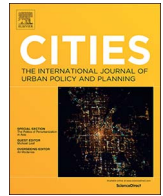


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Guest Editorial/Editorial

## Introduction: Shrinking Cities from marginal to mainstream: Views from North America and Europe

### 1. Introduction

At the turn of the century and at the beginning of the new millennium, Shrinking Cities emerge as one of the most under-theorized and neglected urban development occurrences and yet one of the most challenging urban planning and public policy issues. Shrinking Cities represent a fin-de-siècle realization that modernity's optimistic engagement with urban decline, as a reversible and episodic misfortune praying on good-planning-deprived cities, was after all, a chimera. Not only the usual suspects of de-industrialization (e.g., Detroit, Youngstown, Manchester, Liverpool, Leipzig, etc.), but also global-recession victims (e.g., Stockton, Modesto, Sacramento, Las Vegas, and Phoenix, in the U.S., Valencia, Lisbon, Naples and Athens in Europe) defied modern urban planning and urban development orthodoxies.

In our current global modernity characterized by rising world inequality (Piketty, 2014), growing network power (Castells, 2013) and global predatory financing resulting in brutal processes of social expulsion, exclusion, and displacement (Sassen, 2014), shrinking cities may represent the canary in the coal mine of global systemic transformations (Audirac, Fol, & Martinez-Fernandez, 2010). This includes the Trump presidency delivered, among other things, by votes of discontent with long-term urban decline, de-industrialization and free trade (McQuarrie, 2016). They also represent an inside-out challenge to traditional planning and public policy approaches to neighborhood abandonment, vacancy and concentrated poverty, amid new waves of gentrification resulting from a global urban redevelopment boom dominated by internationally financialized real-estate development processes (Guironnet & Halbert, 2015).

### 2. Internationalization of Shrinking Cities research

Since the year 2000 several independent initiatives, including the German Federal Cultural Foundation sponsored exhibition and research on Shrinking Cities (Oswalt, 2005), and the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCIRN)—whose members contributed to this Cities' volume—have sought to raise awareness of shrinking cities. The first emphasized shrinking cities as an international phenomenon, the second cast shrinking cities as a *glocal* phenomenon (Pallagst et al., 2009; Cunningham-Sabot, Audirac, Fol, & Martinez, 2013; Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, & Cunningham-Sabot, 2012; Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2016). Other groups contributing to cross-national shrinking city scholarship include OECD and LORC researchers from the University of Ryukoku, Japan<sup>1</sup>; *Shrink Smart: the Governance of Shrinkage within a European Context* (co-ordinated by P. Rink, 2009–2012)<sup>2</sup>; *Cities Re-growing Smaller—Fostering Knowledge on Regeneration Strategies in Shrinking Cities Across Europe* (chaired by T. Wiechmann and S. Fol, 2013)<sup>3</sup>; *Urban Shrinking and Resilience in Smaller Settlements* at the University of Birmingham, UK (directed by P. Lee and V. Mykhnenko, 2015)<sup>4</sup> as well as urban historians, planners, sociologists and environmental planners in Europe and North America (A. Haase, M. Bernt, K. Grossmann, M. Bontje, R. Beauregard, M. Dewar, J. Hollander, J. Schilling and F. and E. Popper among many others) and numerous conferences across the world devoted to examining shrinking cities research and its public policy implications.

Contributing to this vein of research, the first three articles by Wolff (), Hartt (), and Murdoch () examine shrinking cities in Europe and North America at the supranational, national and regional levels—with the last one bringing into focus a more granular level of neighborhood analysis in American shrinking cities. Together these studies raise our understanding of the complex interwoven dynamics of growth and decline within core cities in relation to their suburban and regional hinterlands. They show how, with the exception of large cities, scant attention has been given to the push factors forcing negative net migration in small American and European shrinking cities, despite their large numbers and iconic compact city attributes, particularly in the European context. Given the articles' implied importance of domestic and international immigration in stabilizing population decline, collectively they help make the case for bringing together push and pull factors and cumulative causation migration studies (Massey, 1990) to shed light into shrinking city research. This new knowledge will further our understanding of the social, economic, and cultural forces (beyond creative class notions) that make shrinking cities attractive or unattractive destinations.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/regional/ageingsocietyworkshopjapan.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.shrinksmart.eu/>.

<sup>3</sup> An Action of the European Cooperation for Science and Technology [http://www.cost.eu/COST\\_Actions/tud/TU0803](http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/tud/TU0803).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.findaphd.com/search/projectdetails.aspx?PJID=41208>.

### 3. Resilience planning in Shrinking Cities

Shrinking-Cities scholarly research and media reportage has increased dramatically. While an Internet search of “shrinking city” produced close to 1000 hits in 2004, by 2017 the number has grown to 34.1 million results. This surge in public interest and research, undoubtedly helped by the Great Recession of 2008, marks a turning point for Shrinking Cities—from a marginal topic to a mainstream concern. Urban resilience has become a central planning theme and shrinking cities the “natural” laboratory for testing resilience thinking—from bouncing back notions to non-linear dynamics and tipping point investigations—attempting to establish new adaptive management approaches to urban decline. However, as shrinking cities has mainstreamed, so have shrinking city neighborhoods, vacant lands, and devalued spaces. And on both sides of the Atlantic, they have caught the public eye of local governments, nonprofits, bohemian and arts entrepreneurs, architects and planners. Under new forms of network governance, these stakeholders have rediscovered the market potential of residual spaces and have both contributed to new forms of symbolic and commercial reevaluation and growth, but also to eviction and displacement of occupants of precarious housing in vulnerable and disenfranchised communities. In Germany, the Urban Catalyst project (Oswalt, Overmeyer, & Misselwitz, 2013) asserts having generated an international public discourse on temporary use or do-it-yourself (DIY) urbanism and elevated it to a novel form of professional practice. The practice involves a new approach to urban planning that formalizes informality of space occupation and integrates it into formal urban development processes that bring together investors, municipalities and local activists. “Today, business developers, municipalities and property owners alike have woken up to the fact that the sustainable and successful development of urban life cannot be achieved without consideration of [wastelands and other residual spaces ...]. Traditionally seen as threatening the interests of owners and developers, informal uses are now increasingly embraced as valuable indicators for potential growth” (Christiaanse, 2013, 5). The strategies for temporary uses of the Urban Catalyst project are touted as bringing a new urban vision to shrinking cities and neighborhoods with vacant land, derelict structures and informal users.

Within the backdrop of current resilience planning, the last two articles—the first by Dubeaux and Cunningham-Sabot () and the second by Audirac ()—contribute to the debate of symbolic valuation (in Germany) and devaluation (in the U.S.) of space and people in shrinking cities. The first critically examines the in-between or temporary-uses program in Berlin and Leipzig, which relies on the positive marketing and rebranding of residual and marginal spaces as beacons of creative micro entrepreneurialism. The second raises the issue of territorial stigma or negative branding associated with shrinking cities, on account of the traumatic American legacy of urban shrinkage policies, and the symbolic devaluation that “shrinking city” may impart on neighborhoods slated for redevelopment interventions in the context of austerity politics.

### 4. Examining shrinking city trends at supranational, provincial and neighborhood levels

#### 4.1. Cyclical models of growth and decline in the European systems of cities

Amid a bevy of inquiry examining European cities in distress (e.g., [European Planning Studies, 2015](#)), in this volume, Manuel Wolff () examines the role of centralization and decentralization processes in European cities to understand the evolution of shrinking and growing cities. He uses 5692 urban cores and 2733 urban regions (hinterlands) across Europe to test an influential life-cycle model ([van den Berg, Drewett, Klaassen, Rossi, & Vijverberg, 1982](#)) of urban systems' evolution. The cycle begins with urbanization (centralization), typically characterized by rural to urban migration, followed by suburbanization (decentralization), which in Western Europe began in the 1960s as core city households and businesses, abetted by automobiles and better transportation, moved to the hinterland. The cycle continues with disurbanization (declining population in both city and hinterland) occurring in some Western European cities in the 1970s as households opted for rural and small town residence in the periphery, while slumping birth rates reinforced population decline in the inner city cores. At the end of the cycle, reurbanization takes off in core cities attractive to the knowledge economy, which begin regrowing while decline in the hinterland stabilizes—a process that seems to have begun in Western European cities in the 1980s.

Wolff's () intent is to determine how relevant the cyclical model is in explaining the 1990-to-2010 evolution of European urban systems, what prevalent patterns of centralization and decentralization can be detected, and what are their policy implications. The analysis reveals a very dynamic pattern of growth and decline throughout Europe, with just some cities (23%) actually following the cyclical model. Wolff () detects three major trends: growing urban areas split into decentralizing and centralizing urban growth patterns, such as in Southern and Western Europe, particularly in Northern France and the Benelux region where growing urban cores shifted from centralized to decentralized growth, while in large parts of the UK, Germany, Northern and Southern Europe, urban cores morphed from decentralized to centralized growth. Regarding shrinking urban areas, Wolff () finds that they are decentralizing at a slower pace favoring a pattern of centralized decline, and that after the year 2000, suburbanization begins to lose importance as a factor in urban decline, but not in some regions of France, Poland and the Czech Republic, where it is still a significant driver. On the other hand, the fast growing hinterlands of small urban areas in France have prompted the decline of their urban cores. Wolff's analysis shows that shrinking cities can be found in most European countries, but with strong variations in the urbanizing processes of their hinterlands. The policy implications of this cross-national analysis point to the rampant competition for investment between shrinking cores and their hinterlands in many parts of Europe. This widespread condition calls for national policies that balance out socioeconomic spatial disparities by redirecting investment to declining European urban cores. Wolff () invokes the *Cohesion Policy of the European Union*, which aims to decrease economic regional imbalances, as critical for responding to the intricate territorial challenges of urban decline associated with the evolving European city-hinterland relations.

#### 4.2. Canadian processes of city decline

One problem commonly noted about shrinking cities research is its strong reliance on population loss as the main indicator of urban decline, which may precede or supersede economic decline and/or other correlated, yet temporally lagged demographic processes (e.g., migration patterns, population aging, dependency ratios, etc.). This has prompted some shrinking city scholars to urge for research that focuses on processes rather than outcomes of urban decline ([Großmann, Bontje, Haase, & Mykhnenko, 2013](#)). Heeding this advice and noting the complexity of interrelated processes operating in cities in distress, and the relatively few studies that have tried to simultaneously take them into account, Maxwell Hartt (), in this volume, proposes a circular multiple factor model for understanding the process of urban decline. He applies the model to the time-series relationships of fifteen demographic, migratory, labor, and building activity factors in two declining Canadian cities. Chatham-Kent, Ontario—undergoing economic international migration of industries to the NAFTA region, i.e., Texas and Mexico—and Cape Breton Regional Municipality in Nova Scotia—suffering long-term decline in steel and mining industries—are the cities that Hartt examines over a period of seventeen years from

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