) and there is no

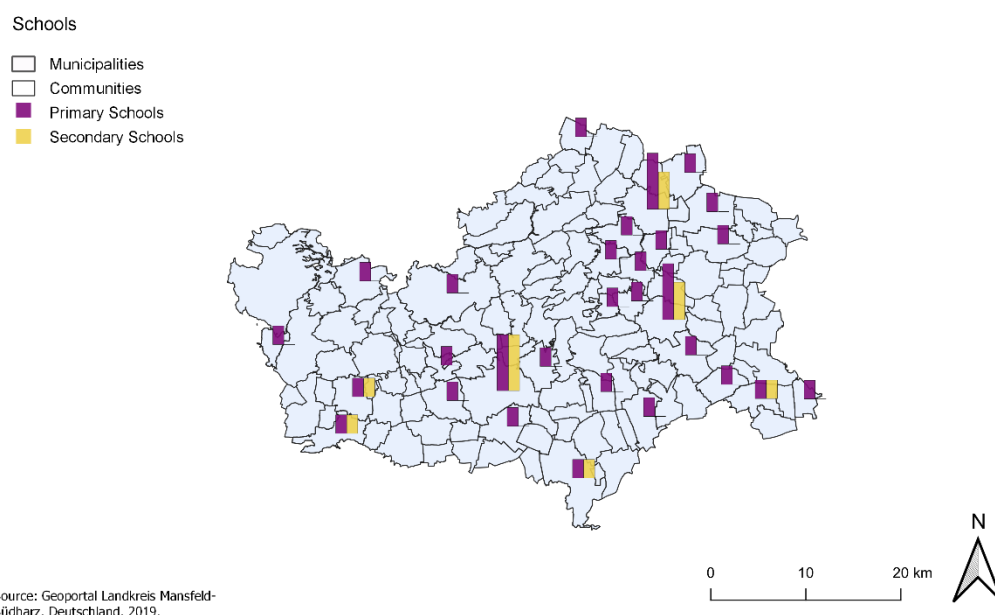
sign for adjustment in recent years. As to services, the provision with health services (through practitioners and hospitals) is not as bad and only a little below the national average. On the other hand, the regional distribution is uneven, with a concentration of general practitioners in the main towns, leaving neighbouring communities with only one or no practitioner. In case of retirement of the practitioner it is often difficult to find a successor in these remote places.

Map 1.6: General practitioners at community level in the CS area Mansfeld-Südharz, 2019



With regard to primary and secondary schools analysis over time indicates that many schools have been closed (or amalgamated) over the last two decades (0,89 schools per 1,000 inhabitants in 2001 cut to less than a half (0,31), see Table 1.5). Provision of kindergartens is still good, even to a higher degree than at the national level. This divergent development is very interesting and underpins interview narratives which highlighted the local dimension of kindergartens and loss of local schools. Map 1.7 shows the regional distribution of primary and secondary schools on a small scale community level.

Map 1.7: Primary and secondary schools at community level in the CS area Mansfeld-Südharz, 2019



What is not captured through data of Table 1.5 is the lack of high education in the CS. However, interviewees repeatedly addressed the problem of having lost a technical college which would enhance skill provision, educational level and self-esteem for the region. Indirectly, the high level of population with low qualification underpins the low integration into knowledge systems and educational infrastructure of high-level.

Table 1.5: Contextual indicators of shrinkage in the CS area and at national level

		2001	2011	2017
Ratio of households with broadband access in the total number of households (%)	CS area			63*)
	National level			93*)
Number of newly-built dwellings per 1000 persons	CS area	0,59	0,30	0,55
	National level	3,48	1,97	2,97
Ratio of newly-built dwellings in the housing stock (%)	CS area	0,12	0,06	0,10
	National level	0,74	0,40	0,58
Number of general practitioners per 1000 persons	CS area			0,63
	National level		0,67	0,67
Number of hospital beds per 1000 persons	CS area	5,40	5,41	5,61
	National level	6,72	6,14	6,02
Number of kindergartens per 1000 persons	CS area	0,59	0,65	0,70
	National level	0,54	0,30	0,39
Number of schools (primary+secondary) per 1000 persons	CS area	0,89	0,36	0,31
	National level	0,46	0,40	0,38

Ratio of population with low qualification (%)	<i>CS area</i>		81,80	n.a.
	<i>National level</i>		69,68	n.a.
Ratio of population with high qualification (%)	<i>CS area</i>		n.a.	n.a.
	<i>National level</i>		12,9**)	n.a.
Number of NGOs per 1000 persons	<i>CS area</i>		n.a.	n.a.
	<i>National level</i>		n.a.	n.a.

n.a. -not available

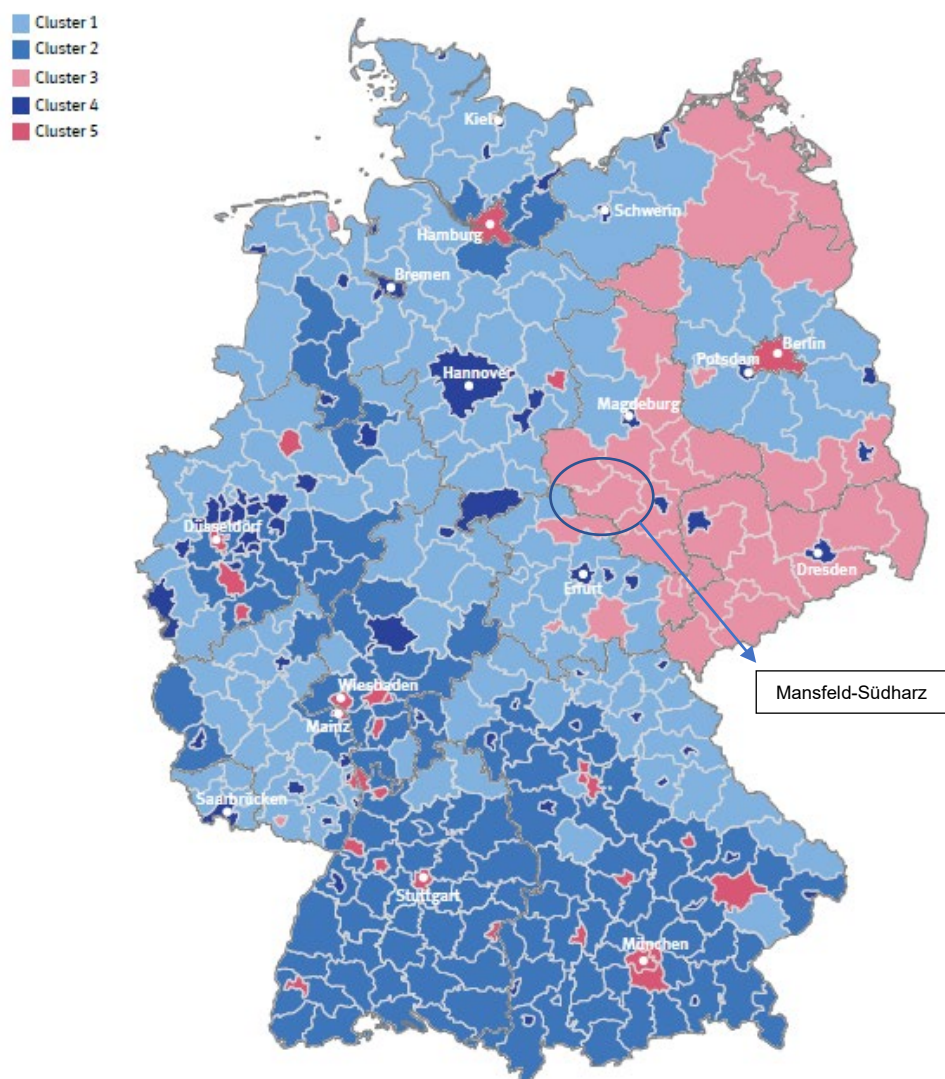
*) with more than 30 Mbit/s, source: Breitbandatlas

**) in relation to total population.

Sources: Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder (Regionaldatenbank), Deutschland 2020

The clear distinction between large-scale areas of Germany, highlighting West-East differences, but also urban-rural dimensions, is underpinned by the following map (Map 1.8). It summarizes a cluster analysis of communal education management at the county level for Germany (Gawronski et al. 2017). The CS being located at the Western edge of the space of Cluster 3 disposes of all the “negative” characteristics ascribed to this cluster: few young people, high share of old people, out-migration, low fertility rate, population decline, few foreigners; high unemployment, low income level; low share of big enterprises, low community tax base; low population density and high share of agriculturally used area.

Map 1.8: Typology of German counties



Source: Gawronski et al. 2017, 81.

1.5 Governance framework

The high and long-term challenges of population decline in large parts of rural regions in Germany led to a particularly high concern and commitment for analyzing, understanding and taking action to mitigate negative demographic developments. This critical situation led to an outstanding involvement of scientific and political institutions with the topic. It is particularly through a long-standing research focus on the relevance of shrinkage in cities and rural regions (of East-Germany) that experts engaged in exploring the demographic changes and challenges and started discussing strategies to cope with the local, regional and national levels of future demographic trends. Leading research has been carried out through the Thünen Institute, a research center affiliated with the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), the Leibniz-Institute Agriculture and particularly its “Institut für Länderkunde” in

Leipzig, and work at the Department for Agricultural Economics and Rural Development at the University of Göttingen.

At administrative **national level** the Federal Ministry of Interior (BMI) focuses on the coordination of activities towards establishing “balanced living conditions for rural areas” throughout the country. Together with the two other mainly involved Ministries for this topic, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) and the Ministry of Family, Aged Persons, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) they established a corresponding National Plan (BMI 2019), and BMEL provides support instruments and framework provisions for the implementation of the different states’ Rural Development Programmes. In order to enhance national views and effective strategies a national Expert Group on Rural Development (SRLE), including 10 national experts from different institutional backgrounds and representing various groups in society, has been established as a national consulting authority since 2015. It is concerned with the gaps in rural-urban spatial developments and advocates considerations on integrating “balanced living conditions” across whole Germany in political discussions and decisions (SRLE 2018), implying substantial activities for enhancing service accessibility, opportunities and life chances in (remote) rural regions.

Demographic development has been a national concern since long. Following a decision of the German Federal Parliament in 1992 a working group on demographic change consulted on appropriate action and submitted its final document how to cope with an ageing society in Germany in 2002 (Deutscher Bundestag 2002). Later on, in 2009 the government’s program targeting at a “demographic strategy for all ages” was announced to address in particular the needs of uneven spatial development between East and West. As a long-term continuous process, demographic change is shaped by common activities of the federal state and the respective state level, as well as more local initiatives, and focuses specifically on the provision of (public) services, particularly in rural, sparsely populated areas. The numerous policy topics relevant for demographic development also call for an inclusion of many different policy fields and administrative institutions in collecting relevant information, reporting on problems and achievements and preparing appropriate strategies (“demographic strategy” of the government). The Federal Ministry of the Interior submitted a “demographic balance” report at the end of the last legislative period (BMI 2017), reminding on the main goals and framework conditions for activities of the government and listing a large number of diverse instruments and realized actions in many different policy fields.

Similarly, at **regional level**, i.e. the federal state level of Saxony-Anhalt, the theme of demographic development is considered as a complex issue and thus requires the collaboration of many (administrative) partners and societal actors. This means that thematic expert knowledge is needed to be gathered in the shaping process for strategy building and implementation of action. Various thematic state Ministries therefore collaborate and organize a structured consideration of the topic through the establishment of an *Advisory Committee for Demography* (‘Demografie-Beirat’; link: <https://demografie.sachsen-anhalt.de/demografie->

konkret/gremien-und-netzwerke/demografie-beirat/), coordinated by the Ministry for Spatial Development and Transport in Saxony-Anhalt. The committee was founded in 2010 with the goal to advise the federal state government of Saxony-Anhalt and to recommend innovative solutions with regard to challenges of demographic change. A specific task is its contribution to the “strategic concept for action in terms of ‘Sustainable Demographic Policy’ for Saxony-Anhalt”. Under the leadership of the state’s Minister for Spatial Development the committee comprises 20 high-ranking experts (from administration, research, employment agencies, migrant organizations, health administration, NGOs and organizations of civic engagement, lower levels of administration within the federal state, i.e. county-level and municipality level and personal experts). Activities are widespread which led to other, more practice oriented networks and institutional gatherings, in particular an “*Alliance for demographic development*” (Demografie-Allianz; link: <https://demografie.sachsen-anhalt.de/demografie-konkret/gremien-und-netzwerke/demografie-allianz/>) since 2011. The difference is that this body consists mainly of experts and persons representing the various action groups, associations and institutions dealing with demographic development in Saxony-Anhalt. More than 75 such institutions are combined in this alliance thereby covering all aspects of regional and local life in the area and supporting civic and communal engagement and activities. A more specific expert group is the “*Expert platform demographic change*” built in 2008 following the suggestion of the scientific council of the Research Centre at Wittenberg. Here the central idea is to enable the transfer and exchange of available knowledge and research findings towards regional and local policy, economic actors and society. Organization of events and dissemination of relevant literature is an important means to enhance the rising discourse on the topic (see: www.expertenplattform-dw.de). Only very recently an additional network emerged from parts of the actors already involved in the mentioned groups, i.e. the *network “active ageing”* (Aktiv älter werden; link: <https://demografie.sachsen-anhalt.de/demografie-konkret/gremien-und-netzwerke/netzwerk-aktiv-aelter-werden/>). The topic of the network underlines the increased concern in the case study and region for the rise in the age structure. Central issues should be discussed by this group and innovative solutions for responding to the observed shifts in the population age structure are sought. It addresses particularly activities to raise awareness, highlight opportunities that have not been seen so far, and responds to needs of this rising population group. The wide scope of institutional involvement in the various regional activities underpin the high level of demographic challenges and the concern of regional actors.

At the **municipal** level the main institutional profile is presented by the local administration. Mayors and local councils are thus the core actors, but many strategic considerations and activities build on diverse local actors from various social groups. The commitment and motivation of these persons are explored in more depth through the interviews in the case study. The county Mansfeld-Südharz comprises 11 municipalities, two of them are an administrative merger of smaller municipalities (Mansfelder Grund-Helbra and Goldene Aue),

the others are significantly larger municipalities that act autonomously for their area (Allstedt, Arnstein, Gerbstedt, Hettstedt, Lutherstadt Eisleben, Mansfeld, Sangerhausen, Seengebiet Mansfelder Land and Südharz). At this level a close cooperation with county level and federal state level activities and networks is highly important in conceiving action and realizing implementation. The numerous examples in the journal "Demograf" (MLV 2019) depict the local relevance of action and the support by multi-level governance frameworks.

2 Patterns and causalities of rural shrinkage

2.1 Broad introduction of global and national factors impacting shrinkage in the CS country

The challenge of “shrinking areas” has been explored and particularly strongly shaped by the experience and discourse in Germany. At the start, concern emerged for “shrinking cities” (Oswalt 2006a and 2006b) which has then been extended through the international debate to assessing instructive cases of urban demographic decline in Europe (Haase et al. 2016) and other parts of the world, particularly the US (Pallagst et al. 2014; Hollander 2018). The literature review in the first phase of the project underpinned that the phenomenon of shrinking is particularly widespread in East-Germany and refers to a large-scale relevance in this area, following the unification process of Germany since 1989. Numerous studies at the national level highlight the persisting gap of a series of socio-economic indicators between West and East-Germany (e.g. Sixtus et al. 2019, Lang and Görmar 2019). In particular, the demographic development in the East has been effected since the unification of Germany so that an immediate out-migration, and subsequently a steady movement towards “West-Germany” can be observed. Together with very limited immigration numbers and plummeting fertility rates in the 1990s a drastic decline of the population aggravated the economic problems of large parts of East-Germany. Three decades later the situation is still almost the same, characterized by continuous population decline due to still negative balances for natural and migration development and negative trends in population forecasts far into the future. Over the last decade, efforts to cope with the situation increased and a number of studies and regional and local initiatives addressed the problem. One of the most comprehensive study was carried out by the Thünen Institute through its targeted investigation on the prospects of (small) shrinking areas throughout the country, particularly focusing on the Eastern part of Germany, commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (Küpper et al. 2013). The analysis focused on a comprehensive view on the reasons of shrinkage and explored various practical recommendations for actions, aiming at enhancing options to cope with local and regional challenges in the sever situation of shrinking rural regions.

The implied socio-economic challenges in large parts of East-Germany were thought to be overcome much sooner, but turned out to be tenacious features and problems of these regions. The legacy of institutional weaknesses and the strongly reduced attractiveness of the area were linked to a wide-spread narrative of regional decline following the Communist collapse. The common explanation patterns of “limited choices” and opportunities within the area depicted a psychological effect and sentiments of inferiority which additionally stirred thoughts of escaping the situation and the crashing economy of the area.

More recently, also opportunities of “shrinking” areas in these parts of Germany are discussed and search for some signs of hope and of emerging activities in these places has intensified. Also experts in the project’s interviews acknowledged some effects of recent shifts in large-

scale policy implementation (Interview 14). These changes are attributed to European and global trends in spatial dynamics and became visible in the immigration wave of 2015/16 which also affected these areas (Interview 1). With the more strict “closure” of the borders thereafter immigration is no major driver anymore. However, the last years have shown a return to economic growth. For remote areas and places like our CS in the Eastern part of Germany this implied an increase in labour demand which, however, could only partly be met due to skill shortages, and on-going orientation of young people towards labour markets outside the CS.

2.2 Evolution of shrinkage in the CS area

The historic background of shrinkage is very evident within Germany, the region and the local level. Thus, interviewees reflected strongly on this “legacy” effect, ascribing to a large part to the adaptation of the economy in the CS area to the organization and policy framework of “East-Germany” after the reunification in 1989. This adaptation and the swift closure of large enterprises representing the economic backbone of the local economy is assessed by most interviewees in a very similar narrative, providing a common rationale that former enterprises had lost economic strengths. However, copper mining had entered into strong difficulties and was in a process of closing extraction facilities throughout the country already before. This problem of “weak competitiveness and not prosperous mining industry” (Interview 4) was experienced since the 1930s but had been covered up by wishes of the German Democratic Republic to keep the industrial potential as long as possible (even beyond the point of efficient use of mining industry). Thus, the “large-scale policy change of the unification of Germany” and the “limited integration ability” (Interview 15) since then was the main trigger for accelerating population decline since the 1990s in the CS. The almost complete de-industrialization of the former industrial pattern of the CS affected the demise of 48,000 working places only in this sector (Interview 4). In addition to the copper mining industries, other relevant regional industries and businesses broke down as well, so that the whole economy of the CS was extremely shaken (Interview 10). Sometimes this is addressed as the “first structural adjustment” for the region, implying that a similar, albeit smaller “second structural adjustment” is impending due to the planned process of “closure” of the coal mining industry throughout Germany until 2038. The financial alleviation of that structural adjustment is planned to be provided through a national support programme for the coal phase-out amounting to a total sum of at least 40 bio. Euro. It is a hot topic in the CS area if the area will be eligible and to what extent respective support can be generated for adaptation measures in the region (Interview 6, 7 and 9). The on-going challenges and structural threats implied with the impending industrial decline are addressed as decisive current aspects for assessing and shaping local and regional policies. Some experts acknowledge that the unavoidable structural changes might also imply altered strategies and new “paradigms” in regional development (see Focus Group discussion).

The awareness that the CS is particularly strong hit by the structural adjustment (of the past three decades) is shared by most stakeholders and inhabitants. The immediate response was one of the highest out-migration waves among all German regions and the experience that challenges are persisting in the CS area until present. The situation is aggravated by the ongoing out-flow of young people, and an above-average percentage of women, having a detrimental effect on the fertility rate and more recently on a sharp rise in the share of high-aged population. Above that, a very high unemployment rate and increasingly very long-term unemployment periods, as well as below average regional income levels are telling features of the regional problems. “Many families have lost their hopes and perspectives and are unemployed for generations” (Interview 8).

This cumulative problem pattern in the region which is often referred to as a “vicious-cycle” from which there is no or hardly any escape had a strong impact not just on the regional economy “but also on the social and societal situation of people living in the region which is characterized by a deep break in the self-esteem of local population as a whole” (Interview 10). Particularly for miners who had always been very proud people the loss of working places (linked to reasonable wages) was felt very strongly and led to economic and personal crises.

Even though the CS has improved the economic structure and parts of its infrastructure (Interview 3), other important infrastructure facilities, like cultural offers, facilities for leisure activities and medical health care gradually disappeared or are threatened to be closed down. In practical terms this means that local poverty is particularly high which even can be observed by the high number of people „queuing-up“ for their transfer payments in front of respective administrative institutions’ buildings at the end of the month (Interview 4). Moreover, the personal problems for the local population accumulate through the ongoing gradual down-scaling and closure of basic services and shops. These trends are widespread throughout the whole CS area and, as a consequence, poverty and scarcity of offer become easily visible.

The differentiation within the CS aggravates problems for some areas due to the current large-scale municipality structure in Saxony-Anhalt. The basis is the administrative reforms at county level (2007) and municipality level (2010) in this area. In the CS it brought about the current county Mansfeld-Südharz obtained through amalgamation of the two former counties (Mansfelder Land and Sangerhausen). Moreover, the following municipality reform led to several large municipalities comprising up to more than 20 villages which had been autonomous municipalities before. In many of the present discussions this dichotomy between “towns” and small “villages” is raised and argued as an obstacle for local action. This debate is relevant and active for large parts of rural regions in Germany (Steinführer et al. 2019).

2.3 Local (regional) perceptions and interpretations of shrinkage: discourses, explanations

The CS empirical work placed particular interest on exploring the local (regional) perceptions and interpretations of shrinkage. It was assumed that by discussing causes and contextual background conditions of shrinkage in this rural area a better foundation for interpreting the local experience of shrinkage and indicators for potential activities of mitigation and adaptation of the situation might be possible.

In general, there was a prevalent position that shrinking in the area is an on-going process with a large legacy effect which cannot easily be stopped or reversed. Thus adaptive activities are implicitly preferred, even if hardly any of the interviewees was explicit on this. The assessment is made particularly difficult as the overall regional dynamic and geographical location within Europe underscores the importance of “large-scale influences (which tend to be) the driving forces that cannot be easily overcome by (partial) policy support, even if coordinated and structured, and supported by best intentions” (Interview 14).

However, the outline and practice of “regional development policies are not really adapted to small rural regions” (Interview 15). With population decline also the size and professionalism of administration decreases and consequently suffers from reduced administrative capacities. What is more, “home-made” problems by decisions at the federal state level Saxony-Anhalt add to the problematique by specific regulations and rules following a concept of “austerity” and limited resource availability for lower levels (Interview 14). Thus, a growing gap between increasing tasks of local authorities and a lack of available resources of local and regional administration is experienced and claimed as the core obstacle for appropriate policy strategies and sufficiently large efforts in implementing useful activities.

This pressure is experienced most explicitly at the local level, including all administrative personal involved with aspects of policy implementation, services provision or support to enhancing local activities. A mayor of a small amalgamated municipality attributes the main reasons for the negative population development directly to the political change following reunification (as the universal narrative goes) and the ensuing industrial decline (Interview 9). However, he recognizes a large scope of policy failure at various levels. The main aspect could be seen in the policy's failure to address and respond in a suitable manner to these challenges over the last decades. In particular, this means that national policies (but also policies at the federal state level) are putting decisions off for as long as possible, and, subsequently, those levels are not involved in communicating with the local and regional level and its population. In his view, and several other interviewees approve to it, policy has thus lost its linkage to the electorate and turned to a predominantly egoistic and materialistic profession. This is not just true for the national scale but also for EU-policies which did not support sufficiently those regions in need of “catching-up” or abolished support instruments prematurely. The local policy thus is constrained to search strategies and actual support activities to improve the situation through local action and support for place-specific industrial

investment and initiatives that are conscious of local strengths. However, this is assessed as a “drop in the bucket” with almost no lasting economic effects or implications for shifting the overall structures. Created jobs are important, but in principle can only slow down the “shrinking” process and have hardly an impact on the “negative spiraling-down” process (Interview 9).

Even if many experts focus on labour market and regional economic structures as driving force for regional development and policy strategies a series of other issues emerges in the empirical work. Local and regional administration actors mainly refer to the “insufficient” support by higher levels and inherent problems due to national and provincial regulations. It is widespread among actors at low levels that financial distribution is not conceived in such a way that tasks at this level can be met appropriately. This problem is relevant for very small municipalities who cannot provide the full range of services demanded by inhabitants but have to seek cooperative arrangements with other municipalities (Interview 5, 9 and 11). But also for bigger ones, including small towns who are legally bound to transfer large shares of their financial resources to the county level, for example (Interview 17). Administrative rules demanding more professional accounting methods (“double budgeting”) add to the day to day requirements and keep municipalities away from more creative and active local development action. It was highlighted in the Focus Group discussions that the “enormous challenges cannot be solved by the county alone. There is a need for (adequate) financial resources, appropriate legal frameworks as well as human resources and expertise to be supplied or supported by the federal state, national commitment and EU Cohesion policy schemes.

Also the type of support is often too short-term oriented and pilot project models might be seen as instructive, but hardly provide regional “solutions”. This leads to wide-spread reluctance to participate in (higher-level) programmes which are assessed as not effective as they establish high-ranking expectations that are not fulfilled. Local and regional actors are dropped and disappointed, and have to cope with persisting problems after the end of “pilot action”, “model region” or too short-term planned “laboratory processes” (Interview 7, 14 and Focus Group). This amplifies feelings of left behind within the population and frustration with professional local and regional actors. Almost all interviews thus showed some signs of “policy fatigue” (Interview 14) which seems an alarming signal for this highly dependent region.

In their own words, actors deploy a “consolidated negative self-conception” (Interview 14) and apply the image of the “vicious cycle” to describe the lack of hopefulness of the region’s situation (Focus Group). This addresses many psychological aspects which hamper intensified engagement and the application of more positive strategies. At the moment, the elaboration of the “Master Plan” for dealing with the nationally announced phase-out of brown coal mining by 2038 is seen as an impetus to revert strategies and find opportunities (and national support) for regional economy and life. This process is conceived as a chance to

achieve more widespread and long-lasting “persistence” (Interview 4) in high-level commitment towards the region.

The debate also revolves around issues of endogenous development, cooperation, interaction with other regions and input from external experts. The long list of previous studies and policy programmes reveal that these aspects have been discussed previously, but as mentioned above, there is strong scepticism in the CS with regard to external influences. Studies have shown that this issue is at the core of finding “innovative” responses to regional challenges (e.g. Harfst and Wirth 2014). It is, however, an issue of emerging interest, particularly in cooperation programmes, like LEADER and Smart Specialization Strategies where more emphasis is put on knowledge exchange and trans-regional cooperation (Interview 4). Depending on personal involvement, some actors focus much stronger on other local and regional assets, in particular cultural, social and environmental features. However, some of them feel side-lined and not taken serious as official support for those activities are limited and hardly appreciated at the large scale (Interview 2). This critical appraisal can be interpreted also as characteristic of an early recognition phase of shifting from ‘passive’ to pro-active development mode in the region. This implies that inspiration and ‘innovative action’ are primarily linked to economic and technological development, underestimating the role of social innovation and reflection of local systems. Nevertheless the discourse on an altered assessment of regional pathways increasingly turns to issues like how to raise attractiveness, realize “opportunities”, appreciate integration and ecological quality. Even if these aspects are slowly emerging in the regional discussion, pilot action and programmes like LEADER dealt with it since many years (Interview 4), but with mixed lasting effects and perception among actors and inhabitants. It is apparent that such non-mainstreaming views and ideas on “non-growth” development are primarily considered by actors in the social and environmental sphere and/or at local levels.

3 Responses to the challenge of shrinkage: visions, strategies, policies

3.1 High level (EU and national) and regional policies addressing demographic decline

3.1.1 EU and national policies indirectly impacting rural shrinkage

The federal state Saxony-Anhalt has been addressed in EU Regional Policy through the inclusion in the areas of highest priority (Objective 1) due to the low economic performance after re-unification with West Germany. This has led to intensive consideration and efforts for use of Structural Funds and Rural Development Policy over the past. In the current period 2014-2020 the planned EU financing from the various funds is still substantial (see Table 3.1) although it is now classified as “transition region” (Art.90, 2b of Reg.(EU) 1303/2013) which implies a GDP level of the region between 75-90% of the EU average. The present description of EU funds focuses on the federal state Saxony-Anhalt as a more detailed distribution of the funds on the county level is not at hand.

Table 3.1: EU financing through ESI funds in Saxony-Anhalt, 2014-2020 (planned budget)

ESI Fund	EU financing (budget planned), in Mio. Euro	National funds (co-financing)
ERDF	1,427	417
thereof CLLD	14	
CF (Art. 91 Reg 1303/2013)	325	
ESF	612	153
EAFRD	602	257
thereof LEADER	86	
EMFF	3	

Source: Sachsen-Anhalt 2017, Förderhandbuch, 15; and https://ec.europa.eu/germany/business-funding/Sachsen-Anhalt_de

The use of the EU-funds summarized in Table 3.1 shows that Saxony-Anhalt is particularly supported through ERDF. Within this fund the priority is on investment measures, particularly on the targets 1, 3 and 4 for which 81% of total ERDF support is planned. The programme has selected the following priorities: (i) research, technological development and innovation; (ii) competitiveness of SMEs; (iii) reduction of CO2 emissions in all industries; (iv) environmental support and resource efficiency; (v) climate change adaptation; (vi) and territorial dimension of endogenous potential. One important project in the case study is the support for renewal of the memorial building of Luther in Eisleben in the CS Mansfeld-Südharz, known and recognized since 1946 as the birth and death place of Luther as “Lutherstadt Eisleben”.

A similar concentration of financial resources on investment activities is observed for the ESF Operational Programme. Priorities here include, (i) sustainable and highly qualified employment; (ii) social inclusion and poverty prevention; (iii) education, skills and lifelong learning.

Saxony-Anhalt has also applied an innovative institutional approach by establishing a joint, cross-sectoral inter-ministerial working group and a Joint Monitoring Committee for ERDF, ESF and EAFRD for the period 2014-2020 (Schlüter 2017, 368). The implementation of the Operational Programmes is supported by close cooperation with a regional bank ('Investitionsbank Sachsen-Anhalt') which takes up a series of administrative duties in financing, and through the "Enterprise Europe Network" (EEN) provides wide-ranging technical support in practical implementation at local level in Saxony-Anhalt.

As Saxony-Anhalt was particularly ambitious in applying a neo-endogenous approach of local development already in the past, the current programmes have taken up the opportunity for multi-fund support through the measure of "Community-Led Local Development" (CLLD), building on the example and experience of LEADER implementation over the past periods (see below). CLLD can be realized also through ERDF and ESF financial resources in this state, in addition to EAFRD.

Also in the implementation of the Rural Development Programme (Pillar 2 of CAP) the state has shown great efforts. The current programme focuses particularly on measures of basic services and village renewal (with the aim of strengthening the social dimension in rural regions and preventing or reducing rural poverty), a strong reliance on catastrophe funds and local development through LEADER. These measures account for significantly higher shares of the programme resources than in other (Western) European countries or regions.

Resuming on its previous intensive focus on implementation of the LEADER approach the state selected 23 Local Action Groups (LAG) which may apply the CLLD approach (making use of additional funds from ERDF and ESF). In total they dispose of about 100 Mio. Euro of EU funds which is an important basic financing for local initiatives. A number of best-practice projects and main themes carried out in the first sets of selected projects is achieved through its local development approach (LAG Mansfeld-Südharz 2016). They are following the strategic outline to foster innovative action to enhance business development and preconditions for local development, in particular targeted education and skills development. The second focus in the strategy is based on the recognition of its regional identity being derived from highlighting Luther's life in the region. Expanding on the "home of Luther" to present the history, culture and landscape features of the region provides a unique asset and attraction which fosters "regional branding" by respective projects.

In the federal state Saxony-Anhalt the possibility to extend LEADER activities and support to a multi-fund support scheme was applied widely. This involved the "specific target 14" in the ERDF implementation termed "extension of the framework of local development strategies to respond better to the complex local challenges". It is the objective of the ERDF programme to implement the CLLD approach within 40% of the 23 selected LAGs. The financial scope of the CLLD support through ERDF arises to 15.9 Mio, with a potential extension of the financial resources due to higher needs for these activities.

Besides EU support, Germany has intensified its commitment to deal with “equal living conditions everywhere” in the country through elaborating a framework of action under the quoted slogan which is also labelled as “our plan for Germany” (BMI/BMEL/BMFSFJ 2019). An expert group commissioned by the three Ministries of the Interior (BMI), of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), and for Family, Aged Persons, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) has provided a comprehensive review and recommendations for the different aspects of living conditions in Germany and how “equal”, or better just, living conditions might be achieved throughout the country. This has particular implications for all German federal states and the lower administrative levels, including regional and local administrations. While all topics include important spatial differentiation and effects, the topics of social service provision and securing civic involvement, participation and “cohesion” is of utmost importance for its relevance for “shrinking rural regions”. With this general report Germany continues its commitment for dealing with demographic changes and spatial divergence of that aspect. Some years earlier the Ministry of Interior had focused in detail on demographic change, policy instruments and action, indicating through the report title that “All Ages Matter!” and it is inevitable to address the specific needs of each age group to support general welfare and life quality (BMI 2017).

The national action programme “regional service provision” MORO has allowed the elaboration of specific model regions in rural areas that address key issues of service provision and prevention strategies against out-migration. The network follows a predecessor programme (carried out in 2012-2015) with activities on service provision and lessons drawn for regional development (BMI 2019). In 21 model regions ample evidence on diverse pathways and management for public service provision has been collected. All the involved rural regions are threatened by on-going trends of population decline and thus represent inspiring approaches and activities for our CS. For many regions with population decline these results are important findings and present practice examples and detailed learning lessons for enhanced sensitivity towards mechanism of population decline and a reconsideration of their strategic approaches.

This wide-ranging concern is visible also at the level of the federal state, with Saxony-Anhalt being particularly stipulated to act in this field due to the tremendous and long-lasting population decline throughout the federal state. The creation of the “Demographic Alliance” at this level in 2011 provided a regional platform for discussion, cooperation and exchange of good practice among more than 75 institutional partners of Saxony-Anhalt.

Raising awareness and understanding for the specific challenges of remote rural regions is also the main aim of the Advisory Committee for Demographic Change of Saxony-Anhalt. An exemplary set of priority topics are the following:

- Immigration and integration issues,

- Enhancing the opportunity for shaping the scope for action through flexibility in applying 'standard regulations',
- Event organisation with focus on demographic issues, like "Week of demography" or yearly events of the "Alliance for demographic development",
- Education support with regard to demography, and
- Providing services and enhancing mobility and accessibility in rural regions.

3.1.2 Regional and local policies directly impacting rural shrinkage

Similar to the higher administrative levels the commitment of the county level (NUTS 3; i.e. our Case Study area) and at local level (municipalities in the CS as well as "villages" within these) for policies dealing with measures that impact rural shrinkage is widespread. This was strongly confirmed by the respective administrative actors (as well as other local actors interviewed) and can also be revealed by a series of activities and relevant projects. Commitment for policy action at this level and consideration of policy failures was intensively discussed at the Focus Group, particularly addressing the structural obstacles for local and regional actors to address rural shrinkage challenges more efficiently. Nevertheless, a wide range of relevant action and tasks was highlighted in that discussion and individual interviews. The various projects are tightly linked to the action field of institutions and private actors, and thus extend either to specific population groups or spatial units within the CS. The various projects can be grouped accordingly:

- Presentation of relevant projects in the CS by the "demographic portal" of Saxony-Anhalt, highlighting specific individual projects, some of them awarded a special recognition through the yearly announced "prize of demography" (Sachsen-Anhalt 2020);
- Individual projects which received the prize in the last year (2019) comprise a local retail shop in a very small village (included in our interviews), vocational training service for young people with multiple personal difficulties, the long-term provision of a "multi-generation house" (also interviewed in our CS), the conversion of a former cloister into a community space for asylum seekers, and a self-organized small garden association for common use.
- Some towns have elaborated an "Integrated Concept for Municipal Development" (IGEK), with different place-based approaches and priorities, e.g. for the municipalities Hettstedt and Südharz (both in 2017), Mansfeld (in 2018) as well as Allstedt (in 2019).
- Several research activities addressed various relevant topics through targeted projects in the area of the CS (e.g. a project within the MORO programme on regional living conditions, IAT 2019-2020; another one on social disadvantage in rural peripheralities in East-Germany and the Czech Republic, Thünen-institute 2018-2021; a project on arrival regions, ifl Leipzig 2016-2019; a project searching for

“potentials of immigration for sustainable development in Saxony-Anhalt”, ifl Leipzig 2017-2019; and a H2020 action, the exploration of social enterprises of infrastructural disadvantaged rural regions – RurAction, by ifl Leipzig 2016-2020). These studies include a wide scope of recommendations for responding to place-based challenges of the CS and suggesting new perspectives and innovative use of local options.

- In addition LEADER/CLLD is applied throughout the CS, focusing on a range of development projects and particularly raising awareness for local action and cooperative working orientation (see above), disposing of financial resources of 4.1 Mio. Euro for the period 2014-2020.

3.2 Discourses and explanations at national/regional levels concerning policy measures and tools addressing rural shrinkage

In the national discourse, the issue of rural shrinkage is predominantly attached to the situation in East-Germany. Minor areas in West-Germany with local problems of depopulation are less evident at the national scale. These other locations would include small-scale remote areas within the “Middle mountains” throughout Germany, areas at the Czech border in the Bavarian forest, places in the Black Forest and some hilly areas at the border to Belgium. None of these is of large scale recognition as a specific shrinking area like East-Germany. Therefore almost the entire research focus of national studies was oriented at these shrinking regions.

The common narrative in these analyses was to explain the underlying processes on the basis of the specific historic and political situation in this part of Germany. The Thünen institute has lead several studies on demographic change, initiating the discourse with the so-called ‘Harz-study’ (Steinführer et al. 2012), an assessment of the remote area of the mountainous region Harz in the centre of Germany with characteristic symptoms of remote places and long-term population loss. Following this introductory “case” to the topic, a more policy-oriented focus should elaborate appropriate strategies for local and regional activities within these regions of population decline (Küpper et al. 2013). Already by then the policy responses were closely related to “adaptation” approaches in order to safeguard living conditions in ageing and shrinking rural regions (Steinführer et al. 2014). They characterize the underlying complex processes and seek to provide reasonable and realistic approaches in the long-term. More recently, these studies intensified and aimed at differentiating the spatial dynamics within the regions, addressing specific attention to the adverse situation in small towns and villages (e.g. Tuitjer and Steinführer 2019), and, on the other hand, searched to enhance local and regional action through investigating “practical responses” to the persisting challenges.

Similar to the scientific discourse, interviews with regional stakeholders revealed compounding effects of the high socio-economic challenges. On-going population decline and recent significant changes in the population age structure (with an intensive increase of aged

persons over the last decade) resulted in sensible consequences at the local and regional level, in particular in the area of public services and provision of social services (Interview 13). These negative trends include almost all types of services of general interest, particularly services of personal and daily demand (like retail shops, bakeries, butchers, restaurants; health services, practitioners; banks and post offices etc.) and, as a consequence, the reduction of public transport facilities. The loss of “daily services” simultaneously led to severe implications for the regional image, in particular the self-perception of the local population: The negative trends in provision of services and problems for day to day life were understood as a sign of increasing “dependence” on other regions and reinforced the image of “loss” (of qualities) of their home and region. “This feeling is so deeply engrained in people that many react through taking extreme (political) positions in the elections or to absent from voting” (Interview 13).

The dominant narrative of loss is often experienced much stronger than any outline for a positive strategy for future development (Interview 1). This adds to feelings of living in an abandoned region, implying an interpretation that “central regulations” are not understood as supportive and, moreover, standardized minimum requirements for social infrastructure are not considering the specificities of small-scale places and not flexible enough to these local conditions (Interview 1). With regard to policy programmes that might be helpful in this situation there is either the view that support, in particular EU Structural Funds support, has been pulled back and regressed in the region too early (e.g. Interview 9) or effectiveness of “big” support schemes and the typical “project” support model is doubted (Interviews 7 and 14, as well as Focus Group). Many interviewees argue that the complexity of funding opportunities, complicated rules and preconditions for receiving support are limiting accessibility of funds, and often enhanced cooperation and local engagement is perceived as more useful (see Interviews 5, 11 and 17). Although some of those initiatives seem at present to work quite well, and local groups that are highly committed could instigate positive trends and achieve momentum in local action, the overall effects and lasting results are assessed as limited, at best (throughout many interviews, but in particular commonly shared assessment by Focus Group). Thus, looking at the large scale context, some kind of “fatigue” is gaining ground which underpins the inherent complexity of issues.

It should be noted also that the numerous activities of local people underscore the hopes and perspectives of local people, much more than programmes and policy strategies. The discourse, as told in the empirical work of the CS, is very much related to local life, work experiences and scope of activities gained through cooperative endeavours of communities and social groups. These opportunities for local action are derived particularly from rising perceptions that the local population is not just regarded as passive “consumers, but, especially in rural regions, traditionally also provides public services, in particular in the field of arts and culture or voluntary fire-brigade service” (Steinführer et al. 2014, 364). In particular, in small communities the role of voluntary work is hence of pivotal relevance. Some argued therefore that providing a substantial base (including financial resources) for small

communities might be more relevant than project-dependent support from higher levels (Interviews 12 and 17).

Providing a more substantial funding base is also a recurrent topic in the expert discussion at national and regional level. Financial resources of local communities have to be increased and adapted in a way that municipal self-government and their ability to act effectively is strengthened (Expertenplattform Demographischer Wandel in Sachsen Anhalt 2018). Also the national Expert Group on Rural Development recommends in their statement on balanced living conditions for rural areas the vital need to increase financial resources of municipalities via long-term support and a place sensitive allocation of financial resources (SRLE 2019, 4f).

3.3 Local responses to shrinkage

3.3.1 Coping strategies

Theoretically, from a governance perspective Germany can be viewed as a country in which „integrative approaches“ are particularly well known and widely used in various contexts since more than two decades (Interview 15). This is supported by the cooperation of the three Ministries responsible for equal living conditions at federal level achieving a joint “Action Plan” for Germany, but also numerous activities through long-term support in urban planning and regional development activities. In general, this confirms a high acceptance of the EU Structural Funds as a useful framework for regional policy and a joint assessment that “a reasonable use of European funds and national resources could make a difference (for the respective regions) and might support regions more effectively than implementation of these policies so far” (Interview 9).

This view supports arguments that don't call so much for additional measures but highlight the need for appropriate framework conditions for civil society. According to them, most emphasis should be put on (i) education, training and courses to enhance (quality of) participation in rural regions, (ii) simplification of eligibility conditions and reduction of bureaucratic obstacles, and (iii) more responsibility for local authority through substantial disposable budgets (Interview 1). Others underscore the observation that “many projects and pilot activities have shown to be emerging and represent driving forces. So (local) stakeholders are able to advance successful projects and this involvement in local communities is a crucial force” (Interview 13). Activities of this kind are both on voluntary basis but also involve actors on a full-time basis. While the wide-spread commitment of the voluntary sector is highly appreciated in rhetoric terms, expenses for local actions (including even small amounts) are hardly supported or reimbursed which puts strong pressure on these actors.

This orientation towards active engagement seems to result from a long-term experience of weakening industrial structures and persisting difficulties in establishing (new) job

opportunities through policy programmes and labour market policy. Strategies which can be seen in the region can be attributed to diverse types:

- A continuous effort by administration, advice and development agencies to try to improve implementation of policy programmes (from all levels, primarily epitomized by EU Structural Funds support). This approach thrives to shape planning practice and to attract innovative industries and new enterprises. As a very active official institution, the “Location Development Agency” (“Standortmarketinggesellschaft”), founded in 2012 aims at promoting the regional economy, transport organization, tourism offer and development, leisure facilities and recreation offers. This integrated view is therefore far stretching and implies to make ample use of available support opportunities. At the local level it particularly enhances intercommunal cooperation, integrated planning, skill development and matching, and implies lasting effects on social perspectives of the inhabitants as well (Interview 7, and Focus Group).
- Another line of argument strongly supports the view that framework conditions in the region have to be improved. This implies two main areas, the improvement of accessibility and a better matching process for skills of workers (and particularly for young adults). While individual mobility has been improved significantly (e.g. through the two main highways A38 and A71 crossing the region) public transport shows important deficiencies. One large-scale aim is the attachment to the “Central German Transport Cluster” (“Mitteldeutscher Verkehrsverbund” – MDV) which is a public transport association of the Leipzig-Halle (Saale) area. Administrators expect that inclusion in that system would facilitate the use of public transport and support regional commuters (Interview 7). One of the current preoccupations is the challenge to achieve a powerful broadband connection throughout large parts of the region (Interview 13).
- Others active in social service activities are convinced that providing a dedicated offer of services would have direct effects on the region’s attractiveness, both for its inhabitants as for attracting people from outside (returnees or immigrants). Also here integrated community centres, e.g. through the offer of “multi-generation houses” might become gateways for many other social aspects and personal demands (Interview 8). The cooperation between different groups of stakeholders and institutions is therefore of outstanding importance. Such community centres would work closely together with regional job centres, youth welfare offices, social workers, self-help organisations, schools and volunteers (of all age groups). Interestingly the county administration (and probably also many other representatives of local administration) strongly support this perspective. A whole series of social services is at display which is organized and addressing all steps of the life course, e.g. welcome and visiting services for new parents, family nurses, child care services, social workers in schools, advice for young people, free public services for pupils, transition management for young adults from school to professional life, cooperation with

universities, etc. (Interview 6). To intensify these activities and make required resources more visible and better available a “Future Fund” has been created in the county.

- As the rate of early school leavers is high in the CS and consolidated long-term unemployment is a huge issue, the regional employment agency and attached institutions (like job center and educational/vocational service organizations) focus particularly on qualification measures for young adults (without vocational training) and offers for long-term unemployed people to activate and qualify them for a possible integration in the labour market. There is a range of programmes (funded by ESF, national and regional funds) which try to reach (young) people in challenging living conditions. This proves, at one hand, successful (drop out rate of early school leavers decreased from 15,6% in 2015 to 11,9% in 2017, Caritas Deutschland 2019), at the other hand labour market experts point out (FG and Interview 17) that a personalized *long-term* support for people with manifold needs would be much more effective, e.g. through a personal coach (‘Förderlotse’) or personal funding, than the fragmented “funding landscape” which is now in place and which is difficult to manage, even for professionals. More locally oriented approaches could be seen for planning issues in towns (e.g. revitalization schemes in town centres to cope with vacancy of shops and houses; see the example of Eisleben, Interview 7) and the focus of very small villages on a “wide range of offers for all age groups and stakeholders of the community” to secure social exchange and retain high quality of life in the villages (Interview 11). It is the explicit aim to “demonstrate that a fruitful life is also possible in a peripheral village” (Interview 5) which was rewarded and appreciated in several occasions by the Demography Prize of the federal state Saxony-Anhalt for the comprehensive activities and stabilizing population effects of that very small community (of several hundred inhabitants).
- A less obvious aspect is the concern to base regional strategies on the specific assets of the regions and to rely on the “rural amenities” as a driver for new incentives and activities. The potential of natural resources, high quality of environment and recreation facilities in open space is taken up in tourism strategies, the elaboration of the “Biosphere Reserve” area (Interview 1) and, partly, the priorities of the LEADER measures (Interview 4). However, there is so far no consensus on the support for this strategy towards enhancing sustainable resource use and focusing on the “uniqueness” of assets of the region. This might be due to the large spatial extension of the area which puts different local aspects into the centre of attention within different parts of the CS area.

3.3.2 Available policy tools: take-up rates, opportunities and hindrances

The interviews and discussion in the Focus Group aimed at gaining information on the use of policy tools. However, an in-depth account of the actual take-up of relevant policy

programmes and instruments is not at hand, and probably is not available for local actors. Assessment therefore is fragmentary and information covers primarily the own action field.

Concluding from the (EU) programme figures a substantial involvement in ERDF measures and some engagement in ESF and EAFRD support should be visible. The main picture occurring from the empirical work is the concentration of the debate on the model character and disruptive implementation of project-like action (through EU programming periods or short-term project application) which limits positive effects, also for well-conceived and exemplary “best-practice” support. This does not mean that interviewees don’t perceive the need for cohesion policies and the general economic effects, but they reflect on the big obstacles of achieving “persistence” and continuity for regional development outcomes (Interview 4, Focus Group).

While some argue that EU funding has been reduced too early by losing its attribution to the category of “Less Developed Regions” within Cohesion Policy and thus ending much of the EU regional support schemes (Interview 9), others highlight achievements in specific fields of action relevant for mitigating or adapting to demographic decline. This involves support by ESF instruments (Interview 3), but more importantly for the wide range of local action, EARDF with its Rural Development Programme (RDP), including LEADER/CLLD implementation (Interviews 4-8, and 11-14). Other instruments of the RDP were mentioned less often which can be understood as a consequence of selecting interviewees mainly from local and regional development domains. However, following information on agricultural support relevant measures would be relevant for areas where farming (and forestry) is of greater relevance. Land use development is, in particular, an issue in relation to intensity, increasing interest in quality products and consumer demand, extending also to landscape issues, concern for diversified agricultural spaces, nature protection areas etc. The long-lasting evolution of the Biosphere Reserve area in the CS reveals many of these discourses and the restrictions for environmental sound practices (Interview 2).

Lack of policy cooperation is addressed partly as an issue of thematic collaboration between policy fields, partly as an issue of spatial scales or collaboration between small and big communities or achieving critical mass through planning for combined services for several villages or municipalities (“flexible geometry” approach). These divergent policy pathways are rather exceptional and indicate the scope of taking up useful place-based experience throughout the CS.

The elaboration of the county’s “mission statement” in a long-term process and the current elaboration of the Master Plan 2038 for addressing the adaptation needs in response to the planned brown coal mining phase-out are the main regional policy discourses oriented at achieving stronger cooperation. Many other cooperative activities happen on a much finer geographical scale, and are thus quite difficult to observe. Nevertheless from conclusions of local actors, these activities build on historic relationships also due to former administrative borders, impact on identity and “regional branding” and are core to achieving resilient regional

development. What actors on county and municipality level miss in this process is a sound resource base and a supporting framework by higher levels that would appreciate the place-based contributions of small areas. Lacking such a reassuring background makes it quite difficult for local actors to retain activity levels and expertise, enhance commitment and secure capabilities of local actors on a long-term basis. The core question is very often how to replace active people (when they are getting too old or terminate their commitment) and to secure positive effects of good-practice local projects beyond project duration and, ideally, also for next generations.

3.3.3. Local visions concerning future pathways and available policy support

Given the on-going pressure on all the actions from different policy fields in the region, all of them seek within their remit to cope with socio-economic challenges. Visionary aspects appeared as minor aspects or were addressed rather as a side aspect in interviews. However, some of the actors are very clear about their perspectives and the main requirements to impact on future pathways that would be supportive for social life and quality of life within their action area.

Visions explicitly mentioned related strongly to the types of strategies mentioned above. So far, the most visible common document on future pathways is the county's "mission statement" (Leitbild 2030) which was elaborated in a long-term participation process with interested regional stakeholders and citizens (Landkreis Mansfeld-Südharz 2018). It implies a set of concrete visions for various areas of life, going well beyond the sphere of administration, addressing the following three main pillars for regional activities:

- Social affairs, health provision and demographic development
- Education, youth and knowledge-based society
- Economy, digitalisation, tourism and environment

Following the intensive engagement through the preparation of the objectives and visions synthesized in this regional document it is envisaged to assess the achievements and up-date the mission's programme every two years. In September 2019 the first of this "evaluation rounds" took place through a regional workshop which sought wide participation and discussion of the priority areas for regional development (Interview 6).

A key concern in the mission's priorities are the needs to provide effective framework conditions for the younger generations so that attractiveness to live in the region might increase in coming years. The development of young people concerns education and skill development, but also the already sensible shortage of high-skilled workers. It is assumed as essential to create a climate in which young people could be persuaded to stay or to move into the region (Interview 7).

Also experts from the outside underscore this vision and point to the need to overcome a perception of stylized explanation of policy failure and to find differentiated policy response to address the place-based problems of the affected areas. In this regard, focused policy

support to attract specialized personal, e.g. medicine personal or teachers, through preferential treatment if they agree to stay for 5 years within the shrinking area might contribute to changes in the region (Interview 15). “A sustainable and more structured vocational orientation in the whole region would be desirable” (Interview 3).

Visions on the most appropriate structure of the European (and national) support regimes are not as clearly expressed. LEADER implementation is most well aware of the high cooperation need and close linkages between local, regional and external actors (Interview 4). In particular, intensified linkages to other LEADER groups through trans-national cooperation might nurture new ideas and contribute to deliver new approaches with increased effects or attractive processes. However, for many the complex support regimes (in EAFRD and the other SF programmes) restrict involvement in these programmes. Visionary aspects relate thus to voluntary action, increase of awareness and regional identity building, and a re-evaluation of natural resources, e.g. through an enhanced appreciation and support for the Biosphere Reserve plans by the federal state Saxony-Anhalt so that the process could be continued effectively.

Since 2019, the region is involved in a new industrial restructuring discussion, i.e. the announced phase-out of brown coal mining in Germany by 2038. For the CS this would imply a further significant loss of regional jobs and a strong adaptation requirement. A Working Group to elaborate a “Master Plan” how to cope with this challenge was installed, with the aim to propose detailed activities in a first draft plan by the first half of 2020 (Wagener 2020). The Master Plan is perceived as distinct from other policy support as it captures the regional hopes for targeted support and an “opportunity to receive relevant resources for sustainable economic development of the region” (Focus Group). Experts highlight that it includes some of the main criteria for successful implementation, i.e. to ground relevant measures in a long-term perspective of local and regional systems, to escape the vicious cycle of top-down measures and overcome scepticism and disappointment of citizens, to (finally) enhance participation and local engagement, and to learn from trans-regional cooperation by merging local knowledge with external expertise. For the first time in the region such a wide-ranging and open discussion on future development options is taking place and supported by different labour market stakeholders, administrative levels and active citizens. In difference to the mission statement this Master Plan intends to formulate concrete and detailed action points, which is the basis for increased expectations for realization of far reaching region-specific targets.

Similarly, smaller communities favour future approaches where local activities (mostly based on voluntary work) can be continued, as well as being supported and valued by the municipalities and county. Their aspiration is to “maintain all activities (at present carried out) in the village and to keep actively creating their community life” (Interview 11). Such an active, local community makes actors involved particularly proud of their way of maintaining a liveable village and community life (Interview 5).

Developing adaptive capacities is hence formulated differently at different local/regional scales, but in many discussions the desire for achieving a method and a process how to organize living conditions and socio-economic development in the region in a “smart” way is a widely shared view.

4 Matching local visions on future pathways of change with potential policy support

4.1 Towards future pathways: enhanced intervention logic along innovative experiences

With regard to grasping the preferences of the community, respectively the various diverse views on future pathways the discussion at the regional level in the empirical work was quite stimulating. Given the long persistence of the challenge of shrinkage in this region and a large part of East-Germany the discourse is continuously led and animated through studies and debate inputs from different levels. After such a long period of impact by negative population change, widely addressed and experienced as a 'vicious cycle', local and regional visions more and more center on practical issues than on nice (new) concepts or hopes put on increased policy support (by external financial input and public funds).

These "practical" action and detailed suggestions for future policy and action change are tightly linked to roles of actors and responsibility patterns. Following the above-presented range of strategies a number of concrete activities and alterations for programme measures are discussed, even at rather low levels. Nevertheless, the mission statement of the county comprises a very comprehensive framework and is a promising indication for the commitment of the responsible administration, involved stakeholders, regional businesses and NGOs, as well as private actors who all have a high interest in contributing to achieving these wide-ranging regional goals. However, the declaration of the three priority areas in the mission statement is very general. Targeting on social development, knowledge systems, all aspects of economic and ecological development, as well as the background of cooperation and solidarity, integrates almost all influential aspects and would account as relevant in most regions. The current elaboration of the Master Plan to cope with the phase-out of brown coal mining over the next two decades has the ambition to provide precise and tangible action points (Focus Group). Its intervention logic is still, as far as it can be assessed through the ongoing discussions, largely oriented on an economic narrative. As such it seems the discussion process taking place at the moment is very much at the initial stage of integrating divergent concerns in its remit.

Regional studies research has traditionally focused since several decades on divergent theories for regional development in "less-favoured regions". With spatial concentration trends and (global) urbanization processes areas like the CS seemed to be left behind and had to "catch-up" either through increased infrastructure development, (fruitless) endeavours to close the skills and technology gaps or through interacting with other regions (Copus and De Lima 2015) and making use of smart development strategies (Kristensen et al. 2019). Earlier on, there had been discourses about strengthening the endogenous potential and building on that foundation the regional development action. However, very soon it became clear that both the regional basis and trans-regional interaction and cooperation might be relevant and more appropriate to achieve tangible success stories in remote, disadvantaged,

shrinking rural regions. Harfst and Wirth (2014) have in an exemplary way shown the limitations of any just “endogenous approach” for regional restructuring and future well-being in this CS.

In the Focus Group meeting discussion the relevance and feasibility of actual and potential intervention approaches, views on favourable conditions and obstacles, as well as already visible good practice initiatives and cooperation experience were addressed. The debate did not so much focus on the three dimensions in the county’s mission statement but largely viewed emerging options through the elaboration of the Master Plan. This underlines the huge efforts and commitment of actors to realize strategies that deploy meaningful effects.

Beyond that formal dimension of administrative work, implementation of public action and support for economic adaptation, as well as socio-economic change in the region, debates on shaping future life conditions can be observed at finer geographical levels as well. This attributes to (small) towns and their specific strategies for “urban development” and integration of local people, as well as to (small) villages which feel neglected from the present administrative structure which combines rather big municipalities with several small villages. The sum of the villages, in general, only accounts for a very small share in the total population number of the municipality (often less than a quarter). Local representatives thrive to unite most interested actors in their community to activate them for local action, cooperation and keeping services, minimum economic activity and social life within these communities.

Intervention logics discussed among the various groups of actors might therefore be quite diverse, ranging from “classical” reliance on SF support in combination with national support mechanisms to the revindication of the paradigm of “(neo) endogenous development” concept through a high degree of decentralisation and use of place-based niches within small areas. By and by, we can witness concern for the predominance of “growth” strategies and the related unilateral interventions which are assessed as hardly useful, but rather as postponing problems in these areas.

The greatest common agreement among interviewees and Focus Group participants seems to address the limitations of current policy support systems for regional development that insinuate that investments in local infrastructure and skills should have a lasting effect on regional outcomes. In contrast to that assumption local and regional actors recognize the structural failures of “project” implementation which encounter limitations at project end and spur disappointment and disengagement among involved people and supportive administration. Successful intervention logics would have to be based on a sufficient resource base of local and regional communities (in difference to widely unquestioned ‘austerity’ features) and a long-term commitment to secure capabilities and commitment, as well as recognition of significant “values” by local actors. Even if that might appear as utopian, the current COVID-19 crisis depicts clearly the potential for alternative pathways, from which we could learn in a search for deliberate (and voluntary) adaptation.

An emerging logic linked to this transformation need, but involving different actors and scales, would relate stronger on local assets (which was partly referred to in the interviews) and a valuation of natural resources and human skills. This perspective involves the place-specific knowledge elements, often not valued sufficiently, but appreciated by some (minority) groups in the area. Organizing such “altered” types of intervention and changing still persistent large-scale structures of support is not yet approved. As long as there is lack in consensus for such strategies and/or in committing public support to unequivocal focus on the long-term challenge of the CS (by different policy levels) effectiveness of general support and regional development will remain limited (and hardly achieve sufficient strength to convert the development strategy).

4.2 Broadened and more suitable policy support

With regard to suitable policy support, the main concern expressed in the expert interviews is related to the insufficient financial and administrative capacity of local and regional actors to address the wide scope of support framework of Structural Funds and to target rural development priorities effectively to place-based challenges. It is not so much the wish to broaden the support framework than to enhance cooperation and networking issues in order to benefit through combined action from the “European offer” of Structural Funds support. Quite often the local level has to cope with a policy “fatigue” in these areas and a scepticism about “external” advice which is an expression of the limited trust and lack of positive experience in applying high-demanding policy schemes. On the other hand, the discourse on local and regional strategies and policy options extends to almost all sub-areas of the CS and to a series of policy domains and action fields. It is shaped not just by respective administrative representatives, but to an increasing extent also by local stakeholders and working groups, as well as citizens who take an interest in shaping local life conditions and raising attractiveness of their area.

Experts involved in the evaluation of the previous programme implementation and dealing with the long-term regional governance system reiterate their concern to orient support stronger on small-scale activity options which would consist of a range of policy measures in diverse policy fields. Many of them address the increasingly required focus on population needs and the enhancement of living conditions to secure and improve living conditions for all groups of society in the CS. The predominance of these ambitions led to a detailed discussion of core local adaptation activities and use of local resources, and a complaint about missing high-level supportive regulations and commitment throughout past decades. It thus reveals a shift towards prioritizing “neo-endogenous” approaches, without labelling the preferred policy deliberations as such. Even if that sounds as a simple turn in the discussion, it is addressing much broader issues and addressing forward looking aspects, implying a highly demanding implementation concept and socio-political approval of (altered) regional strategies.

Beyond providing additional financial resources at low levels, it means also renewed procedural structures that would provide more flexible decision structures and implementation at local levels which actually face substantial legal and formal obstacles. These ideas could be based on the strong commitment for LEADER/CLLD in the region (and the federal state Saxony-Anhalt) but would need a strong impetus to explicitly target the various stakeholder groups and the objective for adaptation in a “shrinking rural region”.

The further elaboration of “smart approaches” targeted on the wide array of required activities and inter-related effects of those measures would be an important pathway for the CS. However, so far discussion on those approaches was limited within experts and local population. In the last year, the national decision to end brown coal mining by 2038 in Germany awakened regional decision-makers and stakeholders invigorating the discourse on regional future pathways. A process for elaborating the respective “Master Plan” to deal with this challenge within the region started. In particular, this became necessary as the impending regional employment development is threatened by further structural adaptation of industries and the expected loss of a high number of jobs. The future regional employment path was described as a “second structural adjustment” (Interview 4). The Working Group now installed is seen as “innovative, comprehensive and open to knowledge” enabling controversial discussions and seeking its potential and strengths from this wide-ranging remit (Focus Group). In this on-going process involved actors see a new and positive sign to overcome stalemate and limited effectiveness of current (regional) policy systems. It is, however, not clear by now to what extent the complex array of issues involved might be addressed and divergent options might be clarified to approve a “manual” of actions including pivotal adaptation requirements for future policy concepts and implementation of EU policies.

The example of the town of Hettstedt has shown in a relatively short period that an altered view and policy approach might have strong positive influence on attractiveness and demographic trends at the local level. In contrast to all comparative other towns and municipalities of the CS the administration decided to address immigration as a reasonable chance to attract new inhabitants and to change the discourse towards accepting new and innovative perceptions of societal development. Good practice action examples are widespread there and refer to a strong consideration of the issue and relevance of migrants for the local people, community life and future chances of the town (Siegert 2019) based on a perspective of integrating all groups of local society and valuing contributions of each of them. More recent events have added to the difficulties in realizing this approach, and pertaining the momentum achieved several years ago. This underlines the need for high level endorsement in the long-term.

4.3 Enhanced governance approaches

The awareness of institutional processes and the governance framework for regional development processes is quite high in the region. Main problems of the CS are presented as tightly interwoven with some of the past decisions on providing larger, “more effective”

administrative units, at both the county (NUTS 3) and the municipality level (LAU 2). As described above, the administrative reform for counties in 2007 led to the creation of the current “Landkreis Mansfeld-Südharz” through the (complete) amalgamation of two former counties. The resulting unit represents an area and a population number which is good comparable with European NUTS 3 areas, but much larger than many areas of the same level in West-Germany. A similar administrative process for the municipality level in 2010 led to several large municipalities in the CS (see introduction and Maps 1.1 and 1.2) in which many villages still exist. Inhabitants of the small villages feel the loss of decision-power for their fine geographical area and the low number of population. Despite the efforts of administration to listen to all parts of their municipalities and to aim to provide appropriate support, services and opportunities throughout the whole area challenges for future development have increased in many of those remote places and threaten quality of life, accessibility of services and community life. While responsibilities for and interest in actions to combat these challenges are well perceived by all levels of administration (community, municipality and county) within the CS, including civil society, the lack of (decision) power and sufficient financial background limits and even hampers effective action. This “gap” between formal tasks for CS authorities and their limited actual “power” to enact changes is felt strongly among local and regional actors.

Despite rising commuting patterns within the CS, some small villages could show positive achievements with regard to population development (as shrinkage could be slowed down for those communities where widespread action took place). However, this paradox effect might result in further difficulties in other parts of the municipalities, especially in the towns, which might become particular problem areas. The development can be assessed as a lack of inter-municipality coordination which is substituted by active local people who achieve place-based arrangements for their communities, municipalities and surroundings.

It becomes therefore decisive to engage in more intensive internal cooperation activities to understand and react convincingly to small-scale spatial dynamics – in addition to the large-scale effects which are not “abolished” or overcome meanwhile.

Local and regional governance in the CS seems to still suffer from half-hearted changes and adaptations more than a decade ago. The diverse types of municipalities and organization structures in place at the moment make it quite different to conceive a “common” answer to the shrinkage situation. As the CS is a rather large area, appropriate geographical spaces for policies shaping life conditions and services is usually below this level (below NUTS3). Nevertheless the county is decisive in supporting the whole area and conceiving strategies at the regional level. The most apparent gap can be observed for the semi-local level (about LAU1-size) which would address the cooperation of several small municipalities. However, through the amalgamation of municipalities in 2010 the “big” municipalities of the CS achieved such a size that internally their area is very diverse and different types of sub-areas can hardly collaborate effectively due to severe power disparities. Moreover, competition between

these “big” municipalities with regard to economic development (set up of industrial settlements), infrastructure and services is still in place and may hinder cooperation in other areas. It would hence be an ambitious effort to establish collaboration agreements on this level for a variety of action fields. The challenge is to “define” appropriate areas for different tasks through different spaces. Thereby overlaps of eligibility areas would increase and that approach of “flexible geometry” is highly demanding for all involved actors. Nevertheless some small communities are working in this direction, involving very high personal efforts of small actor groups. There are considerable doubts about the sustainability of those activities (as they might come into trouble by personal changes/exits of few persons) and the cost implied through such small scaled approaches. It seems, however, that the mistrust of larger levels towards these very emotional and committed local efforts might threaten any search for appropriate lasting arrangements.

Consequently, and this is often referred to in the expert interviews, the EU support of Structural Funds was very important and still is. In particular, it is emphasized that a sufficiently high level of support would be required to address the persisting challenges. It is not just the support measures in itself that are assessed as so influential, but particularly the discourse implying that a national and European “concern” for these areas is also expressed through focused multi-level governance frameworks. There seems limited recognition of the numerous policy decisions and documents at the federal level and of the outline and expectations linked to EU’s Structural Funds. Governance structures need also to convey these high-level objectives more convincingly and understandably to local levels. This includes “listening” to local levels and nurturing “positive” examples” within the region in order to point to feasible implementation and actual effects those measures might imply.

5 Policy recommendations

The discussion of potential policy support is a recurrent theme in any regional debate on place-based strategies for regional development. The empirical work has addressed deliberately (in the interview guidelines and the Focus Group discussion) this pressing agenda on elaborating ideas and recommendations towards a revised future policy development and policy use in the CS. Many of these inspirations are the outcome of long-term discourse in and outside the region. Experts are pointing since several years to the need to better understand the “voices” of local people and to adapt policy measures and implementation practice to the concerns and place-based requirements. In Germany the room for manoeuvre in shrinking rural regions has been addressed in specific studies highlighting the need to cope with the situation and terminate the previous defensive strategy which only took account of challenges and threats of shrinking areas. For example, the study carried out by the Thünen institute in 2013 (Küpper et al. 2013) collected a multitude of national initiatives and local examples that realized the potential for active adaptation measures. In the CS, at least since a decade, a pro-active approach towards coping with demographic decline is sought, reflecting the complex interrelations of underlying causes and driving forces for regional development (MLV 2011). However, like in national assessments, a number of significant obstacles for local and regional activities and resistance against new approaches have to be observed. This include in particular, “limited financial resources and steering options, restrictive standards and legal regulations, unsuitable support conditions and administrative structures, insufficient knowledge on interactions and precarious forecasts, political pressure and citizen resistance as well as inertia of actors” (Küpper et al. 2013, 49).

Following these studies, the regional discourse engaged particularly in three domains of actions to “shape” adaptation measures with regard to regional shrinkage: (i) initiate a changed pattern of settlement, infrastructure and business structures, (ii) instigate cooperation and participation processes, and (iii) extend scope of action for regional actors. Efforts should be particularly strengthened to provide basic support through and preconditions by installing development managers at local level (“Dorfmanager”), securing adequate regional financial resources, prioritize action for new cooperative arrangements (Butzin et al. 2015), particularly for service provision, and lifting the issue of “rural shrinkage” in national political debate so that enhanced political attention for their needs is achieved. Even if that partly sounds as a wish list, Germany has engaged in some related action, e.g. in piloting model regions through competitions. However, these well-intended initiatives proved hardly practical (Küpper et al. 208) and effective for the respective regions (see Focus Group discussions).

As argued by many local stakeholders policy either fails to put sufficient priority on instruments addressing these problems and the adaptation needs or the programmes offered seem too complicated, over-burden with legal and formal details and reductive in providing

meaningful action opportunities. The “retreat” into local and regional action and a continuous focus on regional visions has to cope with this seemingly “neglect” of the shrinking places.

The following areas seem the most relevant policy recommendation aspects for the CS:

- A reconsideration of the potential and required role of national and EU-Support for shrinking rural regions, highlighting the “functions” and specific development opportunities of that type of regions and place-based assets. In particular for the CS this implies an integration of its contribution to the national spatial development strategies.
- A shift in the design and kind of policy support and programmes is required. The current short-term (or medium-term) pilot actions and projects should be overcome and focus should be placed on more intensive and enduring assistance which should also be grounded in the regular administrative structure. Sustained, but highly committed support to the local and regional needs seems more adequate than detached model experience (with no chances of integrating into everyday regional practice).
- An actual integration of all administrative levels highlights the needs for continued and reinforced efforts at the local level. Despite already started initiatives, local tasks and potential have to be appreciated (by all levels) which could become apparent through providing sufficient financial resources for that level. The mismatch of the manifold responsibilities (shrinking) rural municipalities have to tackle and the limited capacity they can dispose of should be a major issue in European and national discussions about funding allocation and policy implementation. Action required should also focus on activities to raise engagement of local inhabitants and integration of marginalized groups, actions to enhance the use of natural resources, increase environmental quality and well-being in the community, cooperative action and spatial collaboration at fine geographical scale (Meijer 2019), and commitment to search for new impulses from “outside” and to ensure relevant resource for peripheral regions in order to be capable to develop “innovative concepts”.
- Strategies to adapt to shrinking processes should address the psychological dimensions related to these processes. As low regional self-conception combined with policy fatigue is not an invigorating stimulus for regional development considerable effort should be laid on information (of already existing opportunities and advantages) and capacity building. This would include processes of proactive change being implemented by communities-of-place, rather than simply reacting to external influences (Skerratt 2013). In particular, the high expectations raised through policy actions should be explicitly discussed in the search for “alternative pathways” of economic and social development.

Nevertheless the current reform of EU-policies and the new programming period can be viewed as a turning point and opportunity for realizing adaptations and improved use of the

EU's framework. The assessment of these changes largely depends also from the higher level, i.e. in Germany the federal state Saxony-Anhalt which should provide an interpretation of the renewed framework applying all possible options to raise attractiveness of the CS (and similar locations throughout the country). The discussion of the opportunities in the interviews and the Focus Group did not so much focus on future concepts using the EU Structural Funds and Rural Development Programme, or other inter-related policies, but highlighted the reiterated national debate on structural adjustment foreseen for the next two decades.

Analysis of the CS suggests a range of preconditions in the following domains for policy implementation through local and regional actors which could be enhanced by appropriate targeted tools:

- **Providing a renewed narrative that underpins a perspective for the region:** The withdrawal from brown coal mining by 2038 leaves a long enough time period to consider fundamental restructuring of the regional labour market and appropriate future action in policies to shift towards some kind of “green economy”, respectively a genuinely sustainable development path. Adaptation required is considered as “an unambiguous re-orientation” towards strategies paving the way for an altered field of policy in the socio-economic relevant policies.
- **Think and plan in a long time frame:** Lessons learned from policy application so far highlight mismatch of well-intended policies and needs of shrinking rural regions. Efforts to enhance local engagement and to elaborate strategies based on local needs should forward place-based approaches and reflect alternative narratives for shrinking rural regions. A fruitful complementary “mix” of local initiatives and trans-regional expertise should be included in the regular regional agenda and should be used to contribute to increased empowerment, self-confidence and targeted action of practitioners.
- **Allocate sufficient resources at local and regional levels:** In particular, local and regional administration lacks available financial, personal and skill resources to address the wide range and intensity of actions required by challenges of shrinking rural regions. These pressures felt by local and regional actors should be addressed by stabilizing existing funding structures and providing continuously available local and regional budgets to address the needs of local population.
- **Engage in action to strengthen trustful relationships:** Support to raise trust is fundamental to incite regional efforts and enhance regional ‘spirit’. Trust building approaches start with overcoming the limitations of administrative rules and regulatory processes to achieve an effective level, avoid excessive control mechanisms, but particularly frameworks to stir exchange of views, approaches and plans, as well as exemplary good practice and effective local involvement.

Conclusions

Main issues arising from CS empirical work and interpretation of the various area-specific information underpin the relevance of “shrinkage” in the CS and its exemplary character for the situation of the Eastern part of Germany, a particular “hotspot” of shrinking in Europe. The long-term process of population decline in the area goes back to the time before the German Unification in 1989. After that historical rupture reaction in East-Germany was particularly strong. The desire for a swift equalization of living conditions between East and West led to marked reactions by local inhabitants: An immediate rise in unemployment, a high number of out-migration and the loss of young population groups, and the dramatic drop in fertility rates. In consequence, these brought about the background in which since then population decline was almost in all years higher than -1.0% p.a. Even though in recent years migration balance improved a little bit, the overall population development is still as negative as it was decades ago.

Local stakeholders and experts agree widely that the political changes through the Unification of Germany is the main reference point in this development. However, despite the common assessment of the underlying triggers and main causes of shrinkage among local and regional actors, conclusions for future pathways, strategies and detailed policy action for adaptation measures are quite different. Their focus depends on discourses in various socio-cultural contexts and personal views towards general social views and narratives. The majority of future scenarios is presented within an adaptation strategy that seeks to take advantage of place-based specificities of the region and a reasonable response towards the (limited) opportunities of the “shrinking” area. However, some argue for an in-depth differentiation of the region, highlighting the substantial internal socio-economic, ecological and cultural differences. It is particularly the desire of being “respected” in the specific development needs at the fine geographical sphere that is quite often overseen, following arguments of “lack of critical mass”, concentration of resources and “effectiveness” of policies. Another emerging narrative is convinced that “growth” concepts and the adherence to that view without any alternative is critical for the emergence of “shrinking” areas and altering future strategies away from that concepts would be crucial for any long-term changes in spatial dynamics.

Emerging local strategies are observed among some groups of actors at fine geographical scale. On account of a long involvement in national, regional and local discussions on population decline the predominant sentiment conceives adaptation strategies as the only realistic option (Küpper et al. 2013, 50f.). Yet, the well-known wish for clear-cut answers and “easy” policy fixes is widespread and sensible in many discourses and personal statements. It is very difficult to accept the high complexity of spatial dynamics, the limitation of regional and local actions’ influence, the long-term nature of desired changes, and the obstacles to shift policy programmes and coordination towards new valuation systems and policy orientation.

Being part of the national policy framework and its tight regulation system can be boon and bane. It seems important to focus local and regional development tasks on their specific and divergent views and tasks so that they can contribute to shape the (national) multi-scale governance system and achieve local engagement and effects on well-being of inhabitants. “Shaping” the overall governance system might be overestimating the potential role of marginal regions: Hence, it might be more appropriate to speak of altering the perspectives and enabling other development pathways, favouring an alternative value system than the currently prevailing “growth” dogma. The resistance against any change by powerful actors of our economy could be seen as main limiting factor and obstacle for such a change. Yet, recommendations to deal with the situation of the shrinking rural region for the CS representatives have to address the actual policy discourse at the local and regional level. This could be more influential than addressing the high-level wishes for macro-regional changes, and could make a real difference. Highlighting the complex issues, without engaging in a black and white outline of regional options and simplifying opportunity development towards “adapting” to mainstream processes might put an ignition spark to required and desired recognition of the area’s needs and improvement of day-to-day living conditions.

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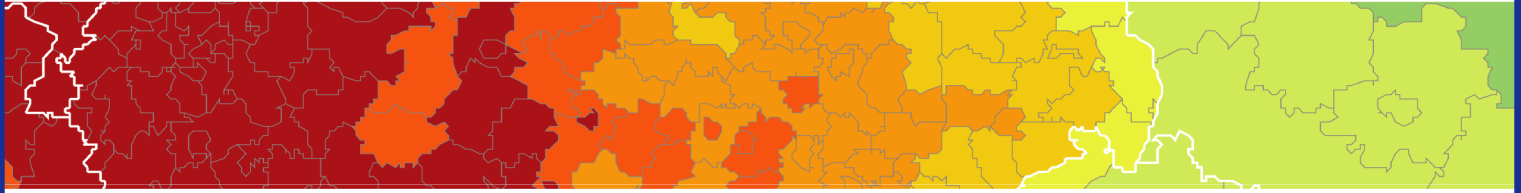
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The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.