

Shrinking Areas

Front-runners in Innovative Citizen Participation



Annegret Haase, Gert-Jan Hospers, Simone Pekelsma & Dieter Rink

European Urban
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Foreword



Photo: Mart Grisel

With few exceptions, cities and towns all across Europe currently face the effects of ageing and depopulation. In the future, the entire continent is expected to feel the impact of shrinkage on its towns, cities and regions.

In shrinking areas, the existing physical and social structure is under pressure. Houses are difficult to sell, schools need to close, services and amenities become too expensive to maintain. As a matter of fact, depopulation touches upon all aspects of daily life. To overcome the consequences of shrinkage joint action is needed. Local authorities need to cooperate with citizens to find ways to maintain the quality of life in their city or town.

This publication, which forms part of EUKN's 2012 Annual Conference, presents a thorough overview of the effects of shrinkage on European towns, cities and regions. It provides a scientific analysis of the phenomenon and the ways different layers of government could deal with it efficiently by using the potential of residents in the shrinking areas. Shrinking Areas, Front-runners in Innovative Citizen Participation gives inspiring examples of active citizens who have taken matters into their own hands and developed joint solutions for several shrinkage-related problems.

With this publication and our conference on 7 December 2012 in Essen, EUKN hopes to provide new insights for urban professionals to strengthen their policy approach and their practical work in relation to shrinkage. We hope to show that shrinkage does not necessarily have to be seen as a problem. It is indeed a challenge, and it is significantly different from the paradigm of growth that we have become used to in the past two decades. It is our hope that the examples analysed in this publication offer real opportunities for improvement and new developments.

Mart Grisel
Director of EUKN

Urban Shrinkage and the Need for Civic Engagement

Gert-Jan Hospers

The world's population is growing at great speed. Every day, the globe expands by more than 200,000 people; every minute about 150 babies are born.¹ In 2011, the world had 7 billion inhabitants, twice as many as in 1960. This population boom will continue, but it will be unequally divided across the globe. Already today, 90% of growth can be found in the third world. While the global population will rise in the coming decades, the EU is confronted with demographic shrinkage. The number of Europeans is stabilizing and will soon shrink. This population decline is caused by an excess of deaths over births. All European countries are ageing now, while the fertility rates in the EU are too low to sustain a stable population. Countries like Germany, Italy and Romania are at the forefront of this process. Are the Europeans too decadent to multiply themselves, as the American writer Laqueur ironically noted in his *The Last Days of Europe*?² Whatever the case may be, as a result of this demographic shrinkage Eurostat foresees that – without future inward migration – the EU will have lost 50 million of its inhabitants by around the year 2050.³

Against this background, this analysis focuses on the link between population losses and the local scale, i.e. the level of urban regions, cities and towns. After all, it is here that Europe's demographic shrinkage has been most obvious in recent years. Population decline is relevant not just for the well-known shrinking cities of Liverpool, Lille and Leipzig. Everywhere in the EU, regions, cities and towns, from old industrial areas and peripheral places to new towns and provincial capitals, are losing inhabitants. In this respect, Wiechmann and Pallagst refer to the Urban Audit of the EU (2007) which revealed that 57% of the cities and 54% of the urban regions in the EU had faced population losses in recent years.⁴ In Central and Eastern Europe shrinking cities are even regarded as the rule rather than the exception. What are the causes and the consequences of this development? How do local policy makers respond to it? What does population decline imply for urban governance? In this analysis we explore these questions and argue that urban shrinkage requires strategies in which citizens have to play an increasingly important role.

Causes and Types of Urban Shrinkage

The shrinkage of cities is not a new or unique phenomenon. In the past localities have always experienced population losses, for a multitude of reasons. Think of the Flemish city of Bruges where many residents left at the end of the fifteenth century. The canal to the North Sea silted up, Bruges' textile industry got into trouble and political problems arose. Due to this mix of natural, economic and political factors, the city lost its dominant position to Antwerp. Bruges shrank; Antwerp grew. Or compare the American settlements that attracted a lot of gold diggers in the Gold Rush of the nineteenth century – they are abandoned now as “ghost towns”. In their *Atlas of Shrinking Cities* Oswalt and Rienits identified no fewer than twenty one causes of shrinkage across the world.⁵ As a matter of fact, natural disasters, epidemics, water scarcity, mobility, demography, political transformation have all caused population decline in particular places in particular periods of time. In modern European literature urban shrinkage is often understood as a local manifestation of the interplay of one or more economic, spatial, demographic and political forces.⁶ The following macro-processes are seen as the main causes of urban shrinkage:

- **Economic transformation.** Economic progress and population growth are closely linked – and also the other way round. We can see this clearly in Europe’s old industrial cities, such as Duisburg, Charleroi and Taranto. Due to globalization and the rise of low-cost countries the traditionally strong manufacturing sector in these areas has got into trouble, notably since the 1970s. The process of de-industrialization is an on-going transformation process, involving company closures, job losses and social deprivation. The lack of economic opportunities has prompted well-educated youngsters to move out, on the look-out for employment elsewhere. This “brain drain” can induce severe urban shrinkage. Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow are cases in point: the industrial hotspots turned into “rust belts” with population losses of up to 50% within about seventy years. Some authors see economic transformation as the main cause of urban shrinkage. Oswalt, for example, defines shrinking areas loosely as “places where the losers of the so-called globalized economy live”.⁷



In the United States we can still find some “ghost towns” from the Gold Rush period

- **Shifts in urban structure.** Urban shrinkage can also be the result of spatial changes, at all relevant scale levels. On the European and national levels, for instance, economic activity is increasingly concentrated in large city regions, such as Greater London, the Øresund region and the Randstad. This centralization process is damaging ordinary cities in the rest of the country which miss out on investment and lose talents that go to “places to be”. This creates a “Matthew effect” (after Matthew 13:12): the rich become richer, whereas the poor become poorer.⁸ Within cities, however, people have increasingly moved to the suburbs from where they commute to work. Moreover, new commercial developments are often planned in greenfield sites outside urban centres. In some places, like Detroit, Oberhausen and Hengelo, urban sprawl has even led to neglect of the city centre and the emergence of “doughnut cities”. Note that this hollowing-out process does not necessarily mean that the city as a whole is shrinking. However, some neighbourhoods do shrink at the expense of other areas of the city. Shrinkage and growth usually go hand in hand.

- *The ageing of society.* With its ageing population Europe is literally becoming the “old” continent: in 2011, 17% of the population in the EU were aged over 64, whereas this was only 9% in 1960.⁹ Birth rates have fallen and people are living longer now. Within Europe, Germany and Italy have the “greyest” society. Some cities are really challenged by this demographic change, because of the lack of adults of working age to take care of the elderly who require more health services. Take the Italian cities of Venice and Genoa. Although Venice is a touristic honeypot site, the local population has shrunk dramatically over recent decades, leaving the elderly behind. Obviously, brain drain aggravates the greying of the tourist magnet, as the average age increases when young people leave. The same is true of the Italian port city of Genoa. Liguria, the region where it is located, is among the greyest areas in Europe: 20% of the inhabitants are over 74 years old. Between 1970 and 2009 Genoa lost 27.5% of its population.¹⁰ This is not only due to ageing, but also to deindustrialization and suburbanization. In reality, the causes of shrinkage are often interrelated.



*The ageing of society is clearly visible in the street, like here in Solingen
(photo: Peter Timmerman)*

- *Political transformation.* The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent opening up of Central and East European countries to the world market also induced a lot of urban shrinkage. The change in the political system from socialism to a market economy led to great transition problems and the exodus of young people to the west. The cases of Eastern German cities like Leipzig, Halle and Dresden, where all the aforementioned factors causing shrinkage came together, are well known. But Katowice (Poland), Ostrava (Czech Republic) and Timișoara (Romania) are also examples of post-socialist cities coping with depopulation. The membership of Central and East European countries of the EU resulted in a new wave of migration out. For example, when Poland joined the EU in 2004, many Polish people left their country to work in the UK.¹¹ They went to

regions where they could easily find work and that are located close to airports with low-cost carriers flying to Poland. In cities like Reading and Southampton thousands of Polish people now live and work. These cities are growing, but at the cost of the Polish regions the migrants come from.

The multi-causality of urban shrinkage is clearly reflected in a recent OECD definition: “A ‘shrinking city’ can be defined as an urban area – a city, part of a city, an entire metropolitan area or a town – that has experienced population loss, economic downturn, employment decline and social problems as symptoms of a structural crisis.”¹² It is important to note, however, that besides urban shrinkage rural shrinkage is also a topical issue. In many EU countries, population decline can be found in the countryside rather than in the city. In France, Italy and Spain, for example, many villages no longer have a shop, pub or post office, while more and more houses and public buildings are left derelict because the people have gone. Even in a small country like the Netherlands, 80% of the shrinking areas is located in a rural region.¹³ The main cause of this rural depopulation process is obvious: the exodus of young people to urban areas. This is a classic case of rural-urban migration on which the English statistician Ravenstein based his famous “laws of migration” which date back to 1885.¹⁴ Thus, rural settlements have built up a lot of experience in dealing with depopulation. Over the years, they have come up with original solutions to respond to shrinkage, such as multi-functional accommodation, e-health and local services that are run by citizens. Interestingly, shrinking cities can learn from their smaller counterparts in the countryside. Therefore, we will also refer to examples from a rural depopulation context when we believe that they offer inspiration for urban shrinkage policy.

Urban Shrinkage and Its Consequences

There are different causes of shrinkage, each producing a different type of shrinking city. However, in agreement with the EU Shrink Smart project we think that there is one clear indicator for urban shrinkage: population decline, in a structural sense.¹⁵ The loss of inhabitants typically sets shrinking cities apart from other urban areas. Usually, cities experience population growth, with planners trying to lead the process in particular directions. In some parts of the city neighbourhoods are renovated and expanded, while in other parts new infrastructure, housing projects and facilities are built. Urban shrinkage, however, is an arbitrary and uncontrolled process that is hard to manage.¹⁶ After all, moving out from a neighbourhood, deciding not to have children and dying are individual events – they are not collective processes that local government can plan for. Owing to urban shrinkage more and more gaps emerge in the physical environment, scattered all over the place. This transforms a “compact” city or neighbourhood into a “perforated” area (see Figure 1).¹⁷ The overall picture of the city is still visible, but it is clear that there are pieces of the puzzle missing. In a growth situation, planners can add a neighbourhood to the urban structure in one go, but this is impossible in a shrinking environment. The process of shrinkage happens at random – it is a trajectory with its own logic.

Shrinkage: A Process of Cumulative Causation

Urban shrinkage is an example of what the Swedish economist and Nobel Prize winner Gunnar Myrdal in 1957 termed “cumulative causation”.¹⁸ He argued that once a negative development in an area has started, it is reinforced and thus leads to cumulative effects that make the situation even worse. For example, the closure of a factory in a city does not only induce job losses as such. It will also result in an exodus of workers, reduced demands for local goods and services, a smaller local tax base and



Figure 1 The perforated city: the dark spots indicate shrinkage in the physical environment¹⁹

growing difficulties in maintaining the local infrastructure. Furthermore, the downward spiral of spatial-economic deterioration is likely to be paralleled by problems in the social-cultural domain. Unemployment and degradation of neighbourhoods may lead to social isolation, resentment and tensions in the city. Myrdal called these self-reinforcing developments “backwash effects”. At the same time, he argued that there might be counteracting forces at work. Where localities shrink, other places grow. The territory in trouble might benefit from “spread effects” from growth areas. As time goes by, high wages, high rents and congestion problems in these growth centres could offer new perspectives for the shrinking area and a process of revitalization and re-urbanization could take place. However, Myrdal thought that the backwash effects tend to dominate the spread effects. Looking at empirical studies on urban life cycles, it seems that he was right: as the cases of Manchester and Leipzig show, cities can indeed grow again, but the trajectory of shrinking places is mostly path-dependent.²⁰

Impact on Hardware, Software and Mindware

The consequences of shrinkage for a city can be grouped into three categories. Population decline affects not only the “hardware”, but also the “software” and the “mindware” of an area. Below, we will explain and review these determinants of the urban fabric.

- **Hardware.** The term “hardware” refers to the visible, tangible and countable (hence “hard”) aspects of a city, such as the housing market, the physical infrastructure and the local economy. Traditionally these issues get a lot of attention. And it is true: shrinkage encroaches deeply into the urban hardware. Demographic decline means a challenge for cities to maintain the quality of life for their citizens and the public provision of education, health and public transport. Problems of unoccupied and unsaleable houses arise, schools and shopping centres have to close,

while firms decide to locate their business elsewhere. In many cities in Eastern Germany a lot of schools, nurseries, kindergartens and other child-related facilities have closed down. Fewer inhabitants also mean smaller municipal budgets, which puts pressure on the investments needed to upgrade neighbourhoods and guarantee the provision of public services. The reason for this is simple: fewer people means fewer opportunities for cost distribution. More and more researchers point to increasing problems in the technical infrastructure of shrinking cities, i.e. the supply of water, electricity and other utilities.²¹ Water pipes, for example, are fixed infrastructures, with fixed costs sometimes amounting to 80%. In a context of depopulation, the remaining users are faced with cost increases that are disproportionate. Moreover, risks of underutilization and related problems (e.g. increased corrosion of tubes and legionella) emerge. Because of this, residents of some shrinking cities already pay more now for drinking water.

- *Software.* While urban planners and economists focus on the hardware side of a city, geographers and sociologists are more interested in the people living there. How do they react to shrinkage and how do they deal with it? The “software” of an area includes the norms and values of local actors and the ways in which they act and interact. In general, shrinkage works selectively: it is the group of the young and talented that tends to migrate, leaving the elderly and underprivileged behind. Thus, the socio-demographic structure of a city changes. The brain drain of youngsters means that their children are born elsewhere, which results in the ageing of the local population. Take the city of Oporto (Portugal) which lost 21.4% of its residents in the last twenty years. With a population share of 20% of people over 64 years old and only 13% of people under 15 years it is a “greying” city.²² Empirical studies suggest that in ageing societies entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation emerge less easily.²³ This is a shame, because shrinking cities in particular can



*Shrinkage can also lead to socio-spatial polarization in some parts of the city
(photo: Lidia Shining Brightly)*

benefit from renewal. In addition, there is the problem that shrinkage weakens or even dissolves existing social networks in the city. Growth creates density and diversity and thus brings people together; shrinkage enlarges distances between people, both in spatial and social terms.²⁴ When many people are leaving, the commitment of the stay-behinds to invest in their neighbourhood can be frustrated. This lower community morale may foster fatalism and a lack of social energy, which hampers revitalization efforts. In Ostrava, for example, shrinkage led to socio-spatial polarization of certain areas in the city.

- *Mindware.* Besides the reality of the urban hardware and software the image of a city, in other words its “mindware”, is also relevant in a situation of shrinkage. The fact is that European cities increasingly compete to attract residents, businesses and visitors. As these target groups do not know everything when taking location decisions, they use whatever knowledge they have from previous visits, stories and media messages. A telling example is a remark of a former Dutch Secretary of State for Internal Affairs in 2010: in the media she simply declared that the Dutch should not buy houses in one of the country’s shrinking areas. Unsurprisingly, an image as a shrinking city is not helpful. Shrinkage is a negatively loaded word, just like “periphery” or “outskirts” (see Box 1). Things get even worse when the inhabitants of a shrinking city are influenced by these unfavourable views from outsiders.²⁵ They may start to feel inferior to the people living in “places to be”, which in turn discourages local empowerment. It would seem therefore that the Thomas theorem (“if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences”) applies to shrinkage as well.²⁶ There is a sort of “communication paradox”: it is important to draw attention to shrinkage, but by identifying it you suddenly see it everywhere. All vacant houses and social problems in the city are considered to be an indication of depopulation then, no matter what their cause is. Emphasizing shrinkage thus can work as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Box 1 What’s in a name: shrinking or waiting cities?

Especially since the extensive international Shrinking Cities-project (2004), the concept of “shrinking cities” has become common property in Europe.²⁷ However, in contrast to growth that stands for progress, profit and success, shrinkage is mostly associated with decline, loss and failure. Meanwhile, some alternative terms have been put forward to avoid the stigma of the adjective “shrinking”. Examples are “lean cities”, “shifting cities”, “sustainable cities” and “waiting cities”.²⁸ The term “lean” suggests that cities should see shrinkage as a way to become more “lean and mean”: as if they lost weight and became healthier. The idea of “shifting cities” refers to the shifts taking place in the urban landscape – not only a demographic shift, but also an economic shift, i.e. the movement of people to larger, wealthier agglomerations. “Sustainable cities” are places that take the needs of future populations into account, something that is easier to achieve under conditions of shrinkage. Perhaps, the best alternative term for shrinking cities is “waiting cities” as proposed by the German planner Sulzer. According to him, “waiting cities are cities that wait, slumber, until their hidden values are discovered”.²⁹ The “waiting” metaphor points to the long-term perspective that is needed to understand shrinkage and deal with it properly. Although all the alternative terms make sense, in debate the notion of “shrinking cities” still dominates.

Policy Responses to Shrinkage

The problems urban shrinkage creates have triggered policy makers all over Europe to develop a number of strategies. Not just city authorities, but also housing corporations, developers and public service providers have tried to respond to population decline. Sometimes these measures are explicitly aimed at coping with shrinkage, while in other cases existing urban policies are intensified. In France, for example, there are no specific tools to deal with shrinkage – the phenomenon is viewed as “a silent process”.³⁰ In practice, we can identify four types of policy responses: (1) trivializing shrinkage, (2) countering shrinkage, (3) accepting shrinkage and (4) utilizing shrinkage.³¹

(1) Trivializing Shrinkage: It Cannot Be True

This policy reaction can frequently be observed in localities where shrinkage is not really yet visible. Policy makers are confronted with demographic projections that foresee that the city will shrink in the next few years or decades. Often the data are called in question, trivialized and brushed aside. A typical response in such a situation is to do nothing, simply denying that the city has a problem. Demographic forecasts, however, are more reliable than economic ones, because there are only three variables involved: fertility, mortality and migration. Moreover, demography works as a “supertanker”: once a trend has set in, it is difficult to steer away from it. It is not difficult to predict the development of the world population – after all, the potential mothers of the next 30 years are being born right now.³² At the same time, the lower the geographical scale, the less reliable demographic data are. Internal migration patterns in particular are difficult to predict. Do people move to city X, city Y or a neighbouring city Z? Therefore it is always useful to start with regional rather than local demographic projections, e.g. data for North Jutland rather than for its main city, Aalborg. Also many solutions for urban shrinkage can be found on the regional scale. And even then, it is not always true that “demography is destiny”. For example, who could predict that Manchester would become a magnet for the creative class after its decline in the 1980s? In short, the best way to deal with demographic forecasts is to consider them as directional rather than inevitable. Demographic data and their underlying trends can guide policy well. Still, as long as shrinkage is not a reality, it is hard to persuade policy makers of its relevance. Or, as it is put in the EU Smart Shrink-project: “The awareness of the challenges brought about by shrinkage developed only when related problems became highly visible.”³³

(2) Countering Shrinkage: The City Must Grow Again

In many European cities where population decline can no longer be denied, policy makers are trying to reverse the trend. The idea is that shrinkage is only a temporary problem that can be resolved by attracting new people and businesses. This market-based, pro-growth policy response is popular in many European countries, especially in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe (see also Box 2).³⁴ Attempts are made to stimulate population growth by means of new real property development, urban restructuring and place marketing. In the new member states of the EU, in particular, creative people have top priority on local authorities’ wish lists. According to Blažek and Uhlíř this can be explained by the “Lisbonization” of urban policy: Europe’s ambitious Lisbon agenda assumes a simple logic that whenever cities have an excellent knowledge and innovation infrastructure, the creative class will flow in.³⁵ For example, states in Eastern Germany have abolished tuition fees to attract students from other parts of the country. The Polish city of Sosnowiec is one of the many cities in Eastern Europe that tries to counter shrinkage with tax expenditure, tax relief and direct loans for high-tech firms. Roubaix, located in the French industrial region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, has a housing diversification strategy

aimed at “developing residential attraction in Roubaix for new populations attracted by heritage and cultural amenities”.³⁶ In turn, the city of Avilés in Asturias (Spain) is attempting to get rid of its old industrial image by investing in flagship projects (the Oscar Niemeyer International Cultural Centre and a knowledge park called “Innovation Island”), accompanied by aggressive place marketing.



The Spanish city of Avilés hopes to counter shrinkage with flagship projects

Box 2 Villages for sale and subsidies to stay

In the European countryside, we can also find a lot of original attempts to attract newcomers.³⁷ In Spain, hundreds of villages are for sale. For example, in 2008 the village of Lacasta in the province of Zaragoza was sold for 189,000 euros, while the buyer got the remnants of a local castle for free. In 2009, the Swedish town of Lekeberg followed a real targeted strategy: it decided to raffle building plots among Dutch immigrants who announced that they would move there within two years. In the same year, the Austrian village of Rappottenstein gave away free plots to outsiders who wanted to start a family there. The municipality welcomed singles as well, provided that they agreed to search for a partner with the desire to have children. The peripheral towns of Sluis, Hulst and Terneuzen in the Netherlands have also employed innovative place marketing methods. Since 2008, they have been present at the annual Dutch Emigration Fair claiming that families looking for spacious houses do not have to move abroad. Why not migrate to the Dutch periphery, where people speak the same language? This initiative has been followed by the Dutch shrinking city of Delfzijl which advertises in the Dutch Emigration Fair to attract employees. Finally, islands near the coast of Croatia hope to increase their population by subsidizing new born babies: their parents get 10,000 euros, on the condition that they stay on the island for the next few years.

It is doubtful whether strategies to counter shrinkage by attracting new residents and firms work. First, many cities fail to think about their uniqueness: nearly all promote themselves as diverse, creative, innovative or liveable in. However, it is not so much about what a city has to offer as such, but what it has to offer that differs from its competitors that matters. Secondly, shrinking cities all compete for the same group of people. As a consequence, a successful housing or branding strategy in one place succeeds at the cost of other areas – a phenomenon called “residential cannibalism”.³⁸ Third, people and businesses are far less mobile than we tend to believe. It is a common finding in migration research that Europeans do not move house very far away.³⁹ Distance is the most important factor explaining migration decisions. If people move house, they mostly stay within the same city, and in any case within the same region. For example, the shrinking cities in Eastern Germany that are growing again, like Leipzig, Dresden and Jena, have been able to attract only newcomers from the region surrounding them. If people leave their region, it is often for private, study or work reasons. Of course, there are differences at different times in someone’s life cycle. Families and the elderly are more immobile than young, educated and single people. But, as research from Sweden demonstrates, the efforts of cities to attract this latter group are also largely ineffective.⁴⁰ If shrinking cities want to welcome newcomers, they had better focus on “return migrants” – people returning to their region of birth because of a sense of place. What applies for residents is also true for firms: they are also extremely home-loving. Among European companies, short distance migration is still the rule, and moving over long distances the exception.⁴¹

(3) Accepting Shrinkage: We Try to Cope with It

In the North West of Europe, policy makers seem to be more realistic in their response to urban shrinkage. Slowly but surely, shrinking cities in the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands are tending to accept population decline as a fact of life. Instead of stimulating growth, they are trying to manage the effects of shrinkage and look for ways to stabilize population development as far as possible.⁴² The starting point here is not so much “how to attract people from outside”, but rather “how to retain the existing residents”. Typically, strategies are aimed at the improvement of the urban quality of life. There is a lot of attention being paid to measures to upgrade the “hardware” of shrinking areas. Often, new construction projects give way to the renovation of the available housing stock in accordance with Jane Jacobs’ maxim that “new ideas must use old buildings”.⁴³ For instance, terraced houses are combined and enlarged or get more car parks. Or older flats are provided with extra facilities like lifts, balconies or little gardens. This fits well with the trend of “ageing in place”, i.e. adapting houses so that people can easily remain and live at home when they grow older. In some cities, whole housing blocks are pulled down – like in the East German city of Schwedt where 5,400 flats have been demolished since the 1990s. The Germans call it “Gesundshrumpfen” (healthy shrinking), while the English refer to “planning for decline”. In the Netherlands, strategies of “slimpen” (smart shrinking) are gaining in popularity: for every newly built house in the region, two old houses are run down.

But even in shrinking cities demolition strategies are not always necessary. A neighbourhood in the Dutch city of Dordrecht, for example, was earmarked for demolition a few years ago. However, the municipality heard from the many Turkish people living there that the old housing stock perfectly satisfied their needs: the upstairs and downstairs flats enabled the grandparents to live near their children and their families. As a result, the city of Dordrecht decided to renovate the neighbourhood



Planning for decline is an euphemism for demolishing buildings, like here in Poznan (photo: MOs810)

instead of pulling it down.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is always important to pay attention to the “software” of an area when coping with shrinkage. What socio-demographic features does the area have? What are the needs of the residents? What problems do they encounter in organizing their daily lives? The results of such consultations can reveal useful insights for local policy, e.g. the wish to have better street lighting, safer cycle paths or more green spaces. In the shrinking city of Brno (Czech Republic) such a bottom-up approach has led to a focus on family support.⁴⁵ Making the live of local families easier is seen as the main solution to the city’s shrinkage problems. Since 2008, the urban authorities have subsidized what they refer to as “family cohesion” with measures to improve the home-work balance and the social inclusion of child-caring parents. In addition, families can get free advice and support at local contact centres that are part of the so-called “Family Point” project. For shrinking cities creating a child-friendly environment is a wise strategy, because it can be a decisive factor for local families remaining in the neighbourhood and thus prevent the further decline of a local community.

(4) Utilizing Shrinkage: There Is More for Less

“Great – finally enough space!”, “Demographic change as a chance” and “Slim is beautiful”. Not all of us see urban shrinkage as a problem. Notably planners, architects and consultants plead for a positive view on shrinking cities. Their argument is that a city’s quality of life does not depend on population density. “There is no proper size for the perfect city. In Scandinavia for example the quality of life is very good, while there is a very low population density.”⁴⁶ Indeed, many shrinking cities have used demolished housing blocks on which to set out green spaces that can be used for recreation or for “urban farming”. In the Dutch city of Heerlen, such “pocket parks” have turned out to be very popular among the locals.⁴⁷ At the same time, more and more shrinking cities, neighbourhoods, towns and villages in the EU are deciding to apply for membership of the international Cittaslow

network. This movement of “slow cities” – closely linked to the “slow food” movement that started in Italy in 1986 – aims at improving the quality of life, sustainability and diversity of local communities in our fast-paced, globalized economy.⁴⁸ Cittaslow attempts to take advantage of local qualities instead of going with the global flow. Other places have high hopes of the so-called “silver economy”: an ageing population may offer opportunities for the development of new services and applications in the field of living, leisure and care. Shrinking cities in the Ruhr Area, for instance, are experimenting with smart living concepts for elderly people. In this sense, shrinking cities are societal laboratories where new methods are tested that are also useful for growing cities. However, we should not be over-optimistic when it comes to utilizing shrinkage. In any case, the American model of Sun City is not likely to be the future for shrinking and ageing Europe. Examples from Belgium (Messancy) and Finland (Seniorpolis) demonstrate that setting up communities especially for the elderly is not very successful.⁴⁹



In some cities ‘urban farming’ is used to fill up demolished parts of neighbourhoods (photo: Linda N.)

Challenges for Urban Governance

Coping with urban shrinkage requires the involvement of many stakeholders. After all, population decline is a complex and comprehensive issue: it transforms parts of the city and affects all aspects of people’s daily life. In such a context, local government is dependent on the capacity of many other actors, varying from corporations, schools, business networks, local associations and citizens themselves. Thus, shrinkage is a “wicked problem” that requires urban governance. Urban governance may be understood as “a process of coordinating actors, social groups, and institutions to attain particular goals, discussed and defined collectively in fragmented, uncertain environments”.⁵⁰

Urban governance has both a horizontal and a vertical dimension. The horizontal one refers to the diversity of types of actors, groups and institutions involved, whereas the vertical aspect deals with the different administrative scale levels that play a part, from the European to the local.⁵¹ As a transformation process population decline resembles other urban governance issues, such as economic restructuring, social inclusion and sustainability. At the same time, shrinkage has distinct characteristics that pose some real challenges for urban governance.



Coping with shrinkage involves the cooperation of many local stakeholders
(photo: Lidia Shining Brightly)

- *From growth to shrinkage.* Shrinking cities do not fit well in a world addicted to growth. Since the Industrial Revolution Western societies have been used to the mantra of growth: three is not only seen as more than two, but also as something better. Growth and shrinkage are each other's mirror images: when cities grow, they lack exactly those assets (e.g. space, housing, facilities) that are abundant in shrinking environments. Growth involves scarcity, while shrinkage goes hand in hand with surplus.⁵² The enduring influence of the growth paradigm can be observed in policy responses to depopulation. In many cities, as we have already seen, growth strategies are popular; in some countries, like Poland and Romania, talking about shrinkage is still a taboo.⁵³ And even when policy makers no longer explicitly strive for urban growth, they try to create a context of relative scarcity: houses are demolished, infrastructures are removed and facilities are combined. Why not start with the surplus that shrinkage creates? Why not look for the opportunities an affluent environment might offer? Such a change in mentality, however, is blocked by our institutions. For local governments, growth traditionally means power and the chance to divide scarce space. Moreover, in planning laws and regulations growth rather than shrinkage is rewarded. Therefore, it is hard to say farewell to the growth paradigm.⁵⁴ This applies not only to local governments, but also to planners, architects and developers. They often feel that they are more original than their predecessors – with the result that too often old buildings are run down instead of being renovated.
- *From local to regional policy.* To manage shrinkage a regional view is needed. Shrinking cities are in competition with cities nearby, because housing markets are mainly a regional phenomenon: what one city gains is gained at the expense of one of its neighbours. In addition, cities and city districts are not fenced off from the rest of the world. Thanks to growing mobility Europeans

commute through a daily urban system that goes beyond local borders.⁵⁵ From this perspective, it makes sense to coordinate investments in physical infrastructure, business parks and public services on a regional scale, preferably the scale of “the region of people’s daily life”. However, implementing policies on a regional level is more difficult than it seems at first sight. The fact is that cooperation in shrinking areas is a typical example of the well-known “prisoner’s dilemma”.⁵⁶ The key point of this theory is that all stakeholders act for selfish reasons, although they know that cooperation does raise collective welfare. City government officials are not inclined to work in the regional interest, since they are accountable to their local constituencies. Often, there are also local sentiments: neighbouring cities are seen as suspect and thus help to create the city’s own identity (“us versus them”), a process that can be called “ordering by bordering”.⁵⁷ It is a sort of parish pump politics: the water tastes the same everywhere, but in the end the water from the pump on the local green tastes best. Therefore, often rigorous measures from higher levels are needed. In the Netherlands, for example, it is the provincial government that has the power to block over-ambitious investment plans from shrinking areas.

- *From backward to forward thinking.* Even if stakeholders accept depopulation and think on a regional level, there is a risk that only the symptoms of urban shrinkage will be tackled. The problem is that urban reality is often analysed using concepts and perspectives from the past, although the world outside has changed – a phenomenon Lefebvre denoted as “the blind field”.⁵⁸ Sound policies in shrinking cities, however, should not simply repair what has been lost, but start from a vision of city living in the future. Shrinkage forces cities to reformulate their goals and measures to achieve them. The possible impact of developments in the virtual world in particular should be taken into account. After all, information and communication technology is chang-



Information technology and an ageing society can go together well (photo: Alice Wiegand)

ing urban form and public services and is likely to do so even more in the future (see Box 2). What societal trends do we see? How often and why do people use the available facilities in their neighbourhood? How can public services be adapted to the future? For example, closing libraries in a city's shrinking neighbourhood and building a new library in the city centre sounds basically like a sensible plan. However, it might make more sense to invest in iPads and e-readers at local schools instead of investing in bricks and mortar. Thus, it is not the existing structure – a library as we know it – which should be the starting point, but the public goal, i.e. fostering reading among the local population. In order to facilitate forward thinking, planning laws and regulations should leave more flexibility for shrinking cities, so that they can experiment with new, future-oriented concepts.⁵⁹

Box 3 Shrinking cities in a “global village”

The virtual world of the mobile telephone, e-mail and internet has important spatial implications, although research on this issue points in various directions.⁶⁰ For one thing, information and communication technologies and broadband investments are creating a level playing field in Europe – even in the most remote village people can now be part of the “global village”. For another thing, there is still a “digital divide” in many countries, which is closely linked to spatial-social inequalities. In the United Kingdom in particular, more and more cities are realizing how important it is to be connected to the virtual world. Since 2006, Aberdeen has employed tele-care and other e-health services in an attempt to respond to the needs of an ageing population. For example, older people with health problems are monitored by a webcam at home. Manchester, too, is investing a lot in the digital world, notably in the city's multiple deprivation areas. There is a special Digital Development Agency running projects under the title of “smart citizens in smart cities”.⁶¹ With the “Fibre to the People” project the local government hopes to stimulate digital inclusion, which in turn should stimulate social cohesion. It is questionable, however, whether digitalization can solve problems in the real world. In Manchester, the social divide within the city is perhaps a greater challenge than the digital divide.

- **From power to empowerment.** Traditionally, the development of localities is based upon three pillars: the government (the public sector), the market (the private sector) and the civil society (the third sector).⁶² Each of these sectors has its own tasks and values, but for the proper functioning of society, they all need each other. The government creates laws and rules and is responsible for public order and public goods. In turn, the market is the arena for entrepreneurship, business and trade – thus, it generates welfare. Finally, the civil society offers citizens meaningful structures, networks and identities. In a shrinking city, however, a gradual shift of power will take place from the government to the market, and in particular to the civil society. The reasons for this transition are twofold. First, urban shrinkage creates an extra fiscal burden on local governments: due to demographic and economic decline earnings will be lower, while the costs of an ageing population and social deprivation will be higher. Second, not all problems relating to urban shrinkage can be solved by spending more public money. To upgrade the “software” and “mindware” of

places, local empowerment is needed – of course, money can help, but in the end it is the intrinsic motivations and energy of people that make a difference.

In the UK, the shift from public power to local empowerment has been captured in the term “civic economy”, that is “comprising people, ventures and behaviours that fuse innovative ways of doing from the traditionally distinct spheres of civil society, the market and the state”.⁶³ Ideally, this new form of collective action produces outcomes that neither the state nor the market could have achieved on its own. In this respect, the shrinking city of Ludwigshafen (Germany) is an interesting case. The municipality has triggered the setting up of more than fifty “social events”: groups (students, employees from local firms or members of the Rotary club) are volunteering for one day to help in urban restructuring, varying from painting buildings to renovating the local children’s farm.⁶⁴



In the United Kingdom there are more than 250 community-owned village shops (photo: Felix O)

Shrinkage and Civic Engagement

Since the financial and euro crisis, public pleas to empower a city’s civil society have mostly been based on cost considerations. From this point of view, citizens have to organize the delivery of public goods and services themselves, simply because government no longer has the budget to do so. This cheap argument ignores the opportunities of civic engagement as such. In the literature on urban policy the intrinsic value of citizen involvement has already been emphasized for many years, starting with the classic article by Arnstein.⁶⁵ The author recognizes the somewhat moralistic nature of the topic when she writes, “the idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you”. In her “ladder of citizen participation” Arnstein distinguishes eight forms to involve citizens in policy processes that directly affect their daily lives, like the restructuring of a neighbourhood or the closure of a swimming pool. As we can see from Figure 2, the higher up the ladder, the more participation there is. At the top we find the extreme situation that citizens are entirely in charge (citizen control), while at the bottom public actors simply manipulate citizens – in this case, it is not justified to speak about participation. In reality, most forms of civic engagement can be grouped under the category of “tokenism”, round the three rungs at the ladder’s middle: the civil society is informed, consulted or appeased. However, more and more studies list cases of successful citizen power.⁶⁶

The Benefits of Citizen Involvement

For areas that are faced with population decline engaging citizens more intensively may be the way forward. Basically, government and citizens have complementary resources which could jointly result in more effective and legitimate strategies (see Figure 3).⁶⁷ First of all, residents are the best people to tell one about their daily environment and its deficiencies – after all, they experience it every day. This streetwise knowledge on the spot is useful for policy makers who want to implement future-oriented measures. For example, inquiring of residents and bus drivers in the shrinking area of Zeeland (the Netherlands) revealed a number of interesting insights to public officials. It turned out that bus drivers in the region increasingly started to suffer from a sort of “loneliness syndrome” as they carried virtually no passengers outside peak times. As a consequence, the government of Zeeland is now promoting car sharing among the local population rather than expanding public transport. Second, by drawing citizens into the policy process or the delivery of public services, policy makers create more acceptance of unpopular decisions that follow from population decline. If volunteers have themselves experienced how difficult it is to run a library to which fewer and fewer people come, they are more likely to be resigned when it closes.

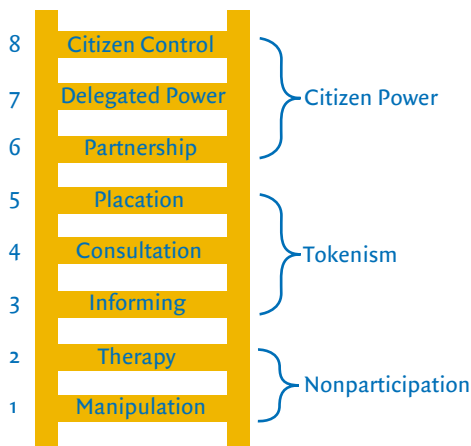


Figure 2 Arnstein's ladder⁶⁸

Government resources	Resources of citizens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - planning and regulation - majorities/consensus - subsidies/tax/licenses - land and real estate - civil service and offices - networks/contacts - legal and institutional knowledge and skills - control/consistency - credibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - time (pensioners, students, unemployed people, etc.) - voting power - money (e.g. private wealth) - media and public opinion - wisdom of the crowds - personalities/reputation - streetwise knowledge and learning-by-doing - intrinsic motivations/energy - creativity

Figure 3 A comparison of government and civil society⁶⁹

Third, citizen participation is intimately linked to the identification of people with their community. This “place attachment” not only motivates civic engagement, it also strengthens it. Civic engagement can be a “keep”-factor: residents who are committed to their community are less likely to move out. Finally, comparable with the argument above, the link between participation and social capital – networks between people and the trust and reciprocity to which they lead – works in both ways.⁷⁰ Ironically, urban shrinkage often brings citizens together in an attempt to prevent the deterioration of their neighbourhood. But a positive side-effect of this is that people get to know each other better, which in turn can lead to more social cohesion and an improved quality of life.

Citizen Power in City and Country

Perhaps the best known example of citizen power is the Swiss cantonal system of direct democracy: for centuries, citizens have been able to use their voting right to amend or veto laws, rules and spending bills in the canton they live in. On the urban level, the system of the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre is often highlighted. In 1989, the city council introduced the tool of “participatory budgeting” in an attempt to tackle the city’s huge socio-economic problems. Since then, the residents have been asked every year to identify spending priorities, choose budget delegates and vote for proposals that the city consequently has to carry out. According to the World Bank, this method has certainly improved the quality of life of the local residents.⁷¹ The Porto Alegre model has been copied by a number of cities, towns and villages across the world. In Europe, too, more and more places, from Solingen (Germany) to Sevilla (Spain) and from Örebro (Sweden) to Plock (Poland), are adopting the participatory budgeting method,⁷² New media, like the internet and cellphones, are often used to collect and evaluate the plans that citizens propose. In Solingen – a shrinking and nearly bankrupt city – in 2010 the government asked its inhabitants via the internet which spending cuts the municipality should implement. For this innovative approach to citizen participation the city received the “European Public Sector Award 2011”.



The voluntary fire brigade in German localities is a great example of civic action
(photo: Doris Anthony)

In terms of Arnstein’s participation ladder, however, participatory budgeting is not the ultimate form of civic engagement. It is true that citizens have a say in what government should do, but they are not in complete control. Moreover, the tool is not specifically linked to the context of population decline. For more far-reaching forms of citizen power in shrinking areas, we have to go to the European countryside. Over the years, population decline has prompted a number of villages to invent new ways of organizing public services responding to the citizens’ needs. In the United Kingdom, for example, there are more than 250 community-owned village shops. Meanwhile, a special organization, the Plunkett Foundation, has been set up to advise citizens how to open a village shop and run it with a team of volunteers.⁷³ In Germany, too, we can find such

an organization (DORV) with a consultancy function for citizens. In any case, Germany is a good model when it comes to voluntary fire brigades and community-owned buses. In many remote villages in the German periphery public transport has gone. As a result, villagers have set up a “Bürger-Bus” system which picks up the elderly and takes them on demand to a nearby city for shopping, swimming or a hospital visit. In the Netherlands, too, local volunteers help in keeping up the quality of life of their village. In Warder, active citizens raised 700,000 euros to save the community centre, while residents in Moerstraten built a new one with their own hands. Obviously, this is civic engagement par excellence!

In European cities a lot of civic action can also be found, although not always related to urban shrinkage. In London’s neighbourhoods there are many cases of citizen power, which has resulted, for instance, in the opening of an eco-friendly theatre and the re-opening of a sociable market. In the context of urban shrinkage, cities and towns in the German state of North-Rhine-Westphalia offer a great deal of inspiration too.⁷⁴ Residents in Mettmann who intend to do something good for their community can participate in special training sessions on active citizenship. In Hattingen citizens have initiated many projects to link the elderly with young people with the aim that both generations should learn from each other. In 2011, a local corporation and a company in Kerkrade-West (Parkstad Limburg, the Netherlands) hired unemployed youngsters to assist in the demolition of buildings in their own neighbourhood. This gave them a temporary job, but also led to commitment to the local restructuring plans. “Due to shrinkage we are demolishing a lot in Kerkrade. Often, we don’t build anything back. By involving people from the neighbourhood, they understand it better”, according to the manager of the corporation.⁷⁵ For other inspiring examples of civic engagement in Europe’s shrinking cities we refer to the cases in the remainder of this report.

The Need for CLEAR Strategies

In all the enthusiasm about the potential of civic engagement, it is important to remain realistic. Notably in shrinking cities there are some barriers to overcome before citizens can really take the lead. After all, how can one explain to citizens that they have to engage in their community, when at the same time the neighbourhood is deteriorating and the tariffs for utilities affected by shrinkage are rising?⁷⁶ In addition, there is the risk of what Hooghe has called the “sour grapes” phenomenon in citizen participation: just like the fox in Aesop’s fable imagining that the grapes that cannot be reached are sour anyway, citizens may pretend not to care for civic action, because that is “not for our kind of people”.⁷⁷ Another problem is a difference in expectations between government and the civil society. Public officials and citizens often speak another language, reflecting the different worlds in which they live – the daily life of a citizen is a different reality from the system world of a public official. This can create a lot of confusion, misunderstanding and irritation.⁷⁸ For example, citizens concerned about traffic safety in their street can come up with the idea that an extra pedestrian crossing might be desirable. After a meeting in the community centre, they go to the city hall to ask for support. However, after a month an official at the municipality sends a letter in which the request is refused, referring to the local policy that crosswalks are not allowed in this type of street. Impersonal treatments and oversimplified reactions like “these are the rules” frustrate any form of local empowerment. Government officials must also engage themselves when they want to engage the civil society as a whole.⁷⁹

Towards a Guaranteeing Government

Urban shrinkage demands a rethink of the role of local government. What, in a shrinking environment, are “public” goods and “public” services, and which of these can be left to the responsibility of the civil society? Typically, city officials are somewhat vague about such sensitive issues. It is certainly difficult to say in general terms what government must guarantee anyway and what citizens in principle could do on their own. But it is always possible for a municipality to define a minimum package of public delivery, or at least a system of different gradations of public involvement. By way of illustration, think of the following: the council of a shrinking city in financial trouble can decide to guarantee citizens in shrinking neighbourhoods the proper working of utilities (e.g. water and electricity), street lighting, rubbish collection, a broadband internet connection and easy access to health care, education and cultural facilities in the city centre. Anything above this minimum has to be achieved by the local government and citizens together. At the same time, there are also cases imaginable (e.g. the organization of a neighbourhood party) where citizens themselves can be considered to be the only actors in charge (see Figure 4).⁸⁰ In other words, more clarity is needed about the ownership of problems in shrinking cities and what this means for the division of tasks between the public sector and the civil society.

Type of initiative	Division of tasks between citizens and government
C (citizens)	Grassroots initiative that citizens can bring about themselves (e.g. organizing a neighbourhood party); there is no government role needed
C+G (citizens + government)	Grassroots initiative, where public involvement is needed for its realization (e.g. creating framework conditions or guaranteeing quality)
G+C (government + citizens)	Public initiative, where civic involvement (e.g. consultation or partnership) is needed for its realization

Figure 4 Different modes of involvement by government and citizens⁸¹

Towards an Activating Government

Preaching civic engagement in shrinking cities is not enough – it must go hand in hand with public measures to enable citizens to assume power. Or, as Neu puts it: “As long as citizen engagement is misunderstood solely as a stopgap to take the place of disappearing government services, an active civil society will have no potential to develop.”⁸² Therefore, local (and also national!) governments must be willing to delegate tasks, resources and responsibilities to the civil society. For this, a flexible approach towards existing regulation is often necessary. How can city councils expect citizens to become active if the rules work against such an engagement? When citizens are taken seriously and empowered in their initiatives, they are also prepared to take responsibility. This can be observed in shrinking areas in Finland. Here, it is a tradition that local policy makers, teachers and parents discuss how to organize education for the children in their community. Where should the school be located, or is a mobile school also an option? Do our pupils have to commute or should we let teach-

ers do that? How can the internet support educational goals? This “public-civic partnership” has generated good results: 40% of the schools in Finland have only fifty pupils or fewer, while the quality of the country’s education system is excellent.⁸³ This local empowerment is possible only because Finnish regions enjoy a great deal of autonomy. Likewise, shrinking cities should be less strict when it comes to regulation. The starting-point of local policy should not be “what is possible within the existing rules?”, but “how can we facilitate citizens as much as possible in their efforts to improve the quality of life?”. In short, shrinking cities need clarity: citizens have to know where they stand. The CLEAR approach may be useful in putting this message into practice.⁸⁴ It can function as a “checklist” for local governments that want to encourage civic action. CLEAR means that citizen participation works best when citizens:

- *Can do* (have enough knowledge, skills and resources to participate);
- *Like to* (act from a “sense of place” and belief in the community);
- *Are Enabled to* (are well-supported by government to participate);
- *Are Asked to* (are approached actively by stakeholders to join in);
- *Are Responded to* (can see that their activities make a difference).

As this checklist suggest, the encouragement of civic engagement in shrinking cities does not stop once the latter has been facilitated. It is important for local government to give feedback to active citizens, so that they know how their initiatives are evaluated. Celebrating the results of civic action with an annual engagement award or another prize might be an apt instrument for providing such feedback.⁸⁵ At the same time, this can motivate other stakeholders to join in.

Summary and Conclusion

In Europe the phenomenon of shrinking cities – cities confronted with population decline in a structural sense – seemed to be limited to exceptional cases like Liverpool, Lille and Leipzig. Demographic shrinkage, however, can be found in places all over the continent, from the Spanish countryside to Scandinavia and from English smokestack towns to Estonian villages. Urban shrinkage can be understood as a local manifestation of several macro-processes, including economic and political transformation, the ageing of society and shifts in urban structure. Unlike its variety of causes, the consequences of urban shrinkage are quite similar: not just the hardware (spatial-economic structure) of a city, but also its software (social-cultural fabric) and mindware (image) are likely to deteriorate. This process, in turn, can lead to a downward spiral. What are suitable policy responses for dealing with this? In any case, trivializing shrinkage by simply denying it is not a sensible idea. Trying to counter or to utilize it with growth and marketing strategies will also lead to disappointing results. The best strategy for shrinking cities is to accept shrinkage and improve the quality of life for the existing residents. In other words, try to avoid the stay-behinds moving out as well.

Coping with urban shrinkage is a governance process in which many actors, such as local government, corporations, schools, business networks, local associations and – last but not least – citizens, have a role to play. Ideally, the joint strategies of these stakeholders are shrinkage-proof, start from a regional view and take advantage of the digitalization of society. Due to the fiscal burden of urban shrinkage – complemented by the financial and euro crisis – local government will be more and more dependent on the willingness of the market and especially the civil society to give a helping hand. To

cope with urban shrinkage the participation of citizens is needed, all the more so because they have streetwise knowledge on the spot. There are several forms of citizen participation, with consulting and informing being common practice at the moment. In shrinking cities, it is inevitable that at some point citizens will also have to make use of their own resources to improve the local quality of life. Experiences with community-owned services in Europe's rural settlements show that there is indeed ample room for citizen power. Shrinking cities can learn from such examples. Civic engagement, however, is not something that can be dictated. If city councils want citizens to care for their community, they must enable them to do so. Civic engagement requires the engagement of local government as well. After all, it takes two to tango.

Protest, Participation, Empowerment

Civic Engagement in Shrinking Cities in Europe: The Example of Housing and Neighbourhood Development

Annegret Haase & Dieter Rink

1. Introduction

In recent years shrinking cities in Europe have become an independent field of urban research. Although at first the reasons, causes, trajectories and consequences formed the centre of the debate,⁸⁶ now questions about governance have also reached the research agenda.⁸⁷ With this, the role of the civil actors in the governance of shrinkage has also moved into the focus of research and projects oriented towards questions of governance; however, hitherto they have rarely been systematically followed (see Hospers in this volume). The earlier thematisation of civil actors in the context of shrinkage has moved nearer to the concept of “urban pioneers”.⁸⁸ A shrinkage problem relevant to civil involvement, ageing, has already been dealt with in a general sense,⁸⁹ but others, such as poverty, which is often particularly noticeable in shrinking cities, have not. Post-socialism was particularly relevant in the 1990s in so far as shrinkage in that decade was the dominant trajectory of urban development.⁹⁰ The link to our topic is that ‘an under-developed civil society due to the lesser degree of citizen participation than is found in Western democracies’ was diagnosed for Eastern Europe.⁹¹ Although the situation has changed in the period of post-transformation in the last few years, there is a specific nexus between pronounced shrinkage in Eastern Europe and a weak civil society.

Whereas this nexus is under-researched, the governance of growth is well researched. Molotch laid down a really paradigmatic basis for research with his concept of “growth coalitions”. (Urban) growth is thus linked to investments (building, renovation, consolidation, rising housing and rent prices, demand for land etc.), which are accompanied by stresses for certain groups and can cause problems or conflicts. Growth is, however, generally designed for profit and increasing prosperity, which can be distributed and from which, if necessary, disadvantaged groups can also be compensated.⁹² The shrinkage context is, in contrast, completely different; it is typically characterised by deindustrialisation, de-investment and loss of functions. The governance of shrinkage is confronted by the threat of a worsening quality of life; it is a matter of fair, or at least the fairest possible, distribution of losses. Experiences from European cities show that it is not so easy to create stable and functioning governance arrangements: political and economic actors usually have only limited resources available and are often dependent on external decisions (see: Couch et al. 2012).

The same is true for civil societies; they often appear as defenders of ownership and ownership interests, as is typical for NIMBY groups (NIMBY – not in my backyard: see Burningham 2000). But what role can they play in shrinking cities? What opportunities for action do they have in a context in which the city shrinks and the goals of actors sometimes fundamentally change? With what problems and conflicts are they typically confronted in shrinking cities? What contributions and alternatives can they provide? Do new mutual interests or new initiatives arise with respect to the problems and demands of shrinkage? These questions are dealt with in the following paper and the results of the EU 7 FP Project “Shrink Smart – the Governance of Shrinkage within a European Context” are drawn upon (see: www.shrinksmart.eu).

In the following sections we work out firstly typical problem situations of shrinking cities, and then we portray some basic features of governance of shrinkage. In section 4 we look at the role of civil society actors.

Here we single out the field of housing and neighbourhood development and discuss the questions developed above using examples from three European cities (Bytom/Poland, Genoa/Italy and Leipzig/Germany).

2. Shrinking Cities: Causes, Trajectories and Consequences

Across Europe since the late 20th century urban shrinkage has become a normal pathway of urban development for many cities. About 40 per cent of all European cities of more than 200,000 inhabitants have lost population over significant periods of time.⁹³ Urban shrinkage brings about fundamental challenges for urban societies, planning processes and governance structures. Population decline impacts on almost all areas of urban life: business and employment, housing, social and technical infrastructure, municipal finances, social cohesion, segregation etc. Shrinkage results in a mismatch between the supply of and demand for built structures, urban space and infrastructure. Urban shrinkage happens when the interplay of macro-processes such as economic, demographic, political change or the shape of urbanisation processes leads to local population losses. There are different drivers of population decline:

- economic decline, generally leading to net out-migration from the city region in search of work;
- suburbanisation or urban sprawl, where the population disperses from the core city towards more peripheral locations within the city region;
- natural demographic change, whereby, usually in an ageing population, death rates exceed birth rates and the population naturally declines;
- ecological processes or shock-like events such as natural hazards.

The dynamics of change are influenced by other intervening factors, such as the political system and its impacts at different spatial levels (national, regional, urban, local); the shape of regeneration policies; and the physical structure of the city, ecological conditions or cultural factors. The causes and consequences of shrinkage are often interconnected. This is particularly evident with regard to economic issues: while industrial change or economic decline is frequently a key cause of population loss, this out-migration can then exacerbate economic problems in a city in a cycle of decline.

The consequences of urban shrinkage can be wide ranging, and vary from case to case, but typically include:

- declining population densities;
- a growing imbalance between housing demand and supply;
- a growing imbalance between the supply of and demand for social infrastructure (e.g. schools), transport and utility infrastructures;
- declining demand for local commercial services;
- the emergence of vacant and derelict land and buildings (brownfields);
- changing demographic characteristics (particularly a rise in the proportion of elderly people);
- greater pressures on local municipal budgets.

In our research project, Shrink Smart,⁹⁴ we aimed at a better understanding of local specificities, identifying challenges and providing solutions for responses to shrinkage at the European level. The research undertaken in Shrink Smart built on seven case studies across Europe, ranging from Liverpool (UK) to Donetsk and Makiivka (Ukraine).

3. Governance of Shrinking Cities

Shrinking cities are characterised by a lack of capacities (financial, institutional, etc.) and, at the same time, are burdened with a number of serious problems (in different fields such as housing, infrastructure, employment, etc.). This leads to an increasing dependence on external resources that enable local actors to cope with the problems. The resources can stem either from the market (private investment) or from the government (public money). As a consequence, strategic decisions (of urban actors) are especially dependent on these financial resources and related requirements. This leads to dependent, contradictory and unstable governance arrangements in which local decisions are highly dependent on shifts in external frameworks (i.e. the cities are highly vulnerable due to changing circumstances such as financial, economic etc. ones).

The arrangements of urban governance under the condition of urban shrinkage are characterised by an incoherence due to the fact that they follow two contradictory ‘poles’: the ‘entrepreneurial city’ and ‘logics of bureaucracy’. Thus urban policy is oriented only partly towards the real existing problems. This leads to a rather inconsistent urban policy that can hardly cope with or may even reinforce the problems caused by urban shrinkage. As a result, coherent approaches that enable the cities to deal strategically with the challenges of urban shrinkage are made particularly difficult and are, in reality, hard to achieve. It is difficult to plan or steer urban shrinkage because under the conditions it produces, governance arrangements become more unstable: this is so because of the dependencies on external resource, funding or decisions.

Following the above developed list of consequences of shrinkage in the different fields of urban policy, one can elaborate a number of problems, consisting of potential conflicts in shrinking cities. We have made a selection of substantial problems related to urban shrinkage which are often the source of social and political conflicts (Table 1). Of course others can be added, but those mentioned in the table below are the most important or serious ones:

Local policy field	consequences/ problems of shrinkage	potential and real problems/ conflicts for urban governance
Housing	lack of investment, decay, abandonment, vacant houses and flats	demolition of old built-up-structures (perceived as urban heritage) needs for renewal
Social infrastructure	shrinking demand for infrastructure for younger groups (kindergartens, schools) growing demand for care of older people (old people's homes)	cuts in funding closures of kindergartens, schools, closures of social, cultural and sports facilities
Technical infrastructure	shrinking demand (water, heating, public transport)	rising costs, cuts, closures restructuring
Municipal budgets	shrinking revenues but stable/ increasing costs due to restructuring	privatisation of public assets, policy of austerity, cuts to welfare measures
Land use	emergence of brownfields (former industrial, commercial and housing sites)	bad influence of “zombie properties” needs for decontamination and revitalisation

Table 1 Impacts of shrinkage and conflicts for urban governance for selected policy fields (authors' compilation)

If one looks at the potentially conflicting points, raised in the table above, it becomes clear that most of these points apply not only to shrinking but also to other cities. The difference is that they are more pronounced in shrinking cities than in growing or reurbanising cities.

Many of the points have been known for a long time. For instance Castells traces the origin of urban movements back to conflicts about “public consumption”.⁹⁵ In contrast to those in growing or reurbanising cities, cuts in public consumption show a particular limitation in shrinking cities. What can civil actors do in this context? In the following text we introduce some examples from the local policy field of housing and neighbourhood development. In shrinking cities we can often observe a rising discrepancy: on the one hand, in the face of mounting problems and the relative weakness of other actors such as the local government or private enterprises, civil commitment is more necessary than ever, but on the other hand, a shrinking population is less and less able to participate. One of the reasons for this is that often some of the younger, well-educated and active population take the chance to out-migrate.⁹⁶ Following the distinction Albert O. Hirshman made between “exit”, i.e. leaving the field, and “voice”, i.e. involvement, participation and protest,⁹⁷ the exit-option is much more likely to be taken in shrinking cities than the voice-option. This might become the crux of the perspectives of shrinking cities; out-migration indicates a lack of identification as well as a lack of hope for a prosperous future. This touches, not least, the basis of local democracy: Since democracy, public life and civil society are inventions of urbanity, they are influenced by losses of urbanity.⁹⁸ Thus urban shrinkage could be linked not only by losses of urbanity as often discussed,⁹⁹ but by a vivid local civil society and local democracy as well. In many shrinking municipalities a future concern will be the basic endorsement of existing freedom rather than the extension of democratic freedoms by civil involvement. In addition, the preservation, stabilisation and defence of existing democratic institutions could also become crucial on the agenda of the civil society in shrinking cities.¹⁰⁰

4. Protest, Participation and Empowerment: Examples from the Field of Housing and Neighbourhood Development

As we have seen above, there are a whole series of consequences of shrinkage in very different political fields, which can become problems and potential conflicts for urban governance. These problems have only been outlined in very few cases of shrinkage. For instance in East German, where there has been wide-ranging public discussion for the last 10 years. The reactions of civil society actors to the effects of shrinkage are very different; the spectrum extends from no reaction to the well-known civic participation up to public protests, as have been studied for many years by research about social movements.¹⁰¹ We have selected some examples, which we have subsumed under the categories of protest, participation and empowerment in the title. Protest belongs here to the most obvious topic that is also well dealt with in research.¹⁰² Protest is typically the beginning of agenda-setting, but can also occur in other phases of the policy cycle. In contrast to the strong public perception, it does not, however, form the most dominant type of action of civil society actors. That tends to be more the different forms of participation, which constitute a “ladder of participation”, in particular in local governance.¹⁰³

Civil society actors contribute to very different fields of policy in numerous processes. In particular in shrinking cities they can take on points that are not (or cannot be) dealt with by policies and planning. Finally, empowerment is suited as an approach in the thematisation of civil societies in shrink-

ing cities, as it deals with the strengthening of the population and capacity building under the conditions of very limited resources.¹⁰⁴ We are dealing here with, classically, low cost approaches.

We want to call attention here to the variation in the reactions of civil society to the consequences or problems of shrinkage as well as the different societal and governance contexts. We could also have chosen examples other than those presented in what follows, but decided on a small number of examples from the policy field of housing and neighbourhood development. This policy field also concerns citizens' living environment in a very basic way and thus gives rise to more direct reactions than other fields or problems. The selection of examples from a more tightly defined policy field also ensures the possibility of comparison.

Civic Society Protest against Urban Decline in Bytom (Poland)

Bytom in Upper Silesia is one of those cities which have been most hit by shrinkage since the 1990s. By 2011, its population had decreased from 231,000 to 179,000. As a result of its economic weakness since the decline of the mining industry which dominated the economic sector, the city suffers from high unemployment and physical decay. The inner city in particular is affected by dilapidation and housing vacancies for technical reasons.¹⁰⁵

Currently about 1,100 council-owned and an unknown number of private flats are vacant here. Due to mining damage about 600 flats have been taken out of use in the last few years in the city district of Karb. Further mining activities which still offer thousands of the scarce jobs in Bytom are likely to damage further buildings, including those of historic value in the city centre. Meanwhile low-income households are becoming concentrated in the inner-city areas with a high level of vacancy and decay. Even when there is no official discussion about vacancy due to over-supply, local experts expect a rise of vacant buildings in the near future, especially in undesirable locations, such as inner-city areas with old buildings as well as some peripheral mine workers' housing estates that are situated close to collieries and factories. Although the city coordinates the handling of vacant flats and buildings, due to a lack of money and difficult negotiations with private owners it is often almost unable to stop the decay. Increasingly only the emergency demolition of a building remains an option, or houses collapse of their own accord. There is no funding from the state for the restoration or securing of endangered buildings and the EU structural funds have not provided funding for this either. Thus, although Bytom is taking part in research projects about urban development (for instance as part of the URBACT programme), it cannot actively do anything to save its buildings unless it finds private investors to buy and redevelop them. However, these are often difficult to find since Bytom suffers from a problematic image. Nevertheless, in recent years the consciousness of the civil society has increasingly been awoken to the fact that the situation cannot continue in this way. Initiatives have been formed to document Bytom's problems, such as the internet portal www.ruiny-bytom.pl, which documents vacancy, decay and demolition in Bytom in detail and criticises inaction by local politics. After the closure of several schools due to a lack of children, a committee of parents protesting against those measures was set up.¹⁰⁶ In the aftermath of the condemnation of the 600 flats mentioned above, which had become uninhabitable and were removed from the market due to mining damage, civil society forums have been formed that have begun to discuss how Bytom's situation can be improved and what new perspectives can be developed for the future of the city and its inhabitants. On the local political level the situation hit a new high point in the summer of 2012 when the mayor and

city council were voted out of office. The topic “shrinkage and decline” was one of the most decisive that led to this step. Now discussion is taking place about whether one should take up the challenge against vacancy and decay as a priority in the new urban policy goals. The local protest by civic society has recently led to a more open discussion between decision-makers and population, and the national government was also included in the debate on Bytom’s future.¹⁰⁷



*Inner-city residential building before demolition in Bytom
(Photo: A. Haase)*

Participation: Urban Forum Leipzig

The “Urban Forum Leipzig” was founded in November 2004 as a platform for groups, initiatives, independent specialists and active citizens of Leipzig.¹⁰⁸ The foundation paper was signed by 15 organisations and numerous citizens of Leipzig. The goal of the platform is to be active to ensure cautious urban development and to be a voice heard in public as well as in the administration and politics. Apart from listed buildings topics include building culture, traffic, retail and green areas. The cause of the founding of this forum was the forced demolition of hundreds of listed buildings in Leipzig, often also buildings with a defining effect on the cityscape. Here it was necessary to induce the city administration and the urban housing associations to handle the cultural building heritage more cautiously as well as to advocate a change in the misguided grant and urban development policies at the state and federal level. In the following years it was possible to end the urban demolition planning and to achieve a broad consensus about the most extensive conservation of the of the 19th century building structure. This was included in the “Integrated Urban Development Concept for Leipzig” (SEKo) adopted in 2009. Urban Forum Leipzig supported the founding of further urban forums in the whole of central Germany. Together with other initiatives, organisations etc. it influenced change in the content of the “Stadtumbau Ost” (Urban Reconstruction East) grant programme in the sense that the incentive to demolish Gründerzeit buildings was removed from the programme. The rules for assistance with old debts for the large housing associations in the new German states were also changed. In the state of Saxony a similar, even more intensive commitment took place.

The urban forum carried out intensive publicity work, participation in or the organisation of podium discussions or colloquia, signature or postcard campaigns, the publishing of brochures, demonstrations and above all discussions with decision makers on a local and sometimes on a national level. In Leipzig many concrete plans were able to be significantly changed and the demolition of listed buildings prevented. In 2008 the Design Forum was set up by the city council. The Forum is composed of five voting specialists from outside the city council as well as ten advisory representatives from the city council factions, the city administration and civil society including the Urban Forum and ensures a continuous voice from civil society.



Old built-up stock in Leipzig / demolished building
Leipzig-Plagwitz
(Photo: A. Haase)

Wächterhäuser (Guardian houses)

This project was founded in 2004 when Leipzig's inner-city districts with its valuable Wilhelminian building stock were endangered by high vacancies and decay, in many places even by the danger of the collapse of buildings. In order to maintain vacant buildings, mostly along main transport axes where a further residential use is highly improbable, a civic association (Haushalten e.V.)¹⁰⁹ was founded which unites architects, planners and other groups of people who want to counteract the decay of the historical building stock. The aim of the "guardian houses" is to save old and probably derelict buildings by using them and thus protect the buildings from damage through vandalism and ongoing decay. The "guardian houses" programme creates a framework where homeowners and potential renters sign a flexible contract to settle the conditions of use of these vacant houses. The contract regulates permission for the temporary use of the houses. The mutual agreement means that no rent has to be paid (except domestic services) but the tenants or users have to protect, to maintain and renovate the rooms, the flat or house themselves. Private owners are given the chance to reduce the ongoing running costs and to find new uses for the buildings as the first steps to revitalisation. The civic association – a bottom-up initiative – cooperates closely with the owners of the buildings and also with some branches of the municipality. Its activities impact on the change in the neighbourhoods and help to maintain the historical building stock. They also foster the settlement of "urban pioneers" in areas of decline and empty properties. At this moment there are 16 "guardian houses" in different old built-up districts in Leipzig. Some of them have already been "released" from the programme since the owners have started to refurbish them in order to reuse them for residential purposes. "Guardian houses" also impact on their closer neighbourhoods, and they undoubtedly contribute to the upgrading of the areas in which they are situated.

The concept of “guardian houses” has also been exported to other cities in eastern Germany and has also received international attention.¹¹⁰



The opening of the first guardian house in Leipzig
(Photo: A. Haase)

Empowerment: Active Citizenship and Neighbourhood Agreement “Ghetto” (CdQ) in Genoa

This Neighbourhood Agreement (started in 2007)¹¹¹ was set up in one of the most critical areas of the historic city centre, and it is a good example of policy response in which welfare benefits can be included in the urban regeneration programme. In this case, the issue is not correlated just to depopulation, but mainly to progressive abandonment. This neighbourhood has historically “accumulated” poverty, destitution, and isolation from the rest of the city.¹¹² There are no shops, business activities or other types of services. It is only recently that through the CdQ the municipality has activated a process of citizen participation (talks, focus groups, interviews of citizens, a survey conducted by the university), and above all the participation of NGOs (35 associations) in a social regeneration process within urban renewal. From a survey promoted by a university research group it emerges that the population was 11,017 in 2008, of which 62% were male and 38% female. It is a young neighbourhood (75% of people are 19-64 years old) and migrants dominate (64% of the total population come from Africa, Latin America and South-East Asia) (source of data: Municipal Registers). Furthermore the composition of the population is mixed: there are elderly Italian people, legal and illegal foreigners, students, artists and, recently, professionals such as architects and painters. This policy tool, 67% of which is funded by national and regional integrated funds and the remaining 33% by state resources, provided two lines of strategy: urban and social actions. In the first action the refurbishment of buildings and flats, which will become social housing (a *Casa della Giovine* – for young women and a *Nursery School*, both forthcoming), was carried out. Other flats have been restructured by means of contributions paid by the municipality to private landlords. In addition, streets, buildings and gas- power- and

water supply systems have been renovated as well. Accompanying these actions are five social initiatives, now partly concluded. The most successful was the opening of the *Casa di quartiere* “GhettUp” (Neighbourhood House). It is a sort of headquarters for associations, citizens and residents of the Ghetto where they can carry out activities and hold cultural events to promote solidarity and social inclusion (such as elementary language courses for migrants, a legal help desk, a video lab giving Ghetto news and information on the city’s social services). One other project that has been completed is *Cittadinanza attiva* (active citizenship). It was a typical bottom-up policy based on participation since, according to a university survey, many proposals to improve living conditions came directly from citizens or their associations. Other activities are still in progress: a first aid station, support to enterprise to improve attractiveness, an artist’s urban area to provide flats for young artists engaged in innovative projects to embellish the Ghetto. Even if social and urban decline is still visible, these projects have been able to improve both the quality of building configuration and the living conditions of many citizens thanks to the creation of real opportunities to access social and public services.¹³



Poster for the initiative “GhettUp” in Genoa
(Photo: C. Cortese)

5. Conclusions

The examples show various activities with different results in the field of urban governance. To summarise it can be said that:

As for *Bytom*, one can conclude that increasing protest by civil society led to the problems of decay, the worsening housing conditions, vacancy and demolition being taken on board in the first place by the local policy agenda. With the concurrent formation of differently oriented initiatives the chances of success were increased and the problem behind the protests became even more “visual”. First the publically effective protest, which recently even led to political consequences (the voting out of the mayor) mobilised a wide public and forced local politicians to react. At the same time the situation in *Bytom* was also taken to national decision makers, even to the Polish government. The civil society protest thus drove agenda setting in a decisive manner; it remains to be seen whether only a verbal or symbolic reaction takes place (by recognising the problem) or whether substantial policies follow. With respect to the further development there is the question whether the protest will transfer to other types of action so that civil society involvement can be staged long term and the different actors can be linked together. This will depend on whether or not other urban development and housing policies are implemented.

In Leipzig, the example of the Urban Forum shows that bottom-up action can become a very elaborate type of organisation with a high degree of professionalism and also what influence this involvement can have not only at local, but also at regional governance levels. At least the basic direction of urban development in Leipzig has been co-determined and priorities changed. The Urban Forum concentrates less on spontaneous protest (which has also occurred), but much more on having the right to be heard, cooperation and co-determination. A large circle of lay experts has arisen as a result of the involvement, which can influence and support the development of similar initiatives in other places. Communication plays an important role, as does expert knowledge with which the members of the Urban Forum confront political decision makers and the city administration. The Urban Forum is an example of a low resource, but high capacity strong civil society initiative. Through its well-publicised actions it has become a partner to be taken seriously by the city policy makers and administration and it participates in the elaboration of master plans. In comparison the guardian house initiative acts directly. It deals with the problems of decay and vacancy linked to de-investment and a lack of demand in cooperation with owners, i.e. private economy actors. It thus has an effect within a political and legal framework created by the city. In the meantime the city has incorporated the initiative into its urban development concept as an example of best-practice.

Active citizenship in Genoa stands for classical activation, that is, empowerment strategy in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. Bottom up activities are incorporated in a state social welfare programme by means of the agreement. With this an effort is made to create more integration between the residential groups in the affected old city quarters. Active citizenship differs from the above-mentioned forms by its connection between involvement and public funded support. In this way, and through its inclusion in the state social welfare programme, it is very close to that which is termed a “third sector organisation” in the scientific literature.¹¹⁴

Overall it becomes clear that this type of civil society involvement, or the inclusion of the civil society, is very dependent on the relevant context. Here context means mainly a) the shrinkage situation, b) the affected policy or management field, and c) the local political and cultural traditions and mentalities. The policy field selected here belongs to one of those in which, classically, civil society involvement occurs, in contrast to (for instance) the field of land use or brownfields. The examples also show the important role played by the actions of civil society in shrinking cities, and that there is much potential to include this. It also shows, however, that (above all for Bytom) how difficult it is to create a conscience relating to unpopular problems and finally to force decision makers to act. In particular, through the example of Bytom, it can be seen how difficult the situation is and what barriers civic involvement comes up against.

Long-term research on social movements comes to the conclusion that “since the 1990s [there has been an] increasingly ... fragmented field of urban movements”.¹¹⁵ In this fragmented field the types of actions of groups, initiatives and networks that are focused on the problems and conflicts arising in shrinking cities are integrated. They form, at best, thematic or mobilisation related networks, but no overarching movement. All of these conflicts and the controversies and protests arising from them do not, however, result in an independent urban movement, but rather duplicate the field of different actors with whom we have been dealing with for many years.¹¹⁶ This is related to the different perception and thematisation of the consequences, problems and conflict situations of shrinkage, but also

to the different local policy fields and regional contexts. At best the privatisation of public assets consists of an overarching focus of activity and protest – there are many (successful) examples of citizens' demands and citizens' decisions (referendums) in Germany. Privatisations appear to be more widespread in shrinking cities due to stretched public budgets. They are, however, perceived as a medium of neo-liberal policies, and not as a reaction to specific problems of shrinkage. Due to these circumstances there are probably no overarching urban movements which are typical candidates for shrinkage, even in the future. For the future it will probably be the smaller, local mobilisations and networks that will determine civil society activities. However, it is not enough to classify these as NIMBIES: the above mentioned examples and many others show that for the groups, initiatives and networks it is a matter of more than their own neighbourhoods, interests and stakes.

Shrinking cities also have experience of the juxtaposition of various problems; they can provide knowledge for cities newly affected by crises.¹¹⁷ They can also show how civil society can act under complicated conditions, how civic involvement can draw the public's attention to problematic issues that are ignored or made taboo by local policies. The examples show the variety and potential of civic involvement, but also that civic involvement is fragile, is not automatic and is based on its context. Shrinking cities are laboratories, not only for actual urban developments, but for democracy on a local scale. In a specific way shrinking cities constitute an *avant garde* – but a specific one as they have to find solutions. Coming back to the above mentioned nexus between the weaknesses of the civil actors and the extent of shrinkage in Eastern Europe one can recommend that the focus is placed on research, public support and policy on a super-local scale to Eastern Europe.

Thorsten Wiechmann

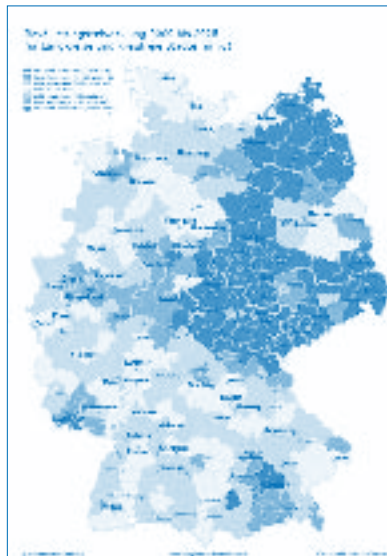
“Europe: islands of growth in a sea of shrinkage”



Europe is a shrinking continent. Its population is expected to decrease dramatically, and this will have a major effect on many municipalities. According to Thorsten Wiechmann – professor of planning at the University of Dortmund and European expert on shrinkage with a wide track record of research in the field of urban shrinkage – many cities currently still underestimate the future impact of shrinkage on their economies, social structure and environment. However, accepting and acknowledging shrinkage does not mean that an area is doomed to fail. Instead, shrinkage may offer the opportunity to revitalise the local economy, boost citizen participation and create a more liveable and sustainable environment.

Shrinkage: From Possibility to Matter of Fact

There are many different forms of urban shrinkage in Europe. How did this diversity develop? And why are some regions more affected than others? Thorsten Wiechmann explains that there are two possible developments which may lead to shrinkage: outmigration or a negative rate of natural increase. Often one even finds both of them at the same time. “The rate of natural increase is usually quite predictable”, Wiechmann says. “However, the movement of people to or from a place is more difficult to predict, because there are so many different causes that lead to migration.”



Shrinkage in Germany
(Source: Bertelsmann Foundation)

What is the situation in Europe in this respect? “If we look at the general demographic development of Europe, we see very low birth rates of fewer than 1.5 children per woman in many countries. These figures tell us that the European population will definitely decrease, no matter how many migrants may come to Europe.” Wiechmann explains that this will have an important impact on European municipalities. “Most of them will shrink, and only a very few will grow. In the long run, Europe will come to consist of islands of growth in a sea of shrinkage.”

This is a future image that many cities may not yet be thinking of, but that they will definitely be confronted with. “Both the number of cities that are already shrinking and that will be shrinking in the future are underes-

timated. Still people believe that most cities are growing, but they are not. Even entire urban regions, including suburban areas are shrinking.” It all sounds very dramatic and alarming, but Wiechmann believes shrinking cities or regions do not have to be afraid. “Neither growth nor shrinkage is intrinsically bad. There is no perfect size for a city. You can’t say that a city of 60,000 inhabitants is less livable in than one of 80,000 or 100,000. You can’t say shrinkage puts us in a negative situation; it’s just a matter of fact that we need to live with.”

From Pursuing Growth to Accepting Shrinkage

The financial crisis has forced us to reconsider our common ways of thinking. “We are so used to growth that it has become part of the identity of our society. The whole planning system and the entire governance system are based on the idea of growth.”

This idea has led to the development of policies that are based on the same paradigm. However, shrinkage requires a completely different approach to planning and policy-making. However, there are not yet many politicians and professionals who have embraced this new approach. “There are only some countries where this new type of thinking has been accepted. Particularly in East Germany, politicians, planners and people have accepted – at least to a certain extent – that demographic growth is not very likely to occur. Also in the Netherlands I have the impression that both the government and inhabitants are quite well aware of the consequences of demographic change and future shrinking processes in the periphery of the country”, Wiechmann states.

How do these different views translate into policy? Wiechmann identifies 4 different phases when it comes to policy responses to shrinkage:

1. ignoring demographic change;
2. pursuing new growth and trying to reverse the trend of shrinkage;
3. adapting to shrinkage by realising that there is no possibility of growth in the future;
4. re-inventing the city or region, not just by adapting to the unavoidable trend of becoming smaller, but by creating a new economic basis for it.

“Most countries are not very far on in this process. Many are still ignoring demographic change and the majority are still going for growth. Very few have moved on to adaptation, and even fewer have reached phase four.” Wiechmann illustrates the current situation: “Many cities and regions still see growth as the answer to all problems. They focus on large external investors that can replace old businesses, such as the mining industry. They do not really concentrate on creating sustainable, new economic motors for the economy. For me, reinvention means finding a competitive position in a knowledge society, with new economic activities based on already existing local businesses and initiatives that are promising for the next decades.”

Active Citizens as the Key to Re-Invention

In order to discover new, sustainable economic activities or sectors for the future, the indigenous potential of the city or regions is very important in Wiechmann’s view. “You have to work with the people who already live in your city. There are some nice examples of such an approach. During the international building exhibition in Saxony Anhalt (Stadtumbau Ost) that took place between 2005 and 2010,

19 cities participated in model projects on urban restructuring. Citizens widely participated in these projects.” Wiechmann also finds Detroit a very inspiring city. “In Detroit you have many community gardening projects on vacant ‘blots’, referring to both empty blocks and plots. People there have conquered many unused areas. Homeowners take the one or two empty plots next to their house and use them as gardens, or playgrounds. I believe this is a win-win situation. Those who stay in the city have more space, and the empty space is used.”

Wiechmann is very much convinced of the importance of resident involvement. “Local and regional governments should involve their residents much more than in the past. Unlike in growing areas, developments in shrinking cities or regions need to take place on existing plots, and in existing buildings. This means you have to deal with property owners, residents and users, making it a very complex process. Planning a shrinking area is far more difficult than planning for a growing city.”

Nevertheless, the question remains how citizens can be involved more directly, and what local governments could do to promote the active participation of residents. “I think local governments should get used to sharing power with residents”, Wiechmann states. “Right from the beginning, ideas should be developed in cooperation with the people. The city could give up central control and give it to neighbourhoods and communities instead, trusting that locals know these areas best and can therefore come up with good plans for their future. In addition, if you have a strategic planning process for a shrinking place in which you try to develop perspective, it is more promising to involve citizens, the public sector and civil society.”

In Wiechmann’s view resident participation can be promoted not just by local governments, but also by regional or central governments. “State programmes can be very helpful. In East Germany we for example have Stadtumbau Ost, in which the federal government and the federal states in East Ger-

Stadtumbau Ost & Stadtumbau West

The Stadtumbau Ost (Urban restructuring in the new federal states) programme was created in 2002 by the Federal German Government as a funding programme. It aims to support East German cities and municipalities to maintain or raise their existing standards as attractive locations for both working and living. The programme has the objective of upgrading cities that suffer from the consequences of shrinkage by strengthening their inner city areas and to stabilise the housing markets of shrinking cities by reducing the existing housing stock overhang.

The programme has two main objectives:

- *to upgrade cities that suffer from the consequences of shrinkage by strengthening their inner city areas;*
- *to stabilise the housing markets of shrinking cities by reducing the existing housing stock overhang.*

In 2002, a competition for the best urban restructuring concepts was held as part of the Stadtumbau Ost project, which received feedback with contributions handed in by 260 east German municipalities. Stadtumbau West (Urban Restructuring in West Germany) is a similar promotion programme initiated by the German Federal Government and the state governments. It has been a central pillar of urban development funding in Western Germany since 2004.

The priorities for the financial aid in the Stadtumbau West programme are:

- strengthening inner cities and town centres;
- revitalising industrial locations/urban derelict land or brownfields;
- furthering development schemes for residential areas.

401 cities and local authorities in west Germany are taking part in the urban restructuring programme Stadtumbau West. The local dimension of Stadtumbau West is very strong, and the programme leaves a lot of space for bottom-up initiatives and strategies created by local partners or stakeholders.

Sources:

www.stadtumbau-ost.info

www.stadtumbau-west.de

www.eukn.org/Germany/de_en

many stimulated active municipal strategies and actions to adapt to demographic change in the region. This greatly helped municipalities to move from phases 1 and 2 mentioned before to phase 3.”

Exchanging Knowledge and Experiences

Apart from state funds for local initiatives in shrinking areas, Thorsten Wiechmann also believes that the exchange of knowledge and experiences among shrinking cities and regions is of great importance. He has been in charge of the “Cities Regrowing Smaller” (CIRES) project; a COST Action which is going to come to an end in 2013.

CIRES aims to foster knowledge on regeneration strategies in shrinking cities across Europe. “We are going to establish an online platform with an overview of trends in urban shrinkage in Europe. It will consist of a number of maps on www.shrinkingcities.eu and give an overview of shrinkage in Europe. 26 countries will be included in this map, which is quite a challenge. In addition we are going to establish a best practice database for practitioners, planners and politicians. We will also have a special publication for the academic audience.

The website should become a continuous platform for exchange and should be ready in 2013. It will be launched during the final conference of the project which will take place in September 2013 in Dortmund. If you want to be fully up-to-date when it comes to shrinkage in Europe, you should therefore visit the platform on a regular basis.”

Zachte G

Province of Limburg, The Netherlands

“Creativity as a way to combat the effects of population decline”

Province of Limburg, The Netherlands

Number of inhabitants: 1,131,938

The Dutch Province of Limburg is experiencing demographic decline. The Parkstad area – in the south of Limburg, with Heerlen as its centre – is one of the first urbanised regions in the Netherlands facing the effects of ageing and demographic decline. The “Zachte G initiative wants to put Limburg’s creative class on the map. It forms a virtual, open web platform on which members can display their talent and work. Its mission is to contribute to a vital climate for creative people living in Limburg; a climate in which there is room for initiative, experiment and diversity. Limburg needs initiatives that improve the opportunities for young people. Therefore, Zachte G promotes engagement and discussion on issues that are relevant for the future of the region. The Zachte G community consists of almost 600 designers, architects, media designers and artists.

The Development of Zachte G and Its Activities

Zachte G (Soft G, referring to the way the letter “g” is pronounced in the South of the Netherlands) has three main goals:

1. to create a better future for the creative industries in Limburg;
2. to make the “invisible” creative community visible;
3. to find solutions for the problems related to a declining and ageing population.

Zachte G started as a creative web community: an open and social platform that is shaped by the input of its users and members. It gave individual talents the ability to promote themselves, their talents and their work, and illustrated the wide diversity of talented, creative people living and working in Limburg.

Today, Zachte G deals with a wider range of activities. One of the central issues the initiative deals with is demographic decline, and the question of how young creative people can be involved in this debate. In 2010, Zachte G organised the “Design for Emptiness” challenge. This contest challenged artists, designers and young entrepreneurs to create concepts for how to deal with the increasing number of vacant buildings in the city of Heerlen. The city council awarded a prize of € 10,000.-. However, there was one important condition for the winner: the prize money had to be used to put the winning idea into practice. By staging a public vote during the i_beta/event and by allocating a vacant plot in the inner city of Heerlen as the home of the exhibition of the prize winners, it drew a lot of attention from the press and visitors to Heerlen. In December 2010, the “Design for Emptiness” winners opened their fashion and art shop. Besides providing exposure for the winner, the competition also enriched the municipality of Heerlen with some thirty practical ideas and plans on how to deal with vacant properties.



Design for Emptiness

Results of the Zachte G Initiative

An important ambition for Zachte G was to display the creative talents available in the Province of Limburg. Especially against the background of ageing and shrinkage the need to build a virtual network for this group was evident. Since 2007 the network has grown, and this has resulted in better visibility for young creative people in Limburg.

The discussion on demographic decline has evolved a lot since that time. Back then, it was mainly a discussion among policymakers and politicians. Today, many creative people are working with local governments to develop new ideas for issues such as vacant properties.

Zachte G contributed to linking the issue of demographic change to creative thinking, for example by organising the “Design for Emptiness” competition, but also by producing videos and organising lectures and debates relating to the demographic challenges.

The initiative also set up an exchange with the American city of Detroit. While the context of the two regions is very different, they do have similar problems; both cities are in urgent need of new ideas that consider population decline as an opportunity and that stimulate the re-use of vacant plots and properties.

In 2010, the Zachte G initiative won a “demography prize”, which was awarded by the German Institut für Zukunftsfähigkeit.

The Impact of Zachte G on the Province of Limburg

The Zachte G initiative led to several spin-off projects, such as the i_Beta/event. This festival will be organised for the fourth time in 2013.

The most sustainable outcome may be the fact that the creative community is now considered as a serious factor in developing strategies for the future of Limburg. Zachte G put the creative class on the map. Before the network was created, the creative class was rather invisible and fragmented. By clustering individual creative entrepreneurs in a network, the image of the creative class was improved.

Zachte G also played an important role in changing the negative views of demographic change. It showed that shrinkage also provides opportunities. For the creative community, demographic decline provides space for experimenting and developing new concepts. Zachte G was able to stimulate the awareness that shrinkage – and its effects such as vacant plots and buildings – can also be seen as an advantage if it is dealt with creatively.

Funding & Governance of the Zachte G Network

The Province of Limburg has invested in Zachte G since 2007. Several municipalities have provided funding on a project basis. There are also several private parties who have invested in Zachte G, in the form of both financial and in-kind contributions.

Zachte G has no formal structure, but functions as a network. It is shaped by the input of its users – almost 600 designers, architects, media designers and artists from Limburg. Betawerk – office for design and media – is responsible for maintaining the network and organising its activities. However, all activities are organised in co-operation with partners. The basic funding is provided by the province of Limburg, which has been very appreciative of the project and the spin-off that it has delivered. The relationship with the province of Limburg can be characterised as one based on trust. In an annual report Zachte G provides a transparent overview of its results.

The Main Lessons Learnt according to Founding Member Maurice Hermans

“In a region with a changing demographic context it is important to focus on the availability of talent. A community that is based on the creativity of its people can be a strong way to bind that creativity. Furthermore, a strong community can have an impact on discussions that are relevant for the future. Media channels can show how talent and creativity can change the image of a region, and that a shrinking region can still be a vital and dynamic place.

Looking back, it might have been better if we had maintained a stronger focus. Keep asking yourself the question: ‘why does my initiative exist?’. It is important that bottom-up initiatives are fostered, but it is also important to take the initiatives and just get started. The creative industry can help to find new answers to the problems posed by shrinkage.”

Sources

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Zachte G: www.zachteg.nl

Design for Emptiness: www.designforemptiness.nl

Betawerk: www.betawerk.nl

Local Youth Co-Create New Skate Park

Kopřivnice, Moravia-Silesia, Czech Republic

“It is important for cities to listen to their younger generations”

Kopřivnice, Moravia-Silesia, Czech Republic

Number of inhabitants: 22,825 (1-1-2012)

Kopřivnice is a small Czech city in a traditionally industrial region. It is best known for the vehicle manufacturer “Tatra”, the third oldest car maker in the world. In 2008, local youngsters were actively involved in planning an old area of the city. They decided they wanted to have a skate park and consequently helped the local government to design and put their plans into operation. For municipal representatives this youth involvement showed that it is important for cities to listen to their younger generations. It not only strengthens their relationship with the city itself, but also promotes local democracy.

Involving Youngsters in Local Planning

In Kopřivnice, youngsters were actively involved in the development of a local skate park in an old area of the city. Together with city representatives, they thought about the way this park could be designed and put into effect. The whole project was managed in cooperation with the Children’s Council of Kopřivnice. Members of this council conducted a survey in all primary schools before the first discussion meeting with the city took place. That way they could make a list of the ideas and wishes of the local youth.



Local youth discussing the development of their skate park

After that, three discussions with city representatives were organised. At these meetings the following questions were discussed:

February 2008: What problems characterise the area?

1. November 2008: What kind of new developments would youngsters like to see in this area?
2. What should the skate park – the preferred development – look like?

Effects of the Skate Park and Youth Involvement

The skate park itself has had a positive effect on the area it is situated in. It is not only regularly used by young people who use it for skating and skateboarding, but also serves as a location for local activities and events. In addition, the relationship between local youngsters and their city has improved. Young people started to trust local officials and city representatives more. The Children's Council played an important role in this respect. It formed a successful link between city officials and local youngsters.

Funding & Governance of the Skate Park

The skate park was funded by the Czech Ministry of the Environment's Revolving Fund. The total cost of the "Kolo kolem Kopru" project was 1,163,163 Czech crowns (approx. 47,000 EUR). It received a grant of 1,016,273 Czech crowns (approx. 41,000 EUR).

The skate park project was part of Kopřivnice's health strategy. The city has been a member of the Health Cities of the Czech Republic Association since 2003. This association is the only network of Czech municipalities that aims to improve the sustainable development, health and quality of life in cities. Health Cities' mission is strategically and sustainably to develop the city and actively involve local residents in making plans for the future.

The Main Lessons Learned according to Project Coordinator Ivana Rašková

"It is important for cities to listen to their younger generations. If a city learns how to cooperate with young people, these youngsters will also be willing to contribute to the development of the city in the future, and actively contribute to other plans for the city."

Sources

Ivana Rašková (project coordinator): ivana.raskova@koprivnice.cz

City of Kopřivnice: www.koprivnice.cz

Jooske Baris

“Many shrinking areas still automatically focus on attaining growth”



Jooske Baris has been involved with the issue of shrinkage for a long time. She did research in Western Germany, trying to uncover the valuable lessons shrinking cities there had learned. Today she is involved in setting up what is going to be the Dutch Platform on Demographic Transition. Jooske Baris is an allrounder, who has wide experience when it comes to the issue of shrinkage. How does she see the future of shrinkage in Europe?

Different Types of Shrinkage in Europe

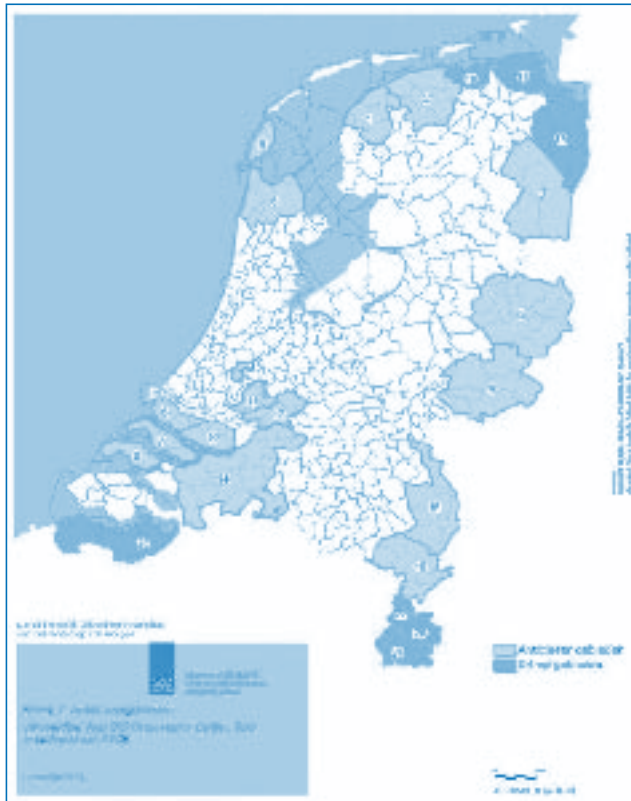
Many cities and regions in Europe are shrinking. Shrinkage has become an almost universal phenomenon that will affect the majority of European municipalities. However, the question is whether shrinkage affects all cities and regions to the same degree, and if the effects of shrinkage are the same everywhere on the continent. According to Jooske Baris, shrinkage itself is rather similar all round Europe, but its effects are very diverse. “In urban areas such as in the Netherlands, the effects are very different from those in rural regions in, for example, France or Italy. In the Netherlands it was very difficult for many regions and public officials to accept shrinkage, whereas in other countries the idea of having regions with fewer facilities, employment or economic vibrancy is more generally accepted.” Obviously, these different approaches to shrinkage also led to different types of policy responses. “In Dutch municipalities, people first tried to combat shrinkage, and attempted to boost the local economy. Losing local facilities and services was a major taboo. In rural areas in France though, it has always been more or less accepted that it may take an hour to get to the nearest supermarket or doctor.”

How Should Cities or Regions Respond to Shrinkage?

Every municipality or region has its own way of dealing with shrinkage. Jooske Baris believes this is very logical, as there is no single recipe for dealing with its effects. Just like the rural area of East Groningen, in the North of the Netherlands, parts of the city of Rotterdam are also shrinking; two very different areas going through a similar development. “The main challenge for local or regional governments is to find new ways to cooperate, and to gather different stakeholders – such as housing corporations, project developers, local governments, health services etc – round the same goal. In addition, it is very important to find new and flexible ways of using existing funds, allowing for the development of innovative ways to generate or reallocate funds.” Baris gives an example. “In a shrinking city, the police force could for example be smaller. The money that is saved in this way could be invested in community centres or the care of the elderly.”

In the Dutch Achterhoek, in the East of the country, far-reaching regional cooperation has already been achieved. In 2011, local governments, businesses and social institutions signed a covenant that aims to turn the Achterhoek into a vital, attractive and healthy region by 2020. The covenant includes

projects in the areas of innovative and sustainable economy, vital living space, mobility and opportunities for rural development .



Shrinking regions and regions that are expected to shrink between 2010-2020 or 2020-2040 (anticipeergebieden). Source: Rijk, VNG, IPO

Intergovernmental approach to shrinkage in the Netherlands

Together with the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) and the Interprovincial Council (IPO), the Dutch government has created an Intergovernmental approach to shrinkage in the Netherlands.

The main aim of this approach is to improve and enhance the habitability of shrinking regions and regions that are expected to shrink in the future (see illustration). The approach mainly focuses on countering the negative effects of demographic change on the habitability of the areas. The main policy areas involved are:

1. housing and spatial planning: restructuring the housing stock and adjusting spatial planning to the effects of shrinkage and a changing population structure;

2. amenities & services: adjusting amenities and services to a shrinking population and a changing population structure;
3. economic vitality and the labour market.

Within this approach, local governments are viewed as the central actors. They are responsible for the creation of regional coalitions to shape the approach to shrinkage. They are also encouraged to cooperate closely with organisations such as housing corporations, educational institutions and health providers, and with the private sector and citizens.

The provincial and central governments have a management task. Whereas the provinces are also considered to be important investors and auditors, the central government does not provide any additional funds for shrinking areas. Its role is purely a facilitating one.

Source: Interbestuurlijke Voortgangsrapportage Bevolkingsdaling 2012, Rijk, VNG, IPO

Cooperation with the Private Sector

In the case of the Achterhoek, cooperation with the private sector is very strong. Should shrinking areas thus increasingly try to cooperate with private stakeholders? “Shrinking areas often have to deal with disinvestment. Traditionally, we have been very much focused on growth, in terms both of the number of inhabitants and the size of the economy. In the case of shrinkage, this traditional idea is being blown apart. Even demolishing buildings costs money. How to earn money in a shrinking area therefore is an essential question. How do you get returns on investments in shrinking cities or regions? For commercial parties this is always going to be the most important starting point. But these parties often have interests in these regions as well: they own land there, the value of which decreases when the area is not being invested in. If you want to work with the private sector, you therefore have to look for new ways of funding and earning that make it attractive for private investors to cooperate.” This is not an easy task. Many shrinking places still automatically focus on attaining growth, instead of trying to find innovative financial methods to deal with shrinkage in a more accepting manner, Jooske Baris says.

The Role of Local Residents in Shrinking Cities or Regions

In Jooske Baris’ view, resident participation is a relatively common phenomenon in shrinking areas. “In some regions characterised by shrinkage, local societies are used to taking care of each other, exactly because they often lack certain services and facilities. People also tend to feel more connected to their environment.” Nevertheless, the type of participation and degree to which residents want to participate differ from one locality to another. “Research by CAB Groningen has shown that there are various citizenship styles. In areas with high unemployment or social isolation, residents participate differently from in areas that are predominantly inhabited by double-income families. For politicians and policy makers it is important to understand how they can respond to these styles.” According to Baris, people tend to be particularly willing to rise to action when it comes to the habitability of their neighbourhood, city or region. Habitability in turn is very much related to the availability of services and facilities.

Lessons from Germany

In Germany, local residents have been actively involved in many cases of shrinkage. How has Germany been so successful in this respect? Baris believes that this has to do with the fact that the political responsibility for shrinkage is often locally based. Municipalities or networks of municipalities are able to direct their own policies in this field. In addition, regional cooperation is obligatory in Germany. “In the Netherlands, regional cooperation is a choice; in Germany it is legally required. This is an advantage, because regional cooperation is essential when it comes to shrinkage.” Another important factor is that shrinkage was recognised as an important challenge at an earlier stage. From the start, both the central government and local/regional governments realised that shrinkage could have a major effect on habitability, sustainability and health. Several East German cities had already shown that shrinkage could have an important negative influence. That is why the central government developed many targeted programmes and policies focusing on shrinkage, and specifically allocated funds to shrinking areas.

The Future of Shrinkage in Europe

We can learn a lot from the past, but obviously shrinkage is also a future phenomenon. The growth of the 90s and 2000s is probably not going to return any time soon, and more and more towns, cities and regions will have to deal with the realities of declining populations and shrinking economies. This will lead to many new strategic questions. “The recently launched knowledge Dutch Platform for Demographic Transition has defined several key challenges for the future. How does one analyse shrinkage? How long does shrinkage take, and will growth ever return? How can funds be used innovatively in shrinking areas? How can private investors be encouraged to cooperate?” These are all issues that will be analysed and discussed by the platform and on its website www.vanmeernaarbeter.nl. The website should become the Dutch knowledge hub for information, data and expertise in the field of shrinkage.

Jooske Baris believes that shrinking cities or regions will increasingly have to look for ways of involving different partners in tackling the effects of shrinkage. Even banks or mortgage lenders may have to be included. In addition, it will be important to be flexible, and to create joint projects and policies that can be adapted if required.

However, it may also be good to be sober. Shrinkage is a major issue today, but in time it could become more generally accepted. “Maybe we won’t be using the word ‘shrinkage’ anymore in five years. Now we think it’s very special, but in a couple of years shrinking cities or regions may be the rule instead of the exception. In the end, history is repeating itself. There are many small historic cities in the Netherlands that used to be major trading centres. We have a short-term memory and tend to forget that shrinkage has always existed.”

BürgerBus Brieselang e.V.

Brieselang, Brandenburg, Germany
“Citizens driving citizens”

Brieselang, Brandenburg, Germany
Number of inhabitants: 10,974 (2011)

In 2007, a group of residents from Brieselang set up the BürgerBus Brieselang Association in order to improve the transport options for elderly and handicapped people. From Brieselang’s railway station there are many regional connections to other surrounding towns, but within the community bus services were limited. For people who are not able to walk or ride a bicycle it was therefore almost impossible to get to the station. They could take a taxi, but as there are only two taxis available, this was not a very attractive option. The BürgerBus is a small bus that can carry up to eight people. It provides bus services in Brieselang itself and carries people to the shops, services and connecting public transport links located in the centre of the town.

How Was the Bürgerbus Initiative Developed and Realised?

First, the residents involved investigated similar, existing services in other communities. Then they tried to involve the regional transport provider, the county (Landkreis) and the local administration. In the end, they took matters into their own hands and founded the BürgerBus Brieselang Association, which now operates the bus service. The main aims of the Association were defined as:

- promoting mobility (of more immobile groups in society);
- improving access to public facilities;
- complementing the available public transport;
- connecting local areas better with each other;
- enabling citizens to deliver services for each other.

Some of the people who were involved in setting up the Association are now still working as voluntary drivers. The BürgerBus runs from Monday to Friday from 8:00 to 17:30 and serves two different local routes. For trips within the community, tickets cost € 1.40. If passengers want to go to other destinations, they have to pay the regular price based on the regional transport provider’s rates.



The BürgerBus in action

The Results of the BürgerBus Initiative

The continuity of the bus service is guaranteed by 25 voluntary drivers. So far, 37,000 passengers have made use of the service. Residents of Brieselang living further away from the centre who decided to use the service now feel more connected to the centre and its social options. The BürgerBus schedule is fully integrated with other bus and train schedules, making it possible for people easily to catch their connections, such as the train to Berlin or Nauen. Other residents have asked the people responsible for the BürgerBus initiative if they can copy their model.

Both the OECD and Governance International have appointed the BürgerBus in Brieselang as an international best practice.

Funding & Governance of the Bürgerbus Initiative

The initiative was funded by a € 35,000 grant from the Federal State of Brandenburg. The local and district authorities shared the operating costs of the bus. The income from ticket sales and from the community association's membership fees also contributes to the operating costs.

The initiative is managed by the members of the association. Before its launch, they had to negotiate with the official institutions involved. They had to convince them that they were serious, and that they had the knowledge and power to begin the initiative and make sure it would be a sustainable service for the community. There were critics who could not imagine that a civil organisation of volunteers would be able to run a sustainable, reliable and regular bus service. However, once the initiative had been set up, even these critics started to praise the project. At the beginning, the initiators felt very lonely though, and did not feel very supported by the officials they had to work with.

The Main Lessons Learned according to Founding Member Klaus Werth

“Never give up. Also private individuals can manage public services. If you start a project like this, you have to be well-informed about rules and regulations. You need people who can come up with solutions, and who are not afraid of questions and difficulties. Once the project has been set up, you need someone to manage the bus service and the drivers' activities.”

Sources

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Plexus Centre of Excellence

Idom & Raasted, Western Jutland, Denmark

“Involve as many people as possible from the very beginning”

Idom & Raasted, Western Jutland, Denmark.

Number of inhabitants: 600 and 400

Idom and Raasted are two small villages in Western Jutland which are facing depopulation. The two small villages are 6 kilometres apart and were considered not big enough for new activities or services for the local population to be set up. However, the inhabitants themselves felt a great need for a place where they could meet other people to play sports, shop, and indulge in cultural activities, day-care and leisure activities. That is why the Plexus Centre was set up in Idom. It is run by a non-profit-making organisation which focuses on three central services: commercial, local and cultural.

Local Volunteers Setting up the Plexus Centre

The idea for the Plexus Centre of Excellence was developed by a group of local volunteers: a farmer, the headmaster of a school, a forester, a journalist and a businessman. They presented their views at two public meetings, which half of all the inhabitants of the two villages attended. During one of these meetings, 10 subgroups with representatives from all the existing local associations – such as parents, sports, senior citizens, etc. – were established. They started working on different aspects of the project. Meetings were held regularly, and more and more people were invited and inspired to join the process. The open nature of the process greatly facilitated local ownership. In addition, collaboration with and respect for the local government was also prioritised from the very beginning. It took four years to complete the setting up of the Plexus Centre, which was opened in 2008.

The Plexus Centre and Its Activities

Because of the Plexus Centre, volunteering has become embedded in the local culture of Idom and Raasted. Older people, for example, serve lunch to school children. Without these volunteers, school lunches would be too expensive for many families.

The new fitness room is used by elderly people in the morning, when no one else is using it, allowing them to exercise in peace.

The Plexus Centre also has a grocer's shop where local people can do their daily shopping. Once a month, locals have dinner together, which has improved social relations among the people of the two villages.

The Centre also provides cultural activities that would normally not be organised in villages of this size. The Plexus Centre has hosted performances of Mongolian musicians, a theatre group from Mexico and Italy and lectures by well-known speakers.



Enjoying music at the Plexus Centre

In the afternoons, children can use the open sports facilities freely. The Centre also provides space for day-care, a local choir and has facilities for conferences, events and parties. The latter are used to generate funds for the Centre's local and cultural activities.

Consequences of the Plexus Centre

The Plexus Centre has created five full-time jobs for local employees from different educational backgrounds. There is also a large number of young part-time employees who are now able to work in their local area instead of having to commute to bigger cities for "after school jobs".

Today, Idom and Raasted are known as an attractive area where the inhabitants are actively engaged and know each other well. There are many activities for young people. Young children can participate in a children's club at Plexus, while adults can enjoy a beer, read the newspaper, watch TV or play games.

Funding of the Plexus Centre of Excellence

The Plexus Centre was funded by European, national, local and private money. It received € 66,500 of EU funding, in the form of rural district funding. The national government provided € 560,000. The local governments of Idom and Raasted provided an € 173,300 fund for both construction and operating costs. € 145,500 was provided by private investors.

Today, maintenance, wages and other costs are covered by rental incomes coming from the day-care and sports facilities. The local government rents these facilities for almost the entire day. In addition, conferences, music- and cultural events and private parties also generate income for the Plexus Centre. The management board, which still consists of volunteers, sets the targets for development and activities.

Governance and Daily Running of the Centre

From the very early days the Steering Committee of the Plexus Centre has been in close dialogue with the two local governments involved. They have shared ideas, discussed financial solutions, considered the consequences for existing development plans and so on. There was close collaboration with the local mayor and the Centre's manager. The Plexus Centre still benefits from these close ties with the local government, because civil servants now also use the centre for meetings, courses and celebrations.

Lessons Learned according to Steering Group Member Helle Torsbjerg Niewald

“It is important to involve as many people as possible from the very beginning. There may be times when the project slows down or gets stuck in problems that are difficult to solve. That is when information and explanations are most needed. However, you also need to focus on spreading good news by writing articles for local newspapers and organising public seminars and activities. One also needs to remember that the project is not completed once the physical building is there. It needs continuous attention and recognition to keep volunteers active and satisfied. The maintenance of the building and the development of the centre's facilities have also to be prioritised from the beginning.”

Sources

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Tamara Weyman

“Local governments have an important role to play within a shrinking context”



Dr Tamara Weyman works as a contracted expert for the OECD, working on various projects involving employment and skills, SME development, Southeast Asia, territorial development policy, and demographic change and sustainability. She also worked as a Research Associate at the Urban Research Centre, University of Western Sydney (UWS) and completed her PhD on Spatial information sharing for better regional decision making in 2007. How does a researcher from the other side of the world view shrinkage in Europe, and how does it compare to shrinkage in Australia and South East Asia? Weyman shared her thoughts with EUKN in an email interview.

Urban shrinkage has many different forms in Europe. What differences do you see between shrinkage in Europe and shrinkage in Australia/South East Asia?

“Firstly, Australia is a relatively young country when compared to European settlement. Therefore there is not the large population or population shrinkage that is occurring in Europe. Secondary, shrinkage is occurring mostly in the smaller towns (10,000 population) that are experiencing.”¹⁸

1. Industry restructuring – for example, in mining towns, the mining company closes down, thereby impacting on the town’s employment and flow on effects.
2. Declining rural economy, affected either by drought or changing economic scale, e.g. smaller farms are being taken over by large corporations resulting in small farming families moving out of the towns, and technology (machines) now dominating the work load, rather than staff, impacting on the local economy of towns. There is also population migration due to lifestyle changes, whereby the older Australians are moving towards the coast, where there are more health services and facilities. The young are also moving towards the coast to the larger metropolitan cities for better opportunities in education and employment.

However – shrinking cities is a global phenomenon, according to the recent publication by Martinez-Fernandez et al. (2012a, p. 219):

The process of globalization leads to the development of a small number of ‘global cities’ (Amin and Thrift, 1994; Sassen, 2001; Dicken, 2003), which gather high-level financial and service activities, and information and communication networks. Private investment is concentrated in regions and cities that possess quality infrastructures, high levels of human resources, and dense networks among operators (Lang, 2005). In particular, capital cities and large metropolitan regions can draw advantage from the concentration of political, economic and cultural institutions (Amin and Thrift, 1994). Conversely, globalization is also the cause of

the decline of numerous industrial cities that have been unable to find a niche in the international economic competition for capital.

According to Martinez et al. (2012c), mining cities are a primary example of industrial change as a determinant of shrinkage:

... once prosperous settlements servicing a mining site or a system of mining sites – are characterized by long-term population and/or economic decline. Many of these towns experience periods of growth and shrinkage, mirroring the ebbs and flows of international mineral markets which determine the fortunes of the dominant mining corporation upon which each of these towns heavily depends. This dependence on one main industry produces a parallel development in the fluctuations of both workforce and population. Thus, the strategies of the main company in these towns can, to a great extent, determine future developments and have a great impact on urban management plans. Climate conditions, knowledge, education and health services, as well as transportation links, are important factors that have impacted on lifestyles in mining cities, but it is the parallel development with the private sector operators (often a single corporation) that constitutes the distinctive feature of these cities and that ultimately defines their shrinkage. (p. 245)

It is of note that these shrinking mining cities are occurring not only in Australia, such as Mount Isa, but also in Canada, Japan and Mexico.”

Do national/regional/local policy responses to shrinkage differ in these (three) different parts of the world?

“The European response to shrinkage is more advanced than the Australian. However, local governments that have been impacted on by declining populations over the past 40 years tend to focus their policy response on population stabilisation and economic sustainability. Local areas that are experiencing population decline on various scales focus their policy response on economic and population growth, such as improving infrastructure and aesthetic aspects of the town, and land use management. The State and Federal governments do not generally interfere with local issues.

However, Governments have been more active in relation to policies to address the ageing of the population. In the recent OECD publication: ‘Demographic Change and Local Development: Shrinkage, Regeneration and Social Dynamics’¹¹⁹ a number examples were given:

- **China** – Targeting elderly Social Exclusion by developing supporting systems in villages and establishing a welfare system to cover the whole population.
- **Canada** – Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW). Provides support for unemployed older workers in shrinking towns. 5-26 weeks’ training in group settings and with work experience and income support while participating in the project.
- **Germany** – Perspective 50 Plus: Regional Employment Pacts for Older Long-term Unemployed Persons. Set incentives for regional and local actors to form alliances (regional employment pacts) in order to develop and implement new and effective strategies and instruments for sustainable integration of older long-term unemployed. Employment pacts involve all relevant stakeholders within a region such as job centres; training providers, non-governmental organisations, employers, social partners, welfare organisations, churches and health insurance.

- **The Netherlands** – Strengthen the work incentives embedded in the retirement and welfare systems; remove obstacles to hiring and retaining older workers; raise the employability of older workers (promoting better health at work, employment services for older workers).

The OECD LEED Programme is conducting a project on the impact of demographic change in local labour markets where these issues are analysed in depth in regions in Poland, the Netherlands, Japan, Italy, China and Sweden.”

What is the role of local governments in shrinking cities? How should they respond to shrinkage? Are they currently approaching the issue successfully, or should something change?

“From the Australian perspective,¹²⁰ local governments have an important role to play within the shrinking context. Although the State and Territory governments administer their own planning systems complete with statutory, policy and procedural frameworks, they do however delegate a number of day-to-day (local) decision making functions to local government. Most of the planning decisions are made at the local government level. The current response to population decline depends on the local authorities’ acknowledgement of the population decline and whether or not they decide to pursue growth or stabilisation. Generally, local authorities prepare and implement an overarching 5 to 10 year strategy/plan that encompasses:

- economic development;
- education/skills;
- environment;
- disadvantaged groups;
- land use planning;
- asset management.

Yes, there is more local governments can do. Rather than focusing on planning for growth, there is a need for consolidation and stabilisation, and some local councils are doing this. At the moment local governments are focusing on strategies and planning, but there is a need for further involvement to promote and re-adjust to local needs with a declining population and shrinking economic base.

Some of the approaches taken by local governments can be found in the OECD publication on ‘Demographic Change and Local Development: Shrinkage, Regeneration and Social Dynamics’.”

What do you think citizens can contribute to? What role do they play in shrinking areas?

“The citizens’ role in shrinking urban areas is important. Not only are they employed, and do they reside and spend their money within the town/city, they also contribute through volunteering their time and expertise.

An interesting example is found in Japan within the shrinking city of Ise, which is an historical cathedral city and has several heritage sites, providing a unique example of skill development and transfer of traditional skills in the Shijinen-sengu (scheduled rebuilding of the architecture of the Ise shrine

every 20 years). Generally engineers and artisans were hired from the Ise region. However the number of skilled workers who are familiar with traditional architecture has been declining. As a result engineers and artisans had to be recruited from other regions.¹²¹

Another example is within the Netherlands and the city of Heerlen with investments in culture, creative communication and engaging with communities in creating a positive climate in the city. A web-platform, the Zachte G Network for Creative Economy, provides a base for individuals to display their talent, work and connect cultural and creative entrepreneurship and Design for Emptiness Challenge.¹²²

Within Cerro de San Pedro, a historic mining district in Mexico, mining company Minera San Xavier proposed to begin mining in the city again by means of an opencast process, with the promise to create 170 jobs. However to gain access to the minerals, the mine would extend to a large area within 600 metres from the town square and one of the mining tunnels would pass under the 17th century church. The process of extraction would involve the use of cyanide and a significant amount of water. The company proposed to move the municipal buildings and historic churches, but were unclear regarding land reclamation measures and disposal of waste. The proposal alarmed the local communities and the wider Mexican community, a coalition of local people, NGOs and international organisations emerged to resist the proposal. The company lost its appeals in court and announced its withdrawal from the project. This provides an example of community empowerment.”¹²³

How should/could shrinking cities involve their citizens? How should local governments change their organisation in order to involve residents more efficiently and/or directly?

“Volunteering is an important element for the social environment for any town/city. The areas of importance include associations, clubs, and groups for elderly and disabled support, training and skills development, opportunities for the youth. Entrepreneurs are another important element of the city by supporting the local population in employment and the services they provide.

Local government should involve the citizens in developing local policy or initiatives, through involvement of the citizens by way of meetings, information groups, community projects, the community will feel more empowered, more ownership of the strategies and actions behind the policy/initiatives.

The triple helix approach is a good instrument to involve citizens, corporations, research and education together in the planning of the future of these communities. Particularly in towns where one industry dominates, it is imperative that the planning for shrinkage is done well in advance and while the city is still growing, as much is needed to prepare for the decline phase. Martinez-Fernandez et al. (2012c) within the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research Symposium provide some examples of community involvement. A recommendation from the article states:

...community leadership emerges as a force for sustainable strategic development. Perhaps planning in shrinking cities needs to embrace the public in a much more vigorous manner; residents who feel their hope for a better life is declining leave for better conditions elsewhere. Community engagement provides an opportunity for these residents to participate in the design of their future in the town, therefore providing some control over their own destiny and perhaps better solutions. Community leadership in Yubari and in Cerro de San Pedro

shows two different approaches but with a lesson regarding the changing face of mining communities, which no longer accept industry development in exchange for environment and heritage. Environmental concerns are changing the dynamics of communities and mining corporations. Communities are able to link to national and international organizations to bring pressures on corporations to change their operational plans. (p. 256)”

What is the role of the private sector in shrinking areas? How should/could local governments involve them? In what way could they contribute to shrinking cities?

“The private sector has a very important role within shrinking areas. This sector provides not only employment for the local community, but also the services and facilities. Maintaining an economic sustainable private sector including SMEs is highly critical in stabilising shrinking areas. Local government should involve this sector in its policy/decision making for the local area, assessing its needs, skills gaps, the issues that impact on the sector, ascertaining what areas are benefiting the sector and promoting these. It is this sharing of knowledge, experience and information that informs decision-making.

The Martinez-Fernandez et al. (2012) articles offer insights into how mining cities combat urban shrinkage through three types of strategies: 1) development innovation hubs, 2) attracting ICT business; 3) evolving the community. Mount Isa provides a case of skills hubs or innovation intensive areas that are isolated:

As exemplified by Mount Isa, many shrinking mining cities represent a special case, being corporate cities with a disconnected innovation system due to the mobility of capital and jobs. These cities are ‘skills-hubs’ or ‘innovation-intensive’ areas that largely remain locked inside the mine site. In Mount Isa, there is an intellectual isolation from the businesses community in the city. While mining companies might be perceived as good corporate citizens participating in community projects, this participation is usually confined to their role as a donor or capital provider. There is a ‘vacuum of knowledge’ in regards to the transfer of knowledge and innovation processes from the main industry to other business/organizations in the city. Technologies, organizational management techniques and a vibrant intellectual life in the mining site usually stop at the gates of the mine. As a consequence, innovation systems in these cities are weak, knowledge circulation from company scientists and knowledge workers remains within the mine compound, and little, if any, innovation transfer takes place. Although city councils in these cities are well aware of the need for public-private partnerships for funding public projects, they are less aware of the need for urban management instruments oriented to capture and transfer knowledge and innovative performance. Sudbury provides an example of a city that is beginning to recognize the importance of entrenching its emerging innovation system in mining technology in the city’s local fabric. (p. 255)

A recommendation from Martinez-Fernandez (2012c) states:

First of all, policymakers in shrinking cities should look at ways to increase the connectivity of the city’s innovation system. Specifically, mining sites should be seen as critical intellectual assets for the development of knowledge networks across the city and region, together with education providers, industry associations, KIBS and community and government organizations. The aim of the development of this network should be to facilitate the flow of knowledge among different stakeholders in the city, to connect to other international networks via its more internationally oriented participants and ultimately to enrich the regional innovation system.

These are the seeds for developing learning environments to hold innovation, creativity and vitality; all are key factors in keeping a place competitive.

Second, the economic paradox in these cities also calls for a review of planning and strategic solutions that have had only mixed success until now. Revitalization strategies based on attracting high-technology/services and tourism industries do not necessarily bring substantial change. Indeed, ICT-based services do not seem to provide the quality of work necessary to retain and attract new talent (as the Canadian case shows). In other cases, financial mismanagement of tourism strategies can have disastrous effects on the finances of the city as the Japanese case shows. Perhaps those industries servicing mining activities such as the Mining Technology Sector offer a more promising future to these cities; indeed the sector has silently been gaining strength in cities such as Sudbury | Canada for many years. However, only recently has its importance been recognized. (p. 256)”

What could be the role of multi-level partnerships in relations to shrinkage? Do you know of any successful examples in this respect?

“The role of multi-level partnership is key for the development of strategies for the management of shrinking cities. For example, in Australia, it is important that the State Government supports the local government, both in resources and policy/strategic decisions. A decision at State level can have a devastating impact on the economy of a local government area. Even decisions made at the federal level that impact on an industry sector can also have a devastating effects on the local community. Supporting the grass-roots is the backbone of the local economy.

A good example is the ‘Perspective 50 Plus: Regional Employment Pacts for Older Long-term Unemployed Persons’. As noted earlier, Aster and Heuermann (2012) describes the programme’s defining feature as addressing the regional level by offering local networks (regional employment pacts). The programme set ‘... incentives for regional and local actors to form alliances in order to develop and implement new and effective strategies and instruments for sustainable integration of older long-term unemployed into regular labour market. Employment pacts are suppose to cover all relevant stakeholders within a region, such as job centres, training providers, non-government organisations, employers, social partners, welfare organisations, churches and health insurance.’ (p. 259)”

The Old Crown Cooperative

Hesket Newmarket, Cumbria, United Kingdom

“Ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things”

Hesket Newmarket – Cumbria, United Kingdom

Number of inhabitants: 250

Hesket Newmarket is a small village in the North West of England, located close to the famous Lake District. With only 250 inhabitants, it may be no surprise that the village does not have many amenities. However, its local services are dearly loved by locals. In the early 2000s, the only pub in the village – The Old Crown – was threatened with closure. The then owner of The Old Crown wanted to sell his pub, and residents were concerned that the pub might pass into the hands of a pub company (pubco) or brewery chain and lose its unique character. They were also afraid that the microbrewery at the rear of the pub would disappear, and that the spiritual links and commercial relationship between the pub and the brewery would be weakened. Residents believed The Old Crown played a pivotal role in the life of the community, and that it would be greatly missed if it were closed. They therefore decided to take matters into their own hands.

Turning The Old Crown Pub into a Co-operative

Determined to keep The Old Crown alive, residents of Hesket Newmarket decided to buy their own pub. However, they were the first in the United Kingdom to do this, and therefore had to invent the wheel somewhat. They took a lot of advice from organisations in both the public (local authority) and social enterprise sectors. Their proposed model was simple: they issued shares and received some grant funding, enabling them to raise enough money to buy the pub. The aim was to include as many people in the local and wider community as possible and give them a true stake in their pub.

Having raised the money and bought the pub, the residents involved sold a lease to tenants to run it for them. The Co-operative owns the building, which is leased to the tenants to run as a pub. The terms of the lease are very generous, but do stipulate that the pub must remain the way the owners want it to stay.



The interior of The Old Crown

The tenants are responsible for the day-to-day running of the pub. The Co-operative interferes as little as possible, but provides as much support as it can. Aside from paying a monthly rent, the tenants do not pay anything to the Co-operative. This means that any increase in profits goes directly to them, and not to the Co-operative. The Co-operative has no financial interest other than a desire to be self-sustaining. The rental income is used for structural repairs and paying small dividends to investors.

Results of The Old Crown Co-operative

Since the pub was bought, turnover has risen from approximately £ 90,000 to £ 260,000. The pub is now secure for the long term. Local people take a pride in what they have achieved.

The pub makes a significant contribution to both the economic and social fabric of the local community, providing local employment, supporting local suppliers and providing a welcome meeting place for locals and visitors alike. The commitment and enthusiasm of the co-operative also provided a catalyst for the pub's development, which has resulted in an increase in the community facilities to include a new dining/meeting room, and a broadband ICT facility that won "Best Outreach" at the UK online centres awards in 2008, providing learning opportunities linked to a local primary school.

In addition, The Old Crown has become a national example, which has generated higher visitor numbers. The success of The Old Crown has had spin-off benefits for other local businesses, such as local B&Bs and the village shop. There are now several other co-operatively owned pubs in the United Kingdom, most of which have been advised by The Old Crown Co-operative and have adapted their model. It seems to be a spreading phenomenon.

Funding of The Old Crown Co-operative

At the start of the project, the residents involved received a grant from the Cumbria Rural Regeneration Unit and from the Lake District National Park Sustainable Development Fund.

However, all the private funding has come from individual shareholders, each of whom has made an equal contribution of £ 1,500. The Co-operative started with 124 members and currently has 148 shareholders. About 50 percent of the owners live in the catchment area of the pub, but the other half do not. Some of them own a holiday house in the region, but there are also some people who have never even been to the pub, but who loved the idea and therefore wanted to invest in it. The Co-operative now has members in Hesketh Newmarket, but also in other parts of the United Kingdom, Spain, Ireland, Germany, Canada and the United States.

Governance

The Old Crown Co-operative is entirely governed by its owners. The local government was not involved, except in pointing the Co-operative to (voluntary) advisory bodies, and of course providing the welcome grant funding at the start of the project (approx. 5 - 6% of the total cost of the project).

Every year in November, the Co-operation organises a shareholders' meeting, during which the annual statements and the activities and events of the past year are discussed. Every year shareholders also vote on the members of the management committee.

The Main Lessons Learned according to Founding Member Julian Ross

"For me the first and most important lesson is that ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things. Leadership and vision are important in this respect. If you combine them with commitment and a lot of hard work, the rest will follow.

In the case of cooperatively buying a pub, it is absolutely essential to marry the “social” aspects (community ownership, egalitarianism, “saving” community assets, etc.) to commercial viability. The project must be resilient enough to survive in a competitive world. It may not work in every circumstance, but if everything comes together it can become unstoppable.

Achieving a project like this requires a great deal of hard work, dedication, commitment, belief and a vision of what you want to achieve. If it is successful, it is one of the most rewarding things you will ever do.”

Sources

Julian Ross (founding member): jamross@globalnet.co.uk

The Old Crown: www.theoldcrownpub.co.uk

Pub is the Hub Casestudies: www.pubisthehub.org.uk

The Impact of European Demographic Trends on Regional and Urban Development

Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

European urban areas are clearly experiencing the effects of demographic change. Large metropolitan regions are expected to see the biggest population growth – with all its advantages and disadvantages – while cities situated in declining regions will face the emigration of active-age residents and the rapid ageing of their populations. In 2011, the Hungarian government commissioned a study into these developments, as part of its Presidency of the Council of the European Union: “The Impact of European Demographic Trends on Regional and Urban Development”. The main aim of the resulting synthesis report was to give a broad overview of the complexity of the problems, paying special attention to their territorial dimension and to the question of what the local (urban) level can do to influence demographic change in a favourable way, or at least to assimilate its consequences. The report thus forms an important source of information and inspiration for professionals and policy makers who are working on the issue of shrinkage.



Discussing the report in Budapest

The Effects of Shrinkage on Urban Areas

Even though all European cities are expected to be affected by shrinkage and demographic change in some way, this does not necessarily mean that all urban areas should expect serious consequences of shrinkage. Shrinkage can be very different based on its volume, pace, and the socio-economic background of the city that experiences shrinkage. It can be a small-scale temporary phenomenon, but it can also be a gradual decrease in the population that causes partial redundancies in the urban infrastructure. In addition, there are also dramatic forms of shrinkage, when the collapse of the local economy is combined with outmigration and a decreasing fertility rate.

The phenomenon of shrinkage covers not only population loss, but also the problem of oversized infrastructure compared to the number of households (housing, sewerage, heating etc.) using it.

Thus, the significance of shrinkage depends less on the number of inhabitants than on the number of households, and on the infrastructure and services already in existence. The key question is to what extent a city (urban area) should accept the fact that its population is declining and that the surplus of the infrastructure and services consumes more and more public funds. Sooner or later most European countries will experience population decline, so cities will only be able to attract residents from each other.

Types of Cities Experiencing Demographic Change

The real challenges that European cities and urban areas will face in the future are the economic and social causes and consequences of demographic change, not demographic change itself. The Hungarian report shows that, in fact, similar demographic processes may occur together with very different socio-economic structures.

The researchers differentiate three different types in this respect:

1. Cities experiencing a strong population increase caused mainly by their large economic power. These cities are mostly bigger cities in Western Europe with local economies connected closely to the world economy. In order to avoid the spatial and social tensions as a result of growth and increasing heterogeneity, dynamically growing cities should concentrate on retaining the territorial and social cohesion of the urban area.
2. Cities with a strong economic background and a gradually shrinking – sometimes slightly increasing – or stable population. The main task of cities with a more or less stable demographic and strong economic background is to create flexible urban strategies.
3. Urban areas of complex shrinkage experience both demographic and economic decline. The main cause of complex shrinkage is economic restructuring: the city starts to lose its population when it is no longer able to provide enough jobs compared to other cities, countries or regions. Thus the strategy to mitigate complex shrinkage should concentrate on the redefinition of the economic basis.

Policy Responses to the Effects of Demographic Change

In addition to the context-specific responses described above, the report lists several measures that are advisable for all urban areas:

- to implement local employment programmes in order to activate the hidden reserves of the labour market and reduce the effect of the shrinking workforce due to ageing;
- to provide new and improved local services for the fast ageing generations (social, health care, transportation, etc.);
- to strengthen local child-care services to encourage mothers into work;
- to implement methods in housing and spatial planning to encourage the formation of mixed residential areas regarding age and social composition;
- to create a family-responsible environment and strengthen the social context supporting family oriented values in order to encourage families with children to stay in urban areas;
- to provide a secure and safe urban environment in order to reduce spatial segregation and improve the quality of life of all generations.

These policy elements should in turn be grouped into integrated policy interventions, the report suggest. Integration in this sense means vertical cooperation (between different levels of governance including the EU, the national state, the region and the local authorities), horizontal cooperation (between settlements of the same functional urban area) and transverse cooperation (between different sectors of intervention).

Sources

Report: “The Impact of European Demographic Trends on Regional and Urban Development”, Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The report is available in the EUKN e-library at www.eukn.org

Conclusion

We may not realise it yet, or we may not want to acknowledge it, but the whole of Europe will be affected by shrinkage. The European population will decline, and all countries, regions, cities and towns will somehow feel the effects of this unavoidable truth. There will be different types of shrinkage and various kinds of effects, but shrinkage is going to form a general reality for the entire continent.

Shrinkage has an important influence on the hardware of a city or region: the housing market, physical infrastructure, the local economy. However, the software and mindware will be equally touched by its effects. Young people with important skills and talents may leave the area and move to larger cities with better job opportunities. Social networks may dissolve, and the local community may lose its spirit and morale. In addition, shrinking areas generally have to deal with a worsening image, as decline is not considered to be very desirable in today's mind-set.

Whether shrinkage is caused by economic transformation, shifts in urban structure, the ageing of society, political transformation or migration, all layers of government – local, regional, national and European – will have to come up with innovative and strong policies to deal with the impact of shrinkage on their territories.

Whereas shrinkage is often still denied today, the future demands a more realistic view of its development. This does not mean trying to reverse the effects of shrinking, aiming to regain both economic and population growth, but should instead mean that governments learn to accept shrinkage and try to utilise its potential. In the past few decades we may have got used to the governance of growth, but we will have to readjust ourselves to the governance of shrinkage, which may involve de-industrialisation, de-investment and the loss of functions.

Shrinkage has serious effects on cities, but it also provides opportunities: more space, less crowded streets, shorter waiting lists for schools or health care and so on. If shrinking areas want to use shrinkage to their advantage, these are the types of elements they should focus on.

Obviously, these issues are very closely related to local citizens. They are the owners of homes, the users of streets and the customers for shops and services. Shrinkage thus provides a major opportunity for governments to empower their citizens and truly strengthen the involvement of residents in local affairs. Local residents are very well able to come up with creative solutions to problems relating to the fact that their neighbourhood, city or region is shrinking. This publication has shown several examples in that respect. In the United Kingdom, residents of the village of Heskett Newmarket bought their local pub. In the villages of Idom and Raasted, Denmark, citizens set up their own multifunctional centre. In Parkstad Limburg, creative companies and freelancers created their own (online) network to promote their activities. In the Czech Republic, youngsters were asked to design their own skate park. In Rieselang, Germany, locals run their own bus service to allow elderly people to remain active and mobile.

In addition, towns and cities may use shrinkage to revitalise regional bonds and networks. Shrinkage is a complex phenomenon that cannot be dealt with in isolation. Different layers of government will have to cooperate, and involve both the private and the civil sectors. Shrinking cities are facing important challenges, such as changes in the housing market, rising costs of public services, businesses leaving the area, unemployment. These are all policy areas that need to be tackled jointly, on the basis of strong and innovative partnerships that are able to look beyond tomorrow towards a sustainable long-term future.

It is time that shrinkage is acknowledged as an important policy field. However, it is equally essential that it is not solely seen as a problem that needs to be solved as soon as possible, for example by attracting new residents and external private investment. Instead, shrinkage could be used as an opportunity to re-adjust the city to changing times, and turn it into a habitable, attractive place to live, both today and in the future. Thinking of shrinking cities as breathing cities, full of new possibilities, might push the discussion of shrinkage into a more positive direction.

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