

Causes of Urban Shrinkage: an overview of European cities

Stephen Platt

Reference:

Platt S (2004) Causes of Urban Shrinkage: an overview of European cities. COST CIRES Conference, University of Amsterdam 16-18 February

Causes of Urban Shrinkage: an overview of European cities

Stephen Platt

A number of interrelated factors contribute to or trigger urban shrinkage in European cities. In general there are three principal widespread structural causes of urban decline – economic, social and demographic change. Climate change may also come to play an increasingly role in migration, but to date environmental factors are not a significant cause of shrinkage. Secondary outcomes, for example the migration of young or highly skilled individuals, poorer service provision, regional specialisation or house price differentials, may exacerbate or contribute to further shrinkage. What might be considered a leading factor, however, and what is merely a consequence will depend on the particular case.

There is also a scalar dimension at work. Economic restructuring is a global phenomenon and occurs all over the western world. Lower fertility is wide spread all over Europe, but suburbanisation is regional phenomenon. Interestingly the degree of shrinkage varies between cities in the same region and so cannot solely be explained by such macro factors as de-industrialisation and lower fertility. Local characteristics, for example policy initiatives, blurred property rights in the centre of some Eastern European cities, may also contribute to these different levels of shrinkage.

Finally, a distinction should be made between the causes of shrinkage for different types and sizes of settlements. For example, the causes may well be different for a small settlement and for a large city.

Causes	Economic	Demographic	Suburbanisation	Social	Regionalisation	Infrastructure and Services	Innovation and Skills	Political	Environment
Australia	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Denmark	1	1	1		1	1			
France	1	1	1					1	
Germany	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1
Hungary	1		1						
Italy	1	1		1	1	1	1		
Netherlands	1	1			1				
Poland	1	1		1		1			
Slovenia			1	1	1				
Spain	1	1	1	1					
Switzerland			1		1				
UK	1		1	1		1	1		

ALL	10	8	8	7	7	6	4	3	2
-----	----	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Table xxx Causes of shrinkage as perceived by participating countries

Table xx summarises the causes of shrinkage as reported for each participating country and the following discussion records some of the detail of individual submissions.

Economic factors

Globalisation and the consequent de-industrialisation of European economies is one of the main causes of urban shrinkage. This relationship between capitalist economic cycles and urban life cycles and the effects of globalisation on cities and urban regions has been commented on by many authors. (Friedrichs, 1993; Amin and Thrift, 1994; Sassen, 2001; Scott and Storper, 2003)

The global integration of financial, telecommunication and job markets, together with increasing individualisation, labour mobility and the functional specialization of regions have all contributed to urban decline in Europe. Mining towns, steel producers, ports, chemical industries, textile cities and agricultural market towns have all felt the negative impacts of economic structural change. Governments have largely been impotent in the face of these macro-economic trend although national/regional policies have in some instances exacerbated the difficulties in particular places.

Demographic factors

Many, though not all, European countries are experiencing a decrease in fertility rates. (Sleebos, 2003; Sobotka, 2004) The reasons are complex and interrelated – later marriage age and more women in the labour force, both of which lead to the postponing of child-bearing common in most advanced societies. (Rindfuss, 1996; Kohler et al, 2006)

Low fertility leads to the related problem of an ageing population as people live longer and young economically active people are having to support an ever increasing number of older people.

It is important, however, to distinguish between household and population. In many places a population decline is accompanied by an increase or a least stability in the number of households as family size declines with later marriage and marriage break-up. In social, physical and psychological terms this makes a big difference.

So in most European countries the population as a whole is both be declining and aging due to the birth rate being significantly lower than the death rate and to increased life time

expectancy - an decreasing concentration of elderly in central areas as the wealthier move to the suburbs or more rural areas in retirement.

These demographic changes have a direct and significant impact on urban shrinkage. Many studies have emphasized the spatial effects of this demographic transition (Van de Kaa, 1987). They analyzed the impacts of demographic change (decrease in fertility rates, population aging, decreasing size of households...) on the evolution of cities (Champion, 1992; Champion, 2001; Ogden et Hall, 2000; Buzar et al., 2005; Buzar et al., 2007; Steinführer et Haase, 2007)

Suburbanisation

All cities go through periods of transition and change. The drivers of urban development the lead to growth can decline and their exhaustion or else some new, external deteriorating influence can lead to shrinkage or decline. Where people choose to locate within a sub-region can also change over time. Suburbanization (Beauregard, 2006), counter-urbanization (Berry, 1976; Fielding, 1982; Petsimeris, 2002), and des-urbanization (Van den Berg et al., 1982) are manifestations rather than drivers of the urban change. They generally result in the depopulation of urban cores and inner city areas. So they have come to be recognised as an important aspect of urban shrinkage. But these processes are not always coincident with a general declining of the economic activity or specific social problems, through the appearance of abandoned spaces and ageing problems are frequent.

Re-urbanisation, which generally involves an upgrading of former working-class homes and industrial buildings, is a countervailing process. Sometimes market led and sometimes initiated by government intervention or incentive, the process is generally known as gentrification.

Social factors

Changing lifestyles also affect and are influenced by shrinkage. Europe has witnessed a dramatic increase in standard of living. This has resulted in changes lifestyles and demand for space. Less young people continue living in a family home. There has been a growth in second home ownership. Household size, as mentioned previously, has fallen. There has been a differentiation of space, more home working and a demand for rooms dedicated as home offices. Children are also given much more personal space than in the past. These changes put pressure on real estate market and house prices increase.

A countervailing effect is that 'dinkies' (double income, no kids) now flee suburbia and come back to the inner cit. This has created a demand for apartments and has led to an increase in property prices in the centre.

Regionalisation

Europe has seen a trend from the compact city form towards a regional city. The influence of large metropolitan regions has increased and we have seen a process of agglomeration with smaller towns losing population to larger cities and intervening rural areas. In Denmark, for example, this spatial polarization is strongly connected to the changing relationships between the rural and the urban realm (Tietjen and Laursen, 2008).

Skills and employment

There has been a migration of young, high-educated people to neighbouring metropolitan with stronger growth and better job prospects. For example in Denmark there has been an exodus of young and skilled people seeking education and better job opportunities (Tietjen and Laursen 2008).

Structural changes in the primary and secondary economic sectors as well as the shift to businesses depending on knowledge and information are important factors in this re-territorialization process (Tietjen and Laursen 2008).

Infrastructure and Services

The dispersion of retail, commercial and recreational activities has followed the de-concentration of the population in the outskirts. The consequent shortage of urban amenities and services has resulted in a poorer quality of life that aggravates the problem and causes further shrinkage.

The impact of a decline in urban services is especially significant in education provision. Areas suffering shrinkage, whether inner cities or rural areas, may have low quality education institutions with low educational attainment schools. This produces an exodus of middle class residents and those able to move to areas with better schools and consequently results in the emigration of young people.

The general decline in the social and cultural environment that comes with abandonment and decline strongly aggravates the loss of attractiveness and quality of life, thus favouring further migration toward other cities/regions.

Political factors

The role of public policies, or the lack of government initiative and direction, can also play an important part. For example, suburbanization has often been encouraged by state incentives for individual home ownership or by government investment in road infrastructure (Jackson, 1985; Downs, 1999). In Eastern Germany, suburbanization has been aggravated by the absence of state intervention to preserve a compact city model (Nuissl and Rink, 2005 ; Couch et al., 2005).

Boundary changes (municipal, national) tax differences, and housing prices can also impact on shrinkage. Regime change can also be significant and the post-socialist transformation in Eastern Europe was a “unique” phenomenon (Bontje, 2004)

Environmental factors

Single events natural disasters such as major floods, earthquakes and volcanos can cause sudden and catastrophic decline in particular cities. More widespread and significant, however, are the predicted impacts of climate change.

Climate change factors, such as droughts, and floods, are a major issue in Australia and may become increasingly significant in Europe. Floods, sea levels and wind-storm hazards are all predicted to increase in Europe. The physical, economic, social and institutional contexts of the city will largely determine its vulnerability to climate impacts by influencing the nature and degree of its exposure to different changes in climate, along with its resilience and adaptive capability (e.g. Eakin 2006, O'Brien et al 2006). In general, cities in coastal and riverine areas are likely to be more vulnerable, due to sea level rise and floods. Cities in weaker economies that rely heavily on climate-sensitive resources but possess inadequate financial, institutional and infrastructural capabilities to cope with extreme climate events will be especially vulnerable to cross-sectoral cascading climate impacts (Thomas and Twyman 2005, Eakin 2006)

Drought and heat related health issues could also be a major factor in southern parts of Europe. Over the next decades, climate change will interact with urban services and infrastructures to determine the severity of water-related health stresses on urban populations (Patz et al 2000a, b, 2005; Epstein 2002; Rose et al, 2001; Greer et al, 2008)

Other factors

A country's position and political stance with regard to international migration flows also affects shrinkage.

A network of local actors, from both the public and private sectors, with the leadership and capacity to reach agreements through formal and informal networks of collaboration is also a significant factor in confronting shrinkage. An incapacity to carry out innovative initiatives in the economic and social fields is a severe handicap in managing change as is an incapacity of cities to generate and value specific resources, whether the social capital of residents or the heritage capital of its fabric and institutions.

Conclusions

The causes of shrinkage is not limited to the local context, shrinkage is also influenced by regional, national and international structures.

The key factors in urban shrinkage can be summarised into the following interrelated and inter-connected groups:

- Demographic – fertility rate, population aging, decreasing size of households
- Economic – different cycles, de-industrialisation, globalisation, dispersion of commercial activities, macro-economic trends, industry/agricultural decline, energy prices and development of wages
- Social/Cultural – Status, lifestyle, skills, education, employment, standards of living, migration, households, housing prices, public welfare, quality of life, and social changes
- Environment – Climate change, rural environment, landscape aesthetics / degradation
- Policy/Politics – taxes, regulations and planning.
- Suburbanisation, re-urbanisation, sprawl, counter-urbanisation – however these may not be actually causes of shrinkage but resulting from spatial processes of many of the causes listed above.

References

- Amin, A. and Thrift, N (1996) *Globalization, institutions, and regional development in Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- Beauregard, R.A. (2006) *When America Became Suburban*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Berg, L. van den (2004) *Towards a thematic strategy on the urban environment: the various roles of green urban space*.
- Bontje, M. (2004) Facing the challenge of shrinking cities in East Germany: The case of Leipzig. *Geographical Journal* Volume 61, Number 1, 13-21, DOI: 10.1007/s10708-005-0843-2
- Brian J. L. (1976) *Urbanization and Counter-Urbanization*. Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA.
- Buzar, S., Odgen, P. and Hall, R. (2005) Households matter: the quiet demography of urban transformation. *Progress of Human Geography* 29(4), 413-436.
- Buzar, Stephan, Ogden, Philip E., Hall, Ray, Haase, Annegret, Kabisch, Sigrun, and Annett Steinführer. 2007. "Splintering Urban Populations: Emergent Landscapes of Reurbanisation in four European Cities." *Urban Studies* 44(4): 651-677.
- Champion, A. G. (1992) *Urban and regional demographic trends in the developed world*. Routledge, London
- Champion, A.G., (2001) A changing demographic regime and evolving polycentric urban regions: consequences for the size, composition and distribution of city populations. *Urban Studies* 38, 657-77.
- Couch, C., Karecha, J., Nuissl, H. and Rink, D. (2005) Decline and sprawl: an evolving type of urban development – observed in Liverpool and Leipzig, *Eur Plan Stud* 13 (1) (2005), pp. 117-136.
- Downs, Anthony. (1999) Some realities about sprawl and urban decline. In *Housing Policy Debate* 10 (4): 955-74.
- Eakin, H. (2006). Institutional change, climate risk, and rural vulnerability: cases from central Mexico. *World Development*, 33 (11), 1923-1938.
- Epstein, P. R. (2002). Climate change and infectious disease: stormy weather ahead? *Epidemiology*, 13 (4), 373-375.
- Fielding, A.J. (1982) Migration and Urbanization in Western Europe Since 1950. *The Geographical Journal* Vol. 155, No. 1 (Mar., 1989), pp. 60-69 Published by: Blackwell Publishing on behalf of The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)
- Friedrichs, J. O. (1993) *Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity*. Sage, London.

- Friedrichs, J. O. (2001) *Globalization, Urban Restructuring and Employment Prospects: the case of Germany*. Ashgate Publishing.
- Friedrichs, J. O. (2001) *Globalization and the New City: Migrants, Minorities*. Palgrave, London.
- Greer, A., Ng, V. & Fisman, D. (2008). Climate change and infectious diseases in North America: The road ahead. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 178(6), 715-722.
- Haase, A., Kabisch, S., Steinführer, A. (2005) Reurbanisation of Inner-City Areas in European Cities. In: Sagan, I, Smith, D M (Eds): *Society, economy, environment – towards the sustainable city*, Gdańsk, Poznań, 75-91.
- Jackson, Kenneth T. (1985) *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Kaa, D. van de (1987) Europe's Second Demographic Transition. *Population Bulletin* 42, pp 1-57.
- Kaa, D. van de (2004) Is the Second Demographic Transition a useful research concept, *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research* (2004), pp. 4–10.
- Kabisch, S., Haase, A. and Haase, D. (2006) Beyond growth – urban development in shrinking cities as a challenge for modeling approaches. In: Voinov, A., Jakeman, A., Rizzoli, A. (eds). *Proceedings of the iEMSs Third Biennial Meeting: "Summit on Environmental Modelling and Software"*. International Environmental Modelling and Software Society, Burlington, USA, July 2006.
- Kohler, H., Billari F.C. and Ortega, J.A. (2006). Low Fertility in Europe: Causes, Implications and Policy Options. In F. R. Harris (Ed.), *The Baby Bust: Who will do the Work? Who Will Pay the Taxes?* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, pp 48-109.
- Nuissl, H., Rink, D. (2005) The 'production' of urban sprawl. Urban sprawl in eastern Germany as a phenomenon of post-socialist transformation. *Cities* 22 (2): pp123-134.
- O'Brien, K. L., Eriksen, S., Sygna, L. & Naess, L. O. (2006). Questioning complacency: climate change impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation in Norway. *Ambio*, 35 (2), 50-56.
- Ogden, P.E. and Hall, R. (2000) Households, reurbanisation and the rise of living alone in the principal French cities 1975–1990. *Urban Studies* 37, 367–90.
- Ogden, P.E. and Hall, R. (2004) The second demographic transition, new household forms and the urban population of France during the 1990s. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS 29, 88–105.
- Patz, B., Graczyk, T. K., Gellera, N. & Vitto, A. Y. (2000a). Effects of environmental change on emerging parasitic diseases. *International Journal for Parasitology*, 30, 1395-1405.

Patz, J. A., Cambell-Lendrum, D., Holloway, T. & Foley, J. A. (2005). Impact of regional climate on human health. *Nature*, 438, 310-317.

Petsimeris, P, (2002) Counterurbanization in Italy, in Ed. H E Geyer *The International Handbook of Urban Systems*

Sassen, S (2001) *The global city*. Princetown University, Princetown.

Scott and Storper (2003)

Steinführer et Haase, 2007

Rindfuss, R.R., Brewster, K.L. and Kavee, A.L. (1996). Women, work, and children: Behavioral and attitudinal change in the United States. *Population and Development Review* 22(3), 457–482.

Sleebos, J. (2003). Low fertility rates in OECD countries: Facts and policy responses. *OECD Social, Employment And Migration Working Papers No. 15*.

Sobotka, T. (2004). Is lowest-low fertility in Europe explained by the postponement of childbearing. *Population and Development Review* 30(2), 195–220.

Thomas, D. S. C. & Twyman, C. (2005): Equity and justice in climate change adaptation among natural-resource dependent societies. *Global Environmental Change*, 15, 115-124.