



Rural shrinkage: A new narrative?

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Death by Nostalgic Sentiment or A New Narrative for Rural Ireland?
ICLRD Conference.

September 26th 2019

Ballymacscanlan House Hotel, Dundalk



Shrinkage : An urban concept



The term “shrinking” first applied to geographical spaces in the form of “shrinking cities” in response to cases of severe urban population decline (Grasland et al. 2008, p.22-23).

Rural Population Decline + Rural Restructuring = Rural Shrinkage?

Grasland *et al* “mainstreamed” the term and established a clear definition of specific simplicity: “a region that is ‘shrinking’ is a region that is losing a significant proportion of its population over a period greater than or equal to one generation” (Grasland *et al.* 2008, p.25).

Sepp and Veema (2017 p.6) extend this definition stating that “Regional shrinkage is a simultaneously demographic and economic process – demography and economy in combination are potential drivers of shrinking”.



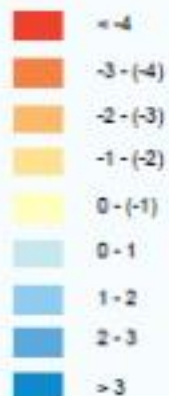
In effect, the latter definition takes parts of the concept of rural restructuring and foregrounds them with reference to weak, lagging or declining rural regions.

European Shrinking Rural Areas: Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance

- § ESCAPE seeks to identify how shrinking rural areas could be better served by a range of policies (Rural Development and Cohesion/regional Policy in particular) across range of governance levels, from EU, through national, regional and local.
- § In order to achieve this the project seeks to improve understanding of the many facets and manifestations of population decline, and the complex ways in which these are tied into wider socio-economic processes (as both causes and effects), especially where they seem to drive cumulative processes of decline.

Rural population change

Average annual population change in rural Local Administrative Units (%), 2001 - 2011



urban or intermediate LAU units

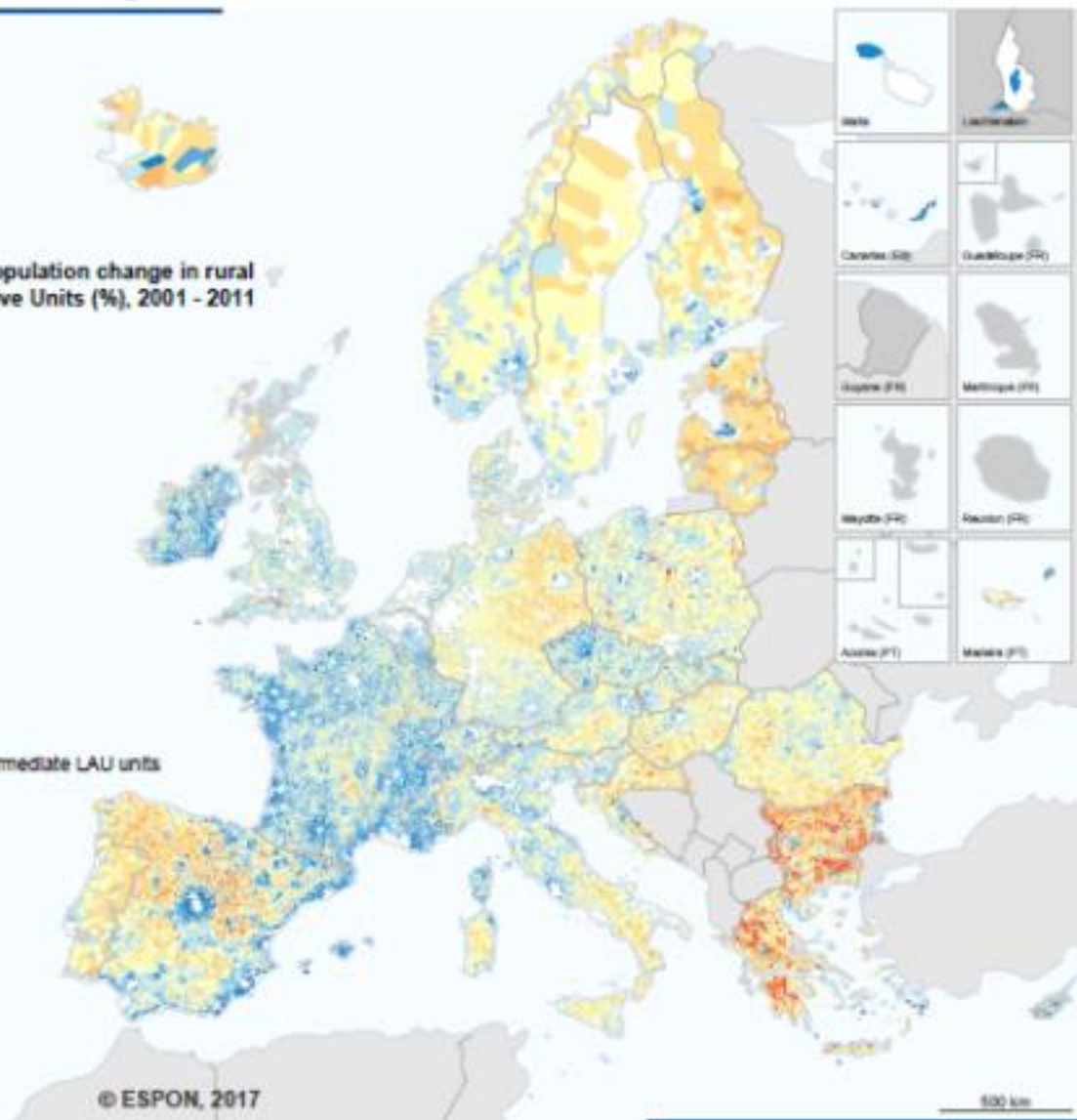
no data

Notes

- Data for LT, PT, SI correspond to LAU1



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Population decline occurs in most EU Member States, and is geographically prevalent throughout southern and eastern parts of the EU.

Differences, e.g. Between 2001 and 2011, in Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Latvia and Hungary, more than 80% of rural regions shrunk. This trend was reversed in Czechia - less than 30% of rural regions depopulated over this period.

Regional level: LAU2 / 1 (2011)
Source: ESPON, 2017
Origin of data: Eurostat, ESPON, 2017
© UMS RIATE for administrative boundaries

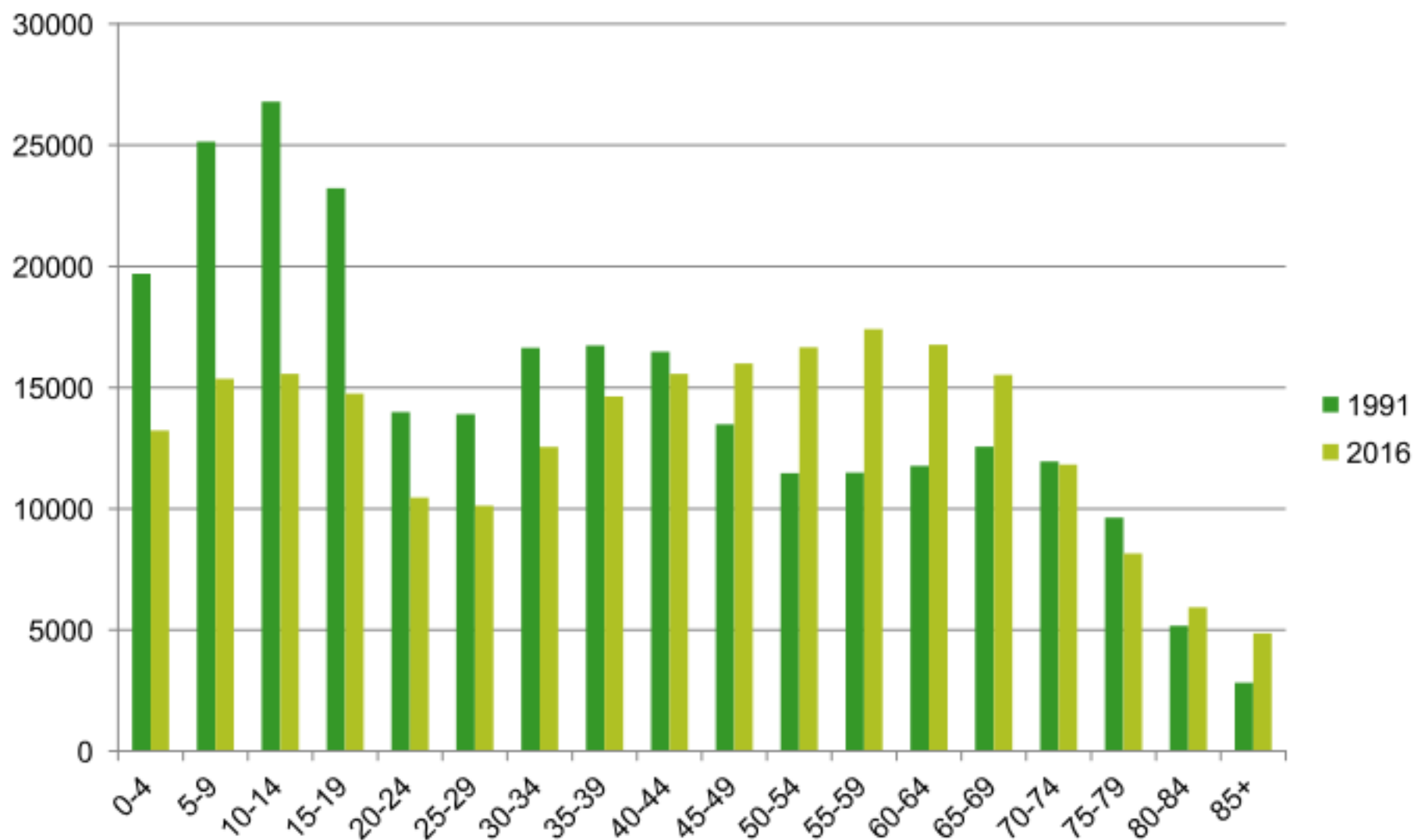
MAUP (or how to make a problem disappear)

1991 – 2016: Number of administrative units recording population loss

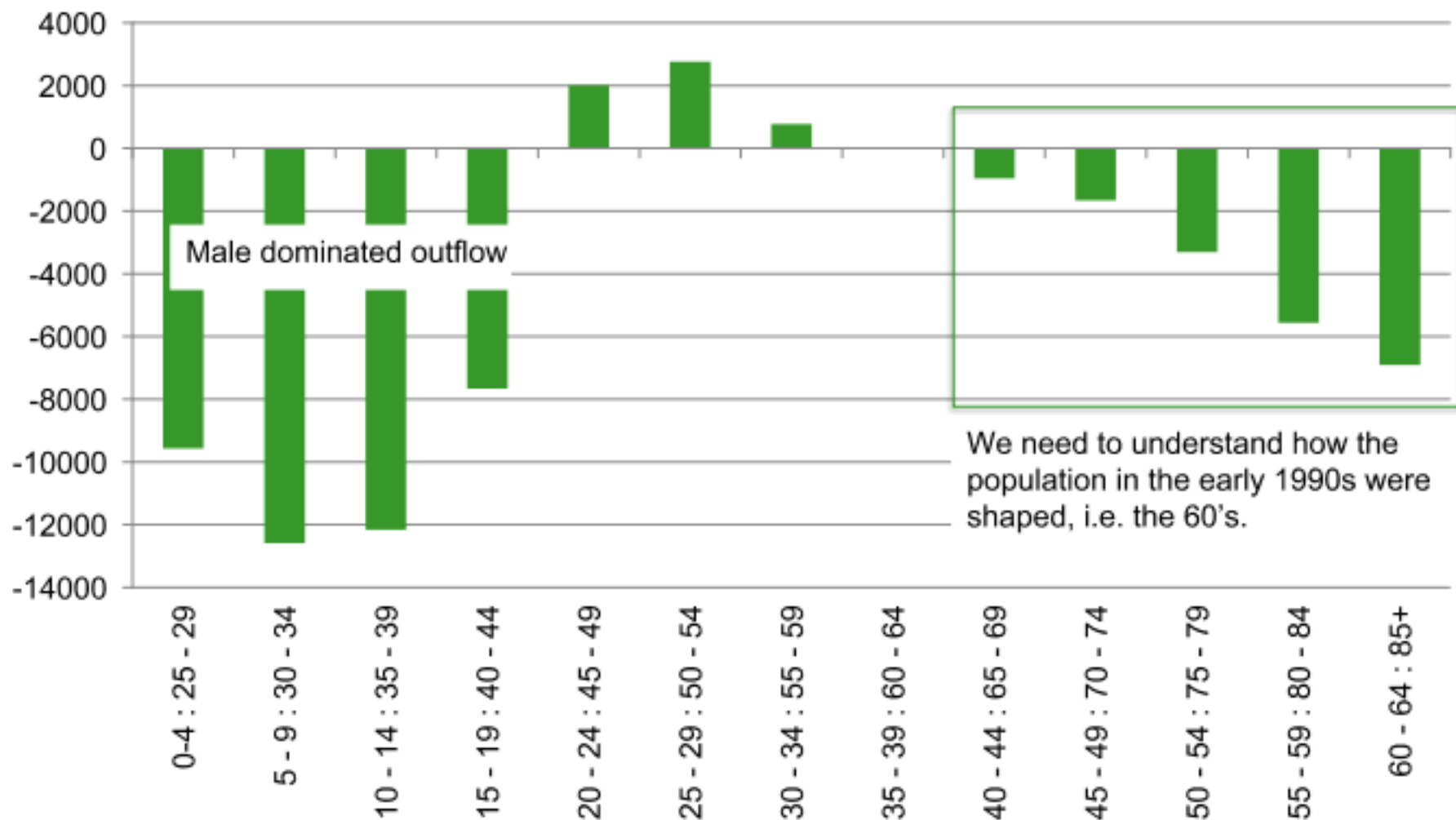
Regions	0
Counties	1
RA / UD	35
EDs	836

643 Rural EDs recorded a decline in population of 27,566 persons between 1991 and 2016

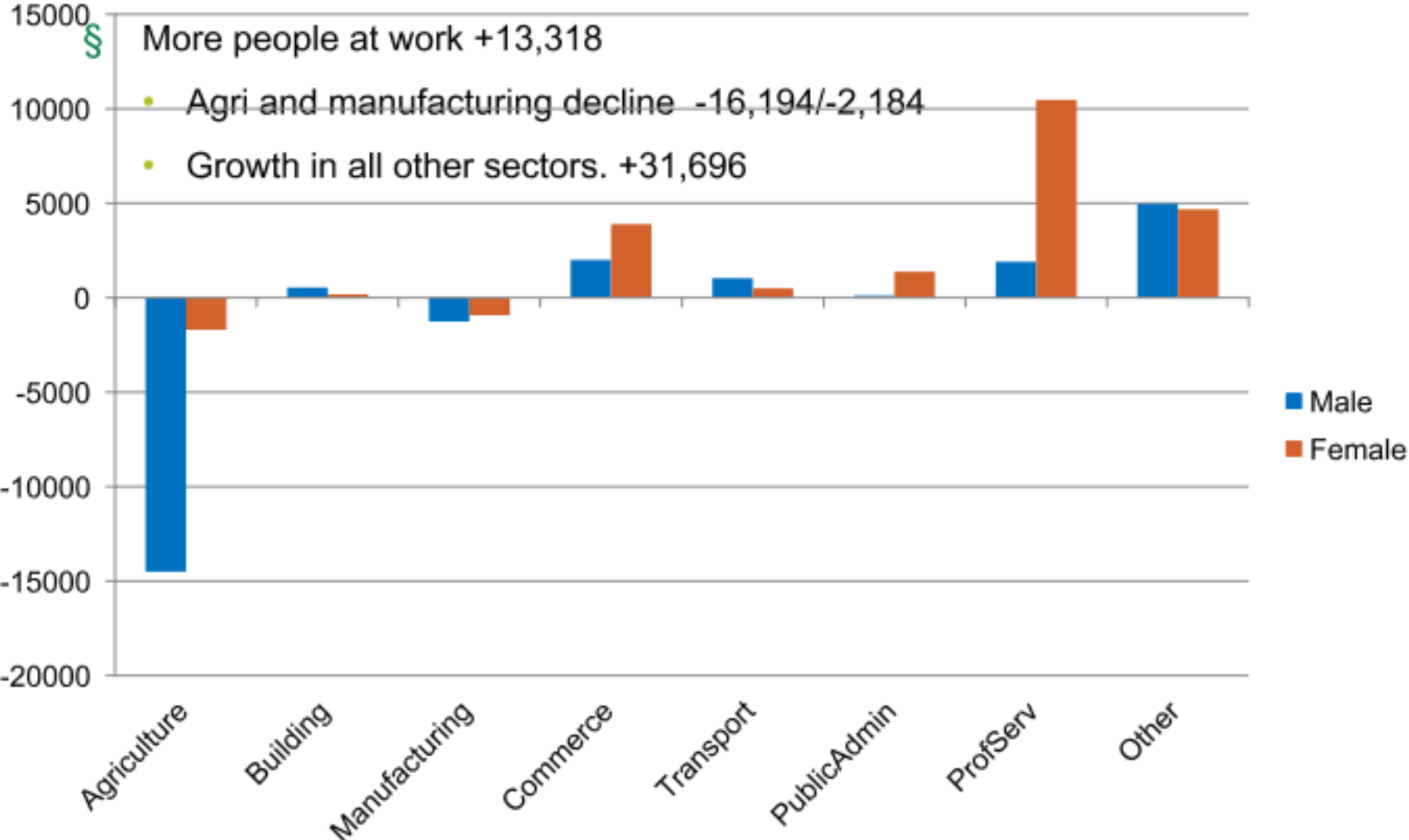
Dimensions of Population Change



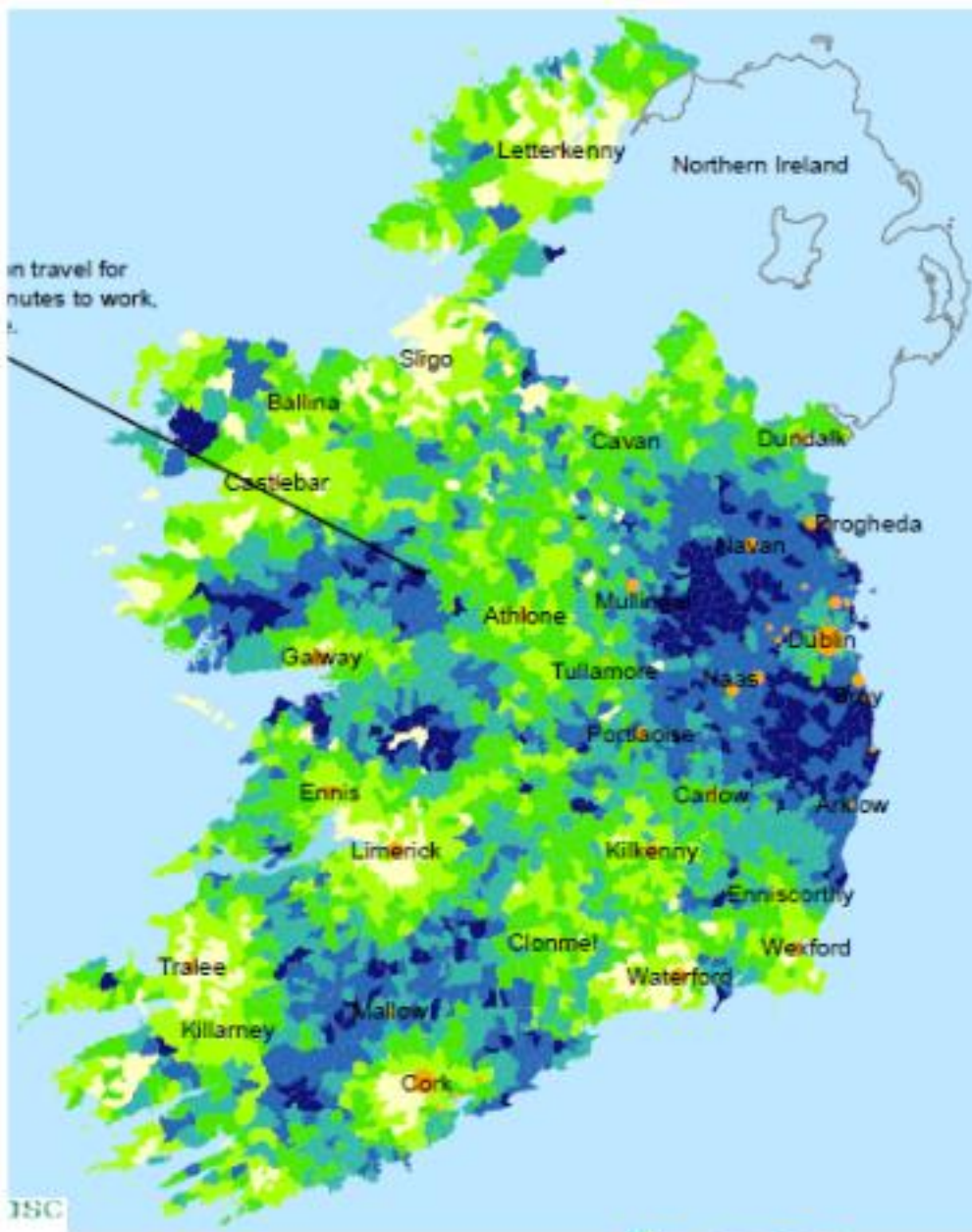
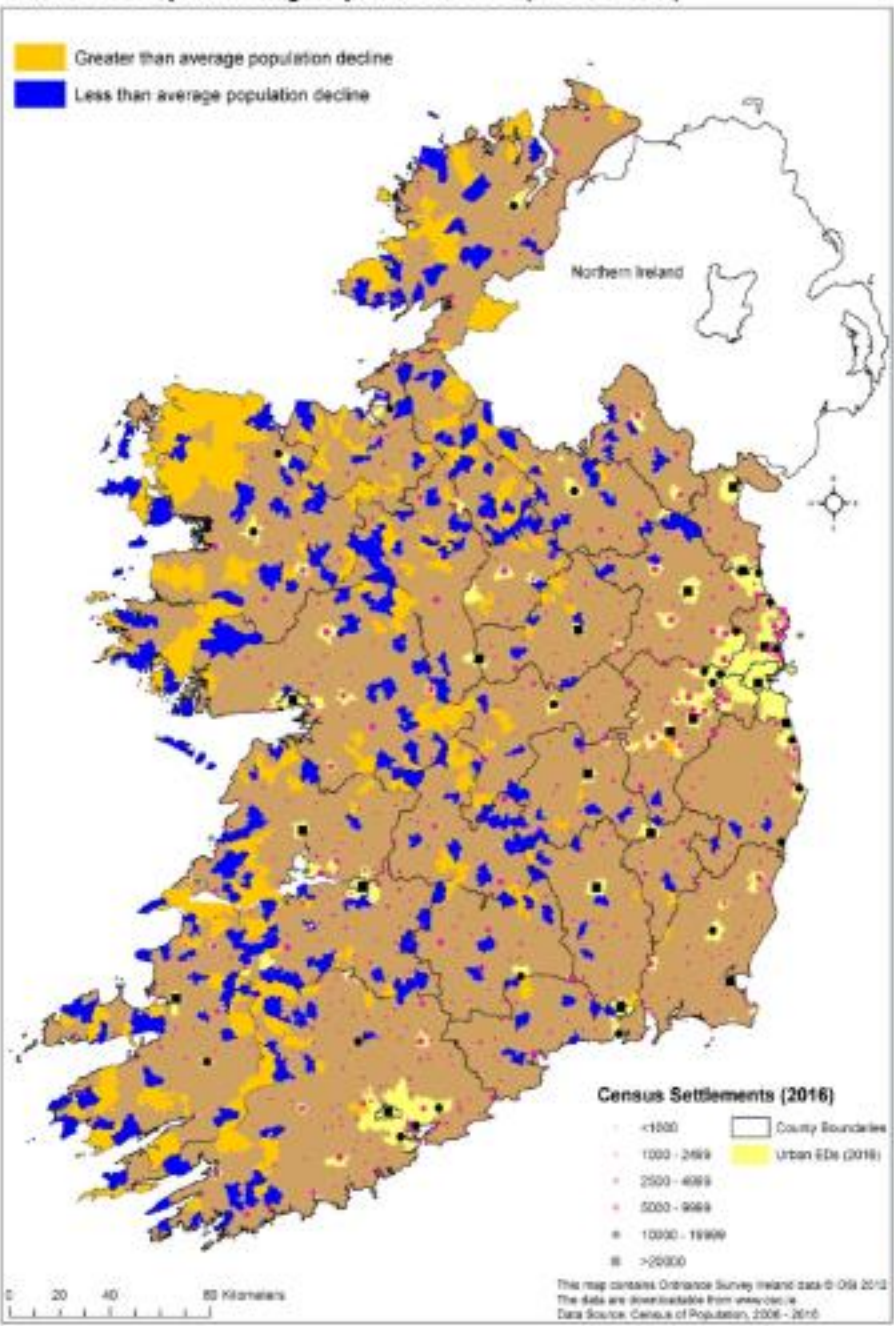
Demographic Changes



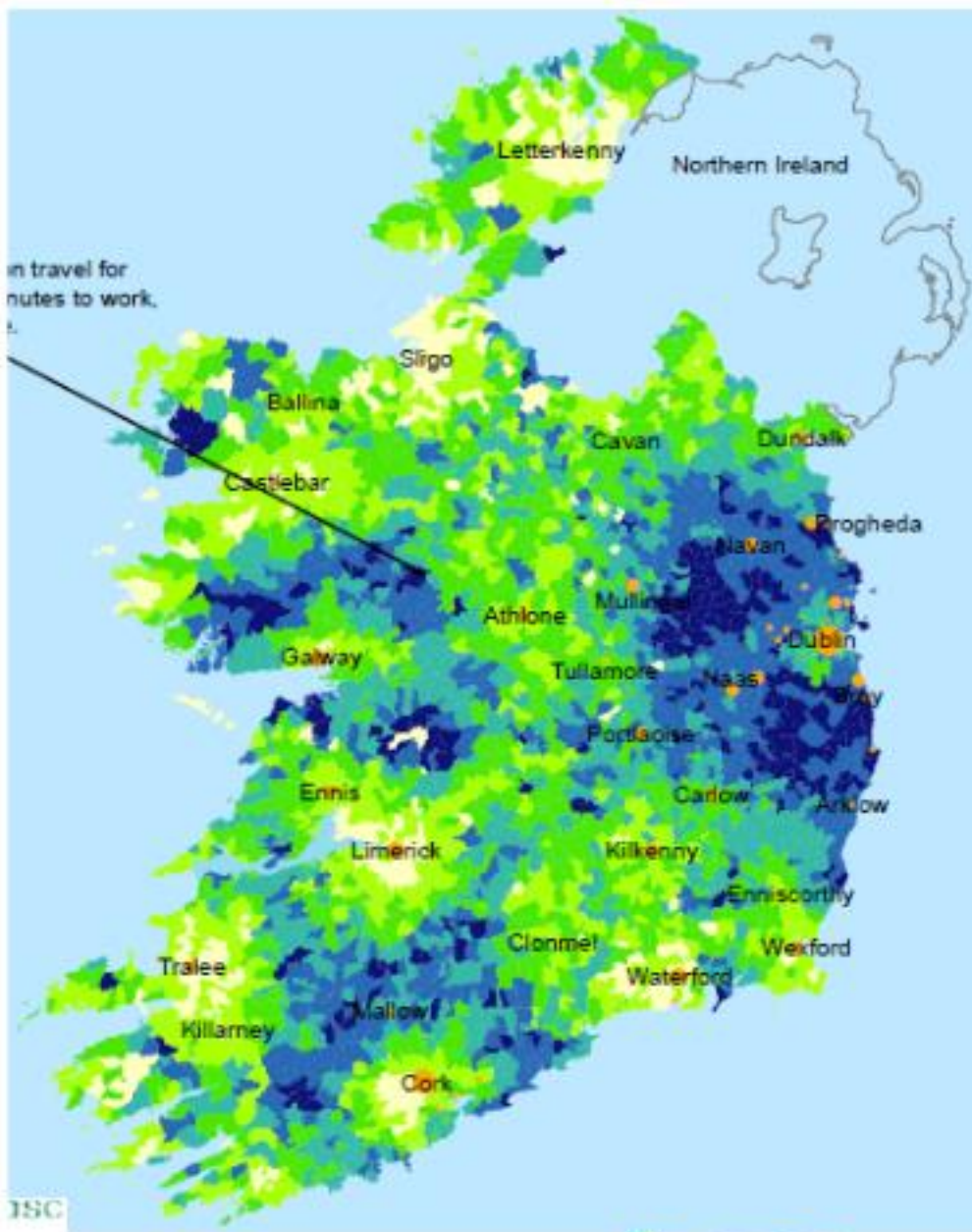
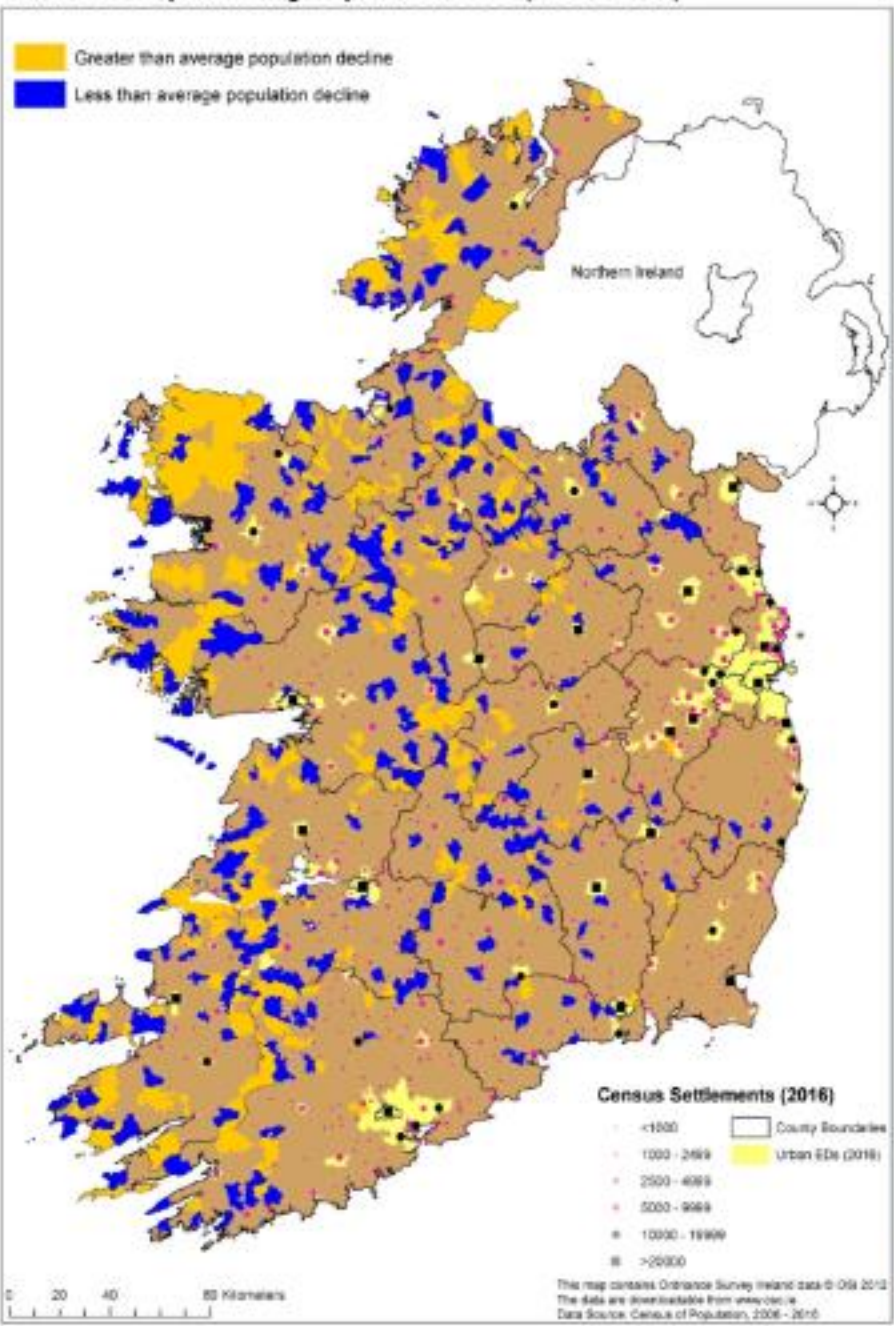
Shrinkage in Ireland



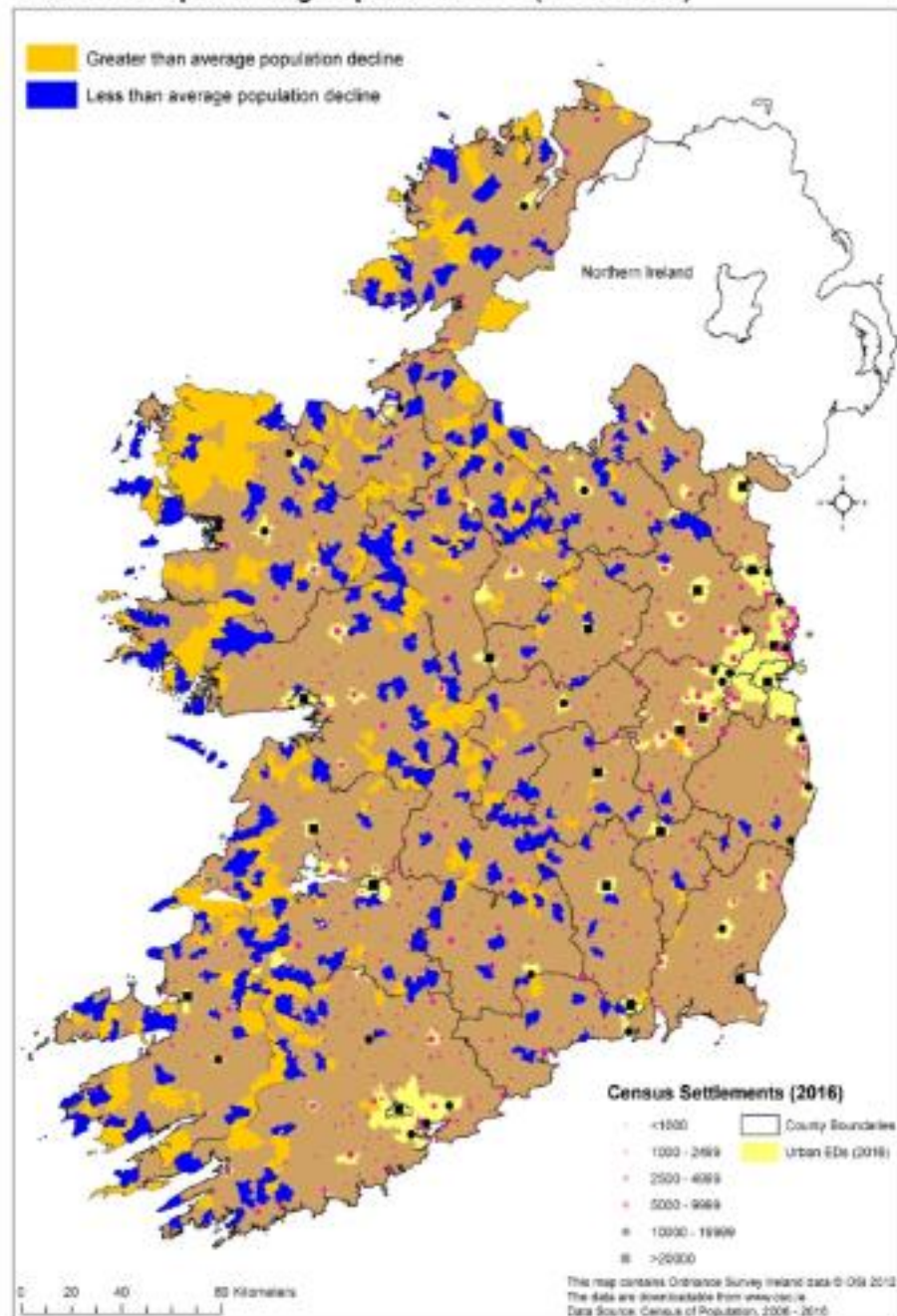
Rural EDs Experiencing Population Loss (1996 - 2016)



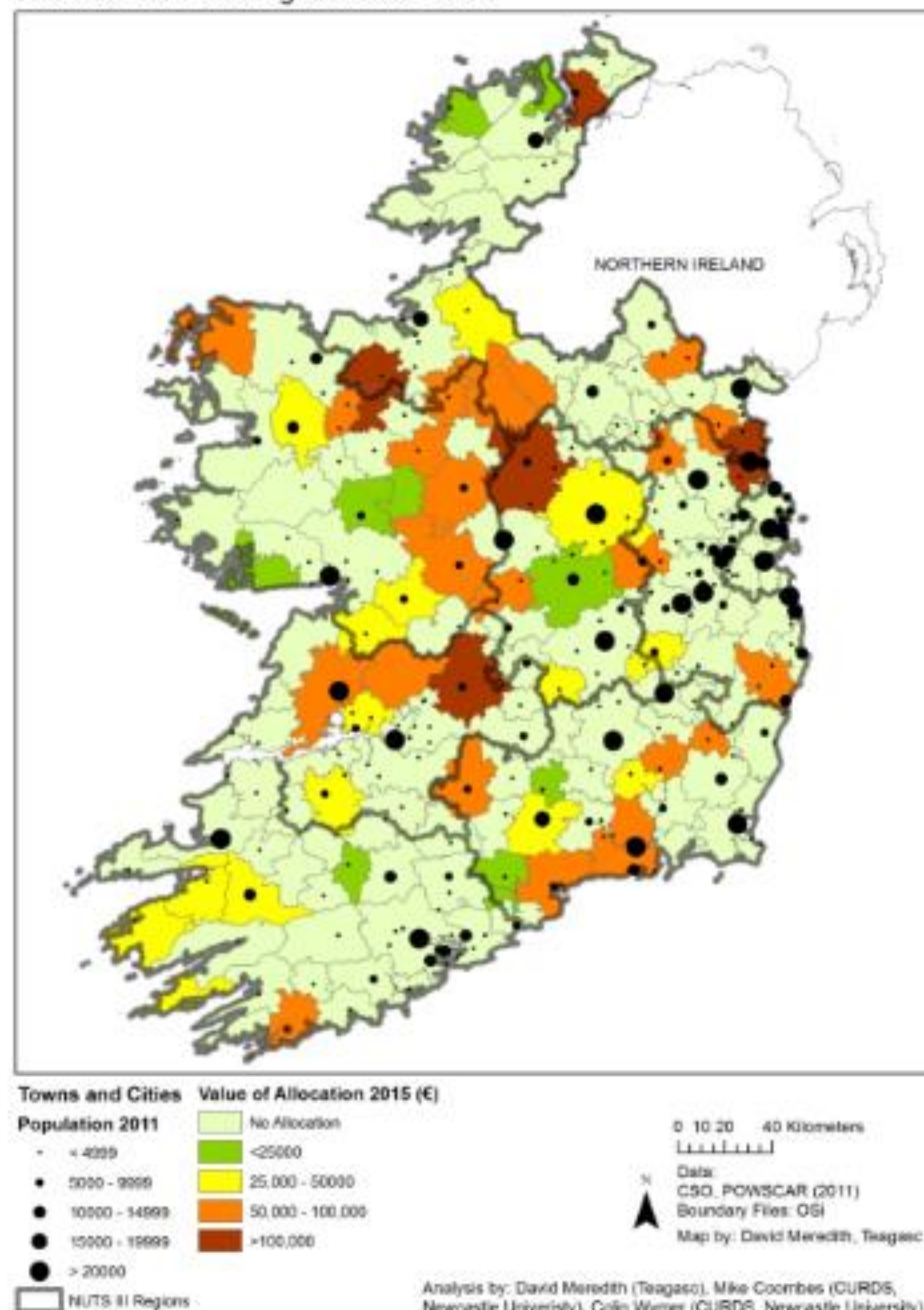
Rural EDs Experiencing Population Loss (1996 - 2016)



Rural EDs Experiencing Population Loss (1996 - 2016)



REDZs: Pilot 1 Funding Allocation - 2015



Conclusions

- § It brings a focus to areas that are experiencing the negative outcomes of change over the longer term.
- § Firstly, it easily conveys the reality and implications of change for some rural areas.
- § It opens up a space to consider (radical) policy alternatives. Rather than pursuing a mitigation, i.e. growth, strategy, some places are exploring the potential of adaptation strategies, i.e. focusing on the populations remaining or moving to their areas and trying to ensure that their needs and hence quality of life is as good as it can be.

Conclusions

The importance of the local governance level, as the scale where the integration of development strategies offers the best potential to tackle the problems associated with shrinkage, is well reflected in the literature (Martinez- Fernandez et al. 2012).

However, shrinkage takes specific forms in different territorial contexts and each local situation is unique, socially contested and constantly changing due to many factors at multiple scales (Tietjen and Jørgensen 2016).

Municipalities that have the greatest need to develop strategies to cope with shrinkage are often those with the least capacity to act which requires a comprehensive policy response, a long-term perspective and consistent, simultaneous commitment at multiple governance scales.

