

"NEW" DIRECTION OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT FROM A CENTRAL EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

While big cities of the developing world grew intensely the ones in the the developed world had started shrinking, first demographically and then occasionally and consequentially in a physical sense as well. This demographic and economic shrinking process triggers specific consequences in all the areas of the urban development processes. These processes can be characterised by quantitative and qualitative changes whose intensity and impact depend on the extent and the time of the causing progressions. In Europe one of the basic problems of the developed and moderately developed societies located in the central and semi-periphery regions has for decades been the process defined as the demographic crisis: the willingness to bring up more children decreases, the population is declining and ageing. The study shows the new directions of the urban development through the example of some Central European countries.

Keywords: demographic change, urban shrinking, urban creativity, new urban governance policy, mobilisation of endogenous resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

In November 1984 the world's leading urban planners met in Rotterdam and their discussion indicated that from then on urbanists would have to face a phenomenon they had not directly experinced before: while big cities of the developing world grew intensely the ones in the the developed world had started shrinking (first demographically and then occasionally and consequentially in a physical sense as well)

(Development Forum, 1985). This process can be defined as follows: "From the development point of view a shrinking city can be characterized by two main processes: on the one hand there is population loss, and on the other declining economic dynamism. This demographic and economic shrinking process triggers specific consequences in all the areas of the urban development processes. These processes can be characterised by quantitative and qualitative changes whose intensity and impact depend on the extent and the time of the causing progressions. As a result of the two main reasons for shrinkage (demographic and economic) the usage-specific density of the shrinking city decreases. Depending on the intensity of the processes the physical shrinkage of the city is possible" (Lang and Tenz, 2003). Urban design and urban planning could not keep up even theoretically with this unprecedented and relatively new– at least in modern and peacetime – phenomenon (Development Forum, 1985).

Since then, however, shrinking in the developed western world does not represent a new phenomenon and in several places urbanists, decision-makers and civil society have been working seriously on its management for many years (Kozma, 2009). Already in 1971 the then Mayor of Munich, Hans-Jochen Vogel, said as the Chairman of the German Association of Cities: "Rescue the cities now!", thus demanding total state-level policy in favor of large cities. In Hamburg főpolgármester mayor Klose called for the concentration of weaker growth forces into a limited number of large cities. Even in the Bavarian province with relatively high birth rates and strong growth the Bild Zeitung anxiously asked: "Do the Bavarians now die out?" (Ganser, 2004). The statistics already at that time were clear enough for the advanced regions in Europe, including parts of West Germany: birth rates had decreased in the long run, and the age of high immigration was over. The years of economic recession could not be compensated by the boom years, and the public expenditure for employment had little effects on employment growth but resulted in increased debts (Ganser, 2004). The problem enforces radically different, unconventional theoretical and practical solutions, thus by now there exist extensive literature and a number of practical experimental management-solutions in the West, while Central Europe and Hungary (although the problem here is also evident and need to be addressed) show the usual belated attitude in this matter as well.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE - CITY SHRINKING AS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

The topic, of course, is interesting and topical now not only at a European level (including East Germany and Hungary), but also on a global scale (though the problem is not global, but occurs at a global level): in the autumn of 2012 an article was published on the Internet in which a American business portal rated the world's fastest-shrinking large cities. This is important and instructive from

the point of view that in parallel with the mainstream process of demographic explosion urbanization is accelerating globally (more often than not, unfortunately, only the quantitative side of it) but there are many (continentally or even globally significant) cities whose population decreases (Vilisics, 2013; index.hu).

Eighteen cities of the twenty-eight included in the list can be found in the area of the the former USSR but cities such as Rome (27), Milan (26), Prague (21), Turin (17) and Seoul (14) are also included (The numbers in brackets show the "ranks" – considering the contraction forecast for 2025). Seven of the ten fastest-shrinking cities are located in the former Soviet Union. This vanguard also includes South Korea's Busan (8), the Liberian capital, Monrovia (7) and Hungary's capital, Budapest (2) as well. According to the data of the portal the population of the Hungarian capital decreased from 2.05 million in 1990 to 1.71 million by 2010. Of all the big cities globally only Dnyepropetrovsk in Ukraine has an even faster population decrease: there the projected rate for the next thirty-five years is 16.87%. However, it is predicted that the population of the city will stop decreasing at this level since the population will be re 1,71 million in 2025. The total estimated population decrease in Budapest will be 14.86% between 1990 and 2025. The other city in the region with a decreasing population is Bucharest (19), but the figure there for the same period stands only at 3.77% (Molnár, 2010, www.businessinsider.com).

In connection with the topic it must by all means be noted that the phenomena of shrinking cities not at all new in the history of mankind: during the development of settlements there have always been contractions and depopulating towns and villages (owing to a number of reasons including wars, pandemics, natural disasters, new trade routes, changes in the importance of domiciliation factors). Nonetheless, ever since city planning/construction has been in existence as a scientific discipline city development has always been understood and interpreted only in the context of growth in (Central) Europe (as well as in the central areas where growth is considered fetish) (Kozma et al., 2012, Péntzes, 2013).

Economic restructuring in many parts of Europe manifested itself most markedly since the 1970s and early '80s in the decline of traditional industrial regions and their settlements (Kincses et al., 2013). De-industrialization, growing unemployment, and population displacement were the crisis symptoms of the regions and cities that had been up to that time the centers of industrial growth (Black Country, the Ruhr region, etc.). The rearrangement of the international division of labour, triggered primarily by the changes in the economies of the developed countries, intensified the competition in the international market. In these areas industrialization in the 19th century resulted in the explosive growth of urban

agglomeration, the above-mentioned period in the 20th century witnessed a decline in some of these regions. On the one hand the changing international economic structure shifted the share of regions in the value of production and on the other hand it has changed the layout of (big) cities as leading central-settlements in the developed industrialized countries. "The increase has thus turned into shrinkage. There are only few cities with a stable basis for economic development ... and cities with new types of development are being formed" (Hannemann, 2003).

In Europe one of the basic problems of the developed and moderately developed societies located in the central and semi-periphery regions has for decades been the process defined as the demographic crisis: the willingness to bring up more children decreases, the population is declining and ageing (Patkós, 2004). Besides, in certain regions and cities the economic productivity and attractiveness are weakening while the social and economic capacities are tightening – partly but not exclusively as a result of the above-mentioned de-industrialization, which – among other factors – leads to the migration of the highly educated, young(er) population further enhancing the regional and local socio-, economic-, cultural-, and environmental problems generating a possibly downward spiral of development (Hagen and Kondorosi, 2009).

Shrinkage is a phenomenon that is now occurring all across Europe, and thus it has become a part of the regional and urbanization processes and characterizes a large group of European regions and cities. The demographic and the related spatial-urban problems of European cities have become apparent by now and are strongly felt both in the whole of Europe and in Germany which can be considered the typical area for the phenomenon of shrinking cities. In the Federal Republic of Germany there were arguments since the mid-70s about the notion that the time of quantitative increase had been over: the population decreased, the economic growth was slow, and the distribution of returns had to end. On this basis some rational experts demanded a transition to "quality growth" (by which they actually thought of "change without growth"); however, the majority unwilling to accept the facts began hard debates which even today seems to be decided in their favour. (Ganser, 2004)

3. RESULTS

East Germany – the classic area of shrinking in Europe

East Germany is regarded as the classic region of shrinking urban areas, and because of the specific situation of the new German states their current problems can not always be comparable to the mainly small-space shrinking processes of Western European cities. Rapid population decline is observable primarily in the industrial and/or peripheral regions, whereas the metropolitan region around Dresden

and Leipzig as well as the Thuringian Erfurt, Weimar and Jena are like islands of stability. In addition, cities along the former inner German border (such as Eisenach, Heiligenstadt, Wernigerode) and the eastern coastal tourism-oriented towns have stable or slightly increasing populations. These differences are also good indicators as to how cities respond to rivalry among the centers through various successful measures (Franz, 2005). Despite all these the massive urban structural fractures and the declining population trends can also be found and studied in Western Europe (the "eloquent" examples of this are visible in the northern industrial cities of England such as in Liverpool, Manchester, Huddersfield), or in North America, in the USA, in the regions of the former industrial development centres (for example the so-called rust-belt with Detroit) (Figure 1) (Kühn, 2002).



FIGURE 1 - SHRINKING CITIES WITH A POPULATION EXCEEDING 100 THOUSAND

Source: bsearch.goo.ne.jp

As shown in the map above in North America and other parts of Western Europe (even in Asia and Africa as well) the shrinking of various regions and cities can be observed, however, the East German process – examining its spatial, but above all temporal concentration – must be considered unique. In spite of suburbanization the shrinkage phenomena in the new provinces – with very few exceptions – are determined by the large shrinking urban regions. In most cities the shrinkage phenomena appeared in the late 1980s and within a few years they led to a population decline of 10 or even 20% (Liebmann, 2002).

A potential theoretican answer to shrinking: unfolding "urban creativity"

In a new approach to urban development it should be assumed that owing to the complexity of the problems the future-oriented, viable solutions require a "new way of thinking" i.e. integrated procedures

and solutions that willingly cross former barriers should be preferred. The creative process therefore means that it is necessary to break away from traditional development routines (Liebmann and Robischon, 2003).

Urban creativity in this sense is not mainly related to the specific management of a city as a creative city, but refers to the central, transformed working principles of politics and local governments (Keim, 2001, Kozma et al., 2012). This assumes that cities are now to be understood not only as the built environment, but also as systems and networks, that is, from now on urban policy should shift the emphasis from the exclusivity of physical infrastructure to city dynamics and the quality of life of the urban population. Naturally, this does not mean (this can not mean) that the urban building measures would no longer play a role in development projects: in the future they must be connected to a broader interpretation of renewal, i.e. as a process that presents opportunities for urban citizens to unfold their potentials.

This is where urban design (in addition to urban planning) takes the stage, which may present great opportunities for a new approach amid the grip of shrinking - the city's main client is not a private customer with well-articulated claims, rather a "non-paying" one i.e. the community with pluralistic values and expectations. It is also important to recognize that precisely for these reasons the city cannot be thought of and designed as an enlarged building or as a set of individual facilities (Lukovich, 2001).

The creative process must be based on extended, effective urban communication and cooperation, which means that urban(development) creativity can be unfolded only by the connection and cooperation of the actors of the public, private and voluntary sectors as well as by understanding of the common strategic objectives. Bringing together the different groups of urban developers presupposes that the existing players are recognised by the community which also motivates them to cooperate. It can be stated: only the intensive interactions among the participants of the development process may bring positive developmental outcomes (Liebmann and Robischon, 2003).

The conceptual process descriptions mentioned above certainly sound like much, but in reality they may take place in a very difficult way, because new developments may trigger great resistance in the (local) community and among the different economic interest groups. The East German experience shows that in the local governments the recognition of the communities' creativity and efficiency is hindered by the difficulties of the local communication practices and the bureaucratic barriers which obstruct creativity. The high potential for innovation which attracts many professionals into the municipalities is held back from many sides owing to the specific stiffness of political power and its (very) limited ability of creativity.

Overcoming this unfortunate situation and the implementation of effective urban development activities therefore fundamentally depend on the cooperation within the local government, the targeted widening of the spectrum of the involved actors, and the involvement of external know-how. This requires first of all that local politics should be willing to, able to, and want to prioritize instead of serving all interest groups, and secondly it must concentrate on strategic decisions instead of trying to play a decisive role in all ancillary activities. In order to be successful, public administration should radically reform its own self-evaluation, it should develop the image of mental devotedness and common objectives as well as self-knowledge, which should be connected to a positive self-illustration (Liebmann and Robischon, 2003). Thus a new kind of development realism is needed which would finally understands that urban planning is nothing more than the planning of culture as a whole (Lukovich, 2001).

Knowing the attempts that have been made to solve local shrinking some German researchers are still pessimistic, because they believe that despite the long available unambiguous data it seems almost impossible for them to convince average people (and a good part of the politicians who think in electoral cycles) about the new regional processes (which are heavily influenced by demographics) and as a result generate a paradigm shift in policy making. The coalition of "remains as it always has" is in numerical superiority and they continue building (unless the projects fail because of funding constraints), although there is a lavish amount of almost everything in most regions (Ganser, 2004); western society has probably never fabricated so little wellbeing at such a high cost.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Some Western European examples have shown that in the case of urban-"development" processes, which were judged critical and close to a crisis (large-scale population decline, empty real estates, steady decline of the funds separated for communal purposes), problems became more evident, and the need for the search of new solutions intensified. Therefore, if these problems accumulated to a certain level of critical mass, and there was no hope to solve them by means of the traditional, politically favourable growth-oriented techniques, then civilians, groups, and organizations became more initiative. The crises and difficult situations were used to leave behind the traditional and reliable routines (which turned out to be useless in the new situations) and find new, innovative ways against the conventional thinking and problem solving examples. At this point the civil society finds it useful if they can try new or rarely used working methods in connection with the implementation of joint projects and if they can build up networks among the players and create a cooperative, positive mood (Liebmann and Robischon, 2003) (i.e. in the new millennium it is feasibility, and within this the degree and the nature of social participation influence urban development [Meggyesi, 2001]).

The development struggle of the surveyed cities is rather instructive and has revealed that it is primarily the endogenous resources that should be mobilized – nonetheless the external sources must also be exploited as long as they are available. (Larger) cities should have a key role in renewing regional economies. The globalization trends, the preferences of the external investors, the modern transport and telecommunication network interconnections may all enhance the position of these cities and increase their responsibility in shaping the economic positions of the micro regions; furthermore, common thinking is also necessary regarding the regional economic role of cities in relation to complex rural development.

Urban development essentially depends on civil participation: if we approach urban development from a psychological perspective (since it is also a symbol), the population generally evaluates the architectural and economic problems of the city as very significant and their own perspectives and socio-economic prospects as (relatively) bad, thus this subjective method of perception can be interpreted as the "peripheralization in the minds". And as other studies clearly show, this negative self-esteem of the local residents can restrain their own creative participation and activities in urban development, which brings about a situation in which the local actors become resigned and the passive sufferers of their own fate – rather than actively shaping it.

In general – we believe – it can be stated that for a city the possibility of development may in each case depend on whether it honestly confronts the challenges. Cooperation among settlements is very important, but by no means enough on its own to overcome the consequences of shrinking. Forward looking, novel solutions are needed: for example new organization forms and management methods should be tried in connection with the local (vacant) properties and real estates, or new operating models adjusted to the shrinkage should be applied in connection with technical-infrastructure management of the city, and sustainable alternatives based on endogenous sources must be examined in the local energy supply.

The targeted, planned deconstruction of a city seems inevitable but its implementation requires flexible, insightful, creative, well-communicating, and cooperative local governance. One of the main tasks of the municipal government is to harmonise the plans, which means that the public and private investment and services offers should be coordinated. In addition, the goals of the urban communities must be harmonised with the development directions of the central government in a way that the city always find a distinctive profile for itself, distinguishing itself from the others.

Thus there is no single recipe; there is no universally applicable "developmental template against shrinkage": attention must be paid to good working practices, but the unique solutions must be found

even in this unity. To achieve this the population as the base for urban development should be increasingly involved – if possible – in the discussions about the demographic changes and their implications as well as in the development of the novel, innovative and sustainable solutions that concern the given settlement.

The crucial point therefore is whether the key players of the local development are actively willing to deal with the problem of shrinking and whether they develop the "personalized" and feasible strategies that mobilise their own resources and which may act against the "exsanguination" of their own region and settlement.

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