

SYMPOSIUM

Shrinking Cities: Urban Challenges of Globalization

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Abstract

Urban shrinkage is not a new phenomenon. It has been documented in a large literature analyzing the social and economic issues that have led to population flight, resulting, in the worse cases, in the eventual abandonment of blocks of housing and neighbourhoods. Analysis of urban shrinkage should take into account the new realization that this phenomenon is now global and multidimensional — but also little understood in all its manifestations. Thus, as the world's population increasingly becomes urban, orthodox views of urban decline need redefinition. The symposium includes articles from 10 urban analysts working on 30 cities around the globe. These analysts belong to the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCIRN), whose collaborative work aims to understand different types of city shrinkage and the role that different approaches, policies and strategies have played in the regeneration of these cities. In this way the symposium will inform both a rich diversity of analytical perspectives and country-based studies of the challenges faced by shrinking cities. It will also disseminate SCIRN's research results from the last 3 years.

Introduction

Shrinking cities are an increasing international, 'end of era' phenomenon (Oswalt, 2006). Over recent decades, globalization has been concentrating resources, key infrastructure and intellectual assets in 'global cities', which act as magnets for population and skills (Sassen, 2001). The gradual shift towards a new global economic order (Castells, 2000; Harvey, 2000; Soja, 2000; Graham and Marvin 2001; Sassen, 2001; Dicken, 2003; Swyngedouw, 2004; Gereffi, 2005) has resulted in a new system of global production, manufacturing, distribution and consumption that has led to new urban forms made possible by the logistic and new technology revolution (Audirac, 2005). Simultaneously, other towns, cities and entire regions are experiencing the outflow of capital and human

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resources, and are suffering from a lack of entrepreneurship and low levels of innovation and intellectual engagement (Martinez-Fernandez and Wu, 2007). Cities whose development was based on a single industry, or on the concentration of an activity in a single sector, have been particularly affected by these globalization processes (Friedrichs, 1993; Bontje, 2004; Lang, 2005) and, as a result of increasing competition on an ever-wider scale, certain cities are losing out (Cunningham-Sabot and Fol, 2007).

This phenomenon of cities growing slowly or declining is found on every continent and can be described as a significant international politico-economic and planning issue. Indeed, when cities shrink, they share common elements in what can be characterized as a 'shrinkage identity' (Reckien and Martinez-Fernandez, 2011). 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. The term 'urban shrinkage' is used to stress the fact that this phenomenon is a multidimensional process with multidimensional effects and having economic, demographic, geographic, social and physical dimensions that not only continue to evolve as a result of new global and local realities, but also influence theories and research proffering diagnosis, prognosis and remedies. The term expands our understanding of 'decline' beyond the simple linear process that is generally understood to follow deindustrialization.

In this symposium we argue that globalization of the economy, global financial flows and the internationalization of production processes are powerful underlying causes of shrinkage in numerous industrial cities that have been unable to find a niche in the current competitive international economic environment (see, in this symposium, Martinez-Fernandez *et al.*, 2012; also Audirac *et al.*, 2012).

Population change in cities today is one of the symptoms of globalization. On the one hand, globalization stimulates the mobility of people across countries and regions, with some communities being at the sending end (resulting in shrinkage of their population), while other areas experience net gains (e.g. capital cities and regional centres). On the other hand, communities and indeed entire countries, Japan or Germany for example, that have low fertility rates are rapidly ageing, a process that often combines with young people moving out, accelerating shrinkage (see Wiechmann and Pallagst, 2012, in this symposium). These multiple facets of urban shrinkage call for a critical deconstruction of the term and a multidimensional reconstruction that accounts for all the key manifestations.

The financial crisis has recently highlighted the vulnerability of current economic growth models and the failure of labour markets that once looked solid and stable (e.g. North America, Europe). The vigorous debate on shrinking cities that originated in Germany and in North America had already stressed the need for a paradigm shift from traditional theories of urban growth and change (Audirac, 2009) to other ways of planning for urban life that would focus on quality of space and slower and smarter growth. In this symposium we argue that the urban growth model is no longer valid for the sustainable development of cities and regions, and that the planning discipline in particular needs to refocus the way that the instruments and mechanisms of city development are applied, so as to take into account the multiple dimensions of urban shrinkage and the related urban regeneration strategies derived from planning practice.

In this introduction, we first review theories of urban change and literature on the causes of urban shrinkage in different contexts. Second, we analyse urban shrinkage as a spatial manifestation of globalization, and, third, we argue for widening the scope of the current urban planning paradigm focused on 'growth' to one that integrates 'growth and decline' as simultaneous and interrelated urban processes.

Theories of urban change

Urban shrinkage today cannot be understood without referring to American and German discourses (Audirac, 2009; Baron *et al.*, 2010; Fol and Cunningham-Sabot, 2010). The terms used to refer to urban shrinkage have changed over time. In American urban

history, the process has been described as ‘urban decline’ (Beauregard, 2003), although a number of authors have used the terms ‘shrinking cities’ or ‘urban shrinkage’ to describe the urban decay and deterioration associated with the contraction of the population and economic base in older North Eastern cities (Weaver, 1977; Breckenfield, 1978; Rybczynski and Linneman, 1999). In Germany the term ‘*schrumpfende Städte*’ (shrinking cities) was introduced by Häußermann and Siebel (1988)¹ as a metaphor to describe the decline in population and economic base experienced by German cities as a result of deindustrialization. In Western Germany during the 1980s the debate on *die schrumpfenden Städte* was based on the realization that the combined effects of demographic trends and economic restructuring would result in a structural change in the development of cities. Instead of considering the decline of Western cities as a punctual and reversible phenomenon, both scholars and public actors started to see it as a structural and durable process. The *städtische Schrumpfung* process has now been widely described and analysed with respect to East German cities, which experienced brutal and dramatic depopulation and deindustrialization after 1989. Recently, the effects of the financial crisis have given birth to a new wave of media and political interest in ‘shrinking cities’, particularly in the US (see the numerous newspapers articles on Detroit, Flint, and Youngstown that have been published since the summer of 2009). Here the term ‘shrinking’ is not only used to describe the process by which cities lose population and employment, but also to define new strategies consisting in demolishing vacant buildings and ‘downsizing’ the city (Baron *et al.*, 2010).

Urban shrinkage is not a new phenomenon. The development and decline of cities and city centres have, since the Chicago School of urban sociology, been viewed as a natural process whereby urban change results from a lifecycle that ends in inevitable decline. At the scale of urban quarters or districts, Hoyt (1939) developed a cyclic approach to urban change. In his study of the structure and growth of residential quarters in American cities, he concluded that residential urban areas undergo an inevitable evolution towards decline, linked to property devaluation resulting from the arrival of less prosperous populations (Lang, 2000). This conception of urban lifecycles echoes the ‘cycle theory’ in economics. According to Kondratieff’s theory (1984) the economy undergoes waves of growth and recession, which comprise a first phase of vigorous growth, reflected in increases in prices, then a period of slower growth characterized by a lowering in prices. According to Schumpeter (1939) the evolution of capitalism is characterized by a process of ‘creative destruction’, punctuated by the appearance of new technologies, their dissemination, and finally the disappearance of their effects in terms of growth. Peter Hall (1988) integrated Schumpeter’s process of ‘creative destruction’ into the consideration of spatial issues, and showed that these processes, which appear at first sight to be a-spatial, do in fact generate spatial effects. Indeed, according to the theory of the lifecycle of products, each product develops through the same sequence of stages — initial development, growth, maturity, decline and obsolescence (Friedrichs, 1993). Thus, throughout the life of a product, after a development phase, production conditions become standardized and the product can be produced in any location. The resulting competition leads businesses to reduce their production costs by relocating, changing to a different product, or introducing innovations in the production process. The evolution of regions and urban agglomerations is thus seen as following development cycles that include periods of rapid growth followed by periods of slower growth and decline. Each wave of regional and urban development is thus seen as being determined by the lifecycles of the industries that belong to it (Booth, 1987). Audirac, Fol, Cunningham-Sabot and Moraes in this issue identify three major global industrial-restructuring cycles: from the factory system at the end of the nineteenth century to today’s global production networks, each associated with a different mode of industrial urbanism (Soja, 2000). The

1 The same authors had already used the term in an article in *Die Zeit* in 1985 entitled ‘Die Chancen des Schrumpfens’ [The opportunities of shrinking], in which they showed the coexistence in Germany of processes of urban growth and urban decline (Florentin *et al.*, 2009).

authors use this cyclical framework to profile three historical types of suburban industrial shrinkage occurring in the global North — Paris and Glasgow— and in the global South — São Paulo, Brazil and Guadalajara, Mexico.

Following a cyclic perspective, in the 1980s a series of studies sought to develop models explaining the evolution of European cities. Following the pioneering work of Hall and Hay (1980), who pointed to a regular pattern of growth and decline characterizing the stages of European urban development, Van den Berg *et al.* (1982) developed a theory of metropolitan evolution involving four successive development stages: urbanization, suburbanization, de-urbanization and re-urbanization. According to this view, derived from a neoclassical economics interpretation, decline is an inevitable process generated by the strategies of economic agents. The model developed by Van den Berg *et al.* (1982) has been contradicted by a number of studies, which have shown that the evolutionary paths of cities are diverse and complex and cannot be contained in a single model of urban change (Cheshire and Hay, 1989; Cheshire, 1995; Champion, 2001; Buzar *et al.*, 2007). Criticizing the neoclassical interpretation of urban change, Smith *et al.* (2001: 498) show that ‘economic disinvestment — the sustained and systemic withdrawal of capital investment from the built environment — is central to any explanation of neighbourhood decline’, an explanation that they have applied to urban and suburban decline.

Suburbanization and the decline of cities

North American literature on urban shrinkage has been dominated by perspectives on urban decline focused on the concentration of urban poverty, the growth of the urban underclass, slums and blight, racial segregation, and immigration. The classical economic view underscores people’s preferences and trade-offs between land, commuting costs and housing location, and predicts urban decline at the centre of cities and growth at the periphery: as affluent consumers can buy more land and housing at the city’s edge and pay for the incurred transportation costs, poor and low-income people concentrate at the urban core where presumably commuting costs and housing costs are lower. Trickle-down or filtering is another common explanation of urban decline. Older housing stock found in the core of the city, which is more affordable, will attract low-income households. Over time, old cities and first-tier suburbs concentrate large portions of poor, low-income, domestic and immigrant populations, and some neighbourhoods physically decay as low rents induce landlords to neglect maintenance and upkeep and to let properties further deteriorate.

The human ecology view stresses the spread of decline through the invasion and succession of poor and low-income populations into middle-class neighbourhoods causing the white middle-class populations to flee to the next ring of outer suburbs (Lucy and Philips, 2000). Historically in the US, a massive racial transition from white to black population has characterized much of this urban change since the 1940s as a result of both economic and racial discriminatory practices on the part of whites (Fishman, 1987; Downs, 1997). However, other factors such as new mobility regimes based on cars and trucks supported by federally subsidized housing and highway construction programs and post-war, anti-urban-decline interventions, such as massive urban renewal projects in central cities, greatly contributed to the American suburbanization of firms and of the white population (Jackson, 1985). As firms and middle-income population moved out, central city and first-tier suburbs experienced further decline exacerbated by a paucity of fiscal resources, social issues (e.g. crime, public insecurity, low-quality public schools) and infrastructural obsolescence, and large ineffective public bureaucracies serving the remaining very poor African-American, Latino and immigrant population (Downs, 1997; 1999). Additionally, Downs (1997) identifies American antipathy for redistributive policies toward the poor and the lack of affordable housing abetted by municipal building regulations as contributing factors of urban decline.

In agreement with classical invasion–succession explanations, Harvard urban economists explain the resurgence of immigrant segregation, since the 1970s, in US

central cities and old suburbs as the result of automobile-dependent suburbanization (Cutler *et al.*, 2005). These authors view shrinking cities as those abandoned by long-time residents and reoccupied by poor and low-skilled immigrants. Dense reoccupation by immigrants however, happened primarily in areas of the city that were well served by mass public transit, and that, in addition to a viable transportation alternative, offered cheap housing (Glaeser and Gyourko, 2005).

Parasitic urbanization and deindustrialization

Other scholars have analysed suburbanization as a process accomplished at the expense of central cities. Beauregard (2006) calls this process 'parasitic' urbanization. For him, post-war suburbanization has been parasitic in that its take-off and expansion represent a break with the history of American urbanization and the start of a new paradigm of decentralization of businesses and households. This growth paradigm preyed on industrial and central cities, draining off their economic vitality, middle-class population and investment. It undermined their governments, leaving behind concentrations of the urban poor, racial minorities, persistent unemployment, abandoned industrial sites, boarded-up neighbourhoods and blighted downtowns.

Coupled with the effects of deindustrialization — an instance of massive transfers of capital to other economic sectors and other parts of the world, which have affected former working-class suburbs since the 1970s — suburban disinvestment has been identified by a number of scholars (Beauregard, 1993; Hill *et al.*, 1995; Phelan and Schneider, 1996; Lucy and Philips, 1997; Smith *et al.*, 2001) as part of a pervasive process of metropolitan restructuring. However, rather than emphasizing residential suburbanization, California School geographers (Storper, 1997; Scott, 1998; Soja, 2000) underscore production and the economic geography of industrial restructuring. Viewed through Soja's (2000) lens of industrial urbanism, shrinking cities are the outcome of degenerative forces resulting from crises in capitalist production. Audirac *et al.* (2012, this issue) argue that post-Fordist transformations, in Europe and Latin America, have had dramatic effects on industrial suburbs. While various phases of industrial urbanism (Soja, 2000) have shaped the evolution of cities and their peripheries, the contemporary restructuring of production at a global scale, based on the new international division of labour, is a major factor contributing to the shrinkage of former industrial suburbs in both Europe and Latin America.

***Die schrumpfenden Städte* as an instance of the effects of post-socialist transformations**

In eastern Germany the combined effects of deindustrialization, suburbanization, post-Soviet re-composition and demographic factors have produced a hitherto unknown context of urban decline (Oswalt, 2006). Here, the hypothesis of transition taking the form of mere adjustment to the processes of post-Fordist modernization gives way to analyses stressing 'the simultaneity, interdependence and overlapping of different processes and structure' (Steinführer and Haase, 2007), which confer a 'unique' character on the evolutions taking place in Eastern Europe and its cities (Boren and Gentile, 2007; Steinführer and Haase, 2007). In eastern Germany, at the start of the 1990s, the economic upheavals generated by the fall of the socialist regime and the process of reunification took place extremely fast. The privatization of business was accompanied by a forced march to modernization, which resulted in drastic reductions in the industrial sector. Post-Fordist change, which took place in a fairly gradual manner in the cities in the West, operated in the cities of the East as 'shock therapy' (Bontje, 2004: 14). Eastern Germany, which according to certain authors has become a dependent peripheral industrial region for Western Germany (Prigge, 2006), today has the lowest rate of industrial employment in

Europe, while the overall unemployment rate is twice that of Western Germany (Glock and Häußermann, 2004). The cities in eastern Germany, which are too peripheral in relation to the main European decision centres to be attractive to investors, have experienced massive emigration, in particular of young qualified salaried workers (and especially women), who have left to look for work in the West.

Today, the cities of eastern Germany, like most Eastern European cities, are undergoing structural changes similar to those taking place in their Western counterparts: they are coping with deindustrialization, sociospatial polarization, and the development of urban sprawl (Steinführer and Haase, 2007; Florentin *et al.*, 2009). Eastern German cities do, however, show features of decline that are specific, or at any rate more marked than those felt in the West. Wiechmann and Pallagst (2012, this issue) compare shrinking cities in eastern Germany and the US and further highlight the current debates and contested policies.

Globalization and urban decline

In industrialized countries, globalization (Amin and Thrift, 1994; Scott and Storper, 2003) has been accompanied by deindustrialization and suburbanization. Today urban shrinkage, rather than being an exception or an aberration, could be analysed as a global and structural phenomenon (Oswalt, 2006). However, local actors tend to see urban decline as a sort of parenthesis, which should be as short-lived as possible with the firm belief that recovery is to be expected (Bontje, 2004). It is worthwhile revisiting this assumption, so as to envisage urban shrinkage as a durable, structural component of urban development.

Classical models of urban decline, as reviewed above, were conceived in the context of a particular mode of economic development, that is to say Fordist industrialization. These models prove to be far less relevant in the current context of economic and urban development, where cities have to cope with a phase of intense economic restructuring (Bontje, 2004). Thus, while urban decline has been interpreted as being a stage in a cyclic process of boom and bust (Van den Berg *et al.*, 1982; Booth, 1987; Friedrichs, 1993), it would seem more appropriate to hypothesize that 'shrinking cities' are the spatial manifestation of a global process accompanying the establishment of a 'new regime of accumulation' (Aglietta and Boyer, 1986). This process is of such magnitude that it reaches beyond (or encompasses) cyclic explanations of growth and decline, since the entire production system is being restructured, generating particularly marked spatial effects (Peck and Tickell, 1992).

Urban shrinkage as a spatial manifestation of globalization

According to Harvey (2000) firms engage in a 'spatial fix'² to cope with profit crises by geographically relocating production units to lower-wage locations. This in large part explains the increasing occurrence of urban decline across the world, as well as the speed at which it is progressing. Indeed, the mobility and the volatility of capital and foreign investment, for which cities are now intensely competing, are unprecedented in their speed and scope. In the era of flexible accumulation, international outsourcing and lean production (Soja, 2000; Scott and Storper, 2003), footloose enterprises have abandoned obsolete industrial plants and infrastructure and deserted many urban places giving way to the post-industrial city whose economic basis is increasingly oriented towards

2 Harvey uses the term 'spatial fix' to refer to the investments in the geographical landscape (e.g. the physical infrastructure of the built environment, transportation and communication, land development, territorial organization) that are made during a growing phase of capitalist cycles only to be destroyed and rebuilt at the next capitalist crisis, beginning a new growth cycle.

services. However, as Audirac, Cunningham-Sabot, Fol and Moraes discuss in this issue, in numerous territories traditionally dominated by industry, employment gains in the service sector have not been sufficient to compensate for the loss of industrial jobs.

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.

Martinez-Fernandez, Wu, Shatz, Taira, and Vargas-Hernandez in this symposium analyse mining cities as a primary example of industrial change as a determinant of shrinkage. Globalization processes are somehow easily recognized in mining cities as their physical, financial, employment and cultural effects share many similarities with other cities across the capitalist world. The article underscores the lack of innovation, knowledge connectivity activities and new skills development in the host mining city. It presents the shrinking mining city as chiefly disconnected from the sophisticated innovation systems found in mining corporations, extending previous arguments discussed by Martinez-Fernandez and Wu (2007). The economic paradox of these cities and their dual innovation system contrasts with the usually strong community involvement among residents, who seek to preserve a sustainable development path for their cities. The cities analysed — Mt Isa in Australia, Sudbury in Canada, Yubary in Japan and Cerro San Pedro in Mexico — exemplify the fortunes and misfortunes of what today can be labelled as 'global shrinking mining cities'.

Shrinking cities and the neoliberal project

Shrinking places are for Smith *et al.* (2001) and Smith (2002) a form of neoliberal urbanism that is the manifestation in the built environment of contemporary capitalism's creative destruction (Harvey, 2005). Drawing on political economic notions of the global neoliberal project, embodied in the Washington Consensus's doctrine of free trade, state devolution and market deregulation, Smith *et al.* (2001)³ empirically challenge conventional formulations of urban shrinkage and decline expressed in terms of invasion–succession processes or in terms of who moves in or out of neighbourhoods. In contemporary capitalist societies, neoliberal policy aims to restore and preserve economic and political privilege among the upper economic classes through privatization of all aspects of economic life, financialization of risk and debt, the management and manipulation of financial crises and state redistributive tactics. The resultant neoliberal project's physical and economic decline stems from new processes of wealth accumulation by a few through the growing dispossession of the masses (Harvey, 2005).⁴

3 Declining suburbs were dubbed the 'Camden Syndrome' after Camden, New Jersey, an aging and declining suburb of Philadelphia, which Smith *et al.* (2001) considered emblematic of deindustrialized regions of the northeastern US and of many American cities in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, the syndrome is spreading today to many previously prosperous cities as a result of the current US financial crisis.

4 For Harvey (2005) neoliberalism is the global project emerging in the 1970s against the Keynesian compromise of the welfare state and its social safety net. As a political and economic theory, it proposes that human well-being can best be achieved by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms that are institutionally buttressed in property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of government is to guarantee such freedoms by protecting their supporting institutions. Deregulation, privatization and state retrenchment in social provision are common features of neoliberal policy, which has been adopted in different versions, coercively or voluntarily, by different

Viewed from this perspective, skills, cultural, educational or other spatial mismatches or deficiencies among residents of shrinking places are not the root of the problem. Rather, speculative circulation of capital in the built environment, such as predatory mortgage lending and its securitization in global financial markets, is largely to blame. As evident in the current and previous financial and real-estate debacles, these speculative processes have brought widespread disinvestment and real-estate devastation to many a neighbourhood and furthered the spread of economic shrinkage and physical decline across the regional and global urban landscapes.

Shrinking cities: places 'unplugged' from global networks

Urban and global restructuring scholars (Bluestone and Harrison, 2000; Soja, 2000; Sassen, 2001; Gereffi, 2005) associate the international division of labour with massive offshoring of manufacturing jobs from developed to developing countries and with the weaving of global production networks. While global cities in the developed world are the command and control centres of the global economy (Sassen, 2001), constellations of globally networked cities from both developed and developing countries have emerged interlaced in global production chains organized by multinational corporations (Gereffi, 2005). In this global system, cities are susceptible to a new form of temporary or permanent decline depending on the restructuring of global networks in specific industries (i.e. electronics, automobiles, banking, etc.). In Manuel Castells' (2000) 'network society', the restructuring of global networks — the 'space of flows' — has direct consequences on the 'space of places' that these networks either interconnect or bypass. The network society perspective allows a scalar view of urban decline both 'zoomed in' from global to local and 'zoomed out' from local to global. In the latter view, the fragmentation of work brought about by the information society and the local spatial and social variability of access to networks influence the development of cities, since some can be temporarily or structurally cut off from the 'space of flows'. Sidestepped by global networks, shrinking cities find themselves metaphorically speaking 'unplugged' from international engines of growth. According to Scott and Storper (2003), we are seeing growing inequalities between cities and regions that are integrated into global networks and those that are not. Innovation and knowledge economies are simultaneously local development engines and nodes in globally networked agglomerations, whose future is more than ever influenced by the strategies of multinational corporations. Thus, while certain spaces become attractive to investment and to the most qualified workers, others lose their economic base, their jobs and thereby their population.

Planning and policy issues in shrinking cities

Planning paradigms have long focused on urban growth while governance has consistently relied on cities as 'growth machines' (Logan and Molotch, 1987). Although some cities are happy to remain small (e.g. Oxford in the UK; Salamanca in Spain) a certain stigma is attached to industrial cities that are growing slowly or declining after losing their former glory. Cities with rapid growth are perceived as 'successful, desirable and admired', and, by implication, residents of slow-growing or declining cities see

countries throughout the world — from the US to Chile and from the UK to China. Global and multilateral institutions like the WTO, World Bank and IMF, which regulate global finance and trade, and central banks, treasury departments, corporate boardrooms, the media and financial institutions, as well as certain universities, are seen as important actors of the global neoliberal regime.

themselves as living in places with a 'diminished sense of self-worth' (Leo and Anderson, 2006). This perception of 'place' influences local policymakers to think of alternative economic development paths for their cities, towns or regions. Urban planning and regeneration strategies vary from attracting investment, radical revitalization of the housing market, modifying infrastructure and revitalizing city centres through greening the space. These strategies have had mixed success.

While many cities focus on stemming decline through incentives and investments, others are moving away from trying to regain lost fortunes and focus on reducing the city's footprint. Scott (2006) argues against focusing exclusively on one type of initiative, such as attracting foreign capital or cultivating culture-led development — strategies that can work, but not exclusively nor in isolation. For example, the rush to seduce global mobile capital might only produce illusory developments (Fol and Sabot, 2003; Friedmann, 2006) rather than creating the sustainable path that cities want to achieve. Audirac, Cunningham-Sabot, Fol and Moraes analyse in this symposium the ambivalent sociospatial effects of urban policies focused on attracting new investment and a wealthy population.

Policy attention has also been devoted to addressing the problem of housing stock, as housing vacancy and abandonment are common in shrinking cities. Several cities (especially in Eastern Europe) have tried to revitalize the housing market via demolition of derelict housing stock, providing in its place open spaces and recreational areas under the assumption that the improved environment will allow the city to recover its vitality and attract population (Lötscher *et al.*, 2004; Bernt, 2006; Oswalt, 2006; Wiechmann and Siedentop, 2006). However, these measures mostly cure symptoms, not causes, as the article by Wiechman and Pallagst argues in this symposium. Abandoned buildings have extraordinary visibility in cities, especially in smaller cities, and are symptomatic of the detrimental impacts on quality of life: decreased property values, increased crime, environmental hazards, rising health and safety issues, which lead in turn to increased disinvestment in the city. High vacancy rates not only reduce a city's tax base but also lead to a loss of activities performed in city centres such as shopping, cultural and sports activities. This environment creates a vicious circle that increases the chances of people moving out (Friedrichs, 1993; Bontje, 2004; Glock and Häußermann, 2004; Lang, 2005).

Local institutions and development agencies are also facing the effects of shrinkage in urban infrastructure. As operating costs increase in shrinking cities and fiscal bases are reduced, certain effects become evident: infrastructure maintenance is deferred; a reduction in population density makes municipal services more expensive; there is a reduction of social and retail activity; there is a lack of social energy and dynamism; people's sense of safety is reduced; urban fabric is lost and disjointed urban areas appear amid 'wild zones' beset by illegal activity and vandalism (Rybczynski and Linneman, 1999). Thus, shrinkage of population and economic activities has tremendous physical and social impacts and equally important impacts on the quality and vitality of the resultant 'perforated city' (Lütke-Daldrup, 2001).

There is another silent but forceful process in shrinking cities that underlies the visible manifestations of vacant blocks and deserted areas but that has received less planning and policy attention: the disappearance of skills, knowledge and innovation as those more able leave for more prosperous cities (Martinez-Fernandez and Wu, 2007). The impact of changing skills on the local knowledge base and the processes needed for skills and employment (re)development in these cities are largely unknown. The loss of skills and talent can rapidly affect local innovation systems, disconnecting them from mainstream globalization, and can hit small and medium enterprises (SMEs) especially hard since they are so dependent on the availability of skilled workers for survival (OECD, 2005; 2008; 2010; Martinez-Fernandez, 2008). Designing skills and employment strategies for these cities requires different approaches from cities that are growing and where skills shortages relate to strong industrial demand. Declining cities need to work much harder at offering lifestyle choices together with a dynamic business environment that can attract and keep knowledge workers and their families. It is also difficult to provide

generic strategies, policies and programs for attracting talent and developing skills in cities in decline as cities are part of territorial systems with different functions and histories. For example, a declining city or area that is within commuting distance of a growing city requires different approaches from a declining area isolated or remote from other urban centres. Within cities there might be pockets of poverty and unemployment that are quite different from other areas of the city, even those in close geographical proximity. Therefore, designing strategies and policies for skills development is a multidimensional process, as regards first the growing or declining processes and cycles of the city and, second, the territorial dynamics of the area and their economic and social trajectories.

The planning discipline has dealt with urban decline for many years and the literature prolifically draws lessons from the experience gained from old-industrialized US and UK cities as well as from the most recent Eastern German experience. However, when it comes to the analysis and impact of different planning strategies and policy initiatives in shrinking cities the evidence is scarce. Therefore, the challenges for planners and local policymakers in devising policies and programs for revitalization are daunting. A more rigorous analysis of policy measures tried outside the classic deindustrializing cities, their rationale, their effects (if any) and the extent of the investment would be of great assistance to local policymakers and practitioners. Even if each city or region is different, examples of best practice can shed light into the complexity of urban shrinkage.

The collection of articles in this symposium aims to provide some clarity on these issues and, at the same time, attempts to contest the main paradigm of urban growth from which modern planning stems. A paradigm shift in urban planning focused on growth to one that includes limited growth or shrinkage might be necessary to tackle what is becoming a global phenomenon both in North and South economies.

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Résumé

La décroissance urbaine n'est pas un phénomène nouveau. De nombreux travaux ont analysé les problèmes sociaux et économiques conduisant au départ de populations et résultant dans les pires des cas à l'abandon d'îlots d'habitat et de quartiers entiers. Cependant, l'étude de la décroissance urbaine doit aujourd'hui tenir compte du constat récent selon lequel ce phénomène est désormais global et multidimensionnel, tout en restant peu appréhendé dans toutes ses composantes. Ainsi, alors que la population mondiale est de plus en plus urbaine, les conceptions classiques du déclin urbain méritent d'être réexaminées. Ce symposium inclut des articles de dix chercheurs travaillant sur trente villes à travers le monde. Ils appartiennent au Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCIRN), dont le travail collectif a pour objectif d'analyser différents types de décroissance urbaine et le rôle que les multiples approches, politiques et stratégies ont joué dans la régénération des villes touchées par ce processus. Ce numéro s'appuie sur une diversité d'approches et sur l'étude de contextes urbains variés, ayant pour point commun d'être concernés par les enjeux de la décroissance urbaine. Il permet de diffuser les résultats des recherches menées au sein du SCIRN au cours des trois dernières années.