

## Demographic change in North West Europe and its impact on rural service provision

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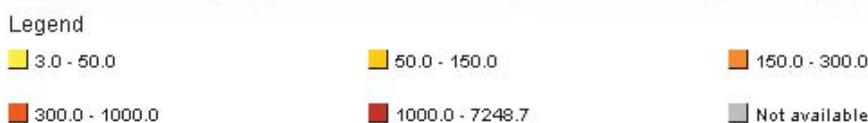
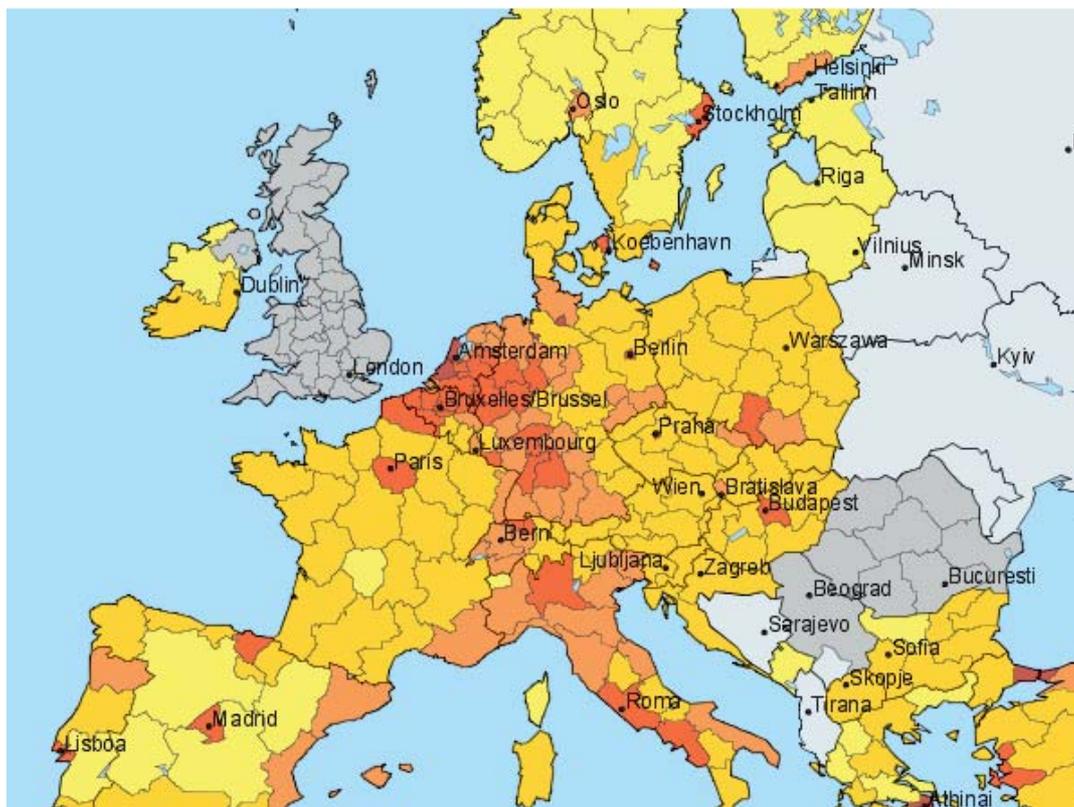
Demographic change is influenced by two main factors:

- natural population dynamics
- migration processes.

As a result of these two processes a shift in the amount of inhabitants within a certain area as well as a change in age structure are recognisable. Likewise, these processes occur apart but simultaneously and affect each other. Both are subject to a variety of developments influencing fertility and mortality or, statistically speaking, birth and death rates (*Lesthaeghe & Neidert 2006*). In particular, an analysis of population density (derived from the total inhabitants in relation to the land area in km<sup>2</sup>) shows how divergent Europe's rural area are, and highlights the kind of challenges those areas are faced with. The OECD classification for rural areas suggests a limit value of 150 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> which implies that all areas in **bright-yellow** and **orange-yellow** are technically defined as rural (*see map 1*).

### Population density by NUTS 2 regions

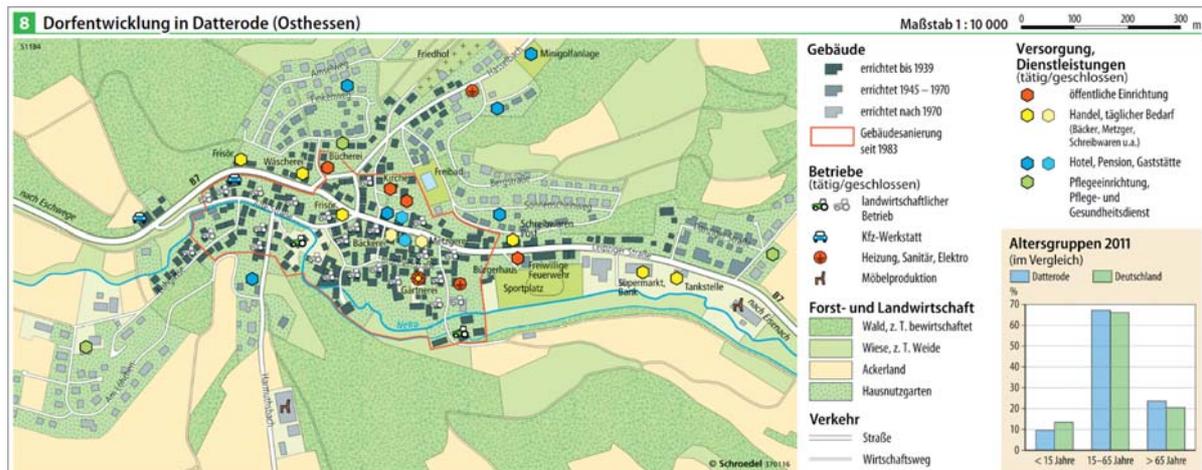
Inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> - 2012



Minimum value:3.0 Maximum value:7248.7

Map 1: Population density in Europe's NUTS-2 regions (*Eurostat 2014*)

The impacts of the second demographic transition (SDT) occur in a variety of rural areas. Housing challenges such as latent vacancy (Gerald 2005), demographic ageing and reductions in rural health service provision (Farmer et al. 2010), the outmigration of young people and later-life (in-) migration (Lundholm 2012; Pinilla et al. 2008), upcoming food deserts in terms of a lack of food retail or local supply facilities (Trebbin et al. 2013; Warburg 2011) as well as the transition towards agricultural structures in rural settlements (Lobao & Meyer 2001). All of these demographic trends become obvious when having looking at an example in Eastern Hesse, Germany (see map 2).



Map 2: Rural development in Ringgau-Datterode (Eastern Hesse) (Seydlitz Weltatlas 2013; p.77)

The linear settlement of Datterode is situated between the cities of Kassel (Hesse) and Eisenach (Thuringia). The shades of grey indicate the sequential development of houses being built with dark grey for the oldest houses, turning lighter as the houses are newer. The old village centre is interspersed with old farm houses (indicated by tractors.) From more than 20 farm houses once, only 2 farmers are still working in agriculture today. Nearly all public buildings were aligned closely to the main road, for instance a library, the village hall, the church or the mayoral office (red hexagon), services like shops, bakeries, butchers, hairdressers (yellow hexagon), as well as tourism related services e.g. hotels, B&Bs, pubs, restaurants (blue hexagon). Only a few of them can be found in the village nowadays (transparent symbols = closed). New developments can be found in the eastern part of the village, like a supermarket, with integrated services e.g. bank, post, bakery and especially health care facilities for elderly care (green hexagon) that are situated in the developing areas.

In order to maintain public buildings and services (public sector) as well as local supply facilities (private sector), resources are needed. That means both, human resources, financial services and a certain demand. Therefore, customers need to know that the more money they spend outside their villages, the fewer services will be sustained within it. As a conclusion, in an era of demographic changes such as the North West Europe is currently facing, local communities will inevitably decide on the fate of their local businesses by the choices they make about their consumption and spending patterns.

- Eurostat 2014. Population density. Online: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/population/data/main\\_tables](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/population/data/main_tables) [20.09.2014]
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