

## ***A threatened existence in North-Groningen?!***

*The perceptions of local actors on the concepts identity and livability in the case of North-Groningen, the Netherlands, after the Second World War.*

### **Abstract.**

Recent developments in the field of rural population decline have in the Netherlands led to a renewed interest in the rural. The rural is nowadays associated with decline, poverty and deprived regions. This image of the rural is not new, after the Second World War rural regions had to deal with the same kind of problems. In the Northern part of the Netherlands this led in 1959 to a study about the society in North-Groningen. The approach of this study was innovative and is still of interest. Especially the focus of the study on social indicators concerning livability and the perceptions of a regional identity is fascinating. In this study the development of those concepts in the case of North-Groningen will be re-examined. This will be done with a theoretical framework which is based on the capabilities approach of Sen and Nussbaum. In order to gain in-depth knowledge on how the developments in North-Groningen are experienced by individuals, three groups will be investigated: rural women, local politicians and rural youth.

## Chapter 1: Introduction.

According to international standards, the Netherlands does not have predominantly rural regions. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) distinguishes only urban regions and so called intermediate regions in the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> Most of the rural Dutch population is living close to a town and most of the Dutch territory has an urban character. However, Dutch standards still identify rural regions in the provinces Groningen, Friesland and Drenthe, Zeeland, North-Brabant and North-Limburg. What is more, recently there has been a renewal of interest in those rural regions. The increased attention of politicians and media in the rural is caused by demographic data showing a rural population decline, resulting in local events like the disappearance of schools, stores and public transport. A common perception of a declining rural is created in the Netherlands. In the Dutch scientific field, the rural society has long been studied from the perspectives of different disciplines, like anthropology, sociology and geography. Historians, however, mainly paid attention to the quantification of the rural and it lasted until the 1990s before more in-depth attention was given to the rural society.<sup>2</sup> The development of rural societies after the Second World War receives even less historical attention and the anthropological, sociological and geographical studies are lacking a historical component.

This study will approach the rural society after the Second World War from a historical perspective. This will be done by taking into account the report *Bedreigd Bestaan* (Threatened Existence), published in 1959, about the rural region of North-Groningen in the Netherlands. In that time the same story was heard about rural societies as nowadays: declining villages, lacking service levels and closing of the villages' last elementary school. The 1959 report distinguished different rural problems and had at that time an innovative approach towards those problems. This study uses the report as a basis to study North-Groningen after the Second World War **until 2005**. Studying a particular rural region and its society over the last 60 years makes it possible to explain oddities of a region and to create a better understanding of those oddities for the future.<sup>3</sup> This paper will make clear why this particular region, North-Groningen, is interesting and what research problem is distinguished.

A small region like North-Groningen cannot be studied by only taking its area into account, even if the borders are approached as permeable. The relations and networks which stretch over the borders are important as well in the definition of a region and its problems.<sup>4</sup> That is why relations at provincial, national and international level are taken into account in this study. In the first part of this study a background of North-Groningen will be given followed by the second part, which will deal with the research problem and related research questions. The hypotheses concerning these questions are discussed as well. Based on the theory a conceptual model is created in the third part. This model shows the relations between the concepts distinguished in this study: identity, livability, society and agency. Following this model, the theory concerning these concepts is

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<sup>1</sup> OECD, *OECD Rural Policy Reviews The Netherlands*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Cruyningen, van 'Dutch rural history', pp. 301-303.

<sup>3</sup> Gerding, 'Op zoek naar het eigen verleden', p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> Pater, de 'Wat is goede regionale geografie?', p. 74.

discussed. In the last part the methodology will be explained, which is divided into two phases, a descriptive phase and an analytic phase.

*North-Groningen and the Bedreigd Bestaan report: reasons to study it.*

North-Groningen is a region in the Northern part of the Netherlands, as shown in figure 1. It covers an area of almost 110.000 hectares and had in 2007 just over 70.000 inhabitants.<sup>5</sup>

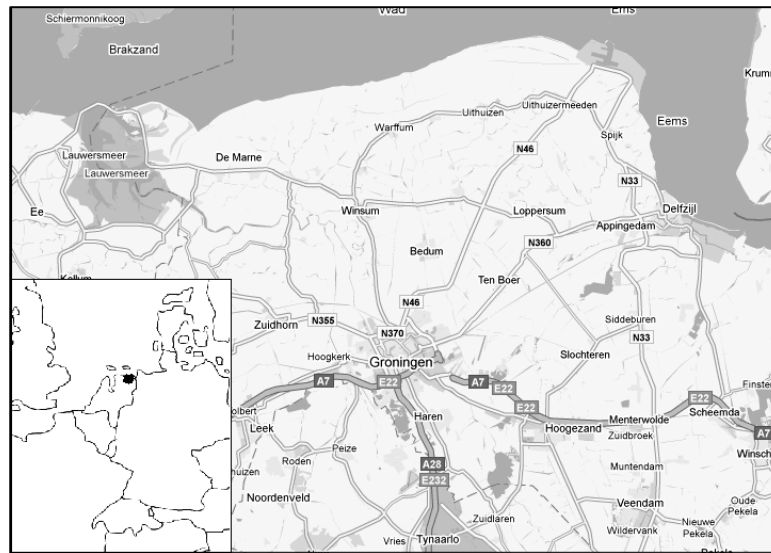


Figure 1.1: Map of North-Groningen.

Like most rural regions in Western Europe, North-Groningen was until the end of the nineteenth century closely interrelated with agriculture.<sup>6</sup> This means that from all perspectives North-Groningen and agriculture were regarded as united. Next to agriculture, other economic sectors did exist, but, these were mainly services and manufacturing targeting the agricultural industry. The agriculture and agricultural related businesses provided employment for the majority of the rural labor force. Rural communities were based on agricultural structures. These were not only economic. From a social perspective many North-Groningen village communities were divided into three classes: a farmer class, a middle class and a laborer class.<sup>7</sup> Besides this division the social life in a village was dependent on the agricultural seasons. For example during the summer most of the village population helped harvesting.

Rural societies have always been in transition, but at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Western traditional rural society started to change substantially. Influenced by mechanization, agriculture shifted to more efficient ways of producing products and food. At the same time, industrialization took place in Western societies. In the province of

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Netherlands, Statline, <http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/dome/?LA=NL> (accessed June 11 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Hoggart, Black and Buller, *Rural Europe*, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> See for example: Universiteitsbibliotheek Groningen BM—13030 *Enquête naar karakter der plattelandsbevolking: dossier met antwoorden op een enquête gehouden in 1946-1947 door mr. J.A. Buurma van het Sociologisch Instituut van de R.U. Groningen over het karakter van de Groninger bevolking in zijn verschillende groeperingen*. And Botke, *Boer en heer*.

Groningen this resulted in the period 1870 - 1930 in the development of agricultural, shipbuilding and cloth manufacturing industries.<sup>8</sup> In North-Groningen no other economic sectors of importance developed and a focus on agriculture remained. Despite the Groningen provincial economic growth the number of new jobs was not enough to keep up with the growth of the population. Mainly rural residents migrated towards towns and other more promising regions outside the province of Groningen. As a result, a feeling of being marginalized developed in Groningen after the First World War.<sup>9</sup> This feeling originated in a peripheral position in geographical terms of the province of Groningen within the Netherlands. The declining economic growth in the 1930s strengthened the feeling of being neglected by Dutch politics, that were situated at the other side of the country in The Hague.

After the Second World War while the whole of Europe was recovering, some rural regions could not keep up. In the Netherlands the rural regions in Zeeland, North-Brabant, North-Limburg, and the northern part of the Netherlands, had to deal with all kind of economic, demographic and social problems. These were mainly caused by the ongoing traditional economic focus on agriculture and lack of substitute economic activities in those regions. The development and maintenance of employment and social welfare became threatened. In the province of Groningen the feeling of being marginalized became stronger. This continuing feeling was the result of an ongoing negative development, which can be seen in for example data about the job opportunities in the province of Groningen in the time period 1930 - 1950. These could not keep up with national development and even more importantly with the regional population growth.<sup>10</sup>

The negative development concerned the provincial government, leading to a growing political understanding that something had to be done. As a result, several institutions paid specific attention to the situation in the province of Groningen. In 1951 a *Provinciale Groninger Welvaartscommissie* (Groningen Provincial Prosperity Committee) was established. Its goal was to improve prosperity in the province of Groningen. This resembled a national initiative by the former Dutch minister of Social Affairs, W. Drees.<sup>11</sup> The main idea was that provinces could pursue a provincial prosperity in line with their needs and initiatives at a national level. One of the main problems observed was the decline in population. This was a process which was initiated by industrialization and was in that time seen as a natural, inevitable process.<sup>12</sup> Although rural-urban migration was common, the 1954 report of the *Provinciale Groninger Welvaartscommissie* characterized the migration as alarming, because it had consequences for the livability of the rural region and its remaining population.<sup>13</sup> Something had to be done to restrict the out-migration and improve prosperity.

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<sup>8</sup> Broersma, *Het Wonderland achter de horizon*, p. 168.

<sup>9</sup> Karel, 'Naar een nieuw regional bewustzijn', p. 208.

<sup>10</sup> Ebels and Dijkstra, *Rapport van de Provinciale Groninger Welvaartscommissie*, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Janssen, *Vooruit denken en verwijlen*, p. 115.

<sup>12</sup> Kooij, 'Stad en platteland', p. 95.

<sup>13</sup> Ebels and Dijkstra, *Rapport van de Provinciale Groninger Welvaartscommissie*.

North-Groningen was one of the regions which suffered hard from the out migration. From 1949 until 1969 the North-Groningen population started to decline with a yearly average of 4,8 persons per 1000 inhabitants.<sup>14</sup> In this time period the total Dutch population increased with a yearly average of 12,8 persons per 1000 inhabitants. In 1970 the population in North-Groningen started to increase again, in some years even above national average.<sup>15</sup> These differences in demographics could be related to, or stronger, could be explained by societal developments in North-Groningen. The one-sided economic structure of North-Groningen and its resulting economic problems became already clear in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it lasted until the 1950s before the problems and the situation of North-Groningen were taken seriously by the population itself. In March 1955 this resulted in the foundation of the *Stichting Noord-Groningen*, (SNG, Foundation North-Groningen). Although the initiative was private, it was the societal and governmental upper layer of the North-Groningen population who set up the foundation.<sup>16</sup> At the start the main goal of the foundation was to open up the economy of North-Groningen and to develop its economic, social and cultural interests in order to improve the livability.<sup>17</sup> To reach this goal the foundation focused on land reclamation, improvement of the water conditions, infrastructure construction and the development of recreational possibilities. However, a focused goal about how to deal with the concerns and the future of North-Groningen was missing. In order to develop such a goal the foundation tried to find out what concerned the local population. This was done by organizing different social and cultural activities for the population of North-Groningen, such as exhibitions, lectures and meetings.

The necessity to develop a focused vision became more significant in 1957. In that year a study of a student of Professor Doctor E.W. Hofstee at the Agricultural University of Wageningen concluded that it was possible that small villages on *Het Hoogeland* would disappear.<sup>18</sup> This threat was caused by the changing way of life of rural populations, for example by farm employees who prefer to live in the larger villages because of the higher standard of services. The study increased the concerns of the SNG about the future of North-Groningen and it resulted in the initiation of a study about the social, economic and cultural structure of North-Groningen. The research was conducted by different institutions and resulted in eleven preliminary studies.<sup>19</sup> In 1959 the final report with the

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<sup>14</sup> Based on the combined data of the six North-Groningen municipalities. Statistics Netherlands, Statline. <http://statline.cbs.nl/statweb/>, 2008 (accessed April 25, 2008) and Historische Databank Nederlandse Gemeenten CD-Rom in *Nederland in Verandering. Maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen in kaart gebracht, 1800-2000*. eds Beekink, Boonstra, Engelen and Knippenberg.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> This by private initiative of five dignitaries: J.W. Geertsema (mayor of Warffum), G.R. Meijer (farmer and administrator district water board), R.E. Siemens (farmer), C.N. Smit (candidate notary) and T.J. Tammens (farmer and administrator).

<sup>17</sup> Bouman, *Bedreigd Bestaan*, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Het Hoogeland* is a region in North-Groningen. Tonckens and Abma, *Verdwijnende dorpen*. p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> The institutions involved were: LEI (the agricultural economic institute, under direction of dr. M.A.J. Visser), NETO (Northern Economic Technological Organization, under direction of ir. U.S.F. Joustra), Provinciale Planologische Dienst Groningen (under direction of ir. J. Dieperink), Sociology Institute of the University of Groningen (under direction of prof. dr. P.J. Bouman) and the department of Sociology and Sociography of the University of Wageningen (under direction of drs. J.H.W. Lijfering). The last institute did not provide a preliminary study but was part of the board of governors.

alarming title *Bedreigd Bestaan* (Threatened Existence) was published, under supervision of the Groningen Professor of Sociology dr. P.J. Bouman.

From the 1950s till the 1960s all over the Netherlands reports and concerns about the rural were published.<sup>20</sup> However, *Bedreigd Bestaan* is strikingly different and still interesting to study today. As the title implies the report gave an alarming message about the way of life in North-Groningen.<sup>21</sup> The composers recognize in North-Groningen a strong dependency on agriculture, a declining agricultural work force, migration of young people and a declining local services level. According to the report and following the 1957 study of Abma and Tonckens this would lead to disappearing villages in the worst case. One of the recommendations of the report was to turn the disadvantage of the economic dependency on agriculture into an advantage, by what is called *agrisation*.<sup>22</sup> *Agrisation* was to be used as a development strategy that would focus on developing the already existing agriculture instead of developing new industries in North-Groningen. The focus of *agrisation* is not only economic, the composers also used it in a social and cultural development perspective.<sup>23</sup>

The new approach concerning social and cultural developments separates *Bedreigd Bestaan* from the other reports concerning rural societies of that time. The more social and cultural approach was adapted by Professor dr. P.J. Bouman who went to the United States in 1950 with the Fullbright program, which acted as a program for American European exchange of scientific ideas.<sup>24</sup> One of the new ideas he picked up was social indicator research, which was related to the concept of livability. In *Bedreigd Bestaan* under supervision of Bouman social indicators, like population size and structure, employment, quality of infrastructure, social relations, level of services, mobility, immigration and house-building, were used in order to describe the social and cultural situation of North-Groningen.<sup>25</sup> Unlike the common way to measure livability by economic and objective (hard) facts, some subjective measurements can be distinguished in the report. In that sense *Bedreigd Bestaan* can be seen as a precursor of the social indicators movement in the Netherlands. In international context it lasted until the 1960s and 1970s before a general awareness arose that despite the economic growth the social well-being of people did not improve or was not satisfying. This emphasized the thought of economic measurements as only a part of the social change picture.<sup>26</sup> Nowadays the concept livability is still commonly used in many (local) policies, although the interpretation of livability and use of indicators changed over the years.

Besides this innovative role of *Bedreigd Bestaan*, the report fits in the line of thought of the 1956 *Centraal Planbureau* (Central Planning Office) study of the West of the

<sup>20</sup> 1950-1960: a set of reports was published, for example: Ebels and Dijkstra, *Groninger Welvaarstcommissie* report (1954), H.D. de Vries Reilingh, *Onderzoek regionale culturele situatie in de provincie Noordholland* (1956), J.J. Kalma, *Dorpen willen leven* (1960).

<sup>21</sup> Gardenier and Nanninga, *Vooronderzoek Bedreigd Bestaan*, p. 6. And Bouman, *Bedreigd Bestaan*.

<sup>22</sup> Agrisation is not a new concept, prof. dr. H.J. Keuning used it already in 1949.

<sup>23</sup> Bouman, *Bedreigd Bestaan*. And Gardenier and Nanninga, *Vooronderzoek Bedreigd Bestaan*, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Berkel, van, 'Amerikabeeld en cultuurbegrip', pp. 408-415. And Deijkers 'De paradox van P.J. Bouman', pp. 203-208.

<sup>25</sup> Gardenier and Nanninga, *Vooronderzoek Bedreigd Bestaan*, p. 20. And Bouman, *Bedreigd Bestaan*.

<sup>26</sup> Rogerson, 'Environmental and health-related quality of life', pp. 1373., Grasso and Canova, 'An assessment of the quality of life', pp. 1-25.

Netherlands and the remaining part of the Netherlands.<sup>27</sup> One of the outcomes of this report was the worrying concentration of the Dutch population in the Western part of the Netherlands, which could result in societal problems in these core regions. The report recommended a spread of economic developments and related a population spread in the Netherlands. *Bedreigd Bestaan* gives a solution to this national problem: a region with possibilities to take care of a part of the growing Dutch population. To do this North-Groningen needed help, for example to improve accommodation and employment opportunities. This provided reason for the composers to use the report on the one hand as a political cry for help and on the other as a solution for a national problem. This idea fitted perfectly in the assumed regional identity, which was constructed with the foundation of the *SNG* in 1955. The foundation was based on the feeling of North-Groningen of being neglected by national prosperity. The idea of a neglected North-Groningen region was perfect for constructing an identity and using it as a way to improve livability.

### **Definition of the problem, research questions and hypotheses.**

Based on the themes discussed above, the main focus of this research is socio-cultural change in the case of North-Groningen after the Second World War. The region North-Groningen is chosen because of the striking approach of dealing with societal changes after the Second World War. Notable is the construction of North-Groningen as a region and the related identity formation. North-Groningen is not commonly used as a region, neither by its inhabitants or by outsiders.<sup>28</sup> The *SNG* based its distinction of the North-Groningen region on local municipalities, which is a bit arbitrary, but practical. As the *SNG* stated, North-Groningen is in sociological sense not a community.<sup>29</sup> It becomes clear the *SNG* constructed a regional identity to set their goals, but what happened with this identity, did other groups take over this identity or are other identities constructed? To sum up how are identities of North-Groningen developed in North-Groningen?

Closely related to this first notable aspect of the region North-Groningen is the use of the concept livability in North-Groningen. The innovative way in which the concept livability is used in the *Bedreigd Bestaan* report of 1959 makes the case of North-Groningen special. The use of social indicator research in the report makes it different compared to other regional studies done in that time. While focusing on the livability of the region the report makes use of aspects which are not taken into account in comparable studies. The additional use of social indicators instead of only economic indicators is the most striking. However, just as it accounts for the use of the concept identity, the concept livability has developed further on after its early Dutch use in *Bedreigd Bestaan*, but in what way did it develop?

Concerning these changes this research seeks to address the following research problem:

<sup>27</sup> Rijksdienst voor het Nationale Plan en Centraal Planbureau, *Het Westen en overig Nederland*.

<sup>28</sup> Before the Second World War North-Groningen is not approached as a region quite often, by then the more local North-Groningen regions *Het Hoogeland*, *Hunsingo* and *Fivelingo* are used much more. North-Groningen is in a way a produced region by *Stichting Noord-Groningen*.

<sup>29</sup> GA, Archives Stichting Noord-Groningen, Inv. Nr. 2085-6 Stukken van algemene aard. Ingekomen stukken en afschriften van verzonden stukken, 1955-1982, 1955-1960. Brief van 3 augustus 1955 van de Sociologische Commissie, M. Gaaikema aan het Dagelijkse Bestuur van de Stichting Noord-Groningen.

*How did the concepts identity and livability develop after the Second World War regarding the case region of North-Groningen?*

Focusing on changes in approaches of the two concepts, in the case of North-Groningen, can tell us more about general changes in rural societies. It is a way to interpret the more general socio-cultural changes in a specific case. In the case of North-Groningen is expected that the concepts identity and livability are developed mainly by influence of a changing society and in a lesser extent by local actors. Actors react on changes in the society and their perceptions of identity and livability are influenced by that process. An important component of this study are the values given by actors to the rural region North-Groningen. Rural societies are valued in diverse ways by different actors and valued diverse at different time periods. The values different actors give to North-Groningen are related to the identities which the actors give to the region and how they interpret the livability of the region and in a way how actors can influence changes in developments in North-Groningen. In order to understand these processes this study seeks to address the following questions:

- How did the region North-Groningen develop socio-culturally after the Second World War?
- In which way is the concept identity in the North-Groningen society used by different actors and how did they experience the concept?
- In which way is the concept livability in the North-Groningen society used by different actors and how did they experience the concept?
- In which way are the two concepts identity and livability related concerning the North-Groningen society?

It is clear North-Groningen has changed after the Second World War. As any other region it has dealt with an increasing prosperity after the war. However, in the 1950s some inhabitants of the region were not satisfied with the ongoing developments in North-Groningen.<sup>30</sup> The first research question is contextualizing these developments and it focuses especially on the socio-cultural developments. Concerning this question the following hypothesis is stated: compared to the national average the region North-Groningen, as most rural regions, was socio-culturally lacking behind in the 1950s and begin 1960s. At a regional level it were mainly the small villages which were facing the social problems. A change occurred in the 1960s under influence of different trends: the growing influence of social policies and related subsidies, the increasing prosperity and ongoing modernization. Influenced by *Bedreigd Bestaan* and some other specific reports from the 1960s<sup>31</sup>, and influenced by external processes, like commuting and suburbanization, North-Groningen did some socio-cultural catching up. As a result of changing perceptions of the rural, (urban) people were looking for affordable housing in green rural areas. At the same time local people got used to commuting not only for labor purposes but for services as well. Villages integrated on a regional level, which became the new frame of reference for both inhabitants and 'outsiders'.<sup>32</sup> However, the residential function remains a village issue, and in this trend villages turned from

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<sup>30</sup> Bouman, *Bedreigd Bestaan*, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> The *Provinciale Planologische Dienst* published four reports concerning North-Groningen in the 1960s.

<sup>32</sup> Janssen and de Kuyper 'Van integratie naar identificatie', p. 192.

autonomous into places of residence.<sup>33</sup> Concluding, it can be said North-Groningen changed like any other rural region after the Second World War from a production- to a consumption countryside and this had consequences for the socio-cultural development of North-Groningen.<sup>34</sup>

The above hypothesis is inconspicuous, it could have been the general trend for many rural regions in Western Europe. This first research question is used to set a background for the following research questions. What especially is interesting in this study is how local actors in North-Groningen dealt with socio-cultural developments. The second research question is dealing with a more in-depth approach focusing on identity. The contextualizing of the regional identity of North-Groningen after the Second World War is a process which is influenced strongly by the *SNG*. The *SNG* used the region North-Groningen as a tool to construct a region and used it as a way to connect municipalities, which ensured the *SNG* of (financial) support and background for their ideological goal. Regional identities are social constructions and are based on collective institutional structures.<sup>35</sup> Hypothetically, it can be stated that a regional identity of North-Groningen is mainly produced by *SNG* and is reproduced by different actors groups concerning regional interests. However, the region North-Groningen is not reproduced by local actors in such a way that it became a general used regional designation.

The concepts livability and identity are both approached as social constructions. This means for the concept of livability that it is approached differently by different actor groups and the kind of value given to the concept changed over time. Livability is in that sense the subjective value given by actors to the social-spatial situation in North-Groningen.<sup>36</sup> Since the Second World War livability is used in the Netherlands as a concept concerning small rural places.<sup>37</sup> In North-Groningen the concept livability was for the first time explicitly used in *Bedreigd Bestaan*. Livability was approached as a combination of economic and social indicators concerning the living area. In 1959 employment for example was an important indicator for a good livability. Although *Bedreigd Bestaan* already set off for a more social approach of livability, general processes like modernization eventually changed the value given to livability into a more social one. The social and ecological environment of the living area became more important to actors and economic indicators like employment are less important as long as they are in travelable distance by car. However, the perceived change in livability did not favor the rural for all actor groups.<sup>38</sup> Especially less mobile groups like rural youth experience regions as North-Groningen as having a lack in education and job opportunities which influences their value given to livability and to the regional identity.

The fourth research question focuses on the relation between livability and identity. Both concepts identity and livability have changed under influence of ongoing modernization

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<sup>33</sup> Thissen, *Bewoners en nederzettingen in Zeeland*, p. 211. Droogleevers Fortuijn and Thissen, 'Van toepassingsveld tot proeftuin', p. 57.

<sup>34</sup> Janssen and de Kuyper, 'Van integratie naar identificatie', p. 192.

<sup>35</sup> Paasi, 'Europe as a social process and discourse', p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Janssen and de Kuyper, 'Van integratie naar identificatie', p. 167.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Janssen and de Kuyper, 'Van integratie naar identificatie', p. 192.

processes. In that extent the two concepts are related in their position concerning societal change. The identity given to North-Groningen by a particular actor group is related to an experienced livability. The other way around the experienced livability in a region is affected by the perception inhabitants of a region have about that particular region. Identity and livability can be seen as two aspects of the same process.

### Conceptual model.

Based on the research questions a conceptual model has been created (see figure 1.2). The model shows the relations and causal connections which are set up in this research,<sup>39</sup> and it shows the concepts which influence the process of socio-cultural change in the North-Groningen society. The concepts livability and identity and the changes in their perceptions are the main focus of this research. The concepts society, capabilities, functionings and agency are used as factors underpinning livability and identity. The North-Groningen society is in this study approached as the social life in North-Groningen.<sup>40</sup> Agency is in this study approached as the human

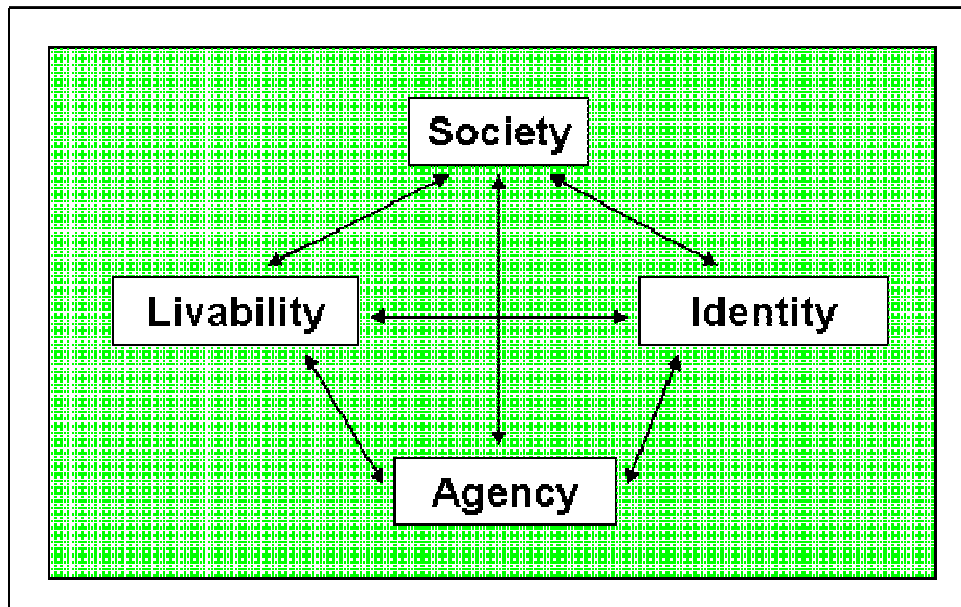


Figure 1.2: Conceptual model: Societal development in North-Groningen.

behavior of actors. In this context an interaction between society (macro) and agency (micro) can be distinguished.<sup>41</sup> Agencies define their character by their position in the society. The other way round social groups can create new relational structures on which society is based.<sup>42</sup> The double arrows in the model make clear these two-sided relations between the concepts. In the model a distinction can be made between the North-Groningen society, which is situated in the green block, and the broader socio-spatial system, which is situated outside the block. This research will deal with North-Groningen

<sup>39</sup> This model is based on Anthony Giddens' structuration theory and in a lesser extent to M. Fishbein and I. Azjens model of planned behaviour and Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum their capabilities approach.

<sup>40</sup> Ragin, *Constructing Social Research*, p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Dom, 'Het nut van Giddens' structuratietheorie', pp. 69 – 91.

<sup>42</sup> Smelser, 'Social Structure', pp. 103-130.

as a region and regions are regarded as a social construction. A region is based on the relationships of local groups within the social structure. These internal relations differ from relationships of groups with components outside the social structure.<sup>43</sup> In a modernizing society local groups are more and more interrelated and are involved in growing connections which go beyond regional borders.<sup>44</sup> The development of relations between groups in a society is closely related to developments of identity and livability. A society and region like North-Groningen are part of a broader socio-spatial system. The livability in North-Groningen is for example influenced by Dutch social politics. On the other hand improvement of livability can come from inside the region, for example local initiatives of local farm wives organizations.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Capabilities Approach.*

In order to understand how individuals respond to the wider environment the capabilities approach provides an organizing framework for the concepts livability and identity. The capabilities approach is originally set up by the economist Amartya Sen and extended and adapted by the philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum.<sup>46</sup> The approach deals with human development and it perceives development as the enhancement of human freedom.<sup>47</sup> Freedom concerns the opportunities people have and what they want to achieve. People are active participants in creating, if possible, their own future. Sen recognizes five interrelated instrumental freedoms which contribute to human freedom: (1) political freedoms, (2) economic facilities, (3) social opportunities, (4) transparency guarantees, and (5) protective security.<sup>48</sup> These components are interrelated and complementary to each other. They show the critical view of the capabilities approach at the traditional economic approaches which focus on incomes and commodities as the basis of well-being. Concerning the concepts livability and identity my research focuses on the social opportunities in North-Groningen. These are social arrangements which people in a society make in order to provide a better life for themselves. Social arrangement includes for example health care, education and cultural activities. All kind of institutions play an important role concerning these arrangements. In order not to forget about the complementary accent of the different instrumental freedoms the social opportunities in North-Groningen are seen in combination to the other freedoms.

On a more individual level the five by Sen distinguished components are interrelated with the capabilities an individual has. The capabilities an individual has determines the freedom to behave in a particular way concerning the life someone wants to have.<sup>49</sup> Capabilities are alternative combinations of functionings someone can achieve, meaning capabilities are what people are *actually* able to do and to be.<sup>50</sup> Functionings in this prospect are the different things a human can and should be and do, so the things a person values doing or being. These functionings can be divided into basic functionings: like

<sup>43</sup> Smelser, 'Social Structure', p. 104.

<sup>44</sup> Knippenberg and de Pater, *De Eenwording van Nederland*, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Bouman, *Bedreigd Bestaan*, p. 238.

<sup>46</sup> Carpenter, 'The Capabilities Approach', p. 354. See Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* and Nussbaum and Sen, eds., *The Quality of Life*.

<sup>47</sup> Sen, *Development as Freedom*, p. 53.

<sup>48</sup> See Sen, *Development as Freedom*, p. 38.

<sup>49</sup> Sen, 'Capability and Well-Being', p. 33.

<sup>50</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, p.5.

having food and being healthy, and more complex functionings: like being part of a community. However, not all functionings which a persons values are achievable. Capabilities are a central concept in Sen and Nussbaum their ideas about agent oriented human development.<sup>51</sup> Although Sen approached capabilities as something universal he did not develop a central list of capabilities. Nussbaum did in order to hand over a basis for determining a minimum for development.<sup>52</sup> This set exists of ten capabilities which every person in the world, no matter birth, gender, age or region should be able to achieve. The purpose of this set is to distinguish inequality in the world and it insists on comparing different groups in a population.<sup>53</sup> However, the approach does not give the possibilities to specific groups to create their own needs.<sup>54</sup>

As can be recognized Sen and Nussbaum created an approach which deals with universal development. Although the approach has an universal focus it is possible, with some considerations, to use the approach on a regional level as well. Especially their thoughts about individual capabilities and how they crucially depend on, among other things, economic, social, and political arrangements is of use in this research. This study approaches the socio-cultural development of North-Groningen from an actor perspective. However, the capabilities approach sees the wider environment as a context which shapes the agency, as a top down movement, this study sees the relation between society and agency in a more interactive model (figure 1.2). Besides this consideration the approach is based in an economical and philosophical background, and for a more historical research the approach needs to be theoretically and methodologically completed.<sup>55</sup> While taking in mind these considerations, the capabilities approach can be used to distinguish inequalities in the North-Groningen development compared to other regions and national level. Besides a theoretical base it can function as a background for the set up of a set of indicators concerning socio-cultural developments in North-Groningen. Besides a theoretical base the capabilities approach can function as a background for a set of indicators concerning socio-cultural developments in North-Groningen.

### *Structuration Theory.*

Alongside the capabilities approach the structuration theory of sociologist Anthony Giddens will be used in an adapted form. In his structuration theory Anthony Giddens pays attention to the dichotomy of structure and agency, which is discussed above and is shown in figure 1.2. He distinguishes the concepts of *agency*, individual behavior, and *structure*, social institutions with rules and resources. Giddens approaches the concepts as interdependent on each other, and calls it duality of structure.<sup>56</sup> Social practice is a mean to overcome this duality, it constructs social life and gives both meaning to structure and agency.<sup>57</sup> The capabilities distinguished by Sen and Nussbaum can create this social

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<sup>51</sup> Sen, *Development as Freedom*, p. 75.

<sup>52</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*. p. 75 and pp. 78-80. Carpenter, 'The Capabilities Approach', p. 358.

<sup>53</sup> Nussbaum, 'Introduction', p.5.

<sup>54</sup> Carpenter, 'The Capabilities Approach', p. 367.

<sup>55</sup> Zimmermann, 'Pragmatism and the Capability Approach.', p. 469.

<sup>56</sup> Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*. p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> McGrath, "A Problem of Resources".

practice. On the one hand side the capabilities are formed by agency and on the other hand they are influenced by structure. In this research the society of North-Groningen is discussed. As Giddens makes clear, a society is a social system which has a specifiable overall 'clustering of institutions' across time and space. These institutions create the rules and resources which determine the structure.<sup>58</sup> An example of such an institution is the educational system. In this sense structure should not be confused with the term (social) system. As Giddens reacted on his critics: 'structure' does not refer to descriptive features of social life'.<sup>59</sup> However, critics remain on the concept and especially on what the reality status of rules and resources are.<sup>60</sup> In this research the term society will be used in order to present all facets of society, including structure, and social life, economic processes and physical constraints.

### *Society.*

The first research question concerns the society of North-Groningen in a sense that it covers the socio-cultural history of North-Groningen after the Second World War. To give an adequate picture of the North-Groningen socio-cultural context and its developments the related economic, social, demographic and cultural aspects will be studied.<sup>61</sup> These different developments interact with each other and together they cause rural change. Thissen distinguished four specific topics around the social consequences of the changing rural:

1. Selective development.
2. Changing population distribution.
3. Changing power relations.
4. The occurrence of local or regional irreversible developments of function loss or downgrading.<sup>62</sup>

The results are changing functional structures and social relations, developing new activities and a changing position of the rural.<sup>63</sup> Related are a changing identity and a changing construction of livability, a changing rural society is the ultimate outcome. The rural society is not only dealing with specific rural problems. Societal changes which appear in urban areas appear in rural areas as well, such as the increase of individualistic values and the decline of established institutions. In that sense it is not only internal factors which influence rural change. To study the societal processes the rural region must first be placed in a wider context.<sup>64</sup> Economic, social, cultural and demographic processes are not bounded to one specific region. For that reason a decisive role is given to the context.<sup>65</sup> The wider context exists of external factors. This has consequences for the development of North-Groningen. In the 1960s the role of environmental planning on provincial and national level increased in regional developments, and at the national level

<sup>58</sup> Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*. p. 164.

<sup>59</sup> Giddens, "A Reply to My Critics." p. 256. One of the main criticism is about Giddens use of structure as rules and resources. For more details see Held and. Thompson, eds., *Social Theory of Modern Societies*.

<sup>60</sup> Waters, *Modern Sociological Theory*. p. 52. MacRaild and Taylor, *Social Theory and Social History*. p. 100.

<sup>61</sup> Conze, 'Social History', p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Thissen, 'Restructering of rural areas', p. 77.

<sup>63</sup> Huigen, Paul and Volkers, 'Introduction', p. 13.

<sup>64</sup> Murdoch and Marsden, *Reconstituting Rurality*, p. 30.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 220.

an economic growth policy was formulated.<sup>66</sup> In a region such as North-Groningen this has consequences for the environmental development.

To research the central problem, North-Groningen is regarded as a region. North-Groningen will be seen as a network of social relations which inhabitants of a region have with each other and with the *outside*. The *outside* is in this context the broader socio-spatial system. Identities of North-Groningen are defined by those external relations.<sup>67</sup> Every social group can construct its own region, meaning that not everyone will distinguish North-Groningen as the same region with the same borders. A region can be distinguished at different levels, for example at an economic level, social level, cultural level and judicial level. These levels do not have to overlap each other completely. The borders of these distinctions are made concerning different criteria, which results in different borders for each level. The *SNG*, however, is quite clear about the borders of the region North-Groningen, in 1959 the region consisted of 26 municipalities. But regions are not fixed, they can change over time. The definition of North-Groningen which is used in 1959 can not be used anymore. As a result of municipal redivisions the 26 municipalities do not exist in the same extent anymore.

#### *Livability.*

Throughout this paper the concept of livability is used to refer to the subjective meaning actors give to their direct living environment. The concept is used a lot by academics and politicians as an instrument to measure the social-spatial situation of a particular region or place. Livability is not a fixed concept and the meaning given to it changes over time. Studying the different meanings given to the concept livability over time can give an explanation of changes in rural regions. The changing value given to the concept shows how the rural is valued over time. For example in the *Bedreigd Bestaan* report livability is one of the main issues dealt with. Livability is conceptualized as a degree to which North-Groningen fits its provisions and requirements to the needs and capacities of the inhabitants of North-Groningen.<sup>68</sup> Due to a lack of employment in North-Groningen many people left to other parts of the Netherlands. At that time employment nearby was an important factor in the value given to the living environment.

In literature, livability is integrated in the much broader concept of *quality of life*. In this study, livability is used as a synonym of the terms quality of life *in* nations and environmental quality of life, which are generally used in the literature.<sup>69</sup> Although livability is generally known since the 1960s during the first half of the twentieth century research dealt already with livability. Before that time the concept was used in a very materialistic way. The focus was upon the material standard of living and was measured by indicators like the GDP per capita.<sup>70</sup> Early in the 20th century this economic focus of livability became criticized. Broader and more social indicators were needed, for example to study inequalities between groups *in* a nation. It resulted in the development of a social indicators movement. The Chicago school which worked on social change in the 1930s

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<sup>66</sup> Janssen, *Vooruit denken en verwijlen*, p. 161.

<sup>67</sup> Pater, de, 'Wat is goede regionale geografie?', p. 72.

<sup>68</sup> Veenhoven, 'Happy Life-Expectancy', p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, Rogerson, 'Environmental and health-related quality of life', p. 1375.

<sup>70</sup> Rogerson, 'Environmental and health-related quality of life', p. 1373.

and 1940s has been mentioned as one of the pioneers in the social indicators research.<sup>71</sup> The main goal of the movement was to create a way to measure the standard of living in representative (social) indicators. The movement developed and the use of social indicators in livability studies increased. The *Bedreigd Bestaan* report in 1959 can be seen as a precursor of the social indicators movement in the Netherlands. It lasted until the 1960s and 1970s before a general awareness arose in the academic and governmental fields that despite the economic growth the social well-being of people had not improved or was not satisfying. It emphasizes the thought of economic measurements as only a part of the social change picture.<sup>72</sup> The newly used indicators were not only influenced by economic and objective (hard) ways to measure livability, an increasing amount of subjective measurements can be distinguished.

The social indicators movement developed and the concept livability became generally known and used in many academic disciplines and policies. Each discipline developed its own conceptualization and methods to study livability. This resulted in a multidimensional concept which became hard to define.<sup>73</sup> Besides this livability is not directly observable.<sup>74</sup> No specific indicator, like GDP for the economic situation, gives clear and direct information about the social well-being of a population. It is attempted to solve the problem by creating sets of indicators to investigate specific aspects of the quality of life. The result is a wide spectrum of different indexes and ways of approaching livability.<sup>75</sup> In a quantitative approach of livability, weaknesses remain about its arbitrary selection, arbitrary weights, limited universal relevance of items, no clear meaning of sum-scores and mixing up means and ends of the used indicators.<sup>76</sup> These sets of indicators are related to the societal developments at a particular time period, and a time specific way of approaching the concept livability.<sup>77</sup> The different approaches and weaknesses show and can explain the changes in perceptions of rural societies. In this study the capabilities approach functions as a theoretical background and besides that it will be used to set up a set of indicators which will show the development of North-Groningen after 1945. The capabilities approach is a good example of how social indicators can show development. In North-Groningen several social indicators are used to distinguish the livability of the region. An overview of these indicators gives an overview of approaches over time. In the methodology part, it will become clear how the development in the perception of livability will be studied.

### *Identity.*

Although changes appeared most people who live in a rural region still see themselves as rural people.<sup>78</sup> People identify themselves with a particular region. Besides the concept livability, this study will focus on such identities, more precisely regional identities of

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<sup>71</sup> Especially the work of the sociologist William Ogburn is regarded as important in this context. Massam, 'Quality of life', p. 144., Rapley, *Quality of Life Research*, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Rogerson, 'Environmental and health-related quality of life', p. 1373., Grasso and Canova, 'An assessment of the quality of life', p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Phillips, *Quality of life*, pp. 1-4.

<sup>74</sup> Rogerson, 'Environmental and health-related quality of life', p. 1374.

<sup>75</sup> Veenhoven, 'Happy Life-Expectancy', pp. 3-5.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Janssen and de Kuyper, 'Van integratie naar identificatie', p. 167.

<sup>78</sup> Simon, Vermeij and Steenbekkers, *Het beste van twee werelden*, p. 170.

North-Groningen. Specific identities, which rural women, local politicians and rural youth have of North-Groningen are taken into account. The concept agency focuses on these specific groups. The regional identity in this study is used as the perception or meaning which inhabitants of North-Groningen give to the region.<sup>79</sup> Historically layered social relations are in that sense important to the identity of the region, they provide a sense of place to inhabitants of the region.<sup>80</sup> The identities of a region are seen as an interpretation of a process through which a region becomes a region or, even more important, continues to be a region. As discussed before, the region North-Groningen is constructed with a particular purpose, it illustrates how many different facets play a role in a region and its identity. The value given to the livability of a region is in that sense related to the identity of a region. It is useful to make a distinction between the above used regional identity which inhabitants created and the identity of a specific region given by outsiders, or in other words the image of a region distinguished by outsiders.<sup>81</sup> The image of a region points to narratives, symbols and practices about the nature, landscape, history or inhabitants of that region. Together they create a *story* or image which is understood by the outside world.<sup>82</sup> This identity or image as it is approached by the outside world will not be used in this study.

An important aspect of regional identity used to be the construction of the *other*. The *other* is everyone who is excluded from the regional identity or in other words who is not identified with the region. For example a person who does not speak the local dialect. The construction of boundaries and the creation of the *other* creates questions in a changing world with more and more mobility,<sup>83</sup> and resulted in an increasing debate about the homogenized and bounded rural.<sup>84</sup> In the literature six aspects of regional identity can be agreed upon:

1. Regional identities are social constructs.
2. The basis of those constructions is formed by perceived characteristics or qualities of the region.
3. The past plays an important role in the process of identity formation.
4. Regional identities are contested.
5. Regional identities are contextualized.
6. Regional identities are processes.<sup>85</sup>

In these assumptions an understanding can be recognized that a region can not have one identity.<sup>86</sup> Identities are not automatically provided by a bordered space, they are variable, sometimes uncertain, and constructed in a confusing network of interactions across different geographic scales.<sup>87</sup> It will therefore not be the aim of this study to find 'the North-Groningen identity', simply because it does not exist. The focus is on the process of rural development, and how it is reproduced by different groups. In this way

<sup>79</sup> Paasi, 'Europe as a social process and discourse', pp. 7-28.

<sup>80</sup> Kneafsey, 'Tourism, Place identities', pp. 35-50.

<sup>81</sup> Dam, van, *A place called Nunavut*, p. 47.

<sup>82</sup> Paasi, 'Europe as a social process and discourse', p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Paasi, 'Region and place', pp. 475-485.

<sup>84</sup> Askins, 'Crossing divides', p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> Groote, Huigen and Haartsen, 'Claiming rural identities', p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Pater de, 'Wat is goede regionale geografie?', p. 73.

<sup>87</sup> Megill, *Historical Knowledge*, p. 45, Kneafsey, 'Tourism, Place identities and Social relations', p. 37.

the construction of different identities by those groups is used as a tool to research the rural change in North-Groningen.

The changing role and position of rural regions has had its influence on the meaning given to rural regions. The role of agriculture has long been the basis of the representations of rural regions.<sup>88</sup> Although some certainties out of history are no longer valid, identities are strongly constructed out of perceptions from history.<sup>89</sup> Memories become more important when identity becomes more uncertain.<sup>90</sup> The report *Bedreigd Bestaan* gives a view of North-Groningen of being a *marginalized region*. By analyzing the construction of different identities of North-Groningen the identities and the meaning which is given to rural areas can be further investigated. Additional identities are constructed out of livability and the attractiveness of the environment.<sup>91</sup> Social and cultural developments are important issues, since they shape the context in which an identity is constructed. To approach different identities three interest groups in North-Groningen are analyzed specifically.

#### *Agency.*

The rural changes discussed in the introduction have different implications for different groups in North-Groningen.<sup>92</sup> In this sense groups and not just individuals are seen as the basis for transformative social action.<sup>93</sup> Three specific groups will be investigated more in-depth, following the research on livability and identities. These are rural women, local politicians and rural youth. These actors all have their own interests in rural areas. The focus of the investigation of these groups will be on how they experience(d) livability in North-Groningen and how they construct(ed) identities of North-Groningen. Identities provides for these groups an answer to the question ‘where do I belong?’<sup>94</sup> The groups will mainly be investigated as (social) organizations which are actively involved in rural issues. An important notion in this context is power. When actors organize in groups they can have the power to influence developments. The power they have depends on the distribution of resources and can result in a group’s domination over another group.<sup>95</sup> The distribution of power over the groups is not fixed. Relations among actors within and between groups can change over time. The comparison of three of those actor groups can give insights in how relations have changed and what influences the changes in rural society have on these changed relations. While discussing these groups, the possible biased position of some of the group members should be kept in mind.

One of the groups taken into account is farm women or more general speaking rural women. Traditionally the group of rural women consists of women who are married to a farmer. The marriage with a farmer determined quite strongly the identities of these women and their position in society.<sup>96</sup> A traditional gender role was constructed for rural

<sup>88</sup> Hoggart, Black and Buller, *Rural Europe*, p. 93.

<sup>89</sup> Groote, Huigen and Haartsen, ‘Claiming rural identities’ p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error*, p. 43.

<sup>91</sup> Janssen, *Vooruit denken en verwijlen*, p. 11.

<sup>92</sup> Muilu, Gilbert, Phimister and Shucksmith, ‘The Changing Rural Context’, p. 26.

<sup>93</sup> Carpenter, ‘The Capabilities Approach’, p. 362.

<sup>94</sup> Paasi, ‘Region and place’, p.479.

<sup>95</sup> Mills, *The transformation of partnerships*. p. 16.

<sup>96</sup> Haugen, ‘The gendering of Farming’, pp.133-153.

women, which was based on their marriage. This implied for example a strict labor division on the farm and in the family. In regions with a strong focus on agriculture, like North-Groningen, the traditional gender role division was long present in many farm families. The changing economic focus on agriculture changed the position of farmers in society and as a consequence, influenced by other more global factors, the position of rural women changed. To know more about the construction of regional identities and value given to livability by rural women social organizations need to be analyzed.<sup>97</sup> Most rural women organize themselves in rural women organizations, especially in the past. The founding of a group gives women the possibilities to speak out and to improve their conditions. Such a group can be seen as an organized interest group. Women organizations are turning into significant social agents in community development and can be seen as a kind of services provider, which can contribute to the livability of a region.<sup>98</sup> In the report *Bedreigd Bestaan* this can be seen in the role given to women's organizations to improve the cultural condition of North-Groningen.<sup>99</sup> Women's organizations were thought to be able to influence the transformation of society.<sup>100</sup> In North-Groningen after the second World War many different rural women organizations were founded, which were based on class and religious distinctions. In every town and village a department of such an organization could be found. At the present two rural women organizations are left in North-Groningen: *Passage* (religious background) and *NBvP, vrouwen van nu* (non-religious). These organizations do not only focus on farm women anymore. The scope of the organizations has become wider and the organizations are now accessible for all women who have a connection with the rural. In that sense the focus is not specific on farm women but more general on rural women.

The second group is the group of local politicians. These are people who are involved in local politics and are member of a political party. In contemporary North-Groningen the political parties PvdA and CDA are dominant.<sup>101</sup> One of the functions of local politicians is to make policies at the local level and to advice policymakers at the national level. Besides the policy making and advisory function, local politicians are the executive branch for national and local policies. They can have quite some authority about local developments and the connected livability in North-Groningen. In the case of North-Groningen local politicians, mainly mayors, were among the first-day-members of the *SNG*. Notable is the gender distinction among local politicians. After the Second World War local politics were dominated by men, which emphasized a clear distinction of identity for men and women in the North-Groningen society. The clear distinction has changed since that time, nowadays women occupy positions as local politicians as well.<sup>102</sup> The example given makes clear that rural women and local politicians became more and more intertwined in the society of North-Groningen. Not only rural women and

<sup>97</sup> Brandth and Haugen, 'Rural Women, Feminism and the Politics of Identity', pp. 325-344.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Bouman, *Bedreigd Bestaan*, p. 198.

<sup>100</sup> Brandth, Follo and Haugen, 'Women in forestry', pp. 466-472.

<sup>101</sup> The CDA is founded in 1980, based on the ARP, CHU and KVP. For example: the 2003 election for the Lower house resulted in North-Groningen in 30,1 percent voted for CDA (*Christen Democratisch Appel*) and 32,7 percent PvdA (*Partij van de Arbeid*), followed by 10,9 percent VVD (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*) and 8,4 percent CU (*Christen Unie*). Compared to the Netherlands, 28,6 percent CDA, 27,3 percent PvdA, 17,9 percent VVD and 2,1 percent CU.

<sup>102</sup> The 2009 mayor of the municipality of Eemsmond is a female: Marijke van Beek.

local politicians are more and more intertwined. The combination of groups and its members are not fixed anymore, the interpretation of groups has changed.

The third group distinguished for this research is rural youth. In the same way as farm women, the rural youth is organized in local youth organizations. These organizations are traditionally based on religion, like Christian Protestant organizations and Catholic organizations. As discussed before the rural youth has to deal with the changing rural in its own way. The decline in rural employment has its consequences for the future of the youth. The attractiveness of a rural region for young people seems strongly related to the job possibilities in that region. The lack of choice in the offer of jobs, mainly farming jobs and the lack of qualified jobs are main problems for young people in rural areas.<sup>103</sup> The rural youth is because of these features probably extra vulnerable to deprivation which may motivate them to migrate.<sup>104</sup> In that sense it is not strange rural youth is characterized by an outflow at a particular age.<sup>105</sup> In 1959 in North-Groningen a lack of job possibilities and an outflow of youth was the case as well. Therefore the report *Bedreigd Bestaan* focused on employment in relation to the population. The main concern in the report is the high number of migrating young people due to a lack of employment and related the social consequences of that migration. However, not every young person left North-Groningen. By focusing on young people who stayed in North-Groningen and their experiences it can become clearer how the North-Groningen society has changed since 1959 and how this group perceived these changes.

### **Methodology.**

The research of the conceptualization of identity and livability is in this project divided into two phases, a descriptive phase and an analytic phase. The first phase sets a context for the second phase, which makes them complementary to each other. Against the distinguished background of the North-Groningen region in the descriptive phase, the analytic phase probes deeper into the research problem. In both phases a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis will be used. The use of two different research approaches is chosen because the quantitative research facilitates the qualitative research and the other way around, at the same time they enhance each other.<sup>106</sup> The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods clears out some of the weaknesses of the methods. A quantitative method provides hard data about developments which qualitative data cannot give. The interpretation limitations of quantification are accounted for by the use of qualitative methods.<sup>107</sup> Qualitative research is in that sense an important tool in social history.<sup>108</sup>

### *Descriptive phase.*

The first research question focuses on the investigation of socio-culturally developments, particular in relation to livability and identity. The descriptive phase is essential in

<sup>103</sup> Auclair and Vanoni, 'The Attractiveness of Rural Areas for Young People' p. 88-91.

<sup>104</sup> Bien, Lappe and Rathgeber, 'The situation of young people in rural areas', p. 167. And Jentsch, 'Youth Migration from Rural Areas', pp. 292-240.

<sup>105</sup> Muilu, Gilbert, Phimister and Shucksmith, 'The Changing Rural Context', p. 27.

<sup>106</sup> Seale, *The Quality of Qualitative Research*, p. 124.

<sup>107</sup> Makhoulf Obermeyer, 'Qualitative Methods', pp. 813-818.

<sup>108</sup> Conze, 'Social History', p. 19.

answering this research question and setting a context for the whole research. The study is more focused if the developments in the concepts identity and livability are studied in their regional context.

The first step in the descriptive phase is an overview of developments in North-Groningen which are related to *Bedreigd Bestaan*. *Bedreigd Bestaan* can be regarded as a comprehensive study of North-Groningen in the 1950s. In response to *Bedreigd Bestaan* different kinds of socio-cultural developments can be distinguished, like the development of community centers and studies at particular socio-cultural topics.<sup>109</sup> Particular attention is given to the developments regarding livability and identity in relation to *Bedreigd Bestaan* and North-Groningen. An inspection of the *SNG* archives provides a set up for information concerning *Bedreigd Bestaan* and reactions regarding the report.

Related to the above described overview is the quantification of developments. The quantification of structures and developments is indispensable in this social historical study. The data consists of basic information about socio-cultural indicators, like services levels, number of different kind of public places and consists of demographic and economic data which is related to socio-cultural developments, like population growth, (see figure 3), education level and income. This data is conducted from *Statistics Netherlands*, the province of Groningen, municipalities in the region and the Groningen archives.<sup>110</sup> The data is mainly on national, provincial, municipality level, and in some cases on village level. In this way the situation in North-Groningen can be compared to other areas, like the province of Groningen, the Netherlands or other regions in Europe.

The variety in data and the variety in data per year can give rise to a disproportionate amount of data over time. This could make an analysis over the past fifty years quite complicated. To redress this a smart mix of serial data and benchmark years will be used. An example: benchmark years are selected on basis of criteria concerning the socio-cultural development. One of the main concerns of the report *Bedreigd Bestaan* is the declining population of North-Groningen. The data of this variable is available on a yearly basis. Figure 3 shows the results of the population growth of North-Groningen per 1000 inhabitants from 1950 until 2007. The following turning points can be distinguished, based on the figure below: 1971 and 1984. From 1984, onwards a more fluctuating process is shown. 2003 shows a turning point towards a negative population growth. The chosen benchmark years are these turning points in the growth of North-Groningen. This will result in the following benchmark years: 1947, as a starting point, 1960, time of the report *Bedreigd Bestaan*, 1971, as a change towards positive growth, 1984, as the start of a more fluctuating period, 1993, in the middle of the fluctuating time period, 2003 as the final turning point into negative growth and the final data point will be 2007 or 2008. In this way more specific attention can be given to particular developments, like labor force, services level, income and housing at particular time periods. If the data is available, an overview on yearly basis can be provided as well. From a practical view, in 1947, 1960 and 1971 censuses are held, which will provide

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<sup>109</sup> Most of these studies are done by or with the help of *SNG*, like Holtkamp and Boekhoven, *Mogelijkheden en onmogelijkheid* and the *PPD* reports.

<sup>110</sup> The municipalities: Bedum, Ten Boer, Eemsum, Loppersum, De Marne and Winsum.

additional information.<sup>111</sup> To have a continuation the benchmark years will be used if necessary in the analytic phase of this study as well.

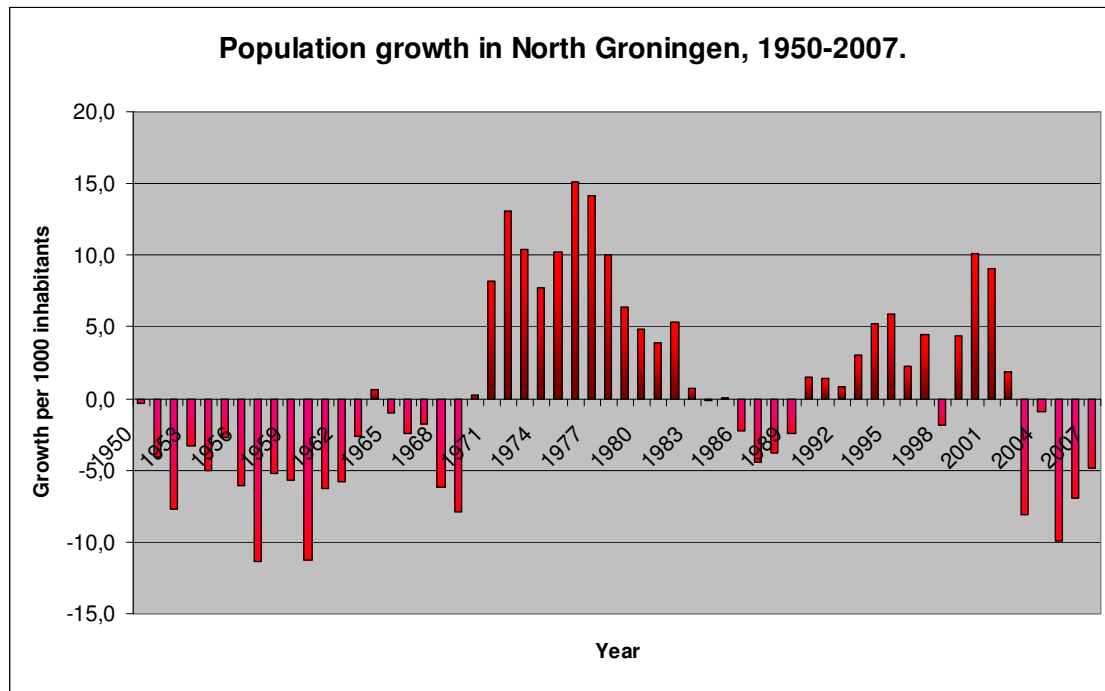


Figure 1.3: Population growth in North-Groningen, 1950-2007.  
Source: Statistics Netherlands, 2008.

The use of quantitative methods only does not make clear the understanding of livability and identity in the North-Groningen context. Especially the perceptions of actors do not become clear. In order to find out who the key actors are in the North-Groningen process of socio-cultural developments a network analysis is carried out. The reason for this is to find out who is on crossroads of different networks and has an influential position. This will draw the attention to potential informants belonging to one of the three research groups: rural women, local politicians and rural youth. The starting point for this analysis are the membership lists of *SNG*. These lists are available in the Groningen archives ranging from the set up of the *SNG* in 1955 until the discontinuance in 1984. The *SNG* is divided into different committee's and especially the members of the cultural committee and sociological committee are taken into account as active in the socio-cultural development of North-Groningen. In appendix 1 an example of a part of one of the membership lists is included. This analysis makes clear who was active and had influence in the development of North-Groningen. Hypothetical can be said it was mainly the societal political upper layer who was involved. As results from the membership lists a high number of mayors with a strong liberal political consideration is involved in the *SNG*.

<sup>111</sup> See for example [www.volkstellingen.nl](http://www.volkstellingen.nl)

*Analytic phase.*

The analytic phase concentrates on *how* actors experienced the socio-cultural developments in North-Groningen. This means that this phase concerns the second, third and fourth research questions, as described above. To interpret the socio-cultural developments more in-depth three specific research groups are chosen: rural women, local politicians and rural youth. These groups each have their own possibilities to influence socio-cultural developments. Even though rural women and rural youth are considered as being marginalized in literature,<sup>112</sup> their organization in associations which originated around the Second World War gives them some possibilities to speak out and have a kind of influence in societal processes.<sup>113</sup>

In order to know how actors experienced the socio-cultural developments, several analyses are performed. First, an inspection is conducted on how the three groups used the concepts livability and identity in their written sources. These sources are for example local governmental reports that focus on livability and identity and minutes and bulletins of local rural women and rural youth organizations.<sup>114</sup> From the descriptive phase it has become clear how livability and identity developed after the Second World War and what societal developments are influential. Based on these outcomes a set of indicators concerning livability and identity is formulated. For example the foundation of a community centre can be regarded as influential in the livability of a village, which makes the presence of a community center an indicator.<sup>115</sup> The use of indicators is helpful in analyzing the contents of written sources. To analyze these sources an open coding system based on the indicators is used.<sup>116</sup> However, the coding system is not static. If during the analytic phase other influential indicators appear, these will be included in the coding system too. Eventually the parts of the sources dealing with livability and identity are coded. For example when a sentence in a minute deals with the decline of number of school pupils it gets the code *school*. The use of indicators and the coding of the sources gives the possibility to distinguish the changes in the conceptualization and use of the concepts livability and identity in time by different groups. It can be seen as a method to compare the perceptions of the three different groups.<sup>117</sup> In that sense it explains certain processes distinguished in the descriptive phase. However, this approach has limitations. It is impossible to inspect all sources concerning livability and identity due to time limitations and availability of the sources. Therefore a selection is made in order to define appropriate sources. This selection is based on the availability and accessibility of the material. In general the selected data is not digital, which can be another limitation. As a consequence manual content analysis is performed instead of the use of a computer analysis program.

The second step of the analytic phase focuses on some particular community issues. This to accomplish in-depth information about the relationship between livability and identity.

<sup>112</sup> See, Jentsch and Shucksmith, eds., *Young People*, Backerra, ed., *Vrouwen van het land*. and Bock and Shortall, *Rural Gender Relation*.

<sup>113</sup> Backerra, ed. *Vrouwen van het land*.

<sup>114</sup> See for a study on rural women organization's bulletins, Branth and Haugen, *Rural Women*.

<sup>115</sup> Teuwen, *Dorpshuizen in Noord-Groningen*, p. 4..

<sup>116</sup> Babbie, *The practice of Social Research*. p. 384.

<sup>117</sup> Ragin, *Constructing Social Research*, p. 93.

In order to do so some interesting research cases are selected from the different analyses described above. The selected cases deal with changes in livability and identity and can be distinguished at village level, which means that they deal with important local issues. At the moment three types of community issues are selected. The first two are the establishment of a community centre and the disappearance schools. It is not clear yet which particular cases will be selected, this will depend on the results from the descriptive phase and the possibilities to gather enough data. In almost every village these kind of community issues are dealt with, so it will not be a big problem to find some appropriate cases. The third community issue which is studied is a socio-cultural manifestation. An interesting case concerning this issue is the manifestation of *Op Roakeldais*, in Warffum. In 1966 it was set up with a threefold goal: economic, cultural and recreational development for the North-Groningen region. This resulted in an international folkloric dance festival, an art, antique and handicraft fair and a business, information and publicity event.<sup>118</sup> Nowadays *Op Roakeldais* still exists mainly as an international folkloric dance festival. It is interesting to study how the three groups took position towards this socio-cultural initiative.

The community issues are studied from the perspectives of the three groups, rural women, local politicians and rural youth. Each of these groups has its own perception and own role concerning the particular community issues. The same sort of sources are used as before: municipality reports and minutes and bulletins of local rural women and rural youth organizations. In addition to these written sources local papers can provide additional relevant background information. The sources are analyzed with a coding method, which is described above. Although a different set of codes is used, the codes are related to the community issue. Concerning *Op Roakeldais* codes are based on the different goals of the manifestation. Hypothetically, rural women mainly pay attention to the cultural purposes in their local association magazines instead of the economic purposes. In this way they created a particular perception, one of focusing on cultural development instead of economic.<sup>119</sup>

Although written sources provide information, the most practical way of studying the changes in perceptions of livability and identity by actors themselves is a qualitative interview method. The use of interviewing as a source, besides written sources, makes it possible to discuss and investigate more complex unities.<sup>120</sup> In this study oral history interviews are used to investigate these complex unities. Oral history is 'the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction.'<sup>121</sup> One of the strengths of oral history is the power to document the undocumented information about communities, organizations, businesses, events and the lives of individuals.<sup>122</sup> Oral history gives ordinary people the opportunity to tell their personal stories and experiences. This research that covers a recent time period, gives the possibility to talk with people who experienced the community issues themselves. The possibility to ask whoever is needed and to ask about whatever is interesting is an extra

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<sup>118</sup> Holtkamp and Boekhoven, *Mogelijkheden en onmogelijkheid*.

<sup>119</sup> Brandth and Haugen, 'Rural Women, Feminism and the Politics of Identity', pp. 325-344.

<sup>120</sup> Leydesdorff, *Wij hebben als mens geleefd*, p. 35.

<sup>121</sup> Perks and Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, p. ix.

<sup>122</sup> Sommer and Quilan, *The Oral History Manual*, p. 3.

advantage in this case. In this study the network analysis as performed in the descriptive phase made clear who are the local actors involved in socio-cultural developments. If possible some of the local actors from the three different groups are interviewed.<sup>123</sup> Additionally the network analysis provides information on the different networks to which an actor belongs. On the basis of this information the position of the actor can be determined. The possible biased position of the actor is regarded as a strength in this research. If an actor belongs to different networks with different interests an interview can make clear these different interests in the analysis and show how relations between networks are. In addition to the local actors, interviews can be conducted with local inhabitants related to the community issue. In the case of *Op Roakeldais* pupils of the *Het Hogeland College* (secondary school) in Warffum can be interviewed, as an example of rural youth.

The interviews in this study are semi-structured and will focus on a set of topics. A semi-structured interview method is chosen to make sure all topics are discussed during the interview and the appropriate choice of the topics creates a chronologic order. The interviews in this study start with topics concerning childhood and develop into topics concerning adulthood. In this way the interviews deal not only with the particular community issue but the wider context is taken into account as well. Which means as much information as possible from an actor is gathered.

The use of interviews as sources deals with personal memories. The use of memories leads to the critique memories are subjective, in a sense that every individual remembers something else which makes oral histories artificial, variable and partial.<sup>124</sup> Memories tend to focus on particular events, particularly humorous, frightening, striking, or unusual occurrences, and are strongly (re)formed by more recent knowledge and a collective memory, which can be nostalgia.<sup>125</sup> The use of eye openers can be a way to solve a part of the problem. Eye openers are used in interviews to make clear the interviewee knows the exact date of a particular event, which can make the memories of people more traceable with the past. Another argument against the use of oral history is the personal bias of both interviewer and interviewee.<sup>126</sup> This relationship is modifying for the oral history and its analyses. Together these arguments make oral histories not seen as reliable. Portelli states oral sources are reliable but with a different reliability.<sup>127</sup> The value of oral history are not the historical facts, but the imagination and symbolism of them. Oral history focuses on the meaning of an event and why it is told in a particular way by the interviewee. Less attention is on the event itself. This makes oral history different compared to written sources and it makes oral history very suitable for an analysis of identity and livability in North-Groningen. Besides that the disadvantage of the subjectivity of oral histories is seen in written sources as well. Written sources are published with a particular intention and in a particular time which makes them subjective.<sup>128</sup> No matter if sources are qualitative or quantitative, all the sources, oral

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<sup>123</sup> Some of the actors died and some of them will be untraceable.

<sup>124</sup> Portelli, 'What makes oral history different' p. 38.

<sup>125</sup> Allen and Montell, *From Memory to History*, p. 47.

<sup>126</sup> Perks and Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, p. 3.

<sup>127</sup> Portelli, 'What makes oral history different', p. 37.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

histories too, need to be critically analyzed. A way to critically analyze an interview is to make use of written sources in a complementary way and use them as a kind of control mechanism. Doing this makes the use of oral histories less problematic as some criticism have stated and in addition to quantitative analysis very suitable for the above discussed research questions.<sup>129</sup>

To sum up, this special combination of research phases with their mix of methods will enable me to answer the research questions and give a readable account of the development of livability and identity of the *Bedreigd Bestaan* region.

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<sup>129</sup> Perks and Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*.

## **Appendix 1: Part of committee membership list *Stichting Noord-Groningen*, 1959.**

### **Founders of the *Stichting North-Groningen* in 1955:**

- W.J. Geertsema, mayor municipality Warffum, place of residence: Warffum.
- G.R. Meijer, farmer, place of residence: Kloosterburen.
- R.E. Siemens, farmer, place of residence: Uithuizermeeden.
- C.N. Smit, candidate notary, place of residence: Eenrum.
- T.J. Tammes, farmer, place of residence: Den Aniel.

### **Executive committee:**

- J.C. Lindeboom, chairman, Wehe den hoorn.
- Mr. J.C. Berghuis, vice-chairman, Groningen.
- C.N. Smit, secretary, Eenrum.
- T.J. Tammes, treasurer, Den Aniel.
- G.R. Meijer, Kloosterburen.
- J. Post, Usquert.
- W.J. Dethmers-Brouwer, Toornwerd.

### **Special membership:**

- A.W. Biewenga, place of residence: Garsthuizen.
- Mr. W.J. Geertsema, place of residence: 's Gravenhage.
- H.D. Louwes, place of residence: Zuidhorn.

### **Committees:**

#### **Cultural committee:**

- Jhr. Mr. S.M.S. de Ranitz, chairman, Winsum
- Mr. A. Brinkman, Uithuizen.
- Mej. M.A. Hijlkema, Mensingeweer.
- K.G. Olsmeijer, Winsum.
- H. Braber, Groningen.
- T.F. Clevering-Meijer, Eenrum.
- Ir. P. Sanders, Baflo.

#### **Sociological committee:**

- Mr. J.A. Buurma, chairman, Groningen.
- P.E. Boerema, Startenhuizen.
- J. Dekkema, Kantens.
- W. Evers-Dijkhuizen, Spijk.
- Mr. P.J. Molendijk, Ten Boer.
- F. Mulder-Geuker, Warffum.
- Dr. L. Zielhuis, Baflo.

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