Addressing retail vacancy in city centers of Gelderland: what can be learned from the Province of Antwerpen?

Student: Anna Popova (s4376218 / 901221P521)

Supervisors: Pascal Beckers (RU) & Jan-Evert Nilsson (BTH)

June 2015
Nijmegen
Karlskrona
Acknowledgements

To my supervisors, Pascal Beckers and Jan-Evert Nilsson, for their valuable help, their time, wise comments and dedication on all stages of this research.

To all the academic and management staff of the Planet Europe Masters program, for making this two-year precious experience possible for me.

To all the interviewees, for their time, shared information and outstanding willingness to help.

To the Province of Gelderland, for the internship opportunity, research support and access to information.

To Rogier van Aaken, for his firm commitment, his kind reliance on my skills and experience and support during both my internship and thesis research.

To my Planet Europe colleagues, for broadening my perspective and sharing with me their opinions and life experience.

To my friends, Iuliia Kauk, Luis Miguel Rojas-Bercia, Pawel Tkaczyk, Lidya Lestari Sitohang, Christien Voet and Vinicius Macuch Silva, for their endless support, for unconsciously upholding my mood and being there for me during my ups and downs, for hours of laugh and priceless memories and inspiration.

To my closest friends from my homeland, Olga Kurbatova, Lyubov Zhirova and Ekaterina Pozyrko, for all the text messages that they have sent and all the Skype calls that we have had during these two years, for supporting my decision to leave them and for proving that thousands of kilometers is not the distance.

To my family, for their unconditional support and love that cannot be expressed with any existing word.

Thank you.

Anna Popova
Abstract

Recently, downtown shopping areas have faced a number of challenges, which have undermined their vitality and viability. Some scholars argue that the coincidence of long-term shifts in policies, demographic recomposition and mobility increase and medium- and short-term impacts of changes in business and consumers’ behavior has had negative impact on the economic performance of city center shopping areas. There is an increasing interest in retail vacancy in city centers as it reflects the declining performance of the shopping areas.

Retail vacancy is a complex and extensive problem. It is associated with numerous issues such as neglect and under-utilization of space, and is often considered undesirable. Vacancy can lead to decay and dilapidation of the area, but also attracts crime and can thereby result in disadvantaged neighborhoods. In addition, vacancy is also undesirable in the context of a sustainable and efficient use of space. Due to the fact that retail vacancy affects not only economic performance of retailers, but also the area itself, the public space, and, therefore has a spatial characteristics, local and regional authorities are involved in the process of addressing the issue.

The thesis aims at identifying different policy arrangements for addressing retail vacancy in Antwerpen province (Belgium) and analyzing their transferability to the institutional settings of the Gelderland province (the Netherlands). This research contributes to the existing academic literature on the retail vacancy by filling the existing gap and giving insights in policy arrangements and institutional environment of the issue in international comparative perspective.
# Table of contents

1. Introduction ............................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Research aim and research questions ................................................................. 6
      1.1.1 Research questions ....................................................................................... 6
   1.2 Relevance of the research ..................................................................................... 6
2. Theoretical framework ................................................................................................. 9
   2.1 Theory of Structuration ....................................................................................... 9
   2.2 Conceptual framework ......................................................................................... 11
3. Methodology ............................................................................................................... 16
   3.1 Nature of research ............................................................................................... 16
   3.2 Research approach ............................................................................................. 17
      3.2.1 Selection of cases ......................................................................................... 18
   3.3 Research methods ............................................................................................... 19
      3.3.1 Data collection and analysis ........................................................................... 20
   3.4 Validity and reliability of the research ................................................................. 27
4. Research results and data analysis ............................................................................ 28
   4.1 Institutional settings in the provinces of Gelderland and Antwerpen: similarities and
differences ..................................................................................................................... 28
      4.1.1 Structure of Legitimation ............................................................................... 28
      4.1.2 Structure of Signification ............................................................................... 33
      4.1.3 Structure of Domination ............................................................................... 36
      4.1.4 Summary ........................................................................................................ 37
   4.2 The province of Antwerpen combats retail vacancy in city centers: policy arrangements
........................................................................................................................................... 38
      4.2.1 Flemish region .............................................................................................. 38
      4.2.2 Province of Antwerpen ............................................................................... 40
List of Tables

Table 1: Actors engaged into retail location process, affected / challenged by retail vacancy 12
Table 2: List of organizations for interviews in the Netherlands (NL) and Belgium (BE)......21
Table 3: Interview guide .................................................................................................................. 22
Table 4: Coding scheme .................................................................................................................. 25
Table 5: The hierarchy of spatial plans for the province of Antwerpen................................. 29

List of Figures

Figure 1: Retail vacancy rate in the Netherlands (m2 per 1000 inhabitants) 3 ...................... 3
Figure 2: Retail vacancy rates in Gelderland, % ......................................................................... 3
Figure 3: Retail vacancy rates in the Province of Antwerpen (%), 2014 ................................... 5
Figure 4: Evolution of retail vacancy rates in municipalities of the Province of Antwerpen, 2008-2014 ......................................................................................................................... 5
Figure 5: Conceptual model of the Structuration theory ............................................................... 11
Figure 6: Conceptual model for systems of retail location and retail vacancy problem-solving ........................................................................................................................................ 13
Figure 7: Evolution of retail vacancy rates in municipalities of the Province of Antwerpen, 2008-2014 ...................................................................................................................................... 18
Figure 8: Strategic steps for a municipality to address the retail vacancy ..................................... 51
Figure 9: Joint Action Scheme for addressing retail vacancy ..................................................... 52
1. Introduction

Central shopping areas, especially historic centers, have always been core areas within cities’ hierarchical structures as they concentrate a diverse set of functions, endowing this location with a centrality not seen in other areas. Related to this and tied to the fate of cities, retail has always maintained a privileged place in the town center (Beaujeu-Garnier, 1980: 209). However, recently, central shopping areas have faced a number of challenges, which have undermined their vitality and viability. Some scholars argue that the coincidence of long-term shifts in policies, demographic recomposition and mobility increase and medium- and short-term impacts of changes in business and consumers’ behavior has had negative impact on the social and economic performance of city center shopping areas (Guy, 2007; Leeuwen, 2010; Wood & Baker, 2014). As Carlyle (2012) puts it:

‘... the urban city center has faced many challenges to keep pace with the changes in shopping habits for a variety of reasons: declining urban populations; perceptions of the city as unsafe; shops that were located far away from one another; perceptions among suburbanites that the city environment was "confusing;" and expensive and inconvenient parking’ (p. 38)

The changes of retail market forces create ‘winners and losers’ (Carlyle, 2012: 39). Unfortunately, real estate market is not that easily adaptable to the new retail environment and cannot address these issues in a short-term. Therefore, many cities and towns have an oversupply of retail real estate, which results in increasing vacancy rates in central shopping areas. The latest decades of retail transformation and restructuring have shifted the issue of retail vacancy to the fore.

Retail vacancy is a complex and extensive problem. It is associated with numerous issues such as neglect and under-utilization of space, and is often considered undesirable. Vacancy can lead to decay and dilapidation of the area. One vacant building can cause vacancy in surrounding area. Wilson and Kelling (1989) name this this principle as 'the broken window syndrome': if one broken window is not restored, it will make people break more windows. The underlying assumption is that if no one is responsible for a certain good, there is no risk in breaking more windows. Crane (1998) formulated an additional principle in his 'Epidemic Theory’. This means that social problems will spread around a large group of individuals faster after reaching a certain threshold or tipping point. In the case of vacancy, when a certain critical mass of empty buildings in an area is reached, the residents and owners of the
surrounding buildings will also leave the place, producing more and more empty premises. This may be followed by increased crime level.

Moreover, the presence of vacant buildings may cause the decline of property prices in the neighborhood. Vacancy thus represents a significant external cost to owners of surrounding properties. This reduces the value of their property and makes resale very difficult (Accordino and Johnson, 2000). The declining market then leads to a lower market interest and less investment in the neighborhood. In this way, the neighborhood comes in a downward spiral.

The major actors in this process of dealing with retail vacancy are regional and local governments and private-sector decision makers. Their actions are based on different logics. (They have opposite goals, the former trying to maximize public welfare and economic resilience, the latter trying to maximize profit (Ozuduru & Guldmann, 2013). Concerning public authorities, they ‘have long devised instruments and political measures, on diverse levels and of different types, to guide and exert some measure of control over the development process of retail and on its spatial distribution’ (Rio Fernandes & Chamusca, 2014: 172). According to Rio Fernandes and Chamusca (2014), in general, regional and local authorities have tried to maintain a ‘relevant spatial emphasis’, protacting relationship between central areas and supply and distribution of goods and services that has been developed throughout the history (Ibid.). Policy-makers have tried to confront the trend of increasing vacancy rates in city center retail locations. However, many local governments have failed in adressing the issue as they are focused mainly on ‘apperarance, aesthetics and tax generation, which they are better to regulate’, while actual retail planning and corresponding policies have often been ignored (Ozuduru & Guldmann, 2013: 3). This failure of local governments drives attention to the higher level of governance and its importance in planning for retail policies and coordination of municipalities.

Retail vacancy in city centers have recently become a hot topic on the political agenda of different levels of governance in the Netherlands. The distribution of retail vacancy rates among Dutch provinces and regions is uneven. These differences can be easily seen from the Figure 1 presented below. Regions in green color have very low retail vacancy, primarily it is the central part of the country that attracts different groups of population (more jobs and studying opportunities). Meanwhile, the areas marked with red are the most vulnerable with high vacancy rates. These regions are situated on the periphery, most of them are on the border with Germany or Belgium. Generally, these regions are suffering from negative migration and aging population. It is evident that, for instance, the Achterhoek region
(Province of Gelderland) faces one of the highest vacancy rates in the country. Zooming in to the province of Gelderland, the average retail vacancy rate in central shopping areas is 9%, however, large differences between provincial regions are noticeable. This can be detected from the Figure 2. Vacant shops in the village centers of Westervoort and Wijchen areas represent just 4% (marked green), while in Renkum and Zevenaar areas vacancy rates are between 15 and 20 percent of the total retail space (marked orange). In areas such as Mook en Middelaar and Rijnwaarden vacancy rates are over 20% (red areas) (Initiatief Overbewinkeling, 2015).

**Figure 1: Retail vacancy rate in the Netherlands (m² per 1000 inhabitants).** Locatus, (2012), Informatiefolder rapport

**Figure 2: Retail vacancy rates in Gelderland, %**

Although the Province of Gelderland is facing such high retail vacancy rates, the Province has not developed its position yet and, therefore, the policy for addressing the issue is still not presented. In this case, according to Evans (2009), when a new policy is to be designed, the policy transfer approach may be applied. Literature on policy transfer identifies learning as the main mechanism for transferring policy (Marsch & Sharman, 2009). In this regard, learning refers to emulation of ‘foreign institutions and practices to the extent that these measures produce more efficient and effective policy outcomes’ (Marsch & Sharman, 2009:271). As Bennet (1991) puts it, there is:

‘... a natural tendency to look abroad, to see how other states have responded to similar pressures, to share ideas, to draw lessons and to bring foreign evidence to bear within domestic policy-making processes’ (p.220).

In order to obtain in-depth knowledge about foreign practices, the case-study approach may be used. According to Baxter and Jack (2008) put it, a case-study approach helps to facilitate ‘exploration of a phenomenon’ and ensure that ‘the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood’ (p.544). Such definition suits the purpose of the policy transfer and the complexity of the retail vacancy phenomenon.

Looking at the experience of the neighboring countries, Belgium is also facing nowadays an increasing number of vacant retail premises in city centers. According to Locatus data, the average vacancy rate in Belgium reached 8.6% in 2014. The vacancy rates vary across the country, with the highest in Arlon and Charleroi regions with 13.8% and 12.3%, respectively (Zandbergen, 2014). Concerning Flemish region as the one close to the Province of Gelderland in terms of language spoken and written, the most interesting case to compare is the Province of Antwerpen with the average vacancy rate of 8.5% (Provincie Antwerpen, 2014). As it can be seen from Figure 3, vacancy rates vary from one municipality to another. The darker the color of the municipality, the higher the vacancy rate is. For example, the highest vacancy rates can be found in Boom (24%), followed by Baarle-Hertog (19.8%), Niel (18.8%) and Mortsel (17.9%). In Antwerp and in some municipalities of the Antwerp agglomeration vacancy rates are also relatively high.

Even though high vacancy rates are still present in number of municipalities of the Province of Antwerpen, the evolution of vacancy rates since 2008 is worth mentioning. The increase in
the vacancy rate can be seen in almost every Flemish municipality. As the Interprovincial study reveals, vacancy rate in Flanders in the period 2008-2014 increased by almost 70% (Provincie Antwerpen, 2014). Figure 4 demonstrates the evolution of retail vacancy rate in municipalities of the Province of Antwerpen: The greenest colored municipalities are those that decreased vacancy rates between 2008 and 2014. The municipalities with the strongest declines in terms of vacancy located throughout the province: Vosselaar, Laakdal, Putte, Schelle and Wommelgem amounted decrease more than 30% (Ibid.).

Figure 3: Retail vacancy rates in the Province of Antwerpen (%), 2014

Figure 4: Evolution of retail vacancy rates in municipalities of the Province of Antwerpen, 2008-2014
The above mentioned facts make the Province of Antwerpen an interesting case for investigation in terms of the forces of change and policy arrangements for addressing retail vacancy in city centers in order to draw lessons for the Province of Gelderland.

1.1 Research aim and research questions

The research aims at identifying different policy arrangements for addressing retail vacancy in city centers in Antwerpen province (Belgium) and analyzing their transferability to the institutional framework of the Gelderland province (the Netherlands) in order to provide policy-makers responsible for tackling the growing issue of retail vacancy in many municipalities of Gelderland with new insights.

1.1.1 Research questions

In order to achieve the aim of the proposed research, the following guiding question is formulated:

What are the policy arrangements for addressing retail vacancy in city centers of the province of Antwerpen that can be implemented in the province of Gelderland within the existing institutional framework?

Following sub-questions contribute to answering the main research question:

1. What are the similarities and differences between institutional frameworks for retail location in the Province of Antwerpen and the Province of Gelderland?
2. What has been done to combat retail vacancy in city centers of the Province of Antwerpen?
3. What can the Province of Gelderland learn from the experience of the Province of Antwerpen?

1.2 Relevance of the research

The research has both its societal and scientific relevance. Concerning the first, the retail sector is essential because due to many factors, some of them can be named as following: it provides goods and services to residents and visitors; employs a substantial share of the workforce, generating income for the local economy and taxes for local governments;
promotes local development and supports local property values; supports a sense of urban life vitality closely related to the flow of people in retail areas (Mazza & Rydin, 1997). By analyzing existing approaches to addressing retail vacancy, the research can contribute on deriving better understanding of what the possible policy strategy and possible actions on different governmental levels can be. Without comprehensive understanding of those matters, retail planning will keep on being patchily addressed, which in its turn will contribute to and accelerate the decline of neighborhoods, affecting the image and attractiveness of the cities (centers) for business, labor force, residents, events and tourists.

The existing academic literature covers several aspects related to retail locations, policies and development. There is the great volume of research that has been conducted on developing an understanding of the spatial patterns of retailing. This includes the distribution of shops, shopping centers and retailers over an area, and the associated patterns of shoppers’ behavior as well as the internal arrangement of shops within centers and, again, the relationships to shoppers’ movements (e.g. Spierings, 2006; Bolt, 2003). There is some research on the impacts of of the new shopping centres on the existing retail structure, some of these regarding the British and the American contexts (e.g. Guy, 2007). Another dimension of the literature covers specific retail sustainability issues, such as the deprivation of city centers and inner-city neighborhoods, fast-paced development of shopping centers and outward expansion of cities, the ‘death’ of old malls because of poor performance, and the redevelopment of greyfield areas (e.g. Newell, 2009). A number of publications have been made concerning the attractiveness attributes of retail agglomerations (Ooi & Sim, 2007; Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003; Teller & Elms, 2010; Teller & Reutterer, 2008). The institutional perspective of the problem and the way the retail vacancy can be addressed by regional and local authorities have been covered less, while no international comparative research has been done to identify the possible policy arrangements for dealing with retail vacancy in city centers.

The remainder of the thesis is organized as follows. The first chapter will provide the theoretical framework for the research. In this chapter Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration will be reviewed, followed by the conceptual framework which embodies the theory and applies it to the systems of retail location policy and policy addressing retail vacancy in city centers of the Province of Antwerpen and the Province of Gelderland. Next, methodological framework for the research will be presented, identifying and justifying the choice of methods and tools for the investigation. After that, empirical chapter will be presented. In this part of the thesis results of the research will be presented and analyzed. The
last chapter will conclude on findings and provide advice on policy arrangements for combating retail vacancy in city centers that can be transferred to the existing institutional framework of the Province of Gelderland.
2. Theoretical framework

To understand better the process of addressing retail vacancy in city centers, the theory of Structuration is applied in this research. This theory can be seen as conceptual model of how social structures not only restrict behavior of actors, but also creates different possibilities for actions. The main point is that not only restrictions that actors encounter in unrolling their behavior in space and time, but they also contribute to the creation of a certain space-time structure. After a brief description of the theory, the conceptual model for this research is presented for analyzing retail vacancy problem-solving process.

2.1 Theory of Structuration

Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration has been highly influential in a great number of social sciences. The theory has been used in such disciplines as information technology (Jones & Karsten, 2008), strategic management (Pozzebon, 2004; Whittington, 2010), and administrative sciences, including accounting (Englund, Gerdin, & Burns, 2011) and organizational studies (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Heracleous & Hendry, 2000).

The theory of structuration embodies complex concepts such as duality of structure, practical and discursive consciousness, temporality and conceptuality of action, which makes it also suitable for analyzing policy arrangements. According to Giddens, ‘the best that social theory can offer is a series of "sensitizing concepts" that alert investigators to processes among active human agents’ (Turner, 1986: 969).

A key concept of the theory is the duality of structure, where agents simultaneously reproduce or change structures of signification, legitimation and domination by drawing upon the ‘modalities’ of structuration, interpretive schemes, normative rules, authoritative and allocative resources (Giddens, 1979, 1984). According to the theory, social life is highly determined by structures, where social life is a product of subjective decision-making within a single framework (Moore, 2011). The theory makes a distinction between systems and structures, where systems refer to visible patterns that are reproduced across time and space by human actors, while structures represent rules and resources that bind those patterns into continuously reproduced systems (Giddens, 1979).

As Moore (2011) highlights, three structural dimensions can be identified within the theory. The first is signification, which refers to structures of meaning that are reproduced by agents
drawing upon interpretative schemes (Giddens, 1979). The second dimension of structuration is legitimation, the theory of normative regulation (Giddens, 1979, 1984), or the moral constitution of social action (Macintosh, 1994). The third dimension of structuration is domination, or power, the exercise of which is dependent upon authoritative and allocative resources (Giddens, 1979, 1984). These are both enabling and constraining, as power works to both constrain individuals as well as to gain their cooperation (Macintosh, 1994). The role of agency in power refers to the power of human action to transform the social and material world (Roberts and Scapens, 1985).

In his work, Giddens developed two methodological approaches to investigate interactions between structures and agents: analysis of strategic conduct and institutional analysis (Giddens, 1984). While the former emphasizes agency as it places a focus upon the modalities in which agents draw upon structural properties (Giddens, 1979, 1984), the latter focuses on structure as reproduced features of social systems. In other words, the institutional analysis is focused on the rules and resources that bind the system.

Institutional theory highlights cultural influences on decision-making and formal structures. It holds that organizations, and the individuals who populate them, are suspended in a web of values, norms, rules, beliefs, and taken-for-granted assumptions that are at least partially of their own making. These cultural elements define the way the world is and should be. They provide blueprints for organizing by specifying the forms and procedures an organization of a particular type should adopt if it is to be seen as a member-in-good-standing of its class (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Institutions, therefore, represent constraints on the options that individuals and collectives are likely to exercise, albeit constraints that are open to modification over time.

The argument provided above reassembles certain principles of the structuration theory articulated by Giddens (1976). Moreover, the proponents of structuration theory and institutionalists highlight that cultural constraints do not completely determine human action (DiMaggio, 1988; Strang, 1994). Rather, institutions set bounds on rationality by restricting the opportunities and alternatives we perceive and, thereby, increase the probability of certain types of behavior.

The structuration theory conceptual model is summarized in the Figure 5. Institutional realm comprises formal and informal rules of action that have been repeated constantly by actors involved, while action realm represents decisions that are made by public actors of different
levels of governance and by private actors by means of the resources that are at the disposal of corresponding actors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional realm</th>
<th>Signification</th>
<th>Domination</th>
<th>Legitimation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modalities</td>
<td>Interpretive schemes</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action realm</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Sanction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5: Conceptual model of the Structuration theory*


Following the thought of Haslett (2013) that all societies have institutions of signification (meaning), domination (power through allocation or authorization), and legitimation (institutions that reflect the legal and moral standards of the group), and thus, all interactions have elements of meaning, power, and legitimation, the research is exploring the systems of retail location policy as well as policy for addressing retail vacancy in city centers in the Province of Antwerpen, paying attention to existing institutions of signification, domination and legitimation within them. Afterwards, the same procedure will take place regarding retail location policy in the Province of Gelderland. Both systems of retail location and retail vacancy problem-solving are important to look at as the correlation between the former and the latter cannot be denied and will be explained in the following chapter.

### 2.2 Conceptual framework

As it has been mentioned earlier, retail vacancy is a complex and extensive issue that involves different actors and affects economic and social dimensions of everyday cities’ lives. In order to perform the analysis, it is vital to clearly define actors involved, their main goals and range of actions they are empowered to make. The following actors were identified being
potentially engaged in the process of retail location and challenged by existing retail vacancy (see Table 1).

Table 1: Actors engaged into retail location process, affected / challenged by retail vacancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of actor</th>
<th>Name of actor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public actors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provincial authority</td>
<td>Coordinates and monitors actions of municipalities, makes decision on matters such as traffic and transport, urban and country planning and the environment, retail location policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local authority</td>
<td>Incorporates provincial vision into land-use plans, makes decision on retail location in line with retail location policy, interested in maximizing tax revenues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private actors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>Maximizes profit, has preferences on location of a retail spot, has to follow existing legislation and policy, communicates with local authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retail investor / project developer</td>
<td>Return on investment, has preferences on location of a new retail object, has to follow existing legislation and policy, communicates with local authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultancy (spatial / strategy), street / city center manager</td>
<td>Performs targeted research, advises governments and businesses on the spatial and economic development of an area or economic sector such as, but not limited to retail, hospitality, leisure and tourism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The retail location policy and policy on addressing the retail vacancy in city centers are reviewed together. It is important to look at both of the policies as existing vacancy in city centers can partly be explained by overplanning of retail surfaces inside and outside city centers as well as by decisions made on building new retail establishments instead of filling in vacant premises in central shopping areas.

As is shown in Table 1, public and private actors have different goals, nevertheless, they have to communicate in order to reach these goals, using various tools to influence the situation. Using the conceptual model of the structuration theory, the conceptual model for this research was made for systems of retail location and retail vacancy problem-solving (see Figure 6). The actors identified and presented in the Table 1 were placed within the systems. The model represents structures of signification and domination as these are more complex and need deeper analysis. The structure of legitimation is not present on the scheme, yet it is taken into account while analyzing data.

![Figure 6: Conceptual model for systems of retail location and retail vacancy problem-solving](image)

First of all, communication between different actors within the 2 systems is a complex phenomenon. In the relationship between provincial and local authorities, communication is represented by the shared information, created vision and policy for retail by the province, while municipalities in their turn also have information on their socio-economic performance as well as spatial documents (land-use plans) and policies that have to correspond with the ones on the provincial level. Among allocative resources that bring domination power to provinces, money in forms of, for example, subsidies or investment can be named, whilst there are blocking tools that represent authoritative resources.

Concerning relationship between a municipality and private actors such as retailers and project developer / investor, communication between them takes place in the following way. First of all, the municipality has its vision and policy on retail, its development and place in the regional retail structure as well as information on its socio-economic performance that it shares with private actors. These means can be considered interpretive schemes and belong to the signification structure. In their turn, private actors can express their opinion on the vision that the municipality has.

Moreover, this information can help private actors to optimize their behavior to maximize the profit. Regarding the domination structure, both the municipality and the private actor have their own resources that bring them ‘power’. For example, in the situation when a retail investor / project developer wants to build a new retail object, communication process will be taken place between the investor and the local authority in existing institutional setting. In this case, the investor has certain resources to offer that can serve as his / her bargaining power: money and potential employment facilities, physical facilities like parking lots or road improvement, for instance, future tax payments as well as recognition of names of potential retailers (well-known international chains that can anchor the rest of the retailers in that area). At the same time, the local authority has in some cases a piece of land to sell, public facilities such as public space and roads, public parking space, street cleaning, safety provision to grant access to (allocative resources) and power to make a decision (grant a permit) or levy a tax (means of authoritative resources).

Furthermore, the decision that the local authority has to make should comply with the existing vision of the municipality and the province, policy and legislation that have been set up by the provincial and supra-provincial authorities. Special attention should be paid to consultancies. Being a private actor, a consultancy communicates with all the actors mentioned before. As a part of the work, the consultancy can do research for national, provincial or local authorities.
as well as for the market parties. Using the information from the parties, the consultancy can provide its client with a piece of advice or analysis, express its opinion on a certain matter. The main resource that consultancies have in their disposal is expertise, knowledge. In return for this resource and their service they get money from their clients. The examples show that retail location process consists of constantly repetitive actions and comprises a system of signification, domination and legitimation dimensions.

The above presented conceptual model is used for the analysis of the cases. Institutional realm in retail location and retail vacancy problem-solving systems comprises formal and informal rules of action that have been repeated constantly by actors involved, while action realm represents decisions that are made by public actors of different levels of governance and by private actors by means of the resources that are at the disposal of corresponding actors.

Regarding the first structural dimension (signification) and its modality, existing maps, visions and marketing concepts prepared by public authorities or consultancies and their implementation will be used for analysis as they represent ‘symbolic orders’ and stocks of knowledge that actors have incorporated through the communication on daily basis (How an area should look like? How should it be performing? What is the vision of the area? How the issue of retail vacancy is supposed to be solved?). As the second dimension (domination) depends upon the mobilization of allocative resources (land and money) and authoritative resources (power of decision making), decision-making process of retail location and retail vacancy solving will be analyzed (Who is empowered to make decisions on retail locations? Who is involved in dealing with retail vacancy? What are the resources that are used to tackle the problem of retail vacancy and who provides them?). Concerning the legitimation dimension, existing legislative norms regarding retail location policy and policy for addressing retail vacancy will be explored.

However, it is important to keep in mind that besides repetition of structures, the process of interaction between agents and systems is permanently present.
3. **Methodology**

This chapter provides an overview of the nature of the research, explains approach utilized in the research. Moreover, it clarifies the research methods, discusses the sampling methods used in the selection of materials and the identification of interviewees as well as provides explanation of the processes of data collection and analysis.

3.1 **Nature of research**

As it has been said earlier, this research seeks to identify and examine different policy arrangements for addressing retail vacancy in city centers in Antwerpen province (Belgium) and analyze their transferability to the institutional framework of the Gelderland province (the Netherlands). This requires employment of predominantly qualitative methods. Bryman (2012) states that ‘Qualitative research can be construed as a research strategy that usually emphasize words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data’ (p. 22). Saunders et al. (2003) as well emphasize that the main characteristic of qualitative research is that data are collected through words, not numbers. According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research is ‘an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social problem where researcher is an instrument of data collection who gather words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive in language’ (p. 249).

The use of prior or existing theory in qualitative research is legitimate and valuable (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2005). The concepts of the prior theory ‘are the ‘coat hooks’ in the closet; they provide places to ‘hang’ data, showing their relationship to other data” and draw the attention to particular phenomenon (Maxwell, 2005:43). In this perspective, the use of structuration theory in this research refers to the use of a prior theory that shapes the conceptual framework. Because this work has been strongly guided by the theory, the approach used may be called deductive. As Saunders places it, ‘It involves the development of a theory that is subjected to a rigorous test’ (Saunders et al. 2003: 86). In this research, the theory of structuration has been tested by an ‘empirical inquiry’ – systems of retail location and retail vacancy problem-solving.
3.2 Research approach

During the last decades, comparative approach has become an essential tool in social science (Alonso & Barredo, 2013: 207). Referring to comparative research on policies applied by governments of different countries or regions, but addressing the same issue, the significance highlighted by Dodds can be stated here: ‘Comparative public policy can help us to understand and explain why divergent policies are adopted in different contexts, and why they lead to a variety of outcomes’ (Dodds, 2013: 6). Thus, such an approach can help to achieve policy-learning, policy-transfer or cross-pollination which have got their priority nowadays. Learning from abroad, from other countries’ experiences is often seen as one of the prominent features of comparative studies. However, learning from comparison does not necessary mean that practices and policies should be blindly transferred from one context to another (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). Instead, in most policy transfer literature, learning implies more rational approach from the government ‘to emulate foreign institutions and practice to the extent that these measures produce more efficient and effective policy outcomes than the alternatives’ (Marsh & Sharman, 2009: 271).

Creswell (1998) noted that there are at least five traditions of qualitative studies: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Among those five, the case study is chosen to achieve the objective of this research. The use of case study, as Yin (1994) argues, is beneficial to obtain in-depth explanations of phenomenon and context. As Masser claims, the strength of the case study can be found in ‘essential flexibility in practice’ and in ‘the ability to take account of a large amount of local detail at the same time as generally comparable information’ (Masser, 1984: 141). Although the case study approach has been criticized for the issue of generalization of findings, for not being suitable for testing theories and for verification bias and researcher’s preconceived notions (Flyvberg, 2006), this approach suits the most the complex contexts surrounding retail location planning and inter-actor collaboration suits the case study approach. Moreover, as the actors’ perception of planning collaboration is highly bounded on specificities of socio-economic, political, and culture of certain localities, this context specific variance could be better elaborated using case study approach.
3.2.1 Selection of cases

Even though the Province of Gelderland is experiencing high vacancy rates in central shopping areas of its municipalities (9% in average), the Province has not developed its position yet and, therefore, the policy for addressing the issue is still not presented. In the case when a policy is to be designed, the policy transfer approach may be applied (Evans, 2009). Regarding policy transfer mechanisms, learning is the most popular and wide-spread (Marsch & Sharman, 2009). Some of the closest in vacancy rates foreign regions are located in Belgium with 8.6% in average in 2014. Concerning Flemish region as the one close to the Province of Gelderland in terms of language spoken and written, the most interesting case to compare is the Province of Antwerpen with the average vacancy rate of 8.5%. The case of the Province of Antwerpen was chosen due to the sharp decrease of vacancy rates in some municipalities located throughout the Province (see Figure 7): Vosselaar, Laakdal, Putte, Schelle and Wommelgem and Arendonk where vacancy rates dropped by more than 30% between 2008 and 2014 (Provincie Antwerpen, 2014:50).

![Figure 7: Evolution of retail vacancy rates in municipalities of the Province of Antwerpen, 2008-2014](source: Provincie Antwerpen (2014). Interprovinciale studie Detailhandel: Rapport Provincie Antwerpen 2012-2014., p. 50)

The institutional settings of the two provinces are comparable due to the similarities in the spatial planning traditions, though the role of the province of Antwerp in the Flemish region slightly differs from the one that the province of Gelderland has. While the planning systems
of two countries are explain below, the similarities and differences of the institutional settings are discussed in more details in the analytical chapter. First of all, both planning systems are based of the framework control, which means that the plans at lower levels (more precise specifications) should not contradict the plans at higher levels. In the Netherlands, as well as in the Flemish region, provinces play an important role regarding spatial planning. The provincial level does not have at its disposal the competence to determine land use regulations on its own. However, the province can formulate a strategic plan. Furthermore, the provincial approval of local land-use plans forms an important instrument. In this manner, the province can exert considerable influence on local spatial policy through verification; undesirable land use changes can be opposed, provided such a step is well supported by the planning policy. However, it is important to notice that in the Flemish region planning is very centralistic, therefore ‘the provinces see themselves now primarily as a party that can weigh up and balance spatial interests at the supralocal level’ (Spaans & de Wolff, 2005: 15).

3.3 Research methods

Two methods were chosen for collecting the information. On the first stage, desk research was done to gather information about spatial planning in the Netherlands and Belgium, retail planning in these countries and general situation there. For this stage, the following sources of information were used: policy documents, official reports, academic literature.

For the second stage, the semi-structured (focused) interviews were chosen. A semi-structured interview was chosen because it allows the researcher to address specific questions and expound on content analysis while allowing the interviewee freedom to expound on other concepts (Bryman, 2004). Semi-structured interviews also allow for cross-case comparison (ibid). The interviews allow for further probing into ‘opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences’ that reflect the constructionist ontology and should be explored in depth (Denscombe, 2007:175). This qualitative method also allows respondent the time and scope to talk about his/her ideas and opinion on a particular subject (the problem of retail vacancy in this case). The main idea behind conducting the interviews is to understand respondent’s point of view. Within this method, open-ended questions (some suggested by the interviewer, and some arise naturally during the interview) were used.

Regarding strengths of this method, the validity of the information gathered should be highlighted: respondents are able to talk about the topic in detail and depth for themselves.
with little direction from the interviewer. In addition, few ‘pre-set’ questions resolve the problem of the interviewer’s pre-judgment of what is important to talk about (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 47). However, this method has its own drawbacks. The primary problem for semi-structured interviews was in locating the appropriate participants and in securing interviews as well as limiting bias and subjectivity in the questions (Bryman, 2004). In addition, taking interviews, transcribing them and coding them is extremely time consuming (ibid). This vastly limits the number of interviews the researcher was able to conduct for this paper. Lastly, bias may also occur in the coding stage.

Among different types of semi-structured interviews, the expert¹ interviews were chosen. This choice was based on different factors. First of all, it is less time-consuming than any other method and provides quick way to obtain specific information that in case of this research was needed. Secondly, experts usually have high insight in aggregated and (or) specific knowledge as they are, according to some scholars, responsible for the development, implementation or control of solutions, strategies or policies and have privileged access to information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 49).

### 3.3.1 Data collection and analysis

According to Maxwell (2005), it is vital for conducting interviews to carefully select individuals based on their representativeness as it could increase the reliance of the overall analytical conclusions than does a random sample of interviewees. Secondly, purposeful selection of the respondents also helps to ensure that conclusions will capture all possible perspectives on the issue.

Based on above-mentioned aspects, the interviewees were chosen according to the list of actors that are engaged into the systems of retail location and retail vacancy problem-solving. Balancing public and private actors helps to avoid bias and increase the validity of the research and reliability of the conclusions. The first group of respondents represents public authorities from Belgium and the Netherlands. These people are closely involved in policy-making and decision-making processes on national, provincial and local levels and, therefore, have in-depth knowledge about institutional settings in the countries in terms of spatial

---

¹ In this paper, the definition of an ‘expert’ follows the one given by Meuser and Nagel (1991): it is a person who is responsible for the development, implementation or control of solutions/strategies/policies or a person who has privileged access to information about groups or decision processes.
planning and retail policy. The second group of respondents consists of private actors such as retailers, investors and consultants. Retailers and investors are involved in the process of retail location and are affected by the existing retail vacancy; they can provide information from another angle and share their experience in communicating with public authorities as well as express their opinion and ideas about dealing with retail vacancy. At the same time, consultants have a broader image of the current state of affairs as they perform their own analysis and may have visions or ideas about addressing existing retail vacancy in city centers. Table 2 contains the list of organizations representatives of which were interviewed while the interview timetable can be found in the Appendix 1.

Table 2: List of organizations for interviews in the Netherlands (NL) and Belgium (BE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of actor</th>
<th>Name of actor</th>
<th>Name of organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public actors</td>
<td>Provincial authority</td>
<td>the Province of Gelderland (NL), the Province of Antwerpen (BE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local authority</td>
<td>Municipality of Nijmegen (NL), Municipality of Doetinchem (NL), Municipality of Bronckhorst (NL), Municipality of Antwerpen (BE), Municipality of Arendonk (BE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private actors</td>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>INretail (NL), Comeos (BE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retail investor</td>
<td>Vastgoed Belang (NL), Ulvenhout Retail Invest NV (BE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultancy (spatial / strategy), street / city center manager</td>
<td>DTNP (NL), IDEA Consult (BE),</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The semi-structured interviews were conducted between April 2015 and June 2015 in Belgium and the Netherlands in English language. Even though English is neither researcher’s, nor interviewees’ mother tongue, both interviewer and respondents possess sufficient command of the language to express their thoughts freely. Each respondent was contacted via e-mail or phone call and asked to participate in the research after sharing with him / her the main idea of the research, its aim and societal and scientific contribution. Upon
request, the interviewees were given a preliminary list of questions for preparation. All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. Each interview was between 30 and 70 minutes long. All of the interviews apart from the one with the Province of Antwerp where the interviewee asked not to record the conversation for personal issues were recorded. Additionally, regarding ethical considerations, all data that were obtained from primary sources are kept anonymous using organizations’ names upon request.

As it was mentioned earlier, the semi-structured interviews were chosen for this research. In order to ensure the coverage of important aspects of the retail location and retail vacancy problem-solving systems, the interview guide was set up (see Table 3).

*Table 3: Interview guide*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of actor</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public actors</td>
<td>What do you think about existing legislation and policy on retail location? Does it take into consideration current changes of the market? How were private actors engaged in the process of making the vision/policy/legislation up?</td>
<td>These questions are asked in order to find out the interviewee’s perception of the existing legislation and policy on retail location as well as to find out how the communication process is organized when it comes to setting up a policy on retail, how local and provincial authorities inform the actors about the changes and their intention, whether and how they get the feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is the actual decision-making process on retail location organized? Who has the bargaining power?</td>
<td>These questions are asked to get insights into actual decision-making on retail location. Also, it is important to identify the allocative and authoritative resources that are at the disposal of public and private actors (for example, what a project developer/investor can offer to a municipality that the municipality...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Answers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the Province watch municipalities make decisions in compliance with existing retail policy? What are the tools the Province can use to ensure that municipalities comply with existing policy?</td>
<td>These questions are asked to identify the role of the province in the communication process between municipalities as well as the ‘powerful’ tools that are at the disposal of the province.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do municipalities of the Province do in order to address retail vacancy in city centers? What should they do? How often do municipalities invite private actors to participate in the process of addressing the vacancy and in what way? Which resources and tools do municipalities use to deal with the issue of retail vacancy? How do municipalities ensure communication between different actors involved?</td>
<td>These questions are asked in order to identify actual policy arrangements and actions aimed at decreasing retail vacancy rates on city centers. Also, it is important to find out means of communication between different actors involved.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does / could the Provincial authority help municipalities to address retail vacancy issue?</td>
<td>These question aims to identify the role of the provincial authority in dealing with the issue of retail vacancy in city centers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think about existing legislation and policy on retail location? Does it take into consideration current changes of the market?</td>
<td>These questions are asked in order to find out the interviewee’s perception of the existing legislation and policy on retail location as well as to find out how the communication process is organized when it comes to setting up a policy on retail, how local and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
provincial authorities inform the actors about the changes and their intention, whether and how they get the feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How clear do you find the spatial requirements that are set up by the government for retail?</th>
<th>This question is asked to obtain the opinion of the respondent about the spatial requirements that are set up within the province.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How is the actual decision-making process on retail location organized? Who has the bargaining power?</th>
<th>These questions are asked to get insights into actual decision-making on retail location. Also, it is important to identify the allocative and authoritative resources that are at the disposal of public and private actors (for example, what a project developer / investor can offer to a municipality that the municipality will be willing to grant a permit for a new commercial establishments)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you communicate with municipalities?</th>
<th>This question aims to identify the ways of communication between private actors and a municipality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What could / should municipalities of the Province do in order to address retail vacancy in city centers? How much should municipalities invite private actors to participate in the process of addressing the vacancy and in what way? What should the Province do regarding the issue of retail vacancy? How do you see your role in that process?</th>
<th>These questions are asked in order to get the opinion of the interviewee and identify actual policy arrangements and actions aimed at decreasing retail vacancy rates on city centers. Also, it is important to find out means of communication between different actors involved.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
During the data analysis the interview coding was performed. The interview coding presents a thematic analysis, which, as Ryan and Bernard state, helps to explore the relationship between themes discussed in the interviews and theoretical materials (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Accordingly, interview outcomes (recorded interviews) were coded in line with thematic analysis in order to identify and examine policy arrangements applied in the province of Antwerp and analyze their transferability to the institutional framework of the Gelderland province. The coding was performed using the ATLAS.ti computer program.

It is important to notice the difficulties and limitations that can be faced while coding in-depth semi-structured interviews. According to Campbell et al. (2013), ‘in-depth interviews often involve many units of analysis, which are not always easily identified’ as well as they ‘tend to elicit more open-ended, rambling responses that often require several codes simultaneously’ (p.297). This issues require explicit guidance for a researcher to establish reliable coding, however, there is not much information in the literature. Also, ‘there is virtually none for establishing reliability in the situation where coding is left up to a single coder’ (Campbell et al., 2013: 298).

For analyzing data collected via semi-structured interviews for this research, a coding scheme based on code families was developed. Code families represent ‘several codes reflecting different aspects of a general theme’ (Campbell et al., 2013: 301). Thus, for this research code families correspond to three structures of the Giddens’ structuration theory, namely: signification, domination and legitimation. Code families, codes and their brief explanations can be found in the Table 4 below.

Table 4: Coding scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code family</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signification</td>
<td>Actions_municipality</td>
<td>This code is used for references to actions that municipal authorities are doing / should/ could do to address retail vacancy in city centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Actions_province</td>
<td>This code is used for references to actions that provincial authorities are doing / should/ could do to address retail vacancy in city centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual policy</td>
<td>this code is used for the existing policy on retail locations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication_municipalities</td>
<td>This code is used for any reference to communication between municipalities within a region / province</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mun_prov_communication</td>
<td>This code is used for references to communication between the Province and municipalities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion_policy</td>
<td>This code is used for any opinion on existing / upcoming policy on retail location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders_involvement</td>
<td>This code is used for references to stakeholders' involvement to the process of addressing retail vacancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision_communication</td>
<td>This code is used for references to any communication between local and provincial authorities and private actors during the process of vision making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bargaining_power</td>
<td>This code is used for any resources or outcomes that a retailer or a project developer can offer to a municipality to get a permit for realizing the project / opening a shop at a certain location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality_resources</td>
<td>This code is used for references to resources that municipalities have (both allocative and authoritative)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power_municipalities</td>
<td>This code is used for powerful tools that municipalities have</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power_province</td>
<td>This code is used for powerful tools that provincial authorities have</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province_resources</td>
<td>This code is used for references to resources that the province has both allocative and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislation_retail</td>
<td>This code is used for any reference to existing / upcoming legislation regarding retail location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislation_miscellaneous</td>
<td>This code is used for references to any existing / upcoming legislation besides the one on retail location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion_legislation</td>
<td>This code is used for any opinion on existing / upcoming legislation given by an interviewee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role_province</td>
<td>This code is used for any reference to the role that the province is / could play in dealing with retail vacancy in city centers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 Validity and reliability of the research

Due to exploratory nature of the research, construct validity and external validity are of concern (Yin, 2003). Construct validity of this research is to be ensured throughout the use of multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, which both take place during data collection. To avoid personal bias, several measures were undertaken: interviews were recorded, as well as interviews summaries were be sent to interviewees for double-check. External validity is ensured through the use of the theoretical framework.

A threat to reliability of the research is the semi-structured interviews, as responses cannot be replicated by another interview. To ensure reliability of the research, a clear documentation of the case-study is to be provided.
4. Research results and data analysis

4.1 Institutional settings in the provinces of Gelderland and Antwerpen: similarities and differences

As it has been mentioned earlier, the two institutional settings are comparable due to the similarities in the planning system. However, there is a number of differences that should be considered while attempting to transfer any policy arrangements that have been applied in the province of Antwerp. This sub-chapter summarizes similarities and differences in the three structures of legitimation, signification and domination between the two institutional settings using the conceptual framework presented earlier to establish a base for further analysis of policy’s transferability.

4.1.1 Structure of Legitimation

According to Albrechts (1999), after the First World war, the Belgian government made municipalities draw up development plans. Generally, the government wanted to systematically reconstruct damaged areas after the war, creating the new planning system from the blank page. For this purpose, the ‘International Garden Cities and Towns Association’ was invited to share the knowledge and experience with the Belgian government. ‘In this way, Dutch […] influences had an impact on Belgian planning proposals, initiatives and then, realizations’ (p. 588). This resulted in the fact that both planning systems are based of the framework control, which means that the plans at lower levels (more precise specifications) should not contradict the plans at higher levels. Thus, since 1999 the Flemish regional spatial planning system has been based on the Decree on Spatial Planning, which requires spatial structure plans and spatial implementation plans to be developed at the regional, provincial and municipal levels. However, it is important to highlight that there is no overall spatial plan on the national level. Table 5 summarizes the hierarchy of spatial plans for the Province of Antwerp on regional, provincial and local levels.
Table 5: The hierarchy of spatial plans for the province of Antwerpen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Governance</th>
<th>Name of the document</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional (Flemish)</td>
<td>Regional Spatial Structure Plan (Regionaal Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen)</td>
<td>Aims at creating coherence between all spatial initiatives in the region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Spatial Implementation Plans (Regionale Ruimtelijke uitvoeringsplannen)</td>
<td>Set up to implement and make concrete the Spatial Structure Plan. Legally binding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province of Antwerp</td>
<td>The Provincial Structure Plan (Provinciaal Ruimtelijke Structuurplan)</td>
<td>Sets out the most desired future development of the Province.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Provincial Implementation Plans (Provinciale Ruimtelijke Uitvoeringsplannen)</td>
<td>Set up to implement and make concrete the Provincial Structure Plan. Legally binding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipalities</td>
<td>The Municipal Structure Plan (Gemeentelijk Structuurplan)</td>
<td>Sets out the most desired future development of the municipality as a whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Municipal Implementation Plans (Gemeentelijke Uitvoeringsplannen)</td>
<td>Set up to implement and make concrete the Municipal Structure Plan. Legally binding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Provincial Structure plan and Provincial Implementation plans have to correspond to the Regional Structure Plan and the Regional Implementation Plans, whilst The Municipal Structure plan and Municipal Implementation plans have to correspond to the Regional.
Structure Plan, the Regional Implementation Plans, the Provincial Structure Plan and the Provincial Implementation Plan. (Land Use Consultants et al., 2004).

In the Netherlands, in contrast to Belgium, the spatial plan on the national level does exist since 1960’s (the Wet op de ruimtelijke ordening or WRO (Spatial Planning Act)). The last revision of that plan was introduced in 2004 (Nota Ruimte). Regarding spatial planning in general, the Province’s main instrument is the ‘Verordenings’ which contains rules on the use of land and buildings in the area over which the plan goes. This rules should be incorporated into municipal land-use plans. The Verordenings reflects provincial interests, which are presented in policies and visions. Municipalities should make their land-use plans in accordance with it.

In both cases, the province of Antwerpen and the Province of Gelderland are responsible for providing the structural vision on the development of the areas within these provinces, while municipalities have detailed land-use plans and are empowered to grant permits for new establishments.

However, some major differences can be identified between the institutional setting in the two provinces. First of all, retail in the Netherlands is very structured in spatial regard. To regulate the distribution and dynamics of retailing in the whole country, a hierarchy of shopping centers was implemented. Spierings (2006) points that

‘The hierarchical system was based on the principles of the ‘central place theory’ by Christaller (1933/1966). This system contains a city centre in the urban core and surrounding urban quarter, district and neighborhood centers. The city centre fulfils the leading position by offering the more exclusive goods – which other types of shopping centers cannot offer due to a lack of catchment area support – in addition to the more everyday goods. The main goal of the hierarchy of shopping centers was to supply consumers with daily products within walking distance of their residences. Non-daily goods, however, had to be bought by consumers at further distances’ (p. 603)

Meanwhile, Belgium is known for its spatial structure, which is characterized ‘by an extensive road network, dispersed settlements and the specific (small scale) structure of agriculture’ (Albrechts, 1999: 588) in general. As the representative of the Province of Antwerpen highlights, this has been the result of the lack of well-developed and strict spatial policy and guidance neither from national nor from Flemish government (Interviewee 8, 2015).
Concerning the policy on the location of retail establishments, it is important to notice that the Dutch government have been protecting city centers as harts of the ‘traditional retail system’ by imposing restrictive policy on developments in the urban periphery. The Verordening of the Province of Gelderland contains rules that are mostly focused on the peripheral areas: only bulky goods can be located in peripheral areas; plans on a new retail object with the surface over 1,500 m² should be agreed on the regional level; supermarkets can be located only in existing retail areas.

In contrast to that, due to a ‘rather permissive spatial policy’ (Albrechts, 1999: 588), out-of-town shopping centers appeared on the outskirts of cities along main roads between municipalities and have led to decline of city centers of municipalities, becoming a big burden. The total retail floor space has risen by approximately 12000000 m² over the last 5 years; most of the space is located outside city center areas. Cheaper renting prices, better physical conditions, more parking space and quicker and easier access have made the competition between retail in city centers and big malls extremely severe. That has led to a big shift of retailers of convenience (clothes, shoes, and electronics) goods from city centers to those shopping centers, leading to roads overload, traffic congestion and empty retail space in the centers. Although Wrigley and Lambiri (2014) claim, it is hardly possible to provide any evidence of the ‘cause & effect’ relationship between the performance of city centers and out of town provision of both leisure and retail, they admit the threat that out-of-town retail establishments pose to nearby city centers and may result in the increasing vacancy of the retail surfaces. In the 1990s the so-called ‘IKEA law’ was established. This Federal act is applicable in the Flemish region until 2017. As the representative of Comeos states:

‘This act tried to regulate commercial establishments and to be a slight barrier to the development of new retail parks outside of cities or individual stores next to main roads. So with this act they tried to.. it was in favor of city centers, this act put in place the regime of permits: you need a number of permits for larger commercial establishments, however, this act doesn’t have this effect. We see that in the last decade a lot of new establishments have been developed, a lot of extra sq.m and the largest growth of sq.m is found on the outskirts of cities. And that’s what the Flemish region wants to change with the new legislation’ (Interviewee 11, 2015).

This leads to the next difference between the institutional settings of the two provinces. In the province of Gelderland the building permit granted by a municipality is based on spatial
requirements and must comply with local and provincial regulations that are bounded to the framework of the Ladder for Sustainable Urbanization (Ladder voor duurzame verstedelijking). According to this document, new retail objects: do not lead to unwanted vacancy, cannot be located in the existing build environment; are well reachable by car and public transportation. Particular attention was given to this framework by representatives of INRetail and Droogh Trommelen en Partners. The latter underlines its importance for creating a good retail structure:

‘It makes regional and local government think if there’s a need in the market […] The effects a new development has on retail structure […] you can only judge them if you know what retail structure you are going for, does it sustain the structure you are going for’ (Interviewee 7, 2015).

It is important to notice, that regulation and guiding in Flanders is based on socio-economic criteria in contrast to the Netherlands, where spatial criterion is taking the leading role. This means that in the province of Antwerp municipalities grant two kinds of permits: a building permit and a socio-economic permit. While obtaining of the former used to be a formal technical procedure, the latter required prove of not competing with and not harming another retail establishment. However, nowadays Belgium has to act in accordance with the EU regulations, which makes socio-economic criteria no longer possible to be used for planning. Due to this fact there is a shift in Belgium towards the recognition of the need of spatial regulations. Therefore, the ‘IKEA law’ is currently in the transition period (Interviewee 8, 2015).

Additionally, the role that provincial authorities play in two countries differ. While in the Netherlands, the province plays an important part with regards to spatial planning. It is responsible for translating national policies and regulations to the provincial level and set out the framework for spatial planning policy at the local level, in the Flemish region ‘the provinces do not perceive themselves primarily as an organ to promote the territorial interests of the province, but one which is concerned with supralocal tasks and the weighing up of interests’ (Vereniging van de Vlaamse Provincies, 2004). Moreover, the representatives of the Ulvenhout Retail Invest Fund and the IDEA Consult question the need of the provincial level of governance as a whole:

‘The province, I think, is a bit of a useless level in Belgium. It was useful at a time. You have communities, you have Belgium – as a link between communities, and Belgium it was useful of course. But now we have regions:"
Flanders, Brussels, Wallonia. They are looking a bit for the purpose; you see in a number of items they still have some use. We mainly use it as a recourse when a local city government says ‘no’ to the building permit, we go to the province to appeal’ (Interviewee 13, 2015).

‘I’m not sure that we need provinces in general. I think they are too much, you have four levels in Belgium: local authorities, provinces, Flanders and Belgium, which is too much and costs too much money. To make all the decision it takes too much time, too many levels. If you throw it away, everything will go faster and cheaper’ (Interviewee 12, 2015).

4.1.2 Structure of Signification

The first thing to mention about the structure of Signification for both of the provinces concerns the vision for retail in cities that they have. As it has been mentioned earlier, the preservative policy for city centers have been present in the province of Gelderland and in the Netherlands as a whole for more than 50 years. All of the interviewees from the Dutch side underlined its importance. The opinion that was given by the representative of Droogh Trommelen en Partners summarizes it as following:

‘... you go to the city center because you want to spend a day in the sun and visit some shops. And that’s getting more and more important, especially for the future of big retail parks outside the city because it is easy to access, but not nice, and the internet is even easier to access the big volume, so in that case it means city centers are probably more sustainable, stronger against continuing development of technology. So, we say if you choose wise, you choose the city center, because there’s no growth in retail property needs, but that’s another question I agree with instantly. Then again, if you put it in perspective, city centers are the bet locations to maintain sustainable retail structure’ (Interviewee 7, 2015).

Although in the recent decades the planning for retail was quite liberal in the province of Antwerpen in particular and in the Flemish region in general, current policy is also focused on reinforcing city centers and making them more vital, including rehabilitation of retail in these areas. Even though retailers, according to the representative of Comeos, are not fond of restrictive policies, they understand the value of city centers:
‘We understand that maybe in last decades it was slightly too easy in Belgium to build shops anywhere, so there needs to be new level playing field, there should be balance between city centers and outside of city centers. That stores at main roads, solitaire stores, because that is the story of the past. So our retailers understand that they have to concentrate in a retail park or shopping center, in the city center’ (Interviewee 11, 2015).

The communication between the provinces and municipalities is a very important component of the effective retail policy. The province in both cases provides municipalities with essential information about the socio-economic performance of the province as shares the vision on retail development within it. Moreover, the provincial role is to insure the communication between municipalities. The province of Gelderland tries ‘to make sure that municipalities can learn from each other within the regions and the whole Gelderland that they have updated information and that they don’t have to invent everything on their own’ (Interviewee 1, 2015). In the province of Antwerpen, both provincial and regional authorities (Interviewee 8, 2015; Interviewee 9, 2015; Interviewee 10, 2015) highlighted the importance of the communication between the province and municipalities.

Another crucial aspect of the structure of Signification is the involvement of private actors in the process of vision or policymaking. As Verwaaijen (2012) highlights, the need for cooperation is frequently underlined by both public and private actors. The government, retailers and real estate owners are tightly bounded to each other; they should work together on the retail landscape of the future. This was confirmed by all the respondents. The private actors are involved through formal and informal consultations, meetings, round tables. As the representative of INRetail pointed it out:

‘First of all, you invite all stakeholders to the table, you tell about the problem and already all kinds of solution, how you can address the problem. Then all parties have to change, have the same vision on the future, how to get to the future. What steps we have to take to build the better world. That’s the main... so everybody has to be at the table, all together, no one excluded, because if someone is excluded, the process will not go well’ (Interviewee 6, 2015).

For example, the municipality of Nijmegen is currently developing a vision on the revitalization of the city center. On the initial stage, different groups of stakeholders were invited to express their opinion on the future of the inner city (Interviewee 4, 2015). According to the Inner city of the future (Binnenstad van de toekomst) vision document
prepared by the municipal authorities, there are different actors involved, inter alia entrepreneurs, property owners, visitors and residents. Some of these parties are organized in groups and associations like the House of the Inner City (Huis voor de Binnenstad), platform for residents of the center (Bewoners platform Centrum Nijmegen), Cultural Network (Cultureel Netwerk Nijmegen) (Municipality of Nijmegen, 2015).

Involvement of different groups of stakeholders is seen beneficial in the province of Antwerpen as well:

‘If a municipality involves private actors, it can only be beneficial for everybody. Of course, it helps if they have already identified all the owners of buildings, if they have a plan for the city center, that they have given information about that plan to owners, to brokers. Because a lot retail leases are negotiated with brokers. So if they talk proactively with all these parties, that will be beneficial. And also they need to talk to retailers as well’ (Interviewee 11, 2015).

Despite the importance of the inter-municipal communication and cooperation that has been pointed out earlier, municipalities in the province of Antwerpen do not do it frequently. According to the representative of the municipality of Arendonk, there is no communication between neighboring municipalities on the issue of retail as it is the choice of the consumer where to shop, yet it is the responsibility of each municipality to look for its attractiveness and place within the regional retail structure (Interviewee 10, 2015).

Unlike the situation in the province of Antwerp, municipalities within the province of Gelderland do communicate. Some examples were given by the representative of the provincial authority to support this point:

‘In the regions Rivierenland, Stadsregio and Achterhoek they have made some kind of regional agreements. In the Stedenriehoek, the area of Apeldoorn, they have started to think about it. And in the North Valuwe they have a lot of work to do. And in the Vallei where they have some kinds of agreements, but it’s very old and needs to be updated. Therefore, it is getting along, it is step by step, but it’s getting better because everyone sees they have a challenge for them and that they need their other municipalities. They need each other because, I think, that is why they talk to each other. That is an incentive because if they cannot trust neighboring municipality, you can have a very good retail in one
municipality, but region as a whole can ruin it. So you need agreements, you need to talk with other municipalities also about your own retail policy’ (Interviewee 1, 2015).

4.1.3 Structure of Domination

Concerning the structure of domination, the situation in the province of Antwerpen and the province of Gelderland is similar in several regards. First, the provincial authorities have powerful tools of control. For example, in the province of Gelderland, an account manager from spatial planning department talks to municipalities about their plans for retail development. If a plan that the municipality has does not correspond to the provincial vision, the plan has to be sent to the provincial authority for revision. Moreover, the province can block the initiative (Interviewee 1, 2015). Meanwhile, the provincial authority of Antwerpen can revise the decision made by a municipality on the permit application: ‘We mainly use it as a recourse when a local city government says ‘no’ to the building permit, we go to the province to appeal’ (Interviewee 13, 2015).

Zooming in to the municipal level, as it has been mentioned earlier, municipalities in both provinces are empowered to grant permits for retail establishments. In the case of the province of Antwerpen,

‘With the current legislation there are two ways of having influence on the decision of the policy-makers. First, there is a building permit, very important. Secondly, the socio-economic permit. In both permits, there is an advice from us where we can say if this retailer in this location either from the building point of view or from the socio-economic point of view where we can say these new buildings are not interesting developments’ (Interviewee 9, 2015).

The communication in this case is bilateral. Municipalities have authoritative resource – power to decide upon the two permits. However, a private actor (retailer or real estate developer ) also has resources to offer and bargain. For example, as the representatives of Comeos and Droogh Trommelen en Partners stated, a permit will be granted by a municipality if the new establishment will increase employment in the municipality. Another factor that was mentioned by the interviewees is the investment in public domain: ‘Sometimes if you want to situate a store there, it’s going to create a lot of traffic, so you need to make investment in everything which is roads, roundabout, parking lots’(Interviewee 11, 2015).
Moreover, in the light of the protective city-center policy, an agreement between a municipality and a project developer, for instance, may be reached under certain conditions in the province of Antwerpen. Thus, sometimes ‘city grants the permit for this development under the condition that there will not be any restaurants, cafes, everything which is leisure, so that people have this in the center’ (Interviewee 11, 2015). One more condition that can be faced by a private actor is a yearly fee to support city center management. Such agreements can be found nowadays already, yet it will become more common feature in several years, because the upcoming legislation foresees also an instrument of a conditional contract between a developer or retailer and a municipality.

Furthermore, according to the representative of INRetail, municipalities often are looking for a recognizable name, for an international chain retailer:

‘when you are international retailer, and they want you, then they, the municipality will do anything to get you, get that international well-known retailer in their own municipality. They are in competition with the neighbor municipality and they want to get that retailer for themselves, so they will do outmost to make it possible to get that retailer on the outskirts. Well, the most of the time it’s also because they earn a lot of money by selling the land to that retailer, so… there are other considerations in that decision-making process, other than the retail structure they want to build. They make the decision regarding all kinds of things and in my experience they always decide on the image’ (Interviewee 6, 2015).

4.1.4 Summary

Summing up, main distinction between the institutional settings in the province of Antwerpen and the province of Gelderland lies in the structure of Legitimation. In the Netherlands the spatial plan on the national level exists, whilst in Belgium there is no overall plan on the federal level. However, the existence of such a plan of the Flemish regional level compensates it. Nevertheless, the role of the province also differs. In contrast to the Netherlands, where provinces play important role in regard to spatial planning, in the Flemish region the need of the provincial level of governance is questioned by private actors. Moreover, retail planning in the Netherlands is strict and hierarchical in comparison to the Flemish region, where
planning has been mostly permissive, therefore spatial landscape is very fragmented with a great number of out-of-town retail establishments.

In both provinces communication between the province and municipalities is very important as well as involvement of different groups of stakeholders in making a vision or a policy. Notwithstanding the fact that the inter-municipal communication plays important role in developing of even and strong retail structure, municipalities of the province of Antwerpen do not frequently communicate with each other. In contrast to that, municipalities in the province of Gelderland see regional communication beneficial for them and are mostly eager to cooperate with each other.

Regarding the structure of Domination, the two provinces are similar in terms of power of granting permits that municipalities enjoy, although municipalities in the province of Antwerpen currently responsible for two permits, situation is expected to change with the upcoming legislation. Provinces have blocking tools in their disposal. Concerning the communication between a municipality and a private actor, municipalities in both provinces are looking for the employment opportunities for inhabitants as well as for a recognizable name of potential retailers. However, in the province of Antwerp municipalities can bargain on conditions for one of the permits to be granted.

4.2 The province of Antwerpen combats retail vacancy in city centers: policy arrangements

The province of Antwerpen has been facing the issue of vacant retail establishments in city centers for several years. The policy that has been carefully developed on all the levels of governance deserves substantial attention and may serve an example for the province of Gelderland to look at. Therefore, this sub-chapter presents policy arrangements of the province of Antwerpen aiming to combat retail vacancy in city centers.

4.2.1 Flemish region

Firstly, it is important to notice that the Flemish regional government plays an important role in retail planning and addressing the fragmented spatial landscape. Two structures are involved there: Legitimation and Signification. While the former concerns changes in regional legislation on retail locations, the latter represents several tools of communication.
The new legislation is aiming to preserve city centers and slow the growth of out-of-town retail development down:

‘Flemish government is now drafting a new law proposal, it will be filed in parliament next week. After that the parliament can have negotiations about the proposal. And then this new legislation will enter into force in 2017, so it’s quite a long time frame [...] From 2015 it’s going to be harder to develop new establishments outside of the city center. All the cities and municipalities will have the power to prohibit new developments outside, they can say new shops only can be found in the city center or specific designated areas. So it’s going to be more difficult for new commercial establishments. Flemish government hopes that if it gets more difficult to open a shop where a retailer real estate developer wants, automatically city centers are going to be regenerated. If it’s impossible to open a shop in the outskirts, retailer will automatically come and look for shops inside of city centers’ (Interviewee 11, 2015).

Retailers expressed their concern about the upcoming changes. According to the representative of Comeos, the retailers are conscious about stricter policy:

‘So our retailers understand that they have to concentrate in a retail park or shopping center, in the city center. So that we can understand. But most retailers fear the intervention of municipalities and Flemish government. It’s not he Flemish government to say what kind of products to have in your store, or only 30% of your products that you sell can be fashion items. That’s what we fear of, that Flemish municipalities are going to do weird things, that they will start to tell what the business should do. This interference with the business is something we fear of’ (Interviewee 11, 2015).

The Flemish government works much more within the structure of Signification and is trying to stimulate municipalities to combat the shift to out-of-town malls and fill in the vacant spots by encouraging retailers to come back to the city centers to make city centers flourishing again. One of the main tools that have been used by Flemish government is subsidizing projects conducting by municipalities aimed to reinforce city centers. These projects can be divided into 3 groups, namely: those aimed at improving commercial plans and performance of the city centers; improving physical conditions of buildings and infrastructure; buying retail space for further merge or re-use (not popular among municipalities). Moreover, the government of Flanders induces municipalities to collaborate and share the knowledge and
experience within the framework of Detailhandelvlaanderen platform funded by the European Union. This platform is a good example of cooperation between Flemish government and the five provinces. On the webpage of the platform detailed reports on the situation in every Flemish municipality can be found. In addition, municipalities are encouraged to network (Detailhandelvlaanderen, 2015).

4.2.2 Province of Antwerpen

The Province of Antwerpen has 70 municipalities, and the Province is responsible for establishing policy on how to manage local economies, supporting and guiding those municipalities. In many communities, local economy is very much dependent on retail business, so that makes retail policy on the regional level highly important, highlighted the representative of the provincial authority (Interviewee 8, 2015). Since 2010, the province has conducted in-depth research on the situation in every municipality. During this research, local population, economy in general and retail sector in particular were studied and conclusions were drawn from the results. Based on this research SWOT analysis was made for each municipality to indicate their own local strength and weaknesses in order to elaborate on possible opportunities and threats (Provincie Antwerpen, 2014). This enabled both the province of Antwerpen and the Flemish region to have clear view of the current situation. Together with the Flemish government the province works on revitalizing city centers and pushing retail forward in these areas.

The province assumes that it is very important for the retail development of the entire region to know what kind of attraction each municipality has, what are the attraction poles in each sub-region. The study conducted by the province helps to identify the problems of the region. One of the problems is that many municipalities do not have enough retail facilities, that leads to the leakage of consumers who go to bigger municipalities for shopping. Also some of the problematic municipalities do not have even facilities for daily shopping (supermarkets) (Interviewee 8, 2015).

The findings showed that in each sub-region in the Antwerpen province there is a city that drives consumers from surrounding smaller municipalities towards its shopping facilities. These attraction spots can be seen on the map presented in Appendix 2. the existence of such attraction poles weakens economies of smaller towns, reduces profit of local retailers and makes them shut down their business (Provincie Antwerpen, 2014).
On the other hand, study concluded that investment in retail has grown enormously during last 15 years. Mostly money has been invested in shopping clusters, big malls, and international retail chains. Shops of such chains now can be found in almost every relatively big municipality (Hema, Blokker, H&M, and Albert Hijn). This fact reflects the findings presented in the previous sub-chapter: municipalities are chasing for such big and well-known retailers. They can drive local economy and set up their own trend. The influence of these chains, which can work more cost-efficient, on smaller retailers is big. Small independent retailers cannot compete, so they are forced to close their business not only in smaller communities, but also in big cities. Altogether, it leads to evolvement of a big number of empty premises along main streets in municipal centers. However, big retailers neither rent these spots nor buy them, as the surface of such premises is too small for locating their business in them. Instead, chain retailers tend to locate their business out of town as the land available there is cheaper, than in the city centers, there is more space, so parking slots can also be build there. This has led to a twofold situation with growing number of shopping facilities in the periphery, whilst existing small shops in city centers are shutting down.

Based on these results of the research, the Province is trying to set up a policy for each municipality in order to stop such ‘evolution’ of retail, to guide further development in another direction and also to focus the whole retail development more on certain municipalities as leading ones for surrounding areas by providing them with facilities that are necessary for taking over this role. This aim corresponds to creating strong regional retail structure. On the other hand the province is going to invest in various projects that are aimed in securing other communities and municipalities in terms of availability of basic daily goods and services (Interviewee 8, 2015).

The role of the province in dealing with retail vacancy consists of three main parts. First of all, the province conducts in-depth research in order to provide municipalities with the suitable knowledge and information. ‘For us it is the main attraction’ - claimed the representative of the municipality of Antwerpen (Interviewee 9, 2015). Secondly, based on the research the province formulates policy on retail, sets framework for municipalities up to guide them through the process of establishing their own policy. Finally, the province also provides ‘coaching’ for municipalities – experts are sent to those municipalities, which are struggling with addressing their problems, in order to help with identifying their main strengths, weaknesses and tools that can be applied to beat the threats and use the opportunities in accordance with the SWOT analysis previously conducted by the province.
One role that was mentioned by municipal authorities is bringing together neighboring communities and making them communicate and cooperate. However, this role has not been fulfilled yet:

‘They can try to bring two communities together [...] That is the thing the province can do, because they are above the cities. But at this time we do not have something like that yet, but we are planning to do that with the province and some communities surrounding Antwerp. They do not have much decision power, more supporting power’ (Interviewee 9, 2015).

4.2.3 Municipalities

On the municipal level, existing retail vacancy in city centers is seen as a great issue. Municipality of Antwerpen is not an exception. Although the average vacancy rate is 12.6%, historical center of Antwerp is doing well, there are many shops along the streets of the city center, which benefit from tourists attracted by historical sights. However, according to the statistics presented by the municipality, there are several districts within the municipality of Antwerpen with very high vacancy rates in their centers, for example Merksem – 28%, Deurne – 19%, Berchem – 19%. The municipality believes that it is important to sustain commerce in those problematic districts. First of all, according to the representative of the municipality,

‘you have to know, first of all, where the problem is, you have to have a good database on retail vacancy. then you have to say in what areas you want to attack this retail vacancy, or you want to have retail actions’ (Interviewee 9, 2015)

Therefore, central areas of 11 districts within the municipality of Antwerpen were chosen as priority for help (Municipality of Antwerp, 2013). This prioritized districts can be seen on the map presented in Appendix 3. In these areas the municipality is conducting a research to identify potential measures for more efficient outcomes. As the representative of the municipality suggested, there are three groups of instruments to be used to deal with the vacancy in city center:

‘You can have spatial instruments, like bringing two empty shops together to make one bigger space, you make a street that makes connection with the
parking lot, you can break of some houses that are empty and build new houses that are more attractive and up-to-date. A lot of things you can do on spatial matter. But you have to do first spatial analysis on that. On more economic approach you can start looking for retailers, or making it interesting for retailers to look also at these interesting spot, to make looking for good people that can have a good shop at this area. Most of the times we use pop-up actions. We use small startup companies who do not have a shop yet, we put them in the vacant spot [...]. The third part is more on promotional, eventual kind of thing. To put the city center in a more good point of view, to have a good name. [...] you have to make it an interesting street with nice accommodation and things to do, so people want to visit that street and spend time there. It can be done by redeveloping of the street, but also by bringing shop-keepers together and building up some interesting events, a good campaign, so people start visiting the street for the events and at that time start using the shops’ (Interviewee 9, 2015)

The representative of IDEA Consult supported this point of view, suggesting that there are several essential items for municipal actions. The first is spatial situation: ‘where you want people to be, to walk, the routes [...] what will they find?’. The next item is about the parking facilities and accessibility, you should be sure people know how to reach your area. The next item is the quality of shopping and leisure facilities: ‘So it is not the question of quantity, more the question of quality – why are you different from your neighbors? What do you have to offer which is special? That is why people will come to you, not because you have the same as the other. So it is the quality of shops’. Moreover, the events, so-called ‘software’ matters: ‘Make sure that people come back. And that they come back 6-10 times a year. When your shops are the same, you need something else to attract people. And that’s what you do with events activities’. And the last but not the least item is marketing: ‘make sure people know what you do’ (Interviewee 12, 2015).

The municipality of Antwerpen pays attention to both owners of retail premises and retailers and entrepreneurs. On the one hand, due to the fact that in general owners of the premises just wait for someone to take over the premise regardless its current condition and for the fix price, it is considered vital to stay in touch with owners and try to inspire them to take actions in order to attract new tenants (e.g. invest money in façade renovation) and to be more flexible about renting price.
On the other hand, the municipality of Antwerp takes very active approach to retailers and entrepreneurs. First of all, the municipality provides entrepreneurs with location advice. People who want to start their business, but do not know how to do that, can contact municipal authority using online form mentioning what kind of business they want to launch and what is the preferable location area. Afterwards, the municipality tries to match owners of vacant premises with potential tenants. Moreover, the municipality consults entrepreneurs on the initial stage of starting their business up. Another initiative presented by the municipality is pop-up shops. This initiative is aiming at those individual retailers who want to try selling their own products (e.g. hand-made accessories, bakery) and then make a decision on whether they want to develop their own business or not. There are 20 small units concentrated in a passage between 2 shopping streets of Antwerp dedicated to hosting those pop-up shops. The main condition for participating in this initiative is a short-term rent (1-3 months) of around 500€ per month.

Furthermore, the municipality of Antwerp believes that accessibility is highly important for physical shops. That is why within the city of Antwerpen much attention is paid to improvement of mobility. However, in surrounding districts city centers are poorly accessible, and due to that many local people prefer taking their cars and going to out-of-town shopping malls, which are equipped with numerous free parking lots (Municipality of Antwerpen, 2013).

The Municipality of Antwerpen has recently taken initiative to attract more customers to central shopping areas. First of all, from September onwards, most of the shops in the center of Antwerp are allowed to be open on the first Sunday of the month. Statistic data presented by the municipality shows that the average number of customers doing shopping on Sundays was around 9000 with several exceptions due to different events taking part in the city center. Another action that was taken by the municipality 4 years ago is the ‘Golden Smile of the Shop’ contest. Customers of the municipality vote each year for the most friendly shopkeeper. By the results of the contest the winner receives financial reward and great attention from the local media (local television, newspaper and radio interviews). Also in every district of the municipality the ‘silver smile’ award is given.

Another action that is undertaken on the municipal level is cooperation between different actors within city center. The scheme that has been implemented in several municipalities within the province of Antwerpen (e.g. Ghent, Kortrijk) corresponds to the concept of Business Improvement Districts. British concept by its origin, business improvement districts
now are widely recognizable management tool for ‘the complexity of town center issues, beyond purely retail’ and represent ‘a key public-private partnership initiative shaping high street activity’ and ‘tangible and repeatable method by which commercial business in specific areas agree, co-ordinate and monitor communal improvements, paid for an extra tax levy’ (Wrigley & Lambiri, 2014: 11). However, this concept cannot function properly in the case of the province of Antwerpen due to the existing legislation. Business improvement districts in the UK have a separate legal situation, they are allowed to ask money from all actors in that area to pay. With that money they can they can invest in the public domain: in security, quality – everything. In Flanders, no one, except for local government, is allowed to ask for money from local retailers, investors, shop owners etc.

‘You can ask for it, but they do not have to pay you. And so, what we see is there are a lot of organizations [...] with memberships, but it’s only 10% of local retailers are members of such organizations, so other 90% do not pay, do nothing. So if you ask retailers for money, 90% will not pay. And that is the difference, in business improvement districts you have to pay. It is not a question of wanting, but you have to pay’ (Interviewee 12, 2015).

Secondly, in Flanders the only authority who is allowed to make changes and invest in the public domain is the local authority, not the private party.

‘You are not allowed to clean the streets, to improve the streets or to plant trees. And in the UK they are allowed. So that’s the second reason why it cannot work here. Of course, there are organizations who call themselves business improvement districts, but in fact, they are not’ (Interviewee 12, 2015).

So what municipalities do in the province of Antwerpen levy a tax. So the local authority imposes a tax, collects it and gives it to the special organization that manages the fund. However, this organization is not allowed to do mostly anything with that money.

While the actions and policy described above belong to the structure of Signification, the municipality of Antwerp also uses the authoritative resource that they have – power to grant permits – in favor of the city center. It is important to mention, that, although there is no new law on retail location yet on the provincial level, the municipality of Antwerp is elaborating on the regulation of retail location and planning to allow building of retail parks around one single parking space with only the shops that are big enough that they cannot be placed within
the central shopping zones (e.g. IKEA, Decathlon, MediaMarkt) (Interviewee 9, 2015). Moreover, the municipality tries not only to stop establishment and expansion of out-of-town retail objects, but also stimulates retailers to find a vacant premise in the city center to occupy it. One of the examples given by the representative of the municipality illustrates this process:

‘I’ll give you an example. There’s a book shop, a local bookshop that is now located in a very small city center, we helped to find the spot there. And there has been a request for a building permit outside of the city center where they have large surfaces, which is ok outside the residential area. But now this developer, they want to build a smaller shop in this retail park. And then we heard that there’s a small book shop that wants to move to the retail park because they have free parking there and a lot of interesting retailers that are very known. So then we have had big discussion on this. Regarding the building permit we said it’s not an area where we allow building of small surfaces because we have a lot of empty premises in the city center. we want to have these retailers, bookstores, we have a place in the city center. so we gave negative advice for the building permit. [...] We try to have an agreement, sometimes it’s a permit but with some restrictions.’ (Interviewee 9, 2015).

Another powerful tool that is at the disposal of municipal authorities is the imposition of local taxes. The representative of the Ulvenhout Retail Invest Fund especially highlighted this:

‘the trick they use is a tax on the premises that are vacant. This is what works in most of the cities. This is the best thing: you force the owner to do something, at least he gives it away for free to someone. This is the best, and it ends up quite high. the aim is not to raise cash, but put things in motion. It has very strict rules [...] but that helps. for a small shop of 50-60 sq.m this tax can easily go a few thousand Euros per year. That is a lot when you have zero income’ (Interviewee 13, 2015).

It is important to notice that not all of the municipalities are so proactive as the municipality of Antwerpen. As part of this research, municipality of Arendonk was contacted for the interview due to the recent sharp decrease of vacancy rates in its central shopping that was stated in the provincial report (Provincie Antwerpen (2014). However, the municipality of Arendonk has not developed its own retail policy yet. As for today, the municipality has a liberal attitude towards new retail establishments within the municipality regardless their
location. The fallen vacancy rate was explained by the representative of the municipality as follows:

‘there are two things. And the first thing, which is very difficult to find in figures is that buildings that are vacant, some owners of the buildings chose to rebuild them and transform them into housing [...] in the center there are previous shops that do not exist anymore, they are homes. That is the reason why they are not in the figures anymore. And the second thing is sometimes without interfering from the government, there are coming new shops in the buildings that are vacant’ (Interviewee 10, 2015).

4.2.4 Summary

To summarize briefly, policy arrangements aimed at addressing retail vacancy in city centers in the province of Antwerpen involve three levels of governance, namely: the Flemish region, the province of Antwerpen and municipalities. It is important to highlight that the regional government is currently working within the structures of Legitimation (drafting new legislation) and Signification (stimulation of retailing to move back to city centers), while on the provincial and local levels most work is done within structures of Signification and Domination. The province mainly shares the knowledge and establishes the framework for retail structure within the province. Meantime, municipalities use all kinds of communication with private actors, use both ‘sticks and carrots’ to revitalize retail in city centers.

4.3 Retail vacancy in Gelderland: how to deal with it

This sub-chapter discusses the possible ways of dealing with retail vacancy of city centers in the province of Gelderland, using the experience of the province of Antwerpen discussed in the previous sub-chapter and keeping in mind existing similarities and differences between two institutional settings that were identified earlier. This sub-chapter firstly presents the current situation in the province of Gelderland accompanied by the opinion of stakeholders on the situation and possible ways of dealing with it. Further, the policy advice is provided.
4.3.1 Current situation in the province of Gelderland and actors’ opinion

Zooming in to the province of Gelderland, the average retail vacancy rate in central shopping areas is 9%, however, large differences between provincial regions are noticeable. Vacant shops in the village centers of Westervoort and Wijchen areas represent just 4, while in Renkum and Zevenar areas vacancy rates are between 15 and 20 percent of the total retail space. In areas such as Mook en Middelaar and Rijnwaarden vacancy rates are over 20% (Initiatief Overbewinkeling, 2015).

As it has been said earlier, spatial policy for retail in the province of Gelderland is restrictive, aiming at preserving city centers and existing retail structure. However, as it was articulated by the representative of the province, recently the policy has been questioned:

‘And maybe it’s too strict, because the retail market is also in the transition, and the consumers’ behavior is in the transition. But we still have the same policy about bulky goods and non-bulky goods and spatial planning components through it. And also we say ‘non-bulky goods only in city centers’ and ‘supermarkets are only within existing retail centers or not city centers, but neighborhoods with local supermarkets – that’s also ok’. But for us it’s now a question: ok, there’s a demand for more sq. m per retail, and then you have a discussion ‘is our policy too strict or not? Is it future-proof?’ – and that’s the question we have to ask ourselves continuously’ (Interviewee 1, 2015).

Yet, being aware of the experience that France and Belgium have had with out-of-town retail establishments, the province is staying resistant to change. Nevertheless, both private and public actors are concerned with existing vacancy rates in city centers.

Regarding the retail vacancy, on the provincial level there are two groups of opinion that were identified by the representative of the province. The first group sees existing retail vacancy as a huge threat that requires governmental intervention. On the opposite, the second group argues that during this transition period in the market there is no need for the government to intervene. However, the rising vacancy rates and the affection for most of the municipalities makes the provincial authorities believe in the need of the real action (Interviewee 1, 2015).

The representative of Droogh Trommelen en Partners supported this point of view, saying:

‘There is only more need to be conservative about preserving the city center as our meeting space, our main retail place. Because of the internet, there’s lack
of need of retail property, and you need to make city centers dynamic, the
market needs it, and you have to provide it within the city center. It’s not the
easiest location’ (Interviewee 7, 2015).

As well as the representative of Vastgoed Belang: ‘we need to use every tool that we can to
save the retail that can be saved and to find a solution for those places with vacancy that can
never be used again’ (Interviewee 5, 2015).

It is worth mentioning that representatives of both Droogh Trommelen en Partners and
INRetail underlined the necessity of changes in the existing policy and legislation. They claim
that it is vital to, first of all, have a clear picture of the retail structure that the province is
aiming for:

‘the role of the government is to on the forehand to know where you want
stores. That’s the main thing you have to do as the government. You set the
boundaries, […] and then the market knows what to do and where to go: to the
city center or another place. If the government says ‘that’s the place we would
like to develop for retail’ […] and you need to know what a city or a region
can, what a program suits it, and then you can decide what a structure you are
going for. This has to be the structure, the environment for retailers where they
can function, otherwise you cannot have strong retail structure. But you got to
have a straight backbone and keep the market parties in what you stand
for’(Interviewee 7, 2015).

Secondly, due to current changes in the market and consumers’ behavior, current restrictions
are described as being too rigid:

We always had branches and every brunch, for example, furniture sold only
furniture, but nowadays, if you sell furniture alone, you don’ exist anymore
within a couple of years. And the consumer asks, is not thinking in brunches.
[...]The legislation looks up to order, but it’s not true because I know retailers
who under-rent some space to…and it’s not possible, because in the legislation
it laid down that minimum scale must be 1000-1500 sq.m, but nowadays many
of my retailers think it’s too much, for example, bedding, you don’t want to
have a shop of 1000 sq.m.’ (Interviewee 6, 2015).

Some of the municipalities have already developed or right in the process of developing of
their policies in order to deal with the retail vacancy. On all the stages of the policy
development and implementation a lot of attention is dedicated to communication with all parties that are potentially involved (Interviewee 3, 2015; Interviewee 4, 2015).

It is important to notice that all the interviewees identified facilitating of communication between municipalities and keeping a closer watch over the compliance with the policy and legislation as essential role for the province in dealing with retail vacancy (Interviewee 2, 2015; Interviewee 3, 2015; Interviewee 4, 2015; Interviewee 5, 2015; Interviewee 6, 2015).

### 4.3.2 Policy arrangements to transfer from the province of Antwerpen

There are several policy arrangements that can be easily transferred from the province of Antwerpen to the existing institutional framework of the province of Gelderland.

First of all, the importance of conducting an overall provincial research has been proved by its benefits for all the actors. Detailed profile of each municipality’s performance can serve a base for establishing a strong provincial retail structure, which was requested by private actors in the province of Gelderland. Also, such an information database can help municipalities to identify their own strength and weaknesses regarding the neighboring communities and overall situation in the province.

Following the previous point, the province of Gelderland has to develop a clear vision on retail within the province. That means identifying and mapping existing regional retail centers as well as centers on smaller scale etc. The most important part in developing a strong retail structure – deciding on supra-local level which municipalities do not have any potential and / or capabilities to play a certain role in the region. For those municipalities it is important to admit such state of affairs and provide sufficient amount of retail to serve its own inhabitants.

Additionally, the platform Detailhandelvlaanderen, which was established for the whole Flemish region, is a good example of how the communication and cooperation between both public and private actors can be organized. This can be a valuable contribution to the structure of Signification in Gelderland. Having such an information portal may be an easy way for all the actors involved to access the information regarding retail performance and policy arrangements in the province of Gelderland.

Once the provincial vision on retail structure has been developed, the role of the province is to keep municipalities under observation, ‘be a guarding dog’ and ensure that all of the municipalities comply with the vision. To do so, the province may use the tools that are
already at its disposal. For example, account managers who check municipal plans that were mentioned by the representative of the province. Furthermore, the concept of ‘retail coaches’ may also be implemented in the province of Gelderland in order to help and guide smaller municipalities, which usually do not have a person specializing in retail development within the administration, while they are developing their retail policy. This two tools can help to secure coherent development of strong retail structure within the province and also prevent undesirable and harmful developments.

For a municipality it is essential to acknowledge the existing retail vacancy and the transition period that the market is currently experiencing. This transition means, and that was confirmed by all the interviewees, that, in fact, central shopping area has shrunk by itself. Therefore, retail is no longer possible of secondary streets, for example. Because of that a municipality has to identify a central shopping area, make it more compact, and, what is most important, be very precise and clear while delivering the information to the stakeholders. That will facilitate and smoothen the transition period.

Moreover, as the example of the municipality of Antwerpen has shown, it is important to follow certain steps while arranging a policy to address retail vacancy. The strategic steps are summarized and shown on the Figure 8.

![Figure 8: Strategic steps for a municipality to address the retail vacancy](source: Author’s own, based on the interviews)
First of all, it is vital to identify strengths and weaknesses of a municipality while performing spatial and economic analysis. It is important to pay attention to the role that the municipality plays in the region and in the province in terms of retail in order to be realistic. Secondly, together with the stakeholders the municipality has to develop a vision, create events and promote the municipality. In order to make people living in the municipality and people coming there enjoy their time and want to come back, such actions as pop-up stores, contests and concerts implemented by the municipality of Antwerpen can be used. This will add certain vibe to the city center of the municipality.

As it has been proved and highlighted earlier, even though dealing with retail vacancy was named responsibility of municipalities by all the interviewees, they are also not fully capable to address the issue of retail vacancy alone. For example, it is beyond their responsibility to force real estate owners to reduce rental prices or retailers to move to their municipality instead of locating their business in any neighboring more attractive city. That is why the joint, collaborative action is required. Cooperation between municipality, retailers and building owners, as it is shown on the Figure 8, may be beneficial for all three parties. The team-work on the vision of the retail in the municipality may help to identify, which areas should remain, which areas should be transformed and the use of which should be changed, where to focus most of the effort etc. however, the municipality is responsible for making decisions and bringing the vision into life. This cooperation may take different forms, for instance, Business improvement districts (Business investment Zones in the Netherlands).

![Figure 9. Joint Action Scheme for addressing retail vacancy](source: Author’s own, based on the interviews)
The policy arrangements mentioned above can be transferred to the existing institutional settings of the province of Gelderland as they represent mainly the structure of Signification and do not require any changes in existing legislation or alike.
5. General conclusions and discussion

This chapter summarizes the findings in relation to each of research sub-questions. Moreover, this section discusses acknowledged difficulties that have been faced during this research as well as its limitations and future research opportunities.

5.1 Findings in relation to research sub-questions

*What are the similarities and differences between institutional frameworks for retail location in the Province of Antwerpen and the Province of Gelderland?*

The main distinction between the institutional settings in the province of Antwerpen and the province of Gelderland are present in the structure of Legitimation. In the Netherlands the spatial plan on the national level exists, while in Belgium there is no overall plan on the federal level. Nevertheless, the role of the province also differs. Distinct from the Netherlands, where provinces play important role in regard to spatial planning, in the Flemish region the need of the provincial level of governance is questioned by private actors. Moreover, retail planning in the Netherlands is strict and hierarchical in contrast to the Flemish region, where planning has been mostly permissive, therefore spatial landscape is very fragmented with a great number of out-of-town retail establishments.

In both provinces communication between the province and municipalities is very important as well as involvement of different groups of stakeholders in making a vision or a policy. However, the fact that the inter-municipal communication plays important role in developing of even and strong retail structure, municipalities of the province of Antwerpen do not frequently communicate with each other. In contrast to that, municipalities in the province of Gelderland see regional communication beneficial for them and are mostly eager to cooperate with each other.

Regarding the structure of Domination, the two provinces are similar in terms of power of granting permits, although municipalities in the province of Antwerpen currently responsible for two permits, situation is expected to change with the upcoming legislation. Provinces have blocking tools in their disposal. Concerning the communication between a municipality and a private actor, municipalities in both provinces are looking for the employment opportunities for inhabitants as well as for a recognizable name of potential retailers. However, in the province of Antwerp municipalities can bargain on conditions for one of the permits to be granted.
What has been done to combat retail vacancy in city centers of the Province of Antwerpen?

Policy arrangements aimed at addressing retail vacancy in city centers in the province of Antwerpen involve three levels of governance, namely: the Flemish region, the province of Antwerpen and municipalities. It is important to highlight that the regional government is currently working within the structures of Legitimation (drafting new legislation) and Signification (stimulation of retailing to move back to city centers), while on the provincial and local levels most work is done within structures of Signification and Domination. The province mainly shares the knowledge and establishes the framework for retail structure within the province. Meantime, municipalities use all kinds of communication with private actors, use both ‘sticks and carrots’ to revitalize retail in city centers.

What can the Province of Gelderland learn from the experience of the Province of Antwerpen?

There are several policy arrangements that can be easily transferred from the province of Antwerpen to the existing institutional framework of the province of Gelderland that include:

- Conducting overall provincial research,
- Establishing of a clear vision of retail structure on the provincial level,
- Sharing knowledge with municipalities via platform for cooperation (for both public and private actors),
- Province to ‘be a guarding dog’, ensuring even and coherent development of provincial retail structure,
- Acknowledgement of municipal strengths, weaknesses and its role in the regional and provincial retail structures,
- Joint action between municipality and stakeholders involved.

These policy arrangements are primarily belong to the structure of Signification and do not require any changes in legislation.

5.2 Difficulties and limitations of the research

The primary weakness of this research is highlighted by the time intensity of conducting two case studies. Due to the limited amount of time, the research may be questioned on the depth of each of cases studied. Moreover, Stake (1980) raises a question about generalizability of
the case-study approach. Therefore, differences in factors that have led to retail vacancy in inner centers, differences in the role of the province in spatial planning as well as the difference in place of retail policy in regional planning system were highlighted and taken into consideration while drawing policy recommendations for the province of Gelderland.

The research could have been strengthened with a wider sample of interviewees. Among others, real estate owners and real estate agencies may have been included. Also, more municipalities from the province of Antwerpen may have been included in order to increase the representation of cases and their generalization ability. Also, since in the province of Antwerpen out-of-town retail plays important role, it is difficult to estimate the complete transferability of the policy arrangements.

Among difficulties that were faced during the research, the following can be named. First of all, municipalities within the province of Antwerpen were not willing to participate in the research. Secondly, despite the fact that both the interviewer and the interviewees were able to speak English freely, the language barrier was still present and limited interviewees freedom to express their ideas.

### 5.3 Comments on the Potential Enhancement of the Research

Due to the fact that in the province of Gelderland provincial authorities instantly question their retail policy for its ‘future-proof’, one of the possibilities for developing the research further may be the assessment of potential threats and benefits as well as optimal policy arrangements for allowing out-of-town retail establishments within the province.
List of references


### Appendices

#### Appendix 1. List of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Audio File name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 1</td>
<td>Province Gelderland</td>
<td>Arnhem</td>
<td>21.04.2015</td>
<td>PGLD_1, PGLD_2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 2</td>
<td>Municipality Bronckhorst</td>
<td>Hegelo</td>
<td>12.05.2015</td>
<td>BRKH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 3</td>
<td>Municipality Doetinchem</td>
<td>Doetinchem</td>
<td>12.05.2015</td>
<td>DTHM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 4</td>
<td>Municipality Nijmegen</td>
<td>Nijmegen</td>
<td>28.05.2015</td>
<td>NMGC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 5</td>
<td>Vastgoed belang</td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>07.05.2015</td>
<td>VGBLG_1, VGBLG_2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 6</td>
<td>INRetail</td>
<td>Zeist</td>
<td>28.04.2015</td>
<td>INRTL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 7</td>
<td>Droogh Trommelen en Partners (DTNP)</td>
<td>Nijmegen</td>
<td>17.04.2015</td>
<td>DTNP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 8</td>
<td>Province Antwerpen</td>
<td>Antwerpen</td>
<td>23.04.2015</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 9</td>
<td>Municipality Antwerpen</td>
<td>Antwerpen</td>
<td>29.04.2015</td>
<td>ANTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 10</td>
<td>Municipality Arendonk</td>
<td>Arendonk</td>
<td>26.05.2015</td>
<td>ARNDK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 11</td>
<td>Comeos</td>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>29.04.2015</td>
<td>CMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 12</td>
<td>IDEA Consult</td>
<td>Breda</td>
<td>26.05.2015</td>
<td>IDCLT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 13</td>
<td>Ulvenhout Retail Invest Fund</td>
<td>Antwerpen</td>
<td>08.05.2015</td>
<td>ULVH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2. Map of the regional retail centers, province Antwerpen

Appendix 3. Map of prioritized districts for dealing with retail vacancy, municipality of Antwerpen