Urban decline within the region: Understanding the intra-regional differentiation in urban population development in the declining regions Saarland and Southern-Limburg
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Understanding spatial differentiation in levels of urban decline
Understanding spatial differentiation in levels of urban decline


ABSTRACT – The economic and demographic changes currently manifest in many Western cities – referred to as urban decline or urban shrinkage – are receiving increased attention in public and academic debates. Although the general processes driving these changes have been identified, such processes cannot explain why regions and cities which have been exposed to similar processes still differ in their economic and demographic developments. This Western European and US-based literature review attempts to answer the question of how this inter-regional and intra-regional differentiation in levels of economic and demographic decline can be understood. It is argued that the degree to which wider societal forces (such as deindustrialization, changes in international and domestic migration and changing fertility levels) impact on a particular region depends on how these forces are filtered, first, through the institutional and, second, the spatial context that the region is located in. To understand the differences between the cities within one region (being part of the same institutional and spatial contexts), we need to descend to the city level and take account of the city type, local (dis)amenities, comprising its physical, social and economic assets, the influence of (the place characteristics of) other cities in the vicinity and the local political framework.

2.1 Introduction

More and more cities in the Western world are undergoing structural changes in the form of population decline and eroding economic structures. Growth, in both demographic and economic terms, is no longer a reality. Some describe these changes as urban decline, whereas others use the term urban shrinkage. What the terms have in common is the demographic and economic changes occurring in some type of settlement, such as a decline in the total population and changing population composition and changes in the amount and type of employment as well as productivity and income. The rustbelt cities in the US and shrinking cities in former Eastern Germany are the well-known examples, but also other types of cities and in other parts of Western Europe are now affected.
The drivers of these changes have received considerable attention so far. A number of them have been pinpointed as major drivers of population decline in the Western world. For instance, Hollander et al. (2009, 223) state that many shrinking cities exist because of the post-industrial shift from manufacturing to service industries, with the resulting unemployment and out-migration (e.g. Pittsburgh, St Louis, Manchester [UK]). Contributing factors might, among many others, be suburbanization, war, natural or human-induced disasters, and ageing or a low-fertility rate, and the dissolution of socialist systems.

Such general factors may help us to understand the ‘occurrence’ of urban decline, but not the ‘degree’ of decline. To give an example, mining regions in Europe have suffered from the closure of the mines (for instance, the Ruhr area in Germany and the mining basin in Nord-Pas-de-Calais). Employment has decreased significantly, and it is argued that people have consequently migrated to other regions, thereby causing population decreases ( decline ‘occurs’). Nevertheless, the degree of decline differs strongly between the regions and also between the cities in these regions. The closure of the mines alone cannot explain this variation, so the question is what can.

By concentrating on the general causes, the influence of the particularities between regions and within regions – which may be crucial for understanding the variance of growing and declining cities – has been overlooked. In this chapter, I formulate a framework for approaching the inter-regional and intra-regional differentiation by taking account of different types of spatial and institutional settings and different types of settlements. The main question that is answered is how can inter-regional and intra-regional differentiation in levels of urban decline between and within Western European regions be explained?

First, the terms urban decline and urban shrinkage are briefly discussed. Then, after discussing the spatial patterns of urban decline in the Western European and American context, the contexts which contribute to these different regional patterns are discussed (the institutional and spatial contexts). Finally, the discussion switches to the factors that contribute to different levels of urban decline within the same institutional and spatial contexts.

2.2 Urban decline vs. urban shrinkage

In the literature, two terms are used to describe population and employment decline: urban decline and urban shrinkage. Urban decline is used especially in the Anglo-Saxon debate from the post-war period onwards, while urban shrinkage originates from a later date and features in the German urban development debate.
In most of the definitions, urban decline is perceived as an urban transformation, comprising population and employment losses as well as related problems of social exclusion, deprivation and sometimes even physical decay (Cheshire and Hay, 1989). An OECD report (1983, 52) states that “Urban decline is thus defined as the spatial concentration in large cities of social, economic and environmental problems such as high levels of unemployment and poverty, housing deterioration and decay of the urban infrastructure”. There is a strong focus on social, economic and physical transformations and less on population decrease. Although these urban problems can often cohere with population and employment decreases, this is not necessarily a causal combination. After all, population decrease may lead to an improvement in living conditions because of less overcrowding and pollution. Moreover, such urban problems can also occur in cities with a growing population.

Bradbury et al. (1982, 18) also separate population and employment losses from the problems that affect quality of life and state that “declining cities are cities in trouble, cities not as economically or socially healthy as they used to be or as they should be”. They distinguish between the descriptive (the objective measurement of any change in population and employment) and the functional meanings of decline (the declining ability of a city to perform its functions and contribute to the wellbeing of the urban residents and society in general). Theoretically, therefore, functional decline can also occur in cities which are not descriptively declining and vice versa. The term functional decline and what is regarded as economically or socially healthy are subjective. Beauregard (1993, 189) is strongly opposed to a “typical social scientist, objective narrative” of urban decline and claims that such narratives “negate what is most important about urban decline; its evaluative, emotional and symbolic content”.

The same problem of definition and negative framing applies to urban shrinkage. Lang (2012, 6) states that it is “also the labelling and adding of values to these structuralist processes and types of regions” which constitute shrinking cities and regions. The term shrinkage was coined by two German scholars, Siebel and Haüßermann, in 1987 to describe, what was then, a new and unprecedented urban development of urban population and employment decline. They distinguished between cities affected by suburbanization of employment and population and cities affected by a full erosion of the economic structure. The term shrinkage continued to take root in the current century. According to Großmann et al. (2008, 79), “the term described the massive post-reunification population losses of the cities and towns in Eastern Germany, due to job migration, suburbanization and negative population growth”. A marked difference between the two concepts is that in the urban shrinkage literature also attention is paid to the effects of negative natural developments on
population developments (low birth rate and high death rates). The definition of Pallagst et al. (2009, 1) is more general and applicable beyond the context of Germany: “The shrinking city phenomenon is a multidimensional process, comprising cities, parts of cities, or entire metropolitan areas that have experienced dramatic decline in their economic and social bases”. Most scholars do not a priori determine the causal and sequential relation between economic decline and demographic decline, but rather acknowledge that both types of decline are interrelated.

Whether it is called urban decline or urban shrinkage, we are clearly talking about an urban transformation process which entails demographic and economic changes and possibly other social and spatial changes as well. The ‘urban’ aspect is interpreted differently by the authors, however, and the definitions therefore apply to different geographical units. The ‘urban’ in the above-mentioned definitions ranges from the neighbourhood (Cheshire and Hay) to cities with more than approximately 100,000 inhabitants (Bradbury et al.) and 333,000 inhabitants (OECD) to the 50 largest US cities (Beauregard). Some do not specify the geographical extent of the unit at all. In the remainder of this review, I use the term urban decline, which is perceived as a process of economic and demographic decline in an urban setting.

We need to be aware that each explanation actually explains the decline in a specific city, a specific region and a specific institutional context (the US, Western Europe and Eastern Germany). This complicated set of drivers of urban decline needs to be unravelled according to the type of settlement and the context this decline finds itself in. This leads to the central question of this paper of how to explain inter-regional and intra-regional differentiation in levels of urban decline.

2.3 Methodology

In this chapter, urban decline is subdivided into demographic decline and economic decline. Even though demographic decline and economic decline and their consequences are strongly interwoven, I do not incorporate the consequences of decline in this review. The consequences – for instance, vacancies, social segregation, underused infrastructures and declining tax revenues – are as numerous and complex as the drivers, and it would take a whole other chapter to discuss them.

I review the literature about urban decline and urban shrinkage in Western European and US cities and try to disentangle the different drivers leading to demographic and economic decline. This disentanglement entails separating demographic change and economic change from their components and their drivers. The components of demographic change are natural increase (births minus deaths) and net migration (in-migrants minus out-migrants) and those of economic change are
changes in the economic structure and number of jobs. The drivers are those processes that lead to the changes in the components (figure 2.1). An example is the driver of declining fertility rates, which then affects the component of natural increase, leading to demographic change. As will be made clear later, the economic and demographic drivers are also interrelated.

I investigate whether and to what extent these drivers differ between regions and among cities in a region. After all, it is not important to policy-makers as to why cities in general are declining, but why exactly their specific city and cities in the region are declining. Or, as Pumain (1999, 1) puts it, “a good and spatially exhaustive knowledge of regional variations in rural and urban types and patterns is therefore needed before any implementation of territorial policies”.

**Figure 2.1. Conceptual model**

![Conceptual model](source: Made by the author)

In this review, wider societal forces manifest in the entire Western world are identified first. In order to explain why there are differences between regions, the ensuing discussion is on how a number of processes differ between different institutional and spatial contexts. For an explanation of the differences between cities located in the same region, I move the focus to the city level and discuss the local context.

### 2.4 Urban decline in the US and Western Europe

The maps of the US and Western Europe show that there are both regional patterns and local variations in population development levels (figures 2.2 and 2.3). There is a pattern of region-wide population decline in the US in the mid-west and the
Appalachian counties, in many Great Plains counties and in counties along the Great Lakes and Canadian border (Mackun and Wilson, 2011). In Western Europe, large-scale population decline has occurred in large parts of Germany, Portugal and Sweden. However, within these large areas of population decline, some cities and counties are still growing (such as Delaware and Dallas in the US and the counties around Berlin in Germany). These maps also demonstrate the fact that the patterns and level of differentiation in growth and decline very much depend on the size of the region in question.

Figure 2.2. Population development in the US, county level, 2000-2010

Population decline is almost omnipresent in Eastern Europe, but there it is rather unique. In this chapter, the focus is only on the US and Western Europe. For further reading on Eastern European urban decline, see, for instance, Mykhnenko and Turok (2008) or Smith and Timar (2010).

### 2.5 Wider societal forces

There are a couple of drivers that affect demographic and economic developments in the Western world. The primary process that affects natural demographic development is said to be the low and/or declining total fertility rates. These decreasing fertility rates can be regarded as part of the second demographic transition which also includes population ageing and changing household structures (Audirac, 2009; Klemme, 2009). Ageing (the shift of age distribution towards the older age
groups because of lower fertility and/or increasing longevity) does not necessarily lead to population decline. In fact, it tends to moderate decline, at least temporarily (Coleman and Rowthorn, 2011; ESPON, 2010). Currently, in many places, ageing compensates birth deficits to a certain extent and, in that sense, population decline is postponed until the point in time that this older generation deceases.

Because this issue of fertility is stressed so often, it is worth digressing on this matter briefly to establish whether there is, indeed, evidence for a relationship between total fertility rates (TFR) and population development in Western Europe. An analysis was carried out on 174 Western European NUTS 2 regions and a significant and positive relationship between TFR of 2009 and population development (2000-2010) was indeed found. This showed that the higher the TFR, the higher the population growth (figure 2.4). Clearly, those regions with very low TFR’s are also regions suffering from population decline. Nevertheless, only 8 of the 174 regions in this analysis had a TFR of 2.1 or higher (the replacement rate) in 2009. The majority of the regions had a TFR below 2.1, but still experienced population increases. This means that migration and/or ageing was compensating these low total fertility rates.

Figure 2.4. Fertility rate (2009) and population change in Western European regions, 2000-2010


1 Western Europe being defined according to the United Nations geoscheme for Europe + UK.
The question remains, however, of whether there is a relationship between declining total fertility rates and population decline as mentioned repeatedly in the literature. This relationship cannot be confirmed for Western European regions in the period 2000–2010 (figure 2.5). There is one clearly discernible cluster of regions with the unexpected combination of high increases in fertility rate and high decreases in population numbers. These are all the Eastern German regions that are catching up with the other regions, as they had extremely low fertility rates to begin with (approximately 1.25 children per woman in 2000).

More ‘national effects’ are discernible. Examples are the German cluster with very low total fertility rates and low population development (in figure 2.4), an Austrian cluster with growing fertility rates and populations and a UK cluster with extremely high increases in TFR (average increase 19%) and small population growth (in figure 2.5). The lower left-hand quadrant (decreasing TFR and population decrease) is a cluster entirely filled with Western German regions. We can therefore identify both national and regional effects.

To sum up, it would appear that it is not so much recent total fertility decline that leads to population decline, as the fact that the already below-replacement level fertility rate is not compensated any more by other forms of population increases (such as migration or ageing).
Figure 2.5. Change in fertility rate and population change in Western European regions, 2000-2010

![Graph showing change in fertility rate and population change in Western European regions](image)


With regard to migration, a number of processes which stimulate migration flows are mentioned in the decline debate. The most frequently mentioned factor is the large-scale economic transformation called the post-industrial and post-Fordist shifts from manufacturing to service industries (Audirac, 2009; Hall, 1993; Hollander et al., 2009; Klemme, 2009; Pallagst, 2008; Wiechmann, 2008), which is related to the integration of regions into the world economy (Sassen, 1994). The demise of industrial economic structures is not that problematic, as long as the losses in industrial employment are compensated by gains in employment in other branches, such as the information and service-based industries (Popper and Popper, 2002). If the industrial employment losses are not compensated, people will leave the region in search of employment elsewhere and the region will also attract fewer immigrants.

A second general factor that influences net migration is (the absence of) international immigration. This immigration flow is crucial for an understanding of population developments in urban areas, as international migration can (partly or fully) compensate for the losses caused by domestic migration and natural decreases (Flöthmann, 2003; Frey, 2005). This happened recently in some cities in the most declining region of the Netherlands, Southern-Limburg, due to the immigration of Eastern European workers to the region (Scheeren-Nowak, 2012).
After the fall of the Iron Curtain and, later, after the admission of many Eastern European countries to the European Union (EU), many Western European countries profited from immigration flows from Eastern Europe. However, these migration flows are rather limited in extent when compared with the population sizes of the sending and receiving countries (European Commission, 2006).

2.6 The institutional context and the role of the welfare state regime

The degree to which these wider societal forces find a foothold in a particular area depends, to a certain extent, on the institutional context that the area is embedded in (Kazepov, 2005). This institutional context serves as a kind of filter. National policies can aggregate, alleviate or avert the effects of certain wider societal forces. Any particular area therefore functions within, and is affected by, its national frameworks with fiscal and monetary regimes and labour market regulation (European Commission, 2007) as well as by social and redistribution policies. How can such frameworks help to understand the spatial differentiation in decline levels? In other words, are cities and regions located in different institutional contexts affected differently by these wider societal forces?

Even though all countries have their own specific sets of policies and regimes and no two countries are exactly the same in this respect, there are still a number of welfare regimes with more or less similar institutional frameworks. Esping-Andersen (1990) identified three ideal types of welfare regimes, namely the liberal, conservative and social-democratic regime. Others added the Mediterranean countries (Arts and Gelissen, 2002) and presented different classifications (such as Ferrera (1996), who distinguished between Anglo-Saxon, Bismarckian, Scandinavian and Southern types, or Bonoli (1997), who mentioned British, continental, Nordic and Southern types).

There are certainly aspects of the institutional framework which can influence natural increase, particularly birth rates. The most important aspect is the influence of national child-related facilities and family policies that influence fertility levels by stimulating child-rearing and by facilitating the combination of children and work. Sleebos (2003) found a weak positive relationship between reproductive behaviour and cash benefits and tax policies in the OECD countries. The types of policies used differ from one welfare regime to the other. In France, Belgium, Denmark, Finland and Sweden, mothers with children are helped to participate in the labour market. In the liberal UK, the chances of a mother remaining employed depends more on her individual capacities and preferences and less on the services and policies of the state. Germany, the Netherlands and Norway take up a middle position. Indeed, in those Western European countries where generous family support is provided, the fertility
rates are higher than the rates in those in which family support is moderate (Neyer, 2003).

The institutional contexts impact on net migration as well. Large-scale economic changes such as deindustrialization and tertiarization, with concomitant effects for the urban labour population, have various impacts in different welfare regimes. In a liberal regime, such processes are theoretically seen as a logical consequence of market behaviour and governments hardly interfere with these market forces. In a social-democratic regime, the reverse applies, with the national government likely making an effort to intervene. An example of a city that suffered from the decline of federal and state support in a liberal national framework is Detroit (Wilson, 2009). The federal state and the state of Michigan did not intervene in the breakdown of the automobile industry (which was a consequence of normal market behaviour). Additionally, the cutbacks in urban aid by the Reagan administration affected the city tremendously (DiGaetano and Lawless, 1999). Under Clinton’s and Obama’s presidency, however, federal state aid was again funnelled to the city, first in the form of an empowerment zone grant and, more recently, via the new American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Steinmetz, 2009). However, above all, local businesses and local politicians, read mayors, have been driving the city’s development, with varying success.

Another wider societal force which has filtered through the institutional framework is the process of neoliberalism. The degree to which a national government employs neoliberal policies and strategies and wishes to intervene in economic processes and regional inequalities is important for an understanding of these differences. A product of the neoliberal school of thought is the concept of territorial competitiveness. According to Brenner (2004), states that have adopted territorial competitiveness policies have contributed to the widened gap between cities(-regions) that are able to compete and those that are not. Those cities that are not competitive and in decline find it difficult to attract investors and private parties as there is no certainty of generating returns (Rink et al., 2011b). Such processes can therefore cause the city to be stuck in a process of decline.

Another institutional ‘filter’ through which wider societal forces impact on net migration rates is national immigration policy. Besides the general legislation regarding asylum seekers included in the Geneva convention and the EU legislation regarding intra-European free movement, European countries still have their own sets of immigration legislation. These differ especially in the admission of non-EU citizens and naturalization. Generally, immigration policy is intended to favour certain population groups and stem certain unwanted groups (Joppke, 2011). In countries in which
immigration policy hampers large-scale immigration, there is less of a chance of immigration compensating population decline through natural decreases.

2.7 The spatial context and the role of regional specificities

A key question is how the differences between regions located in the same institutional context can be explained. I argue that we need to involve the spatial context, or spatial characteristics of the region.

One such regional specificity that directs migration processes is the **regional employment structure**. Wider societal forces of deindustrialization and tertiarization are filtered not only through the institutional context, but through the spatial context as well, as the degree to which such forces affect a particular region depends on the characteristics of the economic structure of that region and on how diversified and flexible the economy is. Deindustrialization will not lead to dramatic economic and demographic decline if the economic structure comprises enough other sectors which can take on these industrial workers. Indeed, the danger of monofunctionality is mentioned frequently in the literature (Bontje and Musterd, 2008; Haüßermann and Siebel, 1987).

Another regional factor is **connectivity and situation**. Where is the region located within the country and how well is the city connected to other places? Peripherality, perceived as the distance to the economic and administrative core area, seems to play a role in regional decline. Examples are the declining French regions, such as Champagne-Ardenne and Limousin (Cunningham-Sabot and Fol, 2007), as well as some Dutch regions (Southern-Limburg, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and East-Groningen). Although the negative developments in these regions are not affected by peripherality alone, it certainly plays a role. Just like urban decline itself, this peripherality is a value-laden concept as it is “*a relational concept which also depends on dominant normative interpretations and/or theoretical viewpoints of the central and the peripheral*” (Lang, 2012, 5). Scale matters as well. After all, a region which may be located peripherally at national level may be located centrally from an international perspective (for instance, the Alsace region in France). Connectivity can influence relative peripherality. Although a region may be located close to the economic core in terms of absolute distance, without good infrastructure it will continue to be relatively distant. This is illustrated by the development of the French region around Lille. The border region in the north of France saw its relative peripherality decrease via the construction of a TGV station, putting Lille strategically on the London–Paris line. This was a powerful impetus for Lille’s economic upswing (Paris, 2000).
This issue of peripherality touches upon the influence of the border. It has already been pointed out that the national institutional setting is an important factor. Border regions are challenged by the proximity of different institutional contexts, leading to a variety of consequences. One important consequence is cross-border migration induced by, for instance, differences in taxation regimes between countries (Latten and Musterd, 2009).

In short, the literature review has shown that the institutional and spatial contexts filter, constrain and fuel the wider societal forces and therefore determine how these forces impact on a particular city. The institutional framework with its concomitant policies can both directly and indirectly influence demographic and economic developments (by stimulating birth rates, protecting and subsidizing important economic sectors and by offering a social and financial safety net in the event of mass unemployment). Furthermore, governments can intervene in the process of decline and start a regeneration process. However, these general processes – even though filtered through the institutional dimension – do not occur on an isomorphic plane. The spatial context that the affected city is located in plays a role as well. The regional economic context, location of the city in the country – peripherality – and the infrastructural connection all play a role. Such a framework allows us to explain the differences between cities in regions that have been exposed to the same wider societal forces. Figure 2.6 schematically portrays this filtering principle. It is clear that the wider societal forces alone are insufficient when it comes to explaining the inter-regional differentiation in levels of decline.

There are reciprocal arrows between the elements of the model, portraying the intricate process of decline with multiple layers of interrelated drivers and feedback loops (Hoekveld, 2012). Demographic and economic drivers are often interrelated. Declining employment may lead to out-migration of young people, which results in dropping birth rates. Population ageing often leads to a change in demand for consumer goods, resulting in the establishment of different stores and, consequently, retail employment. Schwarz and Haase (2010) mentioned the circularity of the decline process and the circular process of population decline, neighbourhood downgrading and use of infrastructure. Friedrichs (1993) also referred to the circular process of demographic decline, economic decline and urban elites. However, neither model has (yet) been empirically tested.

The drivers and the context are also mutually related. If, for instance, urban decline leaves a city obsolete and various problems occur, the national government
can decide to change its redistribution policies or improve a region’s infrastructure (thereby affecting the spatial context).

Figure 2.6. Adjusted conceptual model

![Diagram showing the adjusted conceptual model of urban decline with nodes for demographic change, economic change, changing demographic components, changing economic components, spatial context, institutional context, and drivers: wider societal forces.]

Source: Made by the author

Although this framework may help to explain the difference between regions, it fails to answer the question of why there are differences between cities within a region, despite them having been exposed to the same wider societal forces and the same institutional and regional spatial contexts. Given that insufficient attention has been focused on this question in the literature, I propose a number of areas in which an answer to this question can be sought.

2.8 Intra-regional differentiation: the differences between cities in the local context

It is expected that the absolute properties of cities (that is, size, type, amenities and image of a city) determines which type of drivers of decline play a role. Furthermore, these drivers can have contradicting outcomes. Here, core cities, suburbs, regional cities and small peripheral villages are distinguished.
Core cities in the Western world are often migrant magnets, both internationally and domestically. They serve as economic and political hubs and accordingly have attraction potential. For high-skilled workers, for instance, the attractiveness of metropolitan European regions depends not only on the regional economy and labour market or on national immigration and tax policy, but also on family networks and soft factors (Pethe et al., 2010). What is important with respect to urban decline is the fact that the cities that attract international immigrants are often more stable over time, whereas cities that attract primarily domestic migration vary over time (Frey and Liaw, 1998). This relates to established racial and ethnic enclaves and family connections provided to the new international immigrants by these cities. Conversely, domestic migrants are freer and respond to changes in the location of employment and amenities (Frey, 2005). This means that those cities that primarily attract domestic migrants are, in theory, more vulnerable as changes in their employment base influence net migration rates. Furthermore, those cities that attract international immigrants tend to have positive migration rates and rates of natural increase, although these rates may be negatively affected by suburbanization.

The suburbs profit from the flow of people out of the core city. Suburbanization is mentioned as one of the key drivers of core city decline throughout the Western world. In the US, urban decline is often understood in terms of the ‘doughnut model’ in which the core city loses its population and employment to the surrounding suburbs. Reckien and Martinez-Fernandez (2011) argue that the relationship between population decline of the core city and suburbanization should be seen as a mutually reinforcing process: if people move out towards the suburbs, all kinds of urban problems can emerge in the core city and, consequently, these urban problems can push people out of the city towards the suburbs again. Suburbanization has a couple of underlying drivers as well, at personal and societal level. One example is a person’s desire to live in a detached house in a greener environment. Another is rising incomes and the fact that cars became affordable, with this leading to the decoupling of the workplace and the home (Jackson, 1985).

Suburbanization is shaped and conditioned by the institutional framework. In the US, suburbanization was primarily the result of the functioning of a neoliberal housing market. In Germany, however, the government has actively stimulated suburbanization – and indirectly urban decline – by offering tax benefits referred to as

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2 These paragraphs on suburbanization were in the original publication discussed in the sections 2.5 and 2.6 as wider societal force, however I chose to relocate it to this part of the chapter, as it is actually a factor contributing to the intra-regional differentiation and it would therefore be more logical to discuss it in section 2.7.
the ‘Eigenheimzulage’\textsuperscript{3} and the ‘Entfernung-pauschale’\textsuperscript{4} (Rosenbohm, 2006; Woyke, 2006). In former Eastern Germany, the massive construction of housing in the suburbs was further encouraged by a special tax deduction for supporting new home ownership (Aring and Herfert, 2001). Suburbanization was actively promoted by governments in other European countries as well. In Belgium, for instance, “...suburbanization has long since been encouraged by policy measures not only for economic but also for political motives. The ruling political parties have considered housing construction outside the cities as an excellent countermeasure to socialist mobilizations in the cities.” (De Maesschalck, 2009, 4).

Finally, small peripheral villages are in western European countries often characterized by high death rates and low birth rates (RLG, 2009). Quite often, there is substantial out-migration of young people, spurred by the decrease in employment (due especially to changes in the agricultural sector but also in the retail sector) and the desire for better education facilities.

Intra-regional differentiation in levels of population development can also occur because of differentiated natural developments, which relate to the composition of the population. This composition depends on (a) the size of the fertile female population, (b) the racial composition of the population (although fertility levels are converging, in the Western world immigrant women tend to have more children than native women) (Sobotka, 2008) and (c) religiosity of the population (Frejka and Westoff, 2008). The composition of the population in turn is – to a certain extent – the result of recent and historical migration processes and again the city type: suburbs may attract families with children, which leads to a skewed age composition.

The question is how the differences in net migration between cities of the same type and within the same region can be explained. It is most likely that employment-related motives are more important for migration decisions at regional level rather than at local level. After all, people are willing to accept a certain commuting time to reach their jobs and the jobs do not necessarily have to be available in the city of residence. It is therefore expected that other factors must play a role as regards the differences in net migration rates between cities in the same region.

One of these factors is the presence or absence of local amenities, such as the quality of the urban built environment, recreational and educational facilities, safety and quality of the housing stock. To give an example: First or inner ring suburbs which became populated in the 1960s have to deal with the ageing of the original population

\textsuperscript{3} Home-ownership grant. This grant has been annulled on 1 January 2006.

\textsuperscript{4} Tax exempt mileage. The height of the Entfernungspauschale has been lowered in 2004.
and sometimes outdated housing as well (Puentes and Warren, 2006), which can function as push factors for the inhabitants. This can explain differences in population development between suburbs. Similar processes may apply to firms. Differing levels of quality of business parks, qualified personnel and the level of cooperation with the city government may result in a differentiated attraction of firms.

Additionally, ‘image’ or ‘place character’ (Molotch et al., 2000) can play a role at local level. Declining cities not only have to deal with the physical, economic and social consequences of decline, but also have to deal with the mental and psychological consequences. Negative framing of decline and shrinkage in the media certainly does not help to attract new inhabitants to declining cities. Interestingly, some cities and regions are now trying to capitalize on their image. Some regions use their negative image in a humoristic way, for instance the declining Dutch region Southern-Limburg, which advertised in 2012 in national newspapers and magazines with the slogan “The only thing that really shrinks here is your mortgage”.

However, the decision to migrate or not depends not only on whether the city of departure offers urban functions (work, housing, education, amenities, etc.), but also on whether or not these functions are found elsewhere in the region. As long as these features are offered by cities within the commuting tolerance zone, migration might not be necessary and the city’s population will probably not decline because of migration. In addition, trade-off mechanisms may exist between the different urban functions and their accessibility (Weisbrod et al., 1980). The distance to employment can be traded off for additional living conditions or vice versa. Therefore, if we want to explain differing levels of migration, we need to look at the developments in the other cities in the settlement system as well.

This relationship between local amenities and migrant and firm preferences (residential location theory) has been investigated, though not in regions of decline. Perhaps, certain assets are appreciated in a context of population and economic growth, but not in a context of decline. The accessibility of leisure facilities may, for example, be less important for migrants if employment and financial security is on the decline. There are two complicating factors in this relationship between local amenities and population developments. First, these dynamic assets can be both a driver of migration and a consequence. Fewer inhabitants means the demand for facilities drops, facilities close and the city becomes less attractive, as a result of which further migration may occur. Population decline may (but does not necessarily) lead to housing vacancies, thereby transforming the quality of the city’s housing stock. Second, the appreciation of these local amenities changes over time. In the case of suburbanization, people start to appreciate living in a quiet green environment more
than having access to urban services, and consequently they relocate to the suburbs (which produces population loss for the core city). Consequently, the characteristics of the city remain the same, while the appreciation of these characteristics changes.

The characteristics themselves may change as well. Without entering the extensive debate about urban regeneration, some mention must be made of the influence of politics and politicians as affecting the absolute properties of cities and thus driving migration and urban decline (or a driver of the reversal of decline) (Klemme, 2009). Generally speaking, there are two types of policies that deal with decline (Danielzyk et al., 2002):

- **Active**: subdivided into an expansive strategy, maintenance strategy and planning-for-decline strategy
- **Passive**: meaning no strategies at all, accepting decline as a vicious circle

The aim behind using expansive strategies (constructing new residential areas, for instance) is to attract new inhabitants or at least keep the inhabitants who want to migrate within the city borders. Maintenance strategies aim to maintain urban attractiveness for the current inhabitants and planning-for-decline strategies try to capitalize on the chances generated by population decline (inventing new uses for vacant land, for instance).

As to which types of policies are employed in a given area depends on a number of factors. First, the nation-state determines how much room to manoeuvre is left for policymakers at local level (Lang, 2008; Sellers, 2002), again stating the importance of the institutional context. This relates to whether local policy-makers are both legislatively and financially restrained by higher administrative levels. Local decision-makers are legislatively more constrained in a highly centralized planning system than in a highly decentralized system. Furthermore, the system of financial redistribution within a country defines how much financial elbow room local governments have to execute local policies. Besides these hard factors, soft, less tangible factors also play a role. These are the sets of normative beliefs and practices present in the ‘institutional milieu’ of relations between political and societal actors and agencies (DiGaetano and Strom, 2003).

A related institutional factor is the degree of privatization of former governmental activities. A disadvantage of privatization is that it influences the ability of municipal authorities to determine and direct local developments through planning (Bogumil and Holtkamp, 2002). The privatization of former governmental enterprises such as housing associations may leave local governments less capable of directing developments in the housing domain than before, for instance, in connection with housing that has become vacant as a consequence of population decline. Vacancies
render the area unattractive and this leads to further out-migration (Schetke and Haase, 2008). This power play between national and local levels and the underlying political principles and arguments and manifestations differ between countries (de Vries, 2000).

Governmental decision-makers are not the only ones to try and implement policy agendas. Other individual and collective actors do the same. These can range from civic and entrepreneurial elites to local action groups. Individual actors such as mayors can also have a marked influence on local developments. Examples are the mayors of cities such as Detroit, Lille and Genoa (Bini, 2011; Galster, 2012; Paris, 2000). Interestingly, in a context of decline, this relationship between local political vigour and the national political framework is reciprocal. Public and private actors are even more dependent on national and supranational funding, and this strengthens the relationships between the local and administratively higher levels. “Setting a local development agenda becomes less a matter of local bargaining, political debates and power balances inside the city boundaries but is substantially influenced by ‘windows of opportunity’ in the national funding landscape” (Bernt, 2009, 762).

The attitude of local politicians, the policies that they formulate as a consequence of their attitude, the juridical and financial scope that they have at their disposal and the cooperation (or hindrance) of other local actors can be key to explaining the differences in developments between cities.

2.9 Conclusion

This paper has made it clear that inter-regional differentiation in terms of urban decline can be explained by the differing spatial and institutional contexts. These contexts filter wider societal forces which affect cities throughout the Western world. However, for explaining intra-regional differentiation, or the differences between cities in a region, we need to add another layer to our framework, namely the local level.

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5 This paragraph was originally part of §2.6.
Figure 2.7 shows that the wider societal forces are filtered through the institutional, spatial and local contexts. The local context comprises the absolute properties of cities, that is the urban fabric with its amenities and its image, but also the governance framework of urban policies, local politicians and other civic and entrepreneurial actors. This local political context is again shaped and constrained by the institutional context with its legislative and financial power relations between different political administrative levels. Moreover, the importance of the relationships with other cities in the region cannot be ignored. In order to understand the intra-regional differentiation, we must take simultaneous account of the local, spatial and institutional contexts and consider the interrelationships between these contexts.

The framework that has been presented here is the result of an extensive literature study. Challenging as this already is, this is only the beginning. I argue that before we can make steps in our understanding of urban decline, it would help to acquire some consensus on the terminology, conceptualization and measurement.

Another issue which deserves more attention is the behavioural aspect of urban decline. Urban decline is the consequence of human decisions regarding residential location and fertility behaviour, for instance, as well as business-related
decisions, such as companies’ location behaviour. The consequences of this behaviour crystallize at the local level into the choice for a specific place to live or start/relocate a business. Although such decisions have been investigated abundantly in situations of economic and demographic growth, how such decisions work in a situation of decline is a poorly explored area of urban decline research. In order to understand why a specific place is so unpopular, we need to investigate these migration decisions and motivations, within a multi-level institutional and spatial framework.