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# Strategies for Dealing with Urban Shrinkage: Issues and Scenarios in Taranto

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**ABSTRACT** *Shrinkage has increasingly become a “standard pathway” of urban and regional development in many European cities and regions. Shrinking is generally seen in the literature as a negative phenomenon: certain strategies may, however, trigger-off positive effects, such as social networking opportunities, affordable housing, and an increased sense of identity and opportunity change. Focusing on the effects of urban development should be seen as a priority, attempting to seize opportunities for the integration of a range of urban policies, making the most of scarce resources. This paper begins with a short introduction, a sort of “reading guide” clarifying in which steps the document’s argument is developed in the following sections; then it presents a theoretical framework with some central questions on strategies for shrinking cities and neighbourhoods, with a short review of the literature. An empirical section follows describing the case of Taranto as a de-industrialized city and the main features of its shrinkage, attempting to understand the effects of regeneration policies and urban planning strategies already put into place to tackle shrinkage at various administrative levels. This is followed by an evaluation of existing theoretical knowledge, comparing key points with the main features of shrinkage in the case of Taranto. This is carried out to contribute to a better understanding of the questions addressed, highlighting various unsolved problems that are then dealt with in the concluding section, as research challenges that remain open-ended.*

## 1. Introduction<sup>†</sup>

Since their birth, cities are continually affected by processes of change, extended in time and space to a greater or lesser degree, in terms of their physical and socio-economic environment. The very existence of the city is indissolubly bound to its perennial capacity

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<sup>†</sup>The paper is the result of a joint work of the authors. Nonetheless, Section 2 has been written by F. Selicato, Sections 1, 3, 5 and 6 by F. Rotondo and Section 4 by D. Camarda.

to align urban spaces to such repeated social and economic change. As a result of such change, approximately 80% of the population in the EU now lives in urban areas with cities being regarded as economic engines, capable of generating growth and employment (Commission of European Communities [CEC], 2005). In recent decades, however, the effects of de-industrialization, the impact of overall economic competitiveness on local economies, the loss of function and/or environmental quality and the poor results of policy-making in social integration have given rise to the formation of large, distressed, urban areas. This has contributed heavily to the decline of entire cities, characterized by unemployment, poverty, injustice and social exclusion (Conway & Konvitz, 2000) as well as by a significant decrease in the population in favour of more attractive urban areas (Wiechmann, 2009). Urban shrinkage is not a new phenomenon for cities but it needs new planning paradigms and strategies to cope with. Our current development model is yet linked to a growth paradigm which evaluates every declining process as something wrong to be suppressed or at least, changed as soon as possible. This current development model has directed urban regeneration strategies to give much importance to the improvement of the city and/or neighbourhood “hardware”, the physical improvement of buildings and infrastructures, thus very often promoting the gentrification process substituting low-income residents in favour of more affluent tenants (Smith & Williams, 2006). The social and economical questions lurking behind a deprived neighbourhood have been very often underestimated. The city of Taranto, in the South of Italy, offers an interesting case study about the necessity to use new planning paradigms and strategies to cope with shrinking cities. The paper starts in Section 2, after this short introduction, presenting a theoretical framework about shrinking cities and neighbourhoods included in the general background of urban regeneration process, with a short review of the literature. In Section 3 the case of Taranto as a de-industrialized city has been described, along with the main features of its shrinkage, not just following main demographic dynamics, but illustrating, in a synthetic way just useful to the general goals of the paper, its main economic and labour market indicators also, with an attention to the state of its natural environment. Section 4 offers an account of the effects of regeneration policies and urban planning strategies already put into place to tackle shrinkage at various administrative levels. Section 5 proposes an evaluation of existing theoretical knowledge, comparing key points with the main features of shrinkage in the case of Taranto. In Section 6, some final remarks are proposed, highlighting various unsolved problems that are dealt with in the concluding section as research challenges.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The importance of implementing measures for urban regeneration and of policy initiatives directed towards sustainable development in what have been defined as shrinking cities has already been highlighted for some time in the Green Paper on the Urban Environment (CEC, 1990). It should be noted, however, that until very recently, and in many European countries, much urban regeneration policy was often limited mostly to interventions focusing on areas and/or neighborhoods of a fairly limited dimension, while neglecting the great difficulty faced by wider expanses of urban area (Kazmierczak *et al.*, 2007, 2009). Indeed, a number of European cities in decline present large, distressed, urban areas which suffer from the social, economic and environmental implications which consistently afflict the wider urban fabric, characterized by poor institutional performance and administrative

capabilities. The significant physical size of such areas, the demographic pressure of their populations and the often significant role such populations play in the functioning of the urban fabric thus contribute towards an increasingly complex set of problems (Kazmierczak *et al.*, 2007, 2009).

In the absence of a unified vision extended within the broader context of study, actions have, in some cases, been strictly aimed at the recovery of single urban areas which have had negative repercussions on other spatial contexts, thus triggering concatenate processes with uncertain and unpredictable outcomes (Elkin & Cooper, 1993). The phenomena of migration, housing policy, social inclusion policy and their image as conveyed by awareness campaigns can certainly help to regenerate deprived urban areas (Conway & Konvitz, 2000), yet in the absence of a broader vision, they may also contribute towards greater depression.

In order to cope, therefore, with the unpredictability of outcomes, it is necessary to adopt flexible and forward-looking strategies, sustained by concrete decision-making processes, institutional competence and consistent determination, alongside a methodological rigour in terms of analysis (Kazmierczak *et al.*, 2009). A number of authors argue that planners and public officials, entrusted with the responsibility for defining sustainable urban regeneration policies, do not always put all the necessary skills into practice (Egan, 2004; Kazmierczak *et al.*, 2007, 2009) and, furthermore, often lack the necessary resources to cope with such complex tasks. Other authors highlight the differences between the aims of urban renewal programs and the problems they aim to solve (Skifter Anderson, 2001, 2002), stressing that even in successful cases, more frequent and longer-term effort is required in order to achieve desired outcomes. The inability to focus on the real problems of shrinking cities has already been highlighted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1998), arguing that traditional policies have failed to halt the downward spiral that affects distressed urban areas, due to the complex nature of the problem not being satisfactorily addressed. Recognition of the problems leading to the decline of cities is, therefore, a fundamental condition for the effective implementation of regeneration processes. It is therefore necessary to investigate more fully the knowledge gaps identified through previous experiences, gaps arising from both the uniqueness, as well as the complexity, of the phenomenon, in order to identify why a lack of information, an inability to forecast and the absence or inappropriate use of widespread knowledge have had a negative influence on the efficiency and the effectiveness of policies (Amendola, 2000; Borri, 2000).

In the broader context of regeneration programs that are struggling to take hold and which present often frustrating results in comparison with initial expectations, success stories do also exist. In such cases, cities and their governing authorities often experience a different or, perhaps, renewed role on the wider international scene in terms of social relations and the organization of urban planning. Such cases serve as centres of consumption—thus acquiring prestige, status and cultural relevance, attracting visitors and becoming competitive as potential and attractive sites for multinationals, prestigious public offices or other forms of public and private investment (Le Galès, 2002). Such a process sees European cities directly competing for increasingly limited resources and thus relying on their ability to mobilize extra-economic resources, such as shared culture, a range of different social networks and communities of cooperation (Amin & Graham, 1999; Veltz, 2001).

In this context—even with the commitment of significant resources in the long term—there are, for example, a number of factors which have contributed to the successful regeneration policies of many of the regional capitals of the UK, including Manchester, Birmingham, LeEds and Glasgow. Such success has been characterized by issues, such as (Stewart, 2005):

- Processes of industrial conversion that have allowed communication industries to localize where factories were once located.
- New employment opportunities in science, research and development, advanced design and physical regeneration of formerly inaccessible central areas.
- The combination of features integrating commercial, dining and recreation activities with quality residential accommodation.
- Labour costs and housing units far below London prices.
- The efficiency of transportation links and the absence of urban congestion.
- The high quality of living in urban spaces close to great natural parks.

The positive results of the numerous actions taken are justified in the context of strategies that have been able to effectively focus on a range of problems from the outset of the regeneration process. Strategies have implemented scheduled programs in a balanced and incremental manner, carefully managing the risks associated with attracting new business and new investment. Such strategies are conceived through partnerships as a “modus operandi” for regeneration, demonstrating this course of action as able to effect significant acceleration in the process of change as well as a reliance on strong leadership within the public sector, given a key role in ensuring synergy between differing intervention programs. Such strategies were also able to focus public investment as a catalyst for new private investment, thus finally locating the regeneration process not only in physical, yet also in social terms, involving living communities, building a sense of belonging and affection for urban places (Tsenkova, 2000).

### **3. The Case of Taranto: A De-industrialized Shrinking City**

Many, but by no means all, European cities (Oswalt & Rieniets, 2006) are currently witnessing declining populations (Pumain, 1999), which may often be accompanied by a decrease in fertility indices (Sleeboos, 2003) for complex and interrelated reasons. Such demographic changes have a direct and significant impact on urban shrinkage. As already noted by Wiechmann (2009), three major aspects are fundamental in population changes in shrinking cities: total evolution, migration and aging.

Population loss may be caused by a decline in natural population development and/or outward migration flows that in turn may result in a higher proportion of the elderly.

Migration, as widely investigated by demographers, may be due to a range of causes. Principally, however, the search for employment and alternative training methods appears to have a greater impact on long-distance migration over others (European Commission, 2006). This is further connected to the desire for an improved standard of living (a better living environment in terms of urban quality, healthcare, social and economic factors). The impact of demographic changes (population decline, increase in the average age, decrease in the size of housing, suburbanization, etc.) on the evolution of cities has been analysed by numerous scholars across a range of disciplines (geography,

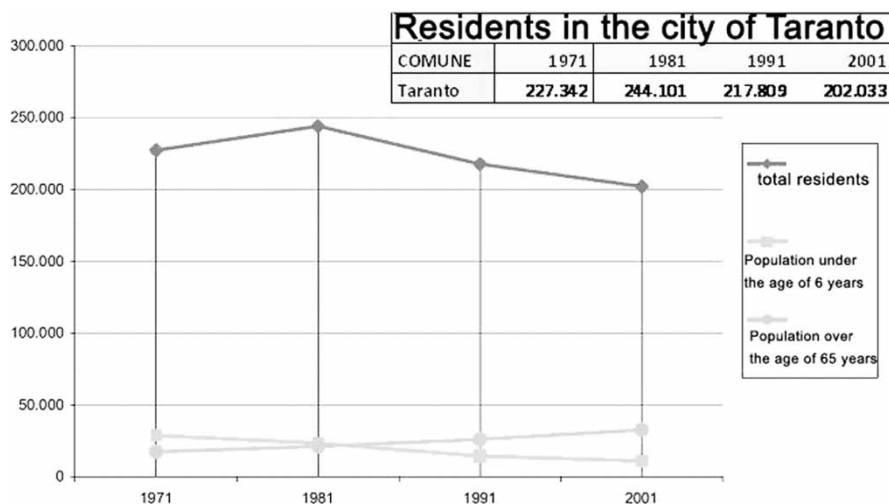
demography and sociology, urban planning) and has been the subject of studies and surveys by international institutions (Johansson & Rauhut, 2002; Milivoja Sircelj, 2002; Sleebos, 2003). The cause-effect relationship between population dynamics and the evolution of cities is bidirectional and presents a range of complex outputs, creating significant difficulty in the identification of what may either be a cause or an effect. In the case of the city of Taranto, possible causes and effects are closely linked, with the concept of the evolution of the city necessarily taking into account the role of the environment and its relative quality, as argued below.

In this section, we therefore seek to outline the major demographic, economic, social, housing and environmental trends revealed on a municipal level, highlighting possible relations with the dynamics of urban evolution, as detailed in later sections, by analysing the effects of urban regeneration policies already in place in the city of Taranto.

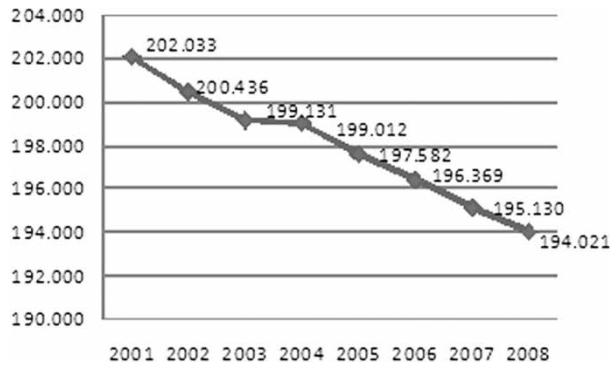
### 3.1 *The Main Demographic Dynamics*

The most recently available census data (in Italy the populations and habitations census is realized by the National Statistics Institute every 10 years and is consultable for the last two decades on the following website: [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)), highlights, as shown in Figure 1, the industrialization program beginning in the city during the 1950s and 1960s and, later, the crisis experienced by larger companies, resulting in de-industrialization and demographic decline.

The same negative trend is observed 8 years after the carrying out of the last census (Figure 2). Part of this decrease is accounted for by neighbouring municipalities such as Grottaglie and Leporano (both showing a growing population of between 2.5% and



**Figure 1.** Population of the city of Taranto over the last four decades up to 2001. It should be noted that the decrease in population between 1991 and 2001, amounting to—16,056 inhabitants, is less extensive than may appear from census data as in 1993, the new town of Statte (14,585 inhabitants) was removed from the municipal territory in Taranto. The more accurate figure for the city of Taranto should thus be adjusted to—1471 inhabitants.



**Figure 2.** Population of the city of Taranto from most recently available census data 2001 to 2008 (data processed by the municipal registry office).

7.5% between the 1991 and 2001 censuses), emphasizing the phenomenon of suburbanization.

After briefly analysing the evolution of the total population, consistent with the premise as outlined above, it is necessary to examine the dynamics of migration and the age of residents.

The negative balance of migration is consistent with the trend highlighting the increasingly negative population figures as reported previously. Such migratory movement (Figure 3) is not compensated by a positive natural balance but, on the contrary, also reports a negative trend, as shown in Figure 4.

The reduction in population represented by the figure above is particularly relevant for those aged between 25 and 34 ( $-9.97\%$  in 2002), principally leaving in search of university places and jobs.

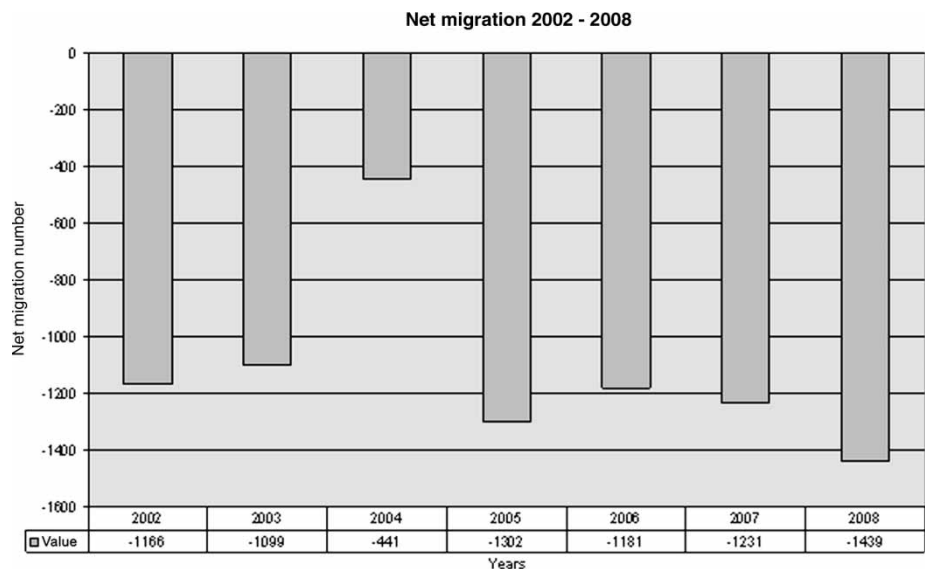
While the index of fertility decreases significantly (Figure 5), birth rates remain relatively high and relatively constant. The continuous and consistently high birth rate in recent years shows the decline of the population to be largely dependent on high emigration which, as noted above, principally concerns the pool of younger workers (25–34 years) and those creating new families.

### 3.2 The Main Labour Market Indicators

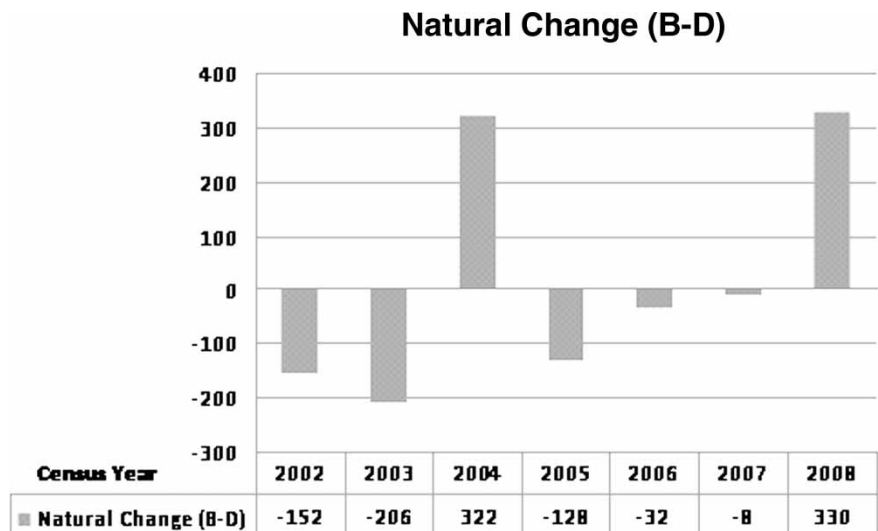
Globalization and the subsequent de-industrialization of European economies are major causes of urban shrinkage (Oswalt & Rieniets, 2006; Audirac, 2010; Cunningham-Sabot & Fol, 2010; Martinez-Fernandez, 2010).

The relationship between the cycles of the capitalist economy, the life cycles of the city and the effects of globalization on cities and urban regions has been the subject of much study, by authors such as Sassen (2001).

Regarding the choice of indicators used to describe these phenomena, there is still much debate in the literature (Harding *et al.*, 2006; Schetke & Haase, 2008; Schwarz *et al.*, 2010). In the present work, those most readily available for the city of Taranto have been chosen, able to adequately describe the phenomenon of shrinkage.

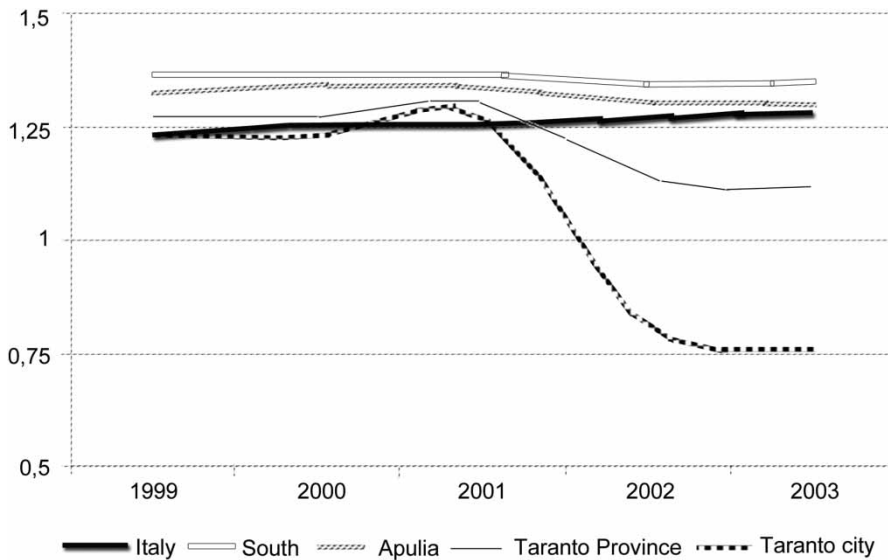


**Figure 3.** Net migration of the Municipality of Taranto, between 2002 and 2008. The graph clearly shows net migration of the Municipality of Taranto in the last 7 years to be consistently negative and that, on average, around 1123 inhabitants per year (arithmetic average) emigrated from the municipality (Elaboration on ISTAT data).



**Figure 4.** The natural balance (Live births—deaths) in the Municipality of Taranto, between 2002 and 2008 is consistently negative with the exception of the years 2004 and 2008. Nevertheless, in these 2 years, the natural balance is significantly below the social balance as previously shown—an average of 1123 inhabitants per year. Therefore, the overall balance remains negative (Elaboration on ISTAT data).





**Figure 5.** Index of female fertility in Italy, in the south of Italy, in Apulia, in the Province of Taranto and in the city of Taranto. Between 1999 and 2003, the fertility rate in the city of Taranto reduced from around 1.25 to around 0.75 (0.5 points below the national average), whilst on a provincial and national level the reduction was much less significant.

Data regarding the workforce are only available at a provincial level; in this context the city of Taranto expresses a clear dominance. From Table 1, it is clear that principal job market indicators for the Taranto Province are coherent with those of Apulia in general, an EU Objective 1 Region, as with the other regions in the south of Italy. The only data that are unambiguous according to a national and regional average is the unemployment rate, in the case of Taranto Province 4% higher (18% with respect to 14.7% for the Apulia region as a whole).

It is clear from Table 2 that the data for the city of Taranto show a slightly more worrying trend compared to the others in terms of the percentage levels of employed and

**Table 1.** Number of employed and unemployed in the province of Taranto, for every thousand people—Census 2001

Labour market indexes	Taranto Province	Apuli	Italy
a. Workforce	206	1449	23,781
b. Employed	169	1236	21,514
c. Searching for a job	37	213	2267
d. No workforce	273	1920	25,303
e. Present population	479	3369	49,084
Activity index (a/e)	43.0	43.0	48.4
Employment Rate (b/e)	35.3	36.7	43.8
Unemployment Rate (c/e)	18.0	14.7	9.5

Source: [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it).

unemployed in the city. Indeed, the percentage of those employed in the city of Taranto is 78% as compared with 80% in the Province and the Region. Moreover, the total percentage of those in search of employment in the city of Taranto is 22%, as compared with 20% in the Province and the Region. In the last three censuses, the rate of unemployment for the city of Taranto (consistently greater than 20% over the last 20 years) shows a swinging trend (see Figure 6) and it may be assumed that the most recent decade value is even greater due to the general international economic crisis and its effects in Italy.

As can be seen from Table 3, in the city of Taranto, as in other European cities, the service sector accounts for the largest number of those employed, although traditional industry still employs 25% of total employees.

As mentioned above, the largest steel plant in Europe is located in Taranto and still employs around 13,346 people (see Figure 7), accounting for almost 100% of employment within the manufacturing sector in the city (equal to 13,767 as shown in Table 3). The plant was founded during the 1960s as a state-owned company, under the name “Italsider” in line with fashionable economic and industrial theories of the day regarding large industrial poles. In 1995, after a long crisis in terms of both turnover and employment, the company was sold to the Riva group, a major Italian industrial group which operates in the steel industry ([www.rivagroup.com/](http://www.rivagroup.com/)).

Alongside the 13,346 workers directly employed by the iron and steel industry in the city, another 3136 associated industry experts work in some support capacity, as may be noted from the 2005 corporate report.

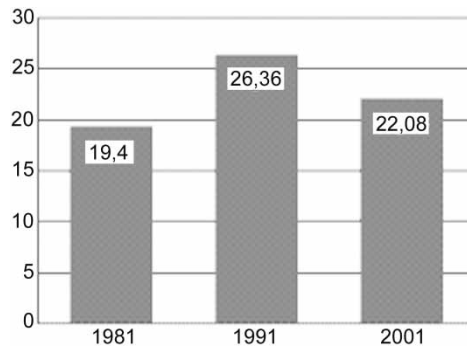
As Figure 8 highlights, employees in the iron and steel industry are still today predominantly located within younger age groups (21–30 years) with only 23% exceeding 40 years of age. The steel industry is still, therefore, of fundamental importance to the local labour market of the city of Taranto and its neighbouring municipalities, a plant which would seem extremely difficult to decommission given the long period of economic crisis engulfing western countries.

**Table 2.** Resident population making up the labour force in the city, in the province of Taranto and in Apulia Region—2001 Census

Province	Labor force					
	Employed	In search of employment				Total labour force
		In search of the first job	unemployed	Other persons in search for a job	Total number of persons in search for a job	
Province of Taranto	164,152	16,804	17,386	7921	42,111	206,263
<i>City of Taranto</i>	<i>55,174</i>	<i>7096</i>	<i>5392</i>	<i>3144</i>	<i>15,632</i>	<i>70,806</i>
<b>Apulia Region</b>	<b>1,170,913</b>	<b>111,279</b>	<b>129,398</b>	<b>53,205</b>	<b>293,882</b>	<b>1,464,795</b>

*Notes:* The bold values are those of Apulia Region, the most relevant term of comparison, the italic values are those of the city of Taranto that is the focus of the paper.

*Source:* [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)



**Figure 6.** Unemployed rate in the city of Taranto 1981–1991–2001 (ISTAT).

### 3.3 Economic and Environment Indicators

Taranto could be described as an economic mono-structural region, whose main characteristic is the long-term (structural) decline in demand and the resulting crisis, which may spill over to other firms, industries or economic sectors (Cunningham-Sabot & Fol, 2010).

In the case of Taranto there are also other economic sectors with a significant impact on employment and income-generation (sea-based activities such as fishing, trade and military activities).

Deindustrialization is primarily manifested through changes in the economic sectors of the city due to the transformation of the role of the city away from traditional manufacturing (Fordist to post-Fordist). Yet, in the case of Taranto, declining industries occupy a large territorial space (as shown in Figure 7) and employ a significant number of workers (currently around 13,000), thus presenting a bleak outlook for the city should such industries decline and ultimately cease operation.

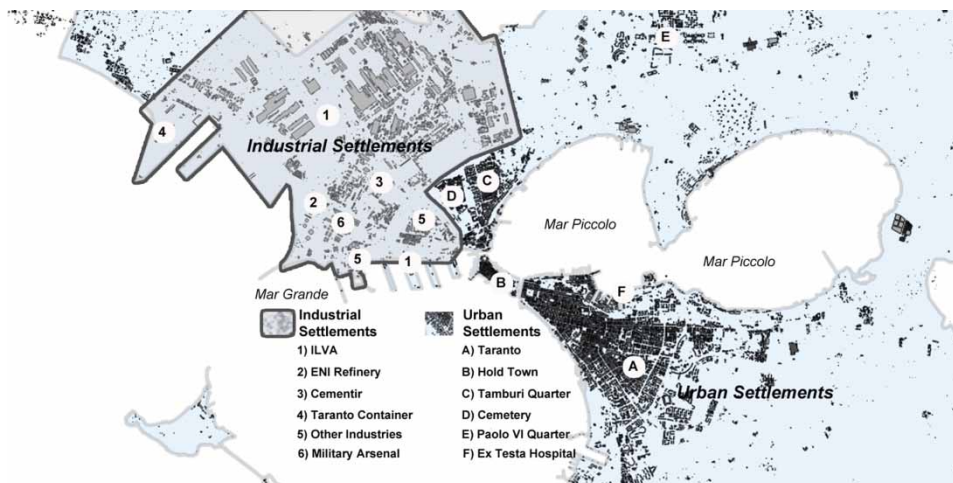
Processes of deindustrialization may be stimulated or overlapped by the effects of globalization. Indeed, the same industries are flourishing in countries with low labour costs.

Many authors have noted that single-event natural disasters such as major floods, earthquakes and volcanoes can cause sudden and catastrophic decline in particular cities.

**Table 3.** Employment by economic sector and territories. Absolute values (thousands) and percentages—Census 2001

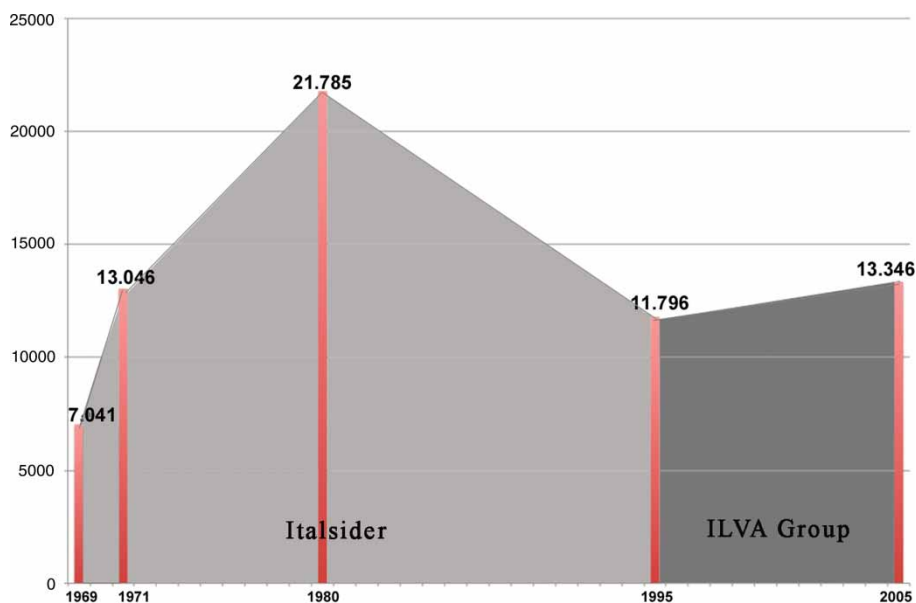
Municipalities	Economic activities			
	Agriculture	Industry	Other activities	Total
Taranto Municipality	1567	13,767	39,840	55,174
Taranto Province	22,390	46,563	95,199	164,152
Apulia Region	140,486	336,530	693,897	1,170,913
Italy	1,153,678	7,028,981	12,811,073	20,993,732

Source: [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it). The 25% of employees works in industry in the city of Taranto and the 28% in the Province and in the Region.

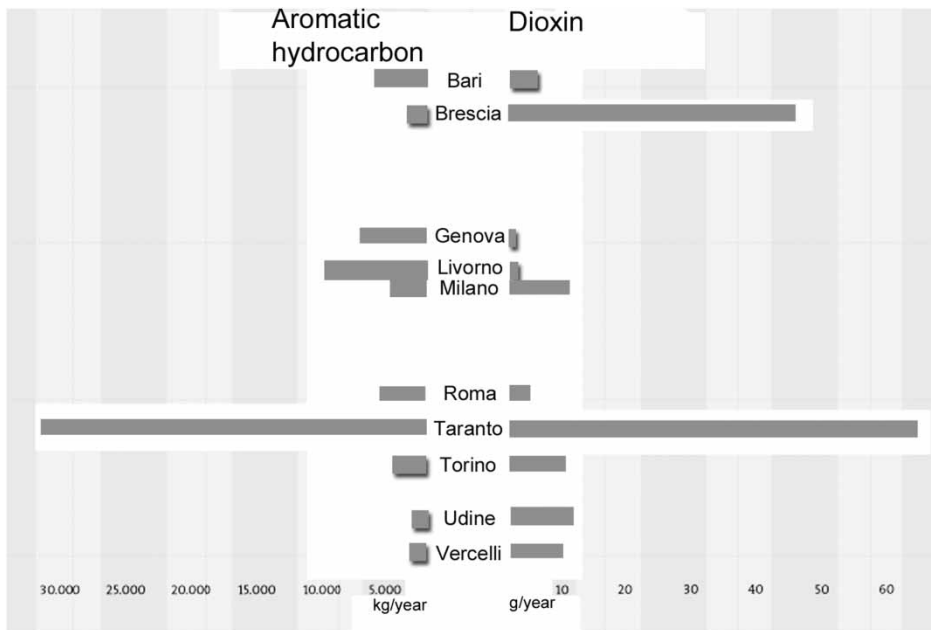


**Figure 7.** The area of the industrial site of the ILVA steel industry in the city of Taranto. It may be noted that the plant occupies an area almost double in size with respect to the area of the entire city.

In the case of Taranto, environmental issues represent a significant problem in long-term trajectories as they are not the result of a single catastrophic event but are strictly related to the general economic picture and thus cannot be solved separately without taking into account both factors (industry causes pollution and contamination which could cause also suburbanization).



**Figure 8.** Occupational trend of the ILVA-Italsider plant from 1969 to 2006 (Pirro & Guarini, 2008).



**Figure 9.** Pollutants (hydrocarbons, dioxins and furans) from some of the 30 Italian provinces. Notice how Taranto far exceeds all Italian provinces.

*Source:* National Inventory of Greenhouse ISPRA, 2005.

Environmental pollution in the city of Taranto is above the levels found throughout the rest of Italy, and possibly Europe, as can be seen in Figure 9.

High pollution is probably one of the most impacting factors, along with labour shortage, causing the emigration of people of working age.

Perhaps the causes of ecological disturbances can occur in relatively short- to medium-term periods, while their consequences have a medium- to long-term character. Thus, the ecological component will play a major role for future tasks and responsibilities in shrinking cities.

#### 4. Policymaking vs. Shrinkage: A Synthetic Account at Different Government Levels in Taranto

Many planning and regeneration policy initiatives have, over time, been carried out at a national, regional, provincial and urban level in Taranto, the majority of them not explicitly linked to the shrinkage problems of the area. The following section briefly outlines the most significant characteristics of such initiatives.

The initiative of the national government has been substantially inconsistent and fragmented in terms of facing up to the problems of deindustrialization in Taranto, despite its historically crucial role in the industrialization process (Borri & Camarda, 1990). In particular, after the privatization of the steel plants, a plan for the environmental regeneration of the Taranto urban and provincial area was drawn up in 1998, backed by both public (20%) and private (80%) funds. Action strategies totalling more than €130 m were scheduled, in particular aimed at regenerating degraded and/or decommissioned industrial/urban

areas, as well as at reducing pollution and managing waste disposal. Expected results showed a medium-term improvement in general environmental quality, but complications related to public financing and leveraging private funds have thus far seen plans remaining largely unimplemented. The responsibility for implementing plans was passed on to the regional administrative board in 2000, thus basically removing the planning and/or proactive role of the national state from the regeneration process of Taranto. Today, governments act generally in terms of moral persuasion, mostly oriented towards preserving the daily activity of the steel plant (centre-right governments upholding private ownership, centre-left governments upholding the power of worker unions), consequently showing little interest for long-term environmental, economic, social or health benefits. Should such plans be fully implemented, the positive effects on local environmental conditions would in turn improve the social and economic conditions and attractiveness of the area, thus combating shrinkage trends (Haase, 2008).

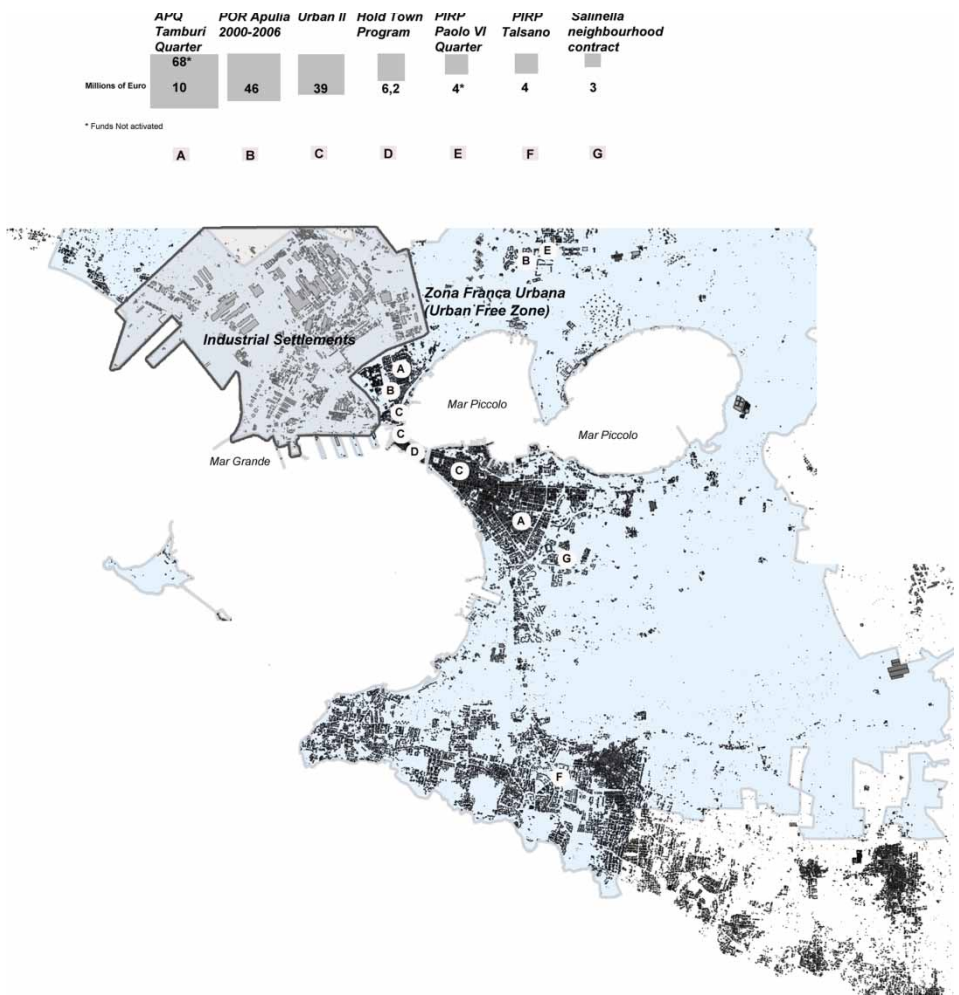
Regional policy-making and planning was defined in law in 1970, yet the Apulia regional government had neither the financial resources nor enough specialized personnel to assert its administrative role for long. Even specific planning laws were not passed until 1980, with little focus on specific areas or particular themes—such as the environment (Camarda, 1999). In 1996, the regional government acquired greater environmental competence, but remained reactive, rather than preventive or proactive. The “Landscape and Environmental Plan” (PUTT/PBA), brought into force in 2000, was born from a 10-year period of analysis but proved to be already outdated once enforced. The plan is fundamentally reticent towards the problems of deindustrialization faced by Taranto and underestimates the actual feasibility of various environmental norms, raising conflict with local communities and remaining largely unimplemented. The identification of policies useful in tackling the dramatic phenomenon of suburbanization in the Taranto area boosted by the urban decay remained as important as ever. The Apulia region has since demonstrated a much greater level of competence in terms of respecting environmental parameters, emissions, pollution and leakages, yet has failed to show structural understanding of problems such as that of urban shrinkage which has affected Taranto to a far greater degree than other areas. Significant actions have followed the implementation of the new planning law of 2001, which gives importance to the singling out of territorial structures (i.e. environmental peculiarities, urban neighbourhoods, cultural heritage, etc.) as catalysts for development. Such law is potentially vital for Taranto, in terms of its need to rethink and to regenerate its territorial structure, thus tackling urban shrinkage. At the same time, the regional government has issued updated financing norms for new housing which, while eco-compatible, are, however, aimed at the regeneration of the periphery, often preferring such strategy to the regeneration of inner-city areas. In the case of Taranto, this involves the consolidation of suburbanization and, therefore, the loss of urban population. Structural policies at the crossroads of the socio-economic and environmental milieu remain largely undeveloped by the regional administration, while being increasingly relevant in terms of the growing entanglement of real-life domains. These policies have been announced as being, at least minimally, part of a forthcoming regional plan which has still to be presented. Taranto suffers particularly from such a situation, needing to rely on the entrepreneurial sector, in order to kick-start long-term social and economic change and, hopefully, respond to shrinkage trends (Schwarz *et al.*, 2010).

The provincial level of government, located between regional and municipal contexts, demonstrates a low level of active intervention, despite the strategic prerogative that such

administrative levels have traditionally shown in other European industrial areas (Wannop, 1995; Cullingworth & Nadin, 2006; Healey, 2009). Undoubtedly, one reason for its ineffectiveness is explained by its short (dating from 1990) existence as an autonomous administrative board. Yet the provincial plan, a fundamental tool in territorial planning and management, in place for some time in other Apulian provinces, has not yet been implemented in Taranto. This is wholly unacceptable given the heavy, pervasive and pressing phenomena of socio-economic and environmental degradation from which the area suffers, particularly in terms of the performance of the metropolitan area, due to its internal flows and synergies remaining fragmented, episodic and generally lacking in strategic infrastructure initiatives. Territorial organization tends towards weakness from the viewpoint of urban and inter-urban functions (low system performance), economic linkages (low district performances) and environmental connectivity (low ecologic resource performance). The only concrete provincial connective fabric is represented by a pervasive housing sprawl, of which the outlying areas take advantage in terms of the establishment of new developments due to the loss of attractiveness of the city of Taranto itself. This represents, however, a further suburbanization and lack of infrastructure for areas connected to Taranto physically but not functionally. The lack of provincial planning and policymaking has therefore generated large diseconomies and malfunctions, which continuously feed into the shrinkage trends observed.

The level of urban regeneration and planning is coherent with the fragmentation and the lack of incisiveness on national and regional levels. After the industrial crisis of the 1970s and the associated paralysis in planning, a strategic, structural and shared vision in terms of transforming the territory never took place. Reasoning in urban planning seems to evoke catastrophic scenarios, with even formal definitions seeming to tie into this concept, with titles such as “Program of Integrated Intervention”, “Program of Urban Recovery”, “Program of Urban Regeneration”, “Program of Urban Rehabilitation”, “Program of Urban Regeneration and Sustainable Territorial Development”, “Program of Communitarian Initiative”, “Neighbourhood Contract”, “Program Contract”, “Territorial Pact” or “Integrated Program of Periphery Regeneration”. Recent and more comprehensive planning efforts date back as far as the 1980s, with the sectorial plans of re-industrialization and pollution reduction. Local political rhetoric remains disaffected in terms of planning, particularly due to the Taranto Master Plan of 1978 (still in force) which, it is claimed, discouraged small entrepreneurship and did little in terms of the physical environment and quality of living. This may well be true in terms of the environment and quality of living, given the increasing loss of residents reaching –20% over the last decade. Yet local entrepreneurship is not disadvantaged in any way, with companies made up mainly of construction firms (70%), which have benefited through the Master Plan in terms of building a city fit for 360,000 inhabitants with the actual population of Taranto barely accounting for 210,000. Indeed, such building has witnessed a flow of concrete challenged only, perhaps, by the perverse actions of the powerful housing and land-owners lobbies in the attempt to raise housing and real estate rents (Kauko & D’amato, 2008; Brueckner & Helsley, 2010). Nevertheless, the construction of new housing under the demagogical rhetoric of revitalization and regeneration remains frequent. The Salinella neighbourhood contract (€3 m), the Urban II program (€39 m), the Tamburi program agreement (€68 m), the Paolo VI program (€4 m), the Talsano program (€4 m) and Inner City Interventions (€6 m) are all autonomous programs with different urban objectives which are potentially useful (Perrone, 2009). However,

as has traditionally occurred in other European contexts, they result as being confined, uncoordinated and partial with reference to their sectors of activity and lacking objectives and regional strategies in terms of territorial organization. Although financially huge, their contribution towards the dramatic needs of socio-economic development in the city, of opposing shrinkage and environmental collapse is therefore unknown. Their contribution is defined as unknown given that any strategies of socio-economic and environmental development of the area are, in themselves, unknown, as are the time schedules associated with such strategies and management models of synergetic implementation. Nevertheless, many programs are currently ongoing (see Figure 10), at times with innovative management tools, such as the STU (a type of Development Corporation, is the Italian acronym of “Società di Trasformazione Urbana”, that could be translated as “Urban Transformation Company”) for the regeneration program of the Urban II area of Porta Napoli, or



**Figure 10.** Localization of the most significant urban regeneration process promoted by the city of Taranto. Note funding levels in circles (Millions of Euros).



the ZFU (a type of Enterprise Zone, is the Italian acronym of “Zona Franca Urbana” that could be translated as “Urban Free Zone”) in the Tamburi neighbourhood.

Such cases clearly demonstrate the paradox of the absence of a comprehensive structural plan, in that it is possible to leave aside the fierce (environmental, social, economic, infrastructural) frictions at the borderline of areas pertaining to different programs (such as the problematic industrial area), thus disregarding well-known international lessons (Healey, 2009).

It is possible to locate a strategic plan proposal (2000), drawn up by Price Waterhouse & Coopers, somehow anticipating the new planning law approach dating from 2001. Yet this plan too shows itself to be a schematic program of proposals and suggestions lacking fundamental aspects of management and the implementation potential which characterize solid strategies. However, the reference to the structural characteristics of the local territory represents an interesting feature, able to rebuild a coherent, realistic and shared significance in an area which has, for some time, lacked a sense of community. Policies to re-equilibrate and reorganize the Taranto area, effectively opposing shrinkage trends, need initial actions to re-compact the local community, not only physically but also socially (Healey, 1997). This is perhaps the most significant characteristic of Taranto in terms of regeneration policies and urban planning strategies, introduced by the regional planning law as a new model of a Master Plan. Only a new master plan, which is able to give value to territorial structures, can counterbalance the long-term trends induced by the dissipative plan of 1978 and reverse the shrinkage currently affecting the whole area.

## **5. Theoretical Knowledge vs. Main Features of Shrinkage**

In this section, theoretical knowledge is evaluated comparing main theoretical thrusts with the salient features of shrinkage exemplified by the case of Taranto, attempting to contribute to a better understanding of the questions addressed.

For most OECD countries, as already noted by Martinez-Fernandez (2010), the transformation of industrial production into the knowledge economy has developed new industries, new business, and new forms of knowledge production and innovative activity.

While the most prosperous cities reap the benefits of globalization and the attraction of talents into a dynamic labour force, shrinking cities experience precisely the opposite—the negative effects of the internationalization of markets, the migration of production and the labour force, a weakened innovation system, and the loss of vitality in terms of city life. This is true to an even greater extent for mono industrial cities such as Taranto, where industrial decline has coincided with demographic and social decline as shown above.

The clearest demographic symptom of the shrinkage has been, in the case of Taranto, the exodus of young workers (25–34 years) and those in the process of creating families. The same has been noted in the case of Sudbury and other mining communities in Canada (Leadbeater, 2009) and in others cases in Australia (Martinez-Fernandez, 2010) and Germany (Wiechmann, 2009).

In the case of Taranto, the phenomenon of population shrinkage is not only tied directly to generalized employment conditions or to the capacity of trans-national corporations to externalize their social costs (such as those resulting from productivity changes) at the expense of host communities and labour, but also to the environmental conditions of the entire territory, characterized by a high level of air and water pollution (hydrocarbons, dioxins and furans, as described).

This high level of pollution is a genuine threat to young couples, hoping to identify the best place to bring up children and establish families. There is a lack of any social research able to identify and describe the real impact of pollution on family choices. It seems reasonable, however, that local news from 2010 reporting four hundred sheep to have died due to the significantly high levels of dioxins in their blood be enough to discourage people from settling down in the area.

Furthermore, in the case of Taranto, pollution reduces the historically high potential level of attractiveness of an ancient Greek city on the sea, with an important port and a range of cultural activities, especially in terms of archaeology and history.

Having seen environmentalists focusing on the dramatic and concrete consequences of pollution, in particular the extremely high level of cancer cases in the area, public opinion in Italy has come to regard the area of the Taranto Province (the effects of pollution caused by the ILVA iron industry spread over an area of around 30 km in radius), as one of the most highly polluted of Italy. Such effects of pollution and the consequent perception of the quality of living by the population are always more decisive and apparent than in cases of environmental change in cities due to, for instance, global temperature data, the regression of glaciers, and the disappearance of certain species from their natural habitats, as discussed for example by Mulligan (2009).

Traditional tourist patterns in the region have shown a lack of interest by foreign travelers, with the province remaining only a regional tourist destination, despite the relative potential of the area with its cultural and environmental riches in a highly engaging territorial context. Such considerations, of fundamental importance for regeneration policies in the city of Taranto, in turn diversifying economic activity, remain blocked by the consequences of steel industry production, with that same industry remaining the largest potential employer for young people in the area.

As already described, strategies applied in urban regeneration projects are mainly physical in character. There remains at present no possible trigger for the social and economic processes which could alter those dynamics.

While it is clear that urban restructuring and the building of new public spaces is an activity of primary importance (Selicato & Rotondo, 2010), it is not enough to respond to such a complex phenomenon with such a multiple of dimensions (Selicato & Rotondo, 2010).

Only the Urban Free Zone initiative provides tax incentives for private projects of small-scale productive activities which, in any case, do not at present provide any particularly positive results due to the withdrawal of support by the Italian Government on financial grounds.

In this context, Taranto has experimented with a significant number of neighbourhood regeneration processes, as described in chapter 3, attempting to mobilize local decision-makers and networks for the building of new coalitions to regenerate significant portions of the city, assuming that pro-active governance demands strategic capacity, which can co-ordinate development activities, coherent with a number of urban studies and the literature of the past decade, promoting multi-level versus hierarchical government systems (Thornley *et al.*, 2003; Healey, 2006). This attempt, still in progress, is difficult to assess in terms of effective results due to the lack of evaluation and analysis. Nevertheless, a cursory examination of the implemented actions, the majority of which remain incomplete, gives a reasonably accurate general idea of their effectiveness. During such processes, rules and regulations are often dismissed as being the inheritance of outdated attempts at controlled territorial development (Albrechts, 2001), attempts which have

not been superseded by updated general strategies, thus achieving relatively little through their new forms of institutional planning frameworks.

## **6. Final Remarks**

It is possible, in the case of the city of Taranto, to analyse various causes of shrinkage, their relationship and some results of the implementation of regeneration strategies in the context of a weak public state with poor organizational structure.

In the particular case of a city of around two hundred thousand people, three distinct causes of shrinkage may be identified as coexisting: de-industrialization, sub-urbanization and environmental pollution. Regeneration strategies need, therefore, to respond to a range of questions, with the ultimate aim of responding to such shrinkage.

This new challenge for planning cultures requires, in turn, the use of new tools such as local taxation, the regeneration of existing neighbourhoods rather than the creation of new ones, along with strong public coordination through structured collaborative planning. As Healey notes:

The collapse of the global capitalist financial system from 2007 and its consequences for economic activity and public sector finance have brought the importance of structuring systems back into the forefront of attention. The crisis has underlined the role of government regulations and practices in reducing the risks and uncertainty which undermine market activity. (Healey, 2010, p. 230)

The case of Taranto should motivate planners to reflect on the goals of policies and programmes in cities where the public sphere has often shown its weaknesses (on 18 October 2006, the city of Taranto declared bankruptcy and after a period of 1 year a special state law identified the funding necessary in order to repay the debts).

In particular, experts must identify whether there exists an integrated approach towards local economic development, skills development, and job creation strategies and programs in areas of shrinkage, such as Taranto.

This requires matching collaborative approaches with structured and clear levels of government in order to meet the large-scale challenge of environmental pollution which often threatens, or at least complicates, the successful implementation of actions.

In the literature on urban regeneration, it is already well documented that physical interventions are not enough to regenerate cities or their neighbourhoods (Roberts & Sykes, 2000; Hull, 2001; Verhage, 2005; Couch *et al.*, 2008; Rotondo, 2010; Stouten, 2010; Tallon, 2010).

One possible explanation is, conceivably, that approaches to urban regeneration, frequently implemented in Italy, as well as in other European countries, have often attempted to tackle physical deterioration, carrying out traditional planning models for development, as has been the case in the city of Taranto, attempting to favour new growth, building new structures for public utilities and services.

The difference however, in the opinion on the present authors, between a shrinking city with degraded neighbourhoods and a degraded neighbourhood in a growing or, at least, stable city, is that in the first case vacant houses, abandoned industry and brown field sites are present.

Thus, in the case of shrinkage, it seems more appropriate to regenerate the existing city, promoting social cohesion and new local enterprise. The city thus requires action from the

“inside”. Physical interventions must be based on the principle of demolishing vacant buildings and reconstruction if necessary. This must be seen alongside economic interventions such as tax breaks for enterprises and higher levels of income tax in an attempt to revitalize the local economy. Such actions are necessary for the promotion of social cohesion and the sharing of visions, perspectives and decisions with the local community in a complex, time-consuming participation process, avoiding bottom-up policies, as so often desired by planners and politicians, accepting a range of different “ways of thinking” in a process of mutual learning.

Such actions are not to be implemented only in the context of the market but should, however, attempt to forge new links for enterprise and a rejuvenated labour market. Furthermore, creative management, not yet codified, is of central importance to such a process. In the field of housing, for example, it could be advantageous in promoting the qualitative renovation of buildings instead of simplistic and cheap maintenance renovation, due to the scarce public resources available.

Qualitative renovation, in our opinion, means a radical restructuring of the complete functioning of existing buildings, promoting, for example, interventions for zero emission building or low-energy buildings, coherent with the wide-scale innovation process already being seen today in the housing market.

Managing the role of properties and their owners is, while obvious, of central importance to the urban regeneration process in shrinking cities.

Such a role could, in the wider public interest, involve owners in the new use of their properties, searching for innovative and creative solutions, persuading them to ultimately abandon parasitic forms of rental earnings. Finally, and of equal importance in terms of the public interest, while avoiding large-scale gentrification processes, is to identify residential communities as a location for enjoying the results of urban regeneration, forcing new figures (in some cases essential for the success of the regeneration process) to generate collaboration within residential communities, thus stemming the emigration flow of lower-income residents to the peripheries.

In conclusion, it would appear that a radical change of paradigm in urban regeneration processes is necessary, abandoning the growth paradigm in search of methods capable of generating a positive “De-Growth”, in the tradition upheld for some time by Latouche (2010), in a new and creative process, involving figures of the market, in particular those of the housing market—so important in urban regeneration processes, as actors themselves in such a change.

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