

A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO THE NEW PHILOSOPHY OF URBAN PLANNING IN EAST- GERMANY

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Abstract

Demographic change represents a special challenge for all Europe. Its impacts on the economy, society and politics are already evident. As well as regions with growth, there are areas in Germany where population decline is significant – and which cannot be halted despite all efforts.

And this is the reason why the cities of tomorrow can no longer orientate themselves on the urban model of a continuously growing city. Urban life quality and economic efficiency do not depend on the increase in the number of inhabitants and spatial usage but on the qualitative growth of sustainable sectors and projects: less is more. These are the principles of IBA Urban Redevelopment 2010. In its final year, it will be possible to review exemplary urban development solutions in the IBA cities – which may also be applied in other cities and regions all over Europe.

Keywords: new urban planning philosophy in East-Germany, re-thinking the city, Shrinking cities, Urban Redevelopment Saxony-Anhalt 2010.

1. INTRODUCTION

Demographic change represents a specific challenge to everyone including experts, civilians and politicians in the postmodern western democracies (consequently in the united Germany as well). The decline in children undertaking, the ageing of society, the increase in the rate of inactives will determine political, economic and social processes for several decades in a (most likely) not positive way, as far as the whole society is concerned (Couch, 1990; Lichfield, 1992; Akbar, 2005; Rummel, 2005). In addition to the relatively small 'elite club' of regions with economic (and possible demographic) growth, in large areas of East and West Germany, a significant decline in the number of inhabitants can be forecasted. This process can be restrained by economic innovations, family-friendly policy and orientated migration (incentives for immigration and settling), but can surely not be impeded (Roberts and Sykes, 2000; Rodrik, 2001; Böhmer, 2005; Rummel, 2005).

Such large-scale changes obviously have an impact on cities, too. Urban image, infrastructure and life-quality must be adjusted to these processes of shrinking in time (Berger et al., 2000). German urbanists and decision-makers have been studying the topic of shrinking cities for several years: their intention is instead of reactions only follower in type, they will act proactively as well as instead of passive acceptance of development tendencies, they will prefer taking active use of the potentials (Böhmer, 2005).

The processes of shrinking apparently can not be considered to be recent: such processes, emptying landscapes, villages and cities also occurred in the previous stages of the history of settlements. However, since urban planning and construction as scientific disciplines exist, in (Central) Europe urban development could only be interpreted basically within the context of urban growth (Kovács, 2003). Eradication of the associative old customs (i.e. development = urban growth), adaptation to the merely new challenges (according to which, from now, urban development must be seen and made to be seen inversely as well) are, of course, challenges not only for the professionals (Rosenfeld, 2005).

An almost philosophic definition on the recognition of the cities today's shrinking as a phenomenon and the necessity of consequent actions is provided by Rüdiger Schultz, executive director of the Saxony-Anhalt State Development Company (SALEG), executive director of the IBA Office: "Architects and engineers today must, in their propositions, draw attention to unexploited urban and spatial potentials. We need the new professional "urban therapist", who sheds light on the undiscovered, deals with people's traumas and everyday wounds, who questions unconsidered actions and blindly-accepted traditions" (Akbar, 2005)

2. DEMOGRAPHIC PROBLEMS IN EAST GERMANY AND THEIR URBANISATION CONSEQUENCES

According to the population prognosis of the Province of Saxony-Anhalt (East Germany), provided the continuation of present demographic trends, in 2020 hardly more than 2 million inhabitants will live in the province (this figure being 2,439,192 as on 31st January 2007). Such forecasts indicating the changes in the number of inhabitants do not necessarily predict the above development processes, however point out the kind of demographic changes the region can experience in case economic and social trends proceed in the present way and rapidity.

Demographic change also demands urban redevelopment – i.e. urban reconstruction as a way of creative renewal, urban development in the form of construction of private houses and flats suitable for the elderly as well as innovation driven urban-rebuilding (Rosenfeld, 2005).

3. ON THE WAY OF FINDING THE OPTIMAL SOLUTION

In order to avoid regressive, negative development resultant from the cities' unavoidable (spatial and infrastructural) shrinking, new solutions must be sought, and among them those by which – even in the case of a decline in the number of inhabitants – liveable future in already attractive cities coupled by a higher quality of life is feasible should be selected. The possibilities for this are available, as the less dense urban population opens the new open spaces of life-style formation, with – theoretically – less social conflicts, less resource wasting and a use of nature indicating a decrease (Rummel, 2005).

Taking these challenges into consideration, the actors in urbanistics of Saxony-Anhalt, had to initialize and moderate an interdisciplinary discussion, an exchange of experience had to be organised both on the national and international levels, and in the meantime, model examples for city districts with various typology had to be developed and their application in practice had to be steadily monitored. The degree and method of the public work, public participation as well as the solution-finding of those all active and involved should be expanded in case the identification of residents with their cities is intended to be sustained. As an ultimate objective, residents would have to be keen on staying even in a shrinking city and would have to shape its future together and consciously.

A wide political and professional agreement has been reached in Germany regarding the fact the market itself – at least not in the Eastern part of the country – can not assure recovery, and therefore the provinces have an increasing responsibility in the field of urban redevelopment interventions (apparently, it is also the case contrariwise, i.e. without the participation of the private sector, the community is not able to find a solution for the problems of cities – in short, close and comprehensive partnership is required).

Urban redevelopment requires a long-term and comprehensive development framework: it can not be static as it has to respond to new development trends. Therefore, the already existing urban development plans should be further developed regionally, on the urban level as well as for each city districts. This is the only way to avoid both misleading community subventions and private investments disregarding future demand (Rosenfeld, 2005).

4. RESULTS - THE NEW PHILOSOPHY OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT

„The end of European cities” is a slogan, accompanied by urbanists' arguments for decades, and today, by the phenomenon of shrinking cities has also come to the front. With today's shrinking cities when aimed and planned unbuildings can not be counteracted, the urbanist argumentation originating in the

past forewarns the loss in density menacing the weakening and the disruption of the built spatial structure and by this, the loss of the original urban characters of the European cities, as it seems in our mentality, it is the (built-up) density obviously being a feature of the urban and, along with it, the (urban) civilisation at all.

This is actually here, where our thinking turns into a self-antagonism: the rigid identification of the European city and urban by the traditional urban building and dense spatial structure today blocks the new possibilities for development and redevelopment. The shrinking city as a crisis symptom can be apprehended between the aspects of sinking and disintegration. It is because, by the image of the "European city", we often recall a desire or even a dream for the past: an image of a Medieval town with walls, central square, a basilica and a 19th century city with block side built-up, civilian houses in Secessionist style, community spaces. This is a city that has not been existing for a while and, meanwhile, has by now undergone manifold alteration processes. The market square, in today's time of a globalised consum-culture, has already been replaced by a shopping centre or has become a tourist environment. And the block side built-up is not dividing the private from the common any more, in case it had ever had a function like this ... (Akbar and Kremer, 2005).

The most recent phenomenon across not only in East-Germany but all over Europe and thus being a part of the processes characteristic for the European cities is shrinking. Deindustrialisation, emigration caused by changes in the labour market, demographic trends are the impacts of the structural change resulting in a decline in the number of inhabitants and shrinking in the former European industrial centres. How can the tradition of the European city be re-interpreted for the shrinking city and for the challenges set by these processes?

Here, however, redefinition of the European city is necessary; an interpretation, identifying the city in an urban discourse through a democratic mentality and emancipated practice and aiming at the use of the „city”'s new concept as a „symbolic capital” is required. As explained by E. F. Isin anthropologist in his study on European urban traditions: „It is impossible to separate the city, democracy and citizenship from each other.” (cited by Akbar and Kremer, 2005).

For W. Kaschuba ethnologist, material transformation is less important rather than forming the urban's ideological and utopic contents characteristic for the specific European traditions of the city. He identifies a symbolic excess being the adhesive and shaping power of the European city in the intellectual history tradition rather than in materiality. The European city „used to be the model of political and social orders, that as an idea produced more meanings, however in practice also exhibited

function deficits. (...) (This city), apart from the functional base, also has a supplementary adhesive and shaping power.” (cited by Akbar and Kremer, 2005).

This is why further discussions should take place on European cities, in order to reach an agreement on urban changes and to seek the too narrow typological definition of the „city” in shrinking as potentiated by the new mental forms and development possibilities of urban.

5. THE IBA STADTUMBAU 2010

It has become absolutely obvious for the Germans by now that no mayor can afford believing in unrealistic urban development scenarios. It is questioned, however, whether the presuppositions of a dynamic economic growth can be fulfilled in a decline in the number of inhabitants and, based on this, a quality urban life can be established in the liveable (and likeable) cities.

The issue of shrinking cities and the responses are intended to be represented in Germany for the first time not on the urban but on the provincial level, by the cooperation of originally 17, today 19 cities, within the framework of the series of events entitled IBA Stadtumbau 2010 initiated by the Province of Saxony-Anhalt in 2002 and representing its final results in 2010.

The experiences gained during the preparatory works of this series of events so far are promising: the cities and residents of Saxony-Anhalt showed great interest and acceptance to cooperate locally in the development processes and to have an opened discussion about unbuildings, re-buildings, new utilisation possibilities of urban areas and buildings (Kovács, 2003).

In the final year of IBA 2010, the cities of Saxony-Anhalt will intend to represent that innovative and creative solutions in urbanistics can be developed under the hard social and economic circumstances of changes, and also want to show that valiant management of these changes would be the best contribution to retain, or even, increase the province’s viability (Böhmer, 2005).

6. DISCUSSION - TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Hereby, at the end of drafting the problems of the shrinking cities as well as the methods and possibilities of solutions, the thoughts of Prof. Dr. Omar Akbar, director of the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation are cited:

“We believe that we should simply turn the debate around, and focus not on the “less” and on loss, but on the “more”. On the freedom, the open space that we gain through the development sites – the freedom to think of unfamiliar ideas; the freedom to involve new active partners that are perhaps entirely

unfamiliar; the freedom to welcome different milieus that may at first seem foreign, but hold the potential to enrich our lives; and, naturally, the freedom to give the landscape a special quality as a place to live and settle”.

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