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## EDITORIAL

# Responding to Tough Times: Policy and Planning Strategies in Shrinking Cities

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### 1. Introduction

Since the industrialization of Europe and North America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, traditional models of urban growth emphasized the expansion of jobs in the manufacturing industries, followed by tertiary activities, as the key driver for rapid population growth (Thompson, 1965, p. 437). Conversely, decline was expected to occur if dominant industries or companies lose their competitive position and market shares. The basic assumption was that economic decline leads to selective outmigration and with it to demographic decline. Since the 1970s, at the latest, when the stable socio-economic model of the post-war period—the fordistic form of mass production and mass consumption—plunged into crisis and with it old industrial cities like Detroit, Pittsburgh, Manchester, Bilbao, St. Etienne or Essen, demographic shrinkage was equated with economic decline.

In the literature several examples of cities going through such cyclical development paths of growth, decline and recovery of the urban economy are well documented. In particular, the late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed the emergence of a corpus of work designed to describe general models of urban growth and decline (van den Berg *et al.* 1982, 1987; Hohenberg and Lees, 1985; Camagni *et al.*, 1986; Booth, 1987; Hesse, 1988; Hamm and Wienert, 1990; Bade & Kunzmann, 1991; Hall, 1993; Meijer, 1993). On this basis scholars like Friedrichs (1993) or Blotevogel and King (1996) aimed at

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specifying the complex relationship between processes of economic restructuring and population developments.

Economic decline, deindustrialization and high unemployment rates are indisputably causes for urban population losses in many places. However, the long-term development of European cities will largely be conditioned by the birth rate and natural population losses. The dramatic decline of fertility to levels far below the natural reproduction rate has been interpreted by Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa (1986; cf. van de Kaa, 1987) as Europe's "second demographic transition". The first demographic transition, which occurred in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, was characterized by high rate of marriage, low divorce rates, and low levels of age at first marriage. The second demographic transition began in the mid-1960s and accelerated during the 1980s. Fundamental shifts of societal norms and values led to characteristic behavioural effects of the people born in the mid-twentieth century. The transition is marked by declining numbers of married couples, rising divorce rates, an increasing age at marriage and dramatically dropping fertility.

Since the 1970s, as the pill took effect, birth rates have declined far below the population replacement level. The second demographic transition also included a shift away from the conventional definition of "families" as couples with children, to more varied household types including an increasing number of blended families. Even though the theory of a second demographic transition is criticized for its determinism, it clearly describes the effects of an incontrovertible fact: the partial decoupling of economic wealth and population growth in Europe.

Despite this, the predominant task of urban policies and urban planning remained to reverse economic decline by restrengthening the economic competitiveness of shrinking cities and going for new economic and demographic growth. In most cases the administrative system in shrinking cities persisted as solely growth orientated (Wiechmann, 2003). Though in particular in Germany the academic debate on long-term population decrease and urban transitions already started in the 1980s (Mackensen *et al.*, 1984; Häußermann and Siebel, 1985, 1987) policy-makers and planners in public administration considered shrinkage to be intractable and were unable to cope with the issue in a constructive way. Given that on a European scale population decrease in many—if not most—cities is inevitable in the coming decades Häußermann and Siebel (1987) criticized this one-sided growth orientation. According to their central thesis the dominant intention to reverse shrinkage into growth did not only intensify the negative consequences of shrinkage, because it went along with a single-edge orientation towards massive external investment, without which the break of the economic trend could not be realized. It also spoiled the prospects of new urban ways of life. However, the euphoria after the reunification of Germany and the unexpected population growth due to immigration from Central and Eastern Europe to West German cities put a sudden end to this debate.

The euphoria after the political changes in Central and Eastern Europe was soon over when the combination of post-socialist and post-fordist transformation processes led to exceptionally severe shrinkage phenomena, with outmigration and natural population losses. The sharp decrease in fertility rates combined with dramatic post-socialist transformation processes (Müller and Siedentop, 2004; Nuissl and Rink, 2005; Kabisch *et al.*, 2006; Steinführer and Haase, 2007) led to a rapid decline of cities and enforced a "shock therapy" (Bontje, 2004). The simultaneity between the different changes confers a "unique" character on the evolutions taking place (Boren and Gentile, 2007). Since

the Berlin wall disappeared in 1989, the population in East Germany decreased by 12% from 18.6 to 16.5 million people in 2008 (Wiechmann *et al.*, 2013). The impact of the on-going demographic change is nowhere in Germany as strong as in the former socialistic eastern part. As Glock and Häußermann (2004) point out, the transformation of the former socialist economy resulted in a process of deindustrialization that was faster and more thorough than any such economic transformation in the Western world. Whereas the German Democratic Republic was a highly industrialized state-led economy, the new *laender* in East Germany have the lowest rate of industrial jobs within EU 15. However, in contrast to popular belief that outmigration is the main originator of the occurring shrinkage, three quarters of the decrease were based on—slowly rising but nevertheless low—fertility rates below the natural reproduction rate (Goldstein *et al.*, 2009). In combination with an increased life expectancy the average age of the population continuously increased.

According to the Urban Audit—a European database for comparative analysis of EU cities—out of 220 large- and medium-sized European cities, 57% lost population in the period from 1996 to 2001. Besides 53 (out of a total of 67 cities) in central and eastern European countries, there are among others, 22 German, 19 Italian, 11 British, and 5 Spanish cities included in the list of shrinking cities. This urban shrinkage was not predominantly caused by suburbanization. Of 98 larger urban zones (a functional urban region mainly based on commuter connections) included in the database, 54% still shrank (Wiechmann, 2008, p. 434). High losses of population in relative numbers were recorded in northern Finland, in central and northern Sweden and in general in the central and eastern European states with the exception of some of the Polish regions. A substantial loss of population took place in southern Italy as well, in the central regions in France, in Scotland and in the Alentejo in Portugal (EU Commission, 2004, p. 14).

Wiechmann (2003) identified shrinking areas in Europe mainly in four types of regions:

- Western European industrial agglomerations in economic decline (Ruhr, Mersey Side, Pays Noir, etc.),
- peripheral, very sparsely populated depopulation areas (primarily Northern Sweden, Eastern Finland and Scotland),
- transformation regions with serious industrial regression (large parts of Russia and the Central and Eastern European states) and
- rural emigration areas with a rapid decrease of births (e.g. parts of Spain, Italy and Greece).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the shrinking cities phenomenon is widespread across Europe. Most European countries see an increasingly ageing population and internal migration from underdeveloped to more competitive locations. The majority of Europe's cities have already lost population and the rate is more than likely to increase in future. Unlike in the past, a great deal has been written on the topic of policies and planning strategies in shrinking cities since the turn of the millennium. A substantial part of the research has been conducted in Germany (Bontje, 2004; Brandstetter *et al.*, 2005; Gestring *et al.*, 2005; Nuissl and Rink, 2005; Kabisch *et al.*, 2006; Oswalt, 2006; Siedentop & Wiechmann, 2007; Moss, 2008, Bernt, 2009, Wiechmann *et al.*, 2013). The point of departure of a broad debate on the stabilization of the housing market, the efficiency of infrastructures in areas of high vacancies and new “*leitbilder*” for shrinking cities—like the

“perforated city” —was primarily the crisis of the East German housing industry. However, in the course of the debate on shrinking cities the focus has developed from a one theme issue to a policy field which incorporates a range of themes.

Outside of Germany the discussion within urban policy and planning on dealing with the problems of shrinking cities had just begun when the global financial and economic crisis, which was triggered by the bursting of the US housing bubble in 2007, drew much attention to this issue. For Europe (Turok & Mykhnenko, 2007; Baron *et al.*, 2010; Fol & Cunningham-Sabot, 2010; Reckien & Martinez-Fernandez, 2011) as well as for North America (Popper & Popper, 2002; Beauregard, 2003, 2009; Allweil, 2007; Rugare & Schwarz, 2008; Hollander *et al.*, 2009; Schatz, 2010), recent research highlights shrinking cities as a dominant development trend and an emerging research agenda in planning. Hollander *et al.* (2009) emphasize two central challenges to the academic planning community: the poor knowledge on how existing planning tools for growing communities can be adapted to be used in a shrinking environment: and a demand for empirical studies on how planners, policy-makers and other stakeholders operate within a shrinking city and how they conceptualize population loss. Special attention was recently paid in the US to cities that are locked into trajectories of chronic loss (Beauregard, 2009). For reinventing America’s “legacy cities” residential and job growth is no longer seen as indispensable to make them economically efficient urban areas with an improved quality of life (American Assembly, 2011). Planning scholars suggest a paradigm shift to “shrinking smart” (Pallagst & Wiechmann, 2005; Pallagst *et al.*, 2009) or “smart decline” (Hollander & Németh, 2011).

The UN-HABITAT world cities report in 2008 analysed the shrinking cities phenomenon worldwide. It showed that the negative growth trend is largely associated with cities in North America and Europe. In the US alone, 39 cities have endured population loss, while in the UK, Germany and Italy, 49, 48 and 34 cities, respectively, shrank in size between 1990 and 2000 (UN-HABITAT, 2008, p. 40). It also showed that even 10% of the 1408 analysed cities in the developing world experienced a reduction in population in this decade.

Certainly, urban shrinkage as such is not a new phenomenon. However, in post-industrial times the major causes of shrinkage have changed (Schatz, 2010, p. 28). For instance, population loss because of epidemics or disasters is less likely today than in historic times. Nevertheless, examples like the hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, the Tōhoku earthquake and following tsunami in north-east Japan in 2011 as well as the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s and the on-going Mexican drug war have dramatically demonstrated in the recent past that these factors still affect the extent of urban shrinkage. In general, recent research has distinguished five main drivers for shrinkage (Schatz, 2010, p. 27 ff., Reckien and Martinez-Fernandez, 2011, p. 1379). These drivers are often found in a combination of two or more of these causes:

- Economic decline (e.g. closure of mining sites or de-industrialization in non-competitive spots).
- Demographic change (e.g. falling birth rates, outmigration in rural depopulation areas).
- Suburbanization (flight of people and jobs to the suburbs, hollowing out of the core city, triggered by urban sprawl).
- Structural upheaval (economic reorganization, collapse of an entire political system, unrest, resettlements).
- Environmental pollution.

The shrinking cities phenomenon represents a challenge to review the principles upon which urban policy has traditionally been based. A realistic future view might entail planning for the future of considerably smaller cities: to depopulate run-down neighbourhoods, to re-green once built-up areas, and to adopt economic development plans that emphasize controlled shrinkage in smaller but nevertheless liveable places. Dealing with the results of demographic contraction processes—often linked with economic and physical contraction processes—and designing the restructuring of shrinking urban regions in Europe are the most challenging tasks for Europe's cities in the forthcoming years.

The purpose of this special issue is to study policy and planning strategies in shrinking cities in Europe. The contributions conceptualize different ways in which shrinking cities have responded to tough times and population losses in a number of ways. The term “shrinking city” refers here to a densely populated urban area with a minimum population of 10,000 residents that has faced population losses in large parts for more than 2 years and is undergoing economic transformations with some symptoms of a structural crisis (Wiechmann, 2008; Hollander *et al.*, 2009).

For a deeper understanding of the mutual relationships, we need robust theoretical concepts to contextualize and analyse the mode of interplay between economic restructuring and demographic transition on the one hand, and policy intervention and planning strategies in the affected cities on the other. Unfortunately, a well-developed, empirically grounded theory is not available, despite an enormous amount of literature both on economic and demographic change as well as on urban policies and urban planning. While the topic of urban decline or city shrinkage has already been well documented in different national contexts (especially Germany, the US and the UK), the research that has been conducted in the past mostly lacked a comparative perspective on the policies and strategies that were implemented to tackle this issue.

Today, “Shrinking Cities” has become a transdisciplinary field of study that addresses complex issues of regenerating urban systems undergoing demographic change and structural crisis. Founded in 2004 in Berkeley, the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCiRN<sup>TM</sup>) aims to advance international understanding and promote scholarship about causes, manifestations, spatial variations and effectiveness of policies and planning interventions to stave off decline in urban regions with population loss (Pallagst *et al.*, 2009). The Cleveland Shrinking Cities Institute, launched in 2005, explores the idea of planned shrinkage as an alternative to the quest for continuous growth. To foster the interdisciplinary knowledge of regeneration strategies in shrinking cities across Europe and to provide a forum for the discussion of successful strategies the COST Action “Cities Regrowing Smaller” was established in 2009. This special issue is an outcome of the conference “Shrinkage in Europe; causes, effects and policy strategies” held in Amsterdam in 2011. It was jointly organized by the University of Amsterdam, the COST Action “Cities Regrowing Smaller” and OECD LEED Programme.

## 2. Contributions to this Special Issue

In this special issue, we aim to offer a varied, yet coherent inventory of the strategies developed to deal with shrinkage in Europe as well as the challenges faced in daily planning practice. The contributions depart from different theoretical perspectives on shrinkage and include case studies from various corners of the European continent and with varying characteristic features: larger and smaller cities, different causes for and effects

of shrinkage, and strategies tackling problems at varying scales (ranging from neighbourhoods to regions).

Before focusing on place-specific experiences in case studies, however, the contribution of Sousa and Pinho offers a theoretical reflection on the concept of shrinkage and what this implies for urban and regional planning. While there are several “theories of growth”, there is not yet a “theory of shrinkage”. Shrinkage or affiliated terms like decline are generally seen as negative developments that planning strategies should work against; growth on the other hand is seen as positive and desirable. Sousa and Pinho nuance this dichotomy and point at the fact that shrinkage is rapidly becoming a structural phenomenon in early twenty-first century Europe. Shrinking cities and regions are no longer exceptions and growth should no longer be the universal planning goal throughout the continent. Therefore instead of seeing “planning for shrinkage” as a paradox, it should be developed as a new planning paradigm: how to adapt planning to shrinkage instead of trying to reverse shrinkage with “back to growth” strategies? This important question is raised rather than answered here, and the possible answers are very likely to differ between countries, regions and places. The other contributions to this special issue offer some examples of how regions, cities and towns of various types try to deal with present and/or future shrinkage in their planning strategies.

Sanchez Moral, Mendez and Prada present a typical case of a city struggling to find a new economic perspective after de-industrialization: Aviles, a medium-sized city in Asturias, Spain. The city had become over-dependent on state-owned steel and iron industries. Strategies developed in the 2000s to revitalize the economy of Aviles include ingredients familiar from many other manufacturing cities and regions throughout Europe: privatization of state enterprises, attracting foreign companies and investments, reorienting the urban economy towards innovation, creativity and culture, flagship projects and rehabilitation of the city’s historical centre and waterfront. This transformation effort also implies an attempt to shift from dependency on external actors and decisions to a leading role of local public and private actors, although higher governance levels like Asturias, Spain and the EU have given important impetuses to the transformation programme too. While the city’s future perspective definitely has improved and we could now talk of a resurgent instead of a shrinking city, the authors still see major weaknesses in the transformation process like the limited involvement of private actors and the remaining presence of polluting cokes factories. The recent sharp economic downturn of Spain may frustrate Aviles’ efforts to modernize its economy. Moreover, one could question the ambitions of the local government: is this strategy distinctive enough or too similar to what many other European cities are developing, and is it a realistic strategy for a city with about 80,000 people? On the other hand, if Aviles would manage to position itself more as part of a polycentric region together with its larger neighbours Oviedo and Gijon, new opportunities might arise.

Kotilainen, Eisto and Vatanen look at shrinkage from a resilience perspective. Resilience of local communities is about the extent to which such communities are capable of dealing with change. This change can either be a sudden shock or a gradual transformation. Their case study is Lieksa, a small town in Eastern Finland with an economy mostly dependent on natural resources, especially the forest industry. The authors address the question why some communities of this type manage to stay vital while others decline in an international economic context in which natural resources are no longer sufficient to be competitive. They see resilience as a multilayered set of capacities of a community,

which may also result in development paths not based on economic growth. Local resilience strategies should not only react to short-term shocks, but also contribute to maintaining a community's core functions in the longer term. In Lieksa a promising future might be found in what the authors call "post-industrialized business related to forest use" like nature tourism, but they admit this offers a vulnerable basis for economic success and will probably not counter the structural process of population decline in the city and region.

Moving from a peripheral small city to a metropolitan setting, Schenkel addresses regeneration strategies in shrinking urban neighbourhoods. While the surrounding city of Berne, Switzerland, is definitely not shrinking, the 1950s housing estate of Tscharnergut is. The Swiss context is familiar to several European countries: after decades of shrinkage of the city centres, late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century city extensions, they have revitalized through a combination of regeneration programmes and a renewed interest in inner-city living. The problem of shrinkage in large cities has relocated to the newer extension areas, especially those built in the first decades after World War II. Tscharnergut was built as a high-rise area for the urban middle class, but has gradually become a concentration area of socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Recently public and private actors agreed on a regeneration programme consisting of a combination of physical improvement, strengthening of socio-economic structures, improving neighbourhood governance and improving the neighbourhood image. This set of measures should break the vicious circle of decline the neighbourhood has faced in recent decades. Although the strategy presented here may work best in the specific local context it was developed for, the points of departure may be applied to neighbourhoods in decline in other European cities as well.

Yet another setting of urban shrinkage is analysed by Elzerman and Bontje: a polycentric urban region in which shrinkage is rather a regional than a local process. Their case study is Parkstad Limburg, a former mining region in the southeast of the Netherlands. Shrinkage appeared on the policy and research agenda of the Netherlands rather late compared to surrounding countries. The Dutch population as a whole will probably still grow for some more decades, but first signs of local and regional shrinkage have already become apparent, especially at the country's edges. Parkstad Limburg is such a pioneer in dealing with shrinkage. The region's name is part of its shrinkage strategy: eight municipalities have joined forces and introduced a new name for the region expressing its combination of urban and natural landscape features. Following the example of several East German cities, the Parkstad region has accepted that shrinkage is not a short-term interruption of growth, but a structural phenomenon. Traditional planning tools and strategies may not work well in such a situation since they are mostly aimed at catering for growth. Alternative planning tools and strategies are not easily found though. Parkstad has made a significant first step towards a "planning for shrinkage" strategy by accepting further shrinkage as its most likely perspective for the next decades, but translating this acceptance into adequate planning measures so far is a process of small steps rather than fundamental changes. The temptation of returning to growth strategies is hard to resist. Moreover, it seems like this acceptance of shrinkage is not yet reached throughout regional society; the next challenge is to bring this out of a small inner circle of policy-makers towards broader circles of citizens, businesses and societal organizations.



Miot explores the assets and drawbacks of strategies to increase residential attractiveness of industrial cities in France. Mulhouse, Roubaix and Saint-Etienne are studied as emblematic cases of this category of cities. Although the strategies of these cities and the local settings to which they are applied differ, they have in common that changing the population composition is seen as a potential driver of new economic vitality. Such strategies combine elements of Florida's "creative class" hypothesis (attracting creative talent to boost urban economic growth) and the policy belief that "social mix" contributes to solving socio-economic problems in neighbourhoods. Miot points at the contradictions in such residential attraction strategies, mostly aimed at attracting middle class residents to regenerate neighbourhoods and hardly addressing the needs and preferences of lower income groups already living in those neighbourhoods. Are residential attractiveness strategies in the end only meant to attract "wanted" people to the city and to push out "unwanted" people? Does that solve urban and neighbourhood problems or does it only move problems to other neighbourhoods or cities?

Camarda, Rotondo and Selicato take us to the city of Taranto, shrinking as a result of multiple challenges: de-industrialization, pollution, suburbanization, a shortage of resources to regenerate the historic city centre, and a rather peripheral location in the economically struggling South of Italy. National, regional and local governance have so far proved incapable of solving Taranto's problems. The city's master plan of 1978 has still not been revised, even though it aimed at a city of 360,000 people while Taranto meanwhile only has 210,000 inhabitants. Many programmes and projects have been initiated at the street or neighbourhood level, but so far they have lacked a coherent strategic framework. The potential that Taranto seems to offer with its rich historic and cultural heritage and its port is frustrated by this lack of effective governance and most of all by the inability or unwillingness of local, regional and national governance actors to tackle the severe pollution of the city's steel and chemical industries.

Finally, Leetma, Kriszan, Nuga and Burdack describe the specific situation of small peripheral towns in post-socialist Europe. Large cities have attracted much attention in the shrinking cities debate, while the impact of shrinkage in small towns may in fact often be relatively larger. Socialist regimes in Central and East Europe generally concentrated investments in larger cities, especially the national capitals, but some smaller towns in peripheral regions managed to establish a quite stable economic base as regional administrative centres and/or manufacturing locations. While the post-socialist transformation in the 1990s was a shock to the societies and economies of these countries as a whole, the impact was particularly large on smaller towns and rural peripheral areas that often lost much of their economic future perspective. However, in most of the cases studied in South Estonia and former East Germany initiatives have recently been undertaken to cope with economic and demographic decline. The authors conclude that their case study towns managed to transform their strategies from being "passive local destinations" of higher-level administrative strategies to "pro-active localities" making use of their endogenous resources. Especially the importance of local social capital is highlighted as a driver of possible ways for small towns to halt a vicious circle of decline.

### **3. Conclusions/Outlook**

The contributions to this special issue form additional proof that urban and regional shrinkage are not only emerging topics on the research agenda of planners, geographers

and other social scientists, but also on the strategic agenda of those working in planning practice. While the specific topics, research angles and case study settings of the contributions differ, there are some general lessons to be learned regarding the analysis of shrinkage and how policy-makers should react to it:

- shrinkage is a structural phenomenon rather than a short-lived interruption of a general demographic and economic growth path in an increasing number of regions in Europe;
- while shrinkage in the past was most often caused by economic decline, violent conflicts, diseases or natural disasters, demographic factors like low birth rates and a greying population increasingly become drivers of shrinkage in Europe;
- shrinkage is not necessarily a negative development and does not have to lead to a vicious circle of deteriorating development perspectives;
- although general characteristics, causes and consequences can be witnessed, shrinkage is never exactly the same process at different locations. History and geography matter a lot for the particular ways in which shrinkage occurs and develops at a specific location; even in a relatively small continent like Europe we already see a huge variety of shrinkage patterns and trends;
- planning in a structurally shrinking city or region is in many respects very different from planning in a city or region experiencing long-term growth. While planning laws, systems and strategies in most European countries are still mostly growth-oriented, possibilities to adapt to a situation in which shrinkage may become the rule rather than the exception should be considered more seriously than before. As some of the contributions to this special issue demonstrate, some cities and regions may already be showing us what planning in times of shrinkage may look like. However, keeping in mind the previous point, this is not a matter of copying from “best practices” since each shrinkage situation is to a large extent unique and requires its own strategies and measures.

Both for academia and for planning practice, urban and regional shrinkage still pose many challenges for the next decades. These challenges include: a better understanding of what shrinkage really is (the “theory of shrinkage” that Sousa and Pinho ask for in their contribution to this special issue); developing a comparative perspective on shrinkage to move beyond the single case studies that currently still dominate the academic debate; convincing more planning practitioners that planning for shrinkage is an exciting challenge rather than a threat or something to be avoided; and developing viable future perspectives for cities and regions faced with structural shrinkage beyond the competitiveness mantra.

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