

Conclusions: priorities for tackling shrinkage in Europe's cities

Hans Schlappa and William J. V. Neill

Shrinking cities are not just places of intractable problems. Shrinking cities provide substantial opportunities for the exploration of and experimentation with utilising land, buildings and economic assets while drawing on the most important resource they have unfettered access to: their local populace.

This book contains examples which show that change is possible even in the most protracted and constrained situations. A common feature of many of the contributions made here is that they have moved beyond traditional economic development models, advocating approaches which are based on social innovation and social enterprise and initiatives where the third sector and civil society are seen as an important resource in the fight against poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. All of these approaches promote collaborative processes between public, private and third sector agencies, service users and citizens. Collaboration appears to help in providing services more effectively, in designing strategies which are supported by stakeholders and in drawing on the commitment of local communities to make their localities a better place to live. Our contributors show that it is possible to achieve a departure from traditional forms of managing land and buildings and to foster more risky but innovative responses to socio-economic as well as environmental challenges associated with urban shrinkage.

There is of course a danger that at times of unprecedented budgetary austerity cities will bring forward fewer experimental initiatives and, at the same time, are likely to use any additional funding they secure to prop up existing institutional structures, processes which no longer reflect the needs of a city that is in long-term decline (Soto *et al.*, 2010). Cities are not to blame for this. The hard realities of oversized infrastructure, surplus buildings and land, an ageing population, unemployment and exclusion require resources for their upkeep and until governmental agencies are providing targeted support to tackle these issues shrinking cities are likely to continue to pursue 'incoherent strategies' (Rink *et al.*, 2014) which do not address the actual causes and consequences of shrinkage. However, there are many actions that can be progressed which address the challenges of oversized infrastructure, foster the temporary use of facilities and promote the careful management of urban land. Facilitating interim use and retrofitting buildings and land for innovative, locally driven uses is important as is the engagement of people in the social economy and the co-production of services they value. Local communities can make inclusive arrangements for local governance and strategy processes that foster experimentation and exploration. The contributions to this volume challenge professionals and politicians to collaborate more extensively in order to develop

responses to urban shrinkage instead of continuing to prioritise the pursuit of economic strategies which rely on the market to arrest and reverse the shrinkage process.

In distilling the main arguments from the contributions made in this volume we can identify four priority areas for actions shrinking cities should explore to deal with the causes and consequences of long-term decline. These are:

- dealing with surplus service infrastructure and land
- fostering temporary uses of buildings and land
- enhancing the social economy and the co-production of services
- facilitating inclusive strategy and governance processes.

The main arguments are presented in the remainder of this chapter and are followed by a discussion of the implications this has for contemporary policy and professional practice.

Dealing with surplus service infrastructure and land

Urban shrinkage tends to be an incremental process for most cities. Public agencies and the services they are responsible for require ongoing adjustment so that they are aligned to the changing, and often decreasing, demands of a population that is shrinking. What the chapter by Walther shows is that in the early stages of population decreases unit costs increase but consumers are protected from price increases. Over the long run, however, the unit price for consumers can increase substantially because of the loss in the economies of scale and falling demand also results in the under-utilisation of the service infrastructure which then leads to additional maintenance costs. As entire sections of service networks need to be closed to respond to shrinkage processes only a fully integrated and cross-sectoral approach can achieve effective interventions. Walther's contribution also brings into focus the fact that municipalities require financial support to deal with this issue and that doing nothing to adjust service infrastructure is very costly, not only in terms of unit costs but also in relation to spatial, economic and social development. Hence governments and municipalities would be well advised to collaborate, jointly face the challenge and together tackle resistance to change from political, administrative and civil society actors, because ultimately the cost of downsizing service infrastructure is an essential investment to help the non-shrinking parts of the city to prosper.

Attracting inward investment is the mantra of politicians at all levels of government, including transnational policymakers who are responsible for the Europe 2020 programme which is so resolutely focused on economic growth. Using the example of Detroit, Neill shows that private sector led regeneration can have disastrous consequences. Where local government and sub-regional planning frameworks are weak neoliberal doctrine permeates strategic decision-making, demanding superior competitiveness of cities that have been sidelined in the global race for capital and jobs. While most European shrinking cities are unlikely to encounter public and private sector investment in 'prime sites' and decline on a

dramatic scale that matches Detroit, local development tends to be driven by a logic which proclaims that enhancing competitiveness is the only way out of decline. The current policy instruments of the EU structural funds provide an important source of funding to help municipalities attract private developers. Intense competition between cities for declining inward investment opportunities results in subsidies being put into 'prime sites' while brownfield land with less economic development potential is neglected. Ferber and Schlappa argue that public sector investment decisions should not prioritise sites where there is a high likelihood that developers are able to generate a return on their investment. Instead sites that have potential to be economically viable in the near future should be prioritised for public subsidy where economic development is aimed for. Sites that are not economically profitable at this point in time should be prioritised for extensive open space, woodland and farming uses. The ABC model provides a simple heuristic tool to think about land as going through a cycle and can assist decision-makers' need to adopt a long-term perspective because the conscious cyclical management of land use generates economic and environmental benefits in the long term.

The benefits of city-wide planning frameworks which integrate the development of green open spaces with economic, housing, transport and other uses are explored in the chapter on urban perforation and green open spaces. Scherzer argues that open spaces offer flexibility in responding to shrinkage and expansion provided their development is embedded in strategic land use frameworks. With little investment, sites that would be in the 'C' category of Ferber's ABC model (see chapter 10) can become valuable spaces for community activities, places where a multitude of local stakeholders come together to make decisions on shared priorities and which are ultimately a resource which enhances the quality of the environment in urban areas. Scherzer also draws attention to the central function professionals fulfil in developing integrative concepts and frameworks which are then put forward for discussion and scrutiny by residents, civil society organisations, businesses and ultimately politicians. Relying on residents to take the initiative in adopting and maintaining surplus land appears to be an abdication of responsibility by public agencies. Instead professionals concerned with the management and development of green open spaces must seek and be part of multidisciplinary planning processes which draw on the expertise and resources of welfare, housing, transport and infrastructure services. Only when there is a strategic framework and clarity on resources associated with particular tracts of surplus land can residents be expected to invest their energies in creating spaces the community values.

Fostering temporary uses of buildings and land

Despite shrinking budgets and pressures on public services, the costly maintenance of parks and open spaces is often endured because these public open spaces project an image of affluence and a good quality of life. Many public open spaces are degraded however, particularly on industrial estates and in neighbourhoods where social housing is the dominant land use. Rather than neglecting these sites Parham shows that urban agriculture offers a valuable alternative to high maintenance and often rather sterile open spaces. Reviving allotments or creating new food growing spaces in residential and commercial areas can help

in ameliorating and mitigating social and economic as well as environmental problems associated with shrinkage. Local food production enhances social interaction, reduces maintenance costs, provides cheap and healthy sources of food and furthermore reduces the carbon footprint of cities. Some cities are being revived because food is grown and consumed locally and while not all shrinking cities can regenerate themselves in this way, promoting local production and consumption does make for a more convivial city. There are barriers to turning high maintenance or neglected open spaces into productive uses; some are in the minds of citizens and require a thorough challenge by public agencies, while others are caused by regulatory frameworks and values associated with professional practice. Retrofitting public open spaces with fruit bearing trees and community gardens would seem entirely appropriate for shrinking cities but professionals as well as elected representatives might need to change their expectations and attitudes towards the purpose of open spaces before such simple ideas are translated into practice.

A similar argument is made by Porst and Neill who illustrate how enormous creative energy can be released from local populations if traditional boundaries which determine and then control 'acceptable' land uses are breached. The case of Berlin shows that even in a highly regulated environment innovative contractual and economic models can be tested and then scaled up to support new forms of enterprises and land uses. Examples of temporary uses of prime city centre sites for high volume retail which promotes local artisans, innovative and locally produced products and services illustrate the creativity that is unleashed when municipalities and property owners engage with local entrepreneurs. The appropriation of vast open spaces, such as the Tempelhof airfield, for community uses further demonstrates the capacity local residents have for experimenting with different ways of using open spaces. While Berlin may be a somewhat exceptional case, most shrinking cities are likely to have scope to foster their creative sectors and the social economy by making buildings and land available for experimental interim uses.

Enhancing the social economy and the co-production of services

Shifting the focus from problems and needs to the assets local communities have is the key argument made in Murtagh's chapter on the social economy in shrinking cities. Often sidelined as not having the capacity to have strategic impact on the local economy, social enterprises and non-monetary trading systems thrive in deprived communities where public sector interventions to address poverty and exclusion have failed. But the social economy does need some support from public agencies though, to get care services, energy generation or urban farming and food production off the ground. Murtagh makes a compelling argument that investment in social enterprises pays off in the long run even in contexts of severe budgetary constraint. Helping citizens to utilise the spatial, physical, cultural and economic resources of places where people live to generate services and products they value enhances social cohesion, generates meaningful paid or unpaid employment and increases the resilience of local communities to deal with long-term decline. Therefore leaders of shrinking cities need to give more consideration to increasing the scope of the social economy and

supporting the provision of investment finance to upscale enterprises which provide socially important or economically viable products and services.

The social economy is particularly relevant to older people. Often portrayed as being economically inactive the chapter by Galjaard shows a vibrant ageing population across Europe, whose members provide services to one another, support the younger generation and enhance community cohesion. This is a far cry from the commonly promoted image of older people being a burden on the public purse and public services. Open spaces and buildings, transport and care services are opportunities for experimental thinking and practices which can enable older people to become active contributors to the services they use. The concept of co-production (chapter 6) helps us to think about service provision as not being the sole domain of appointed officials and professional providers, but the result of collaborative actions between the formal provider and the user of the service. Older people have long been practising the co-production of services they value; be it arts classes, social clubs, fitness and wellbeing initiatives, they all involve professionals as well as older people as service providers. Here we find practical examples and strong arguments showing that a long-term perspective and an integrated approach are necessary to harness the opportunities and address the challenges associated with large proportions of older people in the population.

Collaboration with citizens on service provision is only one, if very practical, aspect of co-production. The example of Altena in Schlappa's chapter on co-production illustrates that shrinking cities can co-produce forward strategies with their local stakeholders which create genuinely new perspectives on the future development opportunities for a city, and that public facilities such as libraries or sports centres can be co-managed. Families and older people are key stakeholders in this process due to their deep knowledge of the place but also because of the resources they have access to, whether these are skills, physical or financial, or of course social networks operating through family and friends. Harnessing these resources to relieve public agencies from the burden of being expected to provide public services and enhancing the status of citizens from being mere consumers to co-producers of services should be in the interests of every city, but shrinking cities in particular.

Facilitating an inclusive strategy and governance processes

Research and practical experience suggest that in shrinking cities problems grow faster than solutions. While we have identified a wide range of potential responses to urban shrinkage which can be initiated without having to have large financial resources they do require the active and deep involvement of citizens. Adopting participatory methods to facilitate citizen engagement in strategy development and planning has been advocated for decades by European and national policies. Murray shows that shrinking cities have much to learn from the experience of participatory planning in rural areas. Well established methods can be used to foster inclusive debates about solutions to problems which move citizens closer to strategic decision-making processes. But sharing power and nurturing a sense of mutuality of interest in dealing with shared challenges remains a barrier for decision makers in rural as well as

urban areas. The chapter on the strategy process in shrinking cities by Schlappa argues that one of the root causes for the exclusion of non-traditional responses to socio-economic decline is the predominant neoliberal logic which underpins much strategic decision-making. As the education of professionals and politicians elevates successful leaders to heroes if they can win against ‘the competition’, we should not be surprised when enhancing competitiveness is the default position at times of crisis, particularly when national and European policy is resolutely focused on achieving growth. Most of our contemporary models and techniques are honed to achieve economic growth, while our conceptual and practical tool kit for dealing with decline requires significant improvement. The model of the strategy cycle in chapter 13 goes some way towards addressing this issue and assisting those who participate in the governance and leadership of shrinking cities to create perspectives on the future of their city which embrace the reality of long-term decline.

In a context where mainstream investment and labour markets have bypassed a city, one of the most important resources to reverse the fortunes of the city must surely be the local population. But Cortese *et al.* argue that local communities seem strangely disconnected from the governance processes and that shrinking cities must give priority to overcoming fragmented sectoral responses to urban shrinkage by adopting an inclusive cross-cutting approach to local governance. With high levels of unemployment, pockets of deep deprivation and a concentration of people who struggle to engage with the mainstream labour market many shrinking cities face profound problems of social cohesion. These problems require social investment rather than austerity and the inclusion rather than marginalisation of those who feel the brunt of social economic decline.

Shrinking cities cannot be left alone to deal with these problems and questions of governance are by their very nature multi-level issues which are constrained or facilitated by national and supranational governance arrangements. However, while regional, national and European policy needs to find ways of supporting the development of governance processes that might emerge from such a process, our contributions here suggest that the first step towards adjusting governance arrangements needs to be taken locally. Each chapter in this volume has touched on issues of governance in one way or another and it is clear that the leaders of public, private and civil society organisations in shrinking cities need to come together and ask themselves whether their local arrangements are fit for the purpose of dealing with the causes and consequences of urban shrinkage. This book contains ideas that could be used to start a critical dialogue on how to organise the governance of local responses to shrinkage.

Implications for policy and practice

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of integrated urban development in national and European policy, a coherent framework which sets out the principles of an integrated approach to urban policy has so far been missing. At the European level we find a general framework of priorities for the Territorial Agenda 2020 which does not seem to address the nature of the challenges encountered by shrinking cities because despite references to integrated and balanced development, the core drivers of the territorial agenda

are concerned with the enhancement of competitiveness and the associated reduction of barriers to the movement of labour, capital, goods and services. The Cities of Tomorrow report (European Commission, 2011a) on the other hand sets out a broad framework for the development of urban policy which recognises that European cities are dealing with problems arising from demographic change, growing social polarisation, weak economic development and environmental degradation, which can only be tackled through flexible and inclusive responses which reconcile conflicting demands and perspectives at the city level. In promoting a vision of the future European city which is part of a polycentric, balanced, culturally sensitive and socially inclusive approach to urban development, Cities of Tomorrow calls for an integrated, cross-sectoral approach as being key to achieving this vision. However, the need for cross-sectoral collaboration has been called for ever since the LEADER programme was established in the early 1990s (Soto *et al.*, 2012; Murray, 2010). The URBAN programmes then promoted the partnership principle in urban regeneration contexts during the 1990s and the policy implications of the ‘integrated approach’ have been distilled into the Urban Acquis (Deutsch-Österreichisches URBAN-Netzwerk, 2005; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005) the Leipzig Charter (The German Presidency of the European Council of Ministers, 2007; EuroCities and Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik, 2007) and more recently the Toledo Declaration (Council of the European Union, 2010). Looking at the challenges shrinking cities face it would appear that the gap between aspirations for an integrated, cross-sectoral urban policy and actual practice appears to be substantial.

As yet we do not find a dedicated European level programme that would target support at cities with very limited growth potential. The policy principle of Community Led Local Development (CLLD) requires cities requesting funding to demonstrate that their integrated territorial development strategy is based on the work of local action groups ‘composed of representatives of public and private socio-economic interests, where at the decision making level neither the public sector nor any single interest group shall represent more than 49% of the voting rights’. The EC (European Commission, 2011b: article 29) puts a renewed emphasis on local collaboration in the delivery of socio-economic development initiatives and could become a key source of support for cities in decline. As the unifying principle for the main structural funding programmes for the 2014–2020 period CLLD therefore provides opportunities to fund non-conventional, bottom-up, collaborative and integrated approaches to urban development. Some estimates suggest that up to 40 per cent of the €308 billion structural funds budget might be invested in urban areas in the 2014–2020 programming period, hence offering significant scope for shrinking cities to secure much needed support. However, much of the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund policy is focused on achieving economic growth and if there is no move to create a bespoke funding programme for shrinking cities we can expect that cities with significant economic growth potential are likely to continue to attract the lion’s share of structural investments, while cities with poor growth potential will fall further behind.

Given the scale of urban shrinkage and the precarious position many shrinking cities find themselves in there is a need for a specific funding stream to support the development of practical interventions. A pilot programme for shrinking cities could perhaps be considered

for the current 2014–2020 programming period, which is modelled on the successful URBAN programmes. The recently approved URBACT III programme would provide an excellent complement to an investment programme by building the capacity of practitioners to find ways of responding to long-term decline, which might develop some of the themes emerging from the contributions to this book. Consideration could also be given to national personal development programmes for people in leadership positions, specifically in shrinking cities. While some of this work could be supported at European level through practitioner networks such as EUROCITIES or the European Urban Knowledge Network, as well as research networks, for example the now well established Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCiRN), much of the support would need to be provided at national level through professional institutes for public and business leaders, government for locally elected politicians and civil society organisations for the governing bodies of local charities.

While EU sources are of vital importance for shrinking cities, particularly in less developed regions, the ability to develop locally appropriate responses to shrinkage also depends on national and sub-national initiatives. Of particular importance would be government support to deal with oversized infrastructure, surplus buildings and green open spaces, as would be planning frameworks which reduce competition between cities and facilitate balanced spatial development strategies. But shrinking cities are of course not only places of problems, they offer substantial opportunities for change and innovation as well. Governments across the world are searching for new models of providing services and addressing the challenges arising from socio-economic decline. Hence shrinking cities should be seen as laboratories where pressures arising from decades of decline have made local institutions and communities ‘change ready’, willing to explore and experiment with new approaches to governance, economic development, social service provision and the physical environment.

Implications for teaching and research

The Cities of Tomorrow report suggests that 74 per cent of the difference in growth rates between individual cities in Europe is accounted for by different GDP growth rates in the countries they are located in. If cities have a 26 per cent margin for manoeuvre to affect their socio-economic development trajectory, because the other 74 per cent are determined by long-term trends and global flows of capital and labour, there is a strong case to help all those involved in governing a city to develop strategic initiatives which focus on issues that they have some control over. Given the limitations of interventions based on economic growth in a context of long-term decline, actors in shrinking cities might need to focus their strategies on softer outcomes such as sustainability and reciprocity, the engagement of civil society in the social economy and the co-production of welfare services. These topics are the focus of research in relation to governance and civil society (Pestoff, 2009; Pestoff *et al.*, 2012; Zimmer and Freise, 2007) and also strategic management in public services (Joyce, 2015; Ferlie and Ongaro, 2015; Pestoff, 2009; Pestoff, 2012). What is needed is a deeper exploration and evaluation of strategic responses to shrinkage which draws together spatial, social, economic, environmental research with management and social policy related studies.

If urban shrinkage continues to spread, as some scholars predict, then the identification of effective responses which go beyond sectoral interventions based on notions of achieving economic growth and competitive advantage should be a priority for research as well as teaching.

It is time to reflect on our own practices and the stake we hold in perpetuating crisis in places left behind in the global race for profit and focus our energies on developing alternative ways of creating prosperous and sustainable communities in what some scholars call the 'post-growth economy' (Paech, 2012). The next generation of chief executives, council leaders, mayors, social entrepreneurs, governors of civil society organisations, need to be equipped with conceptual and practical tools that allow them to explore and exploit non-growth developments which bring benefits to local populations. This partly means giving topics such as social capital, social entrepreneurship, social innovation, co-production, collaborative practice and others a high profile in the mainstream curricula of higher education. Undertaking more research on how cities can move from crisis to choice in contexts of severe constraint would be a priority in relation to spatial, social, economic, environmental and management disciplines. This might over time bring about a change in the content of higher education and professional development programmes and equip future leaders to address the causes and consequences of decline more effectively than at present.

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