

Urban Shrinkage in East Central Europe? Benefits and Limits of a Cross-National Transfer of Research Approaches

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Abstract. This article intended as a position paper reflecting on concept-building discusses the question of how far the term and concept of urban shrinkage apply to postsocialist cities in East Central Europe. In addressing this issue, it touches on the more general topic of the benefits and limitations of the transferability of scientific terms and concepts. Urban shrinkage, as it has evolved from the eastern German context, is introduced and discussed in light of the British and North American debates. The second part of the paper applies this concept to the urban context of postsocialist East Central Europe (ECE), using Polish and Czech cities as examples. In our concluding remarks, we argue (among other points) that it makes sense to work on a good, robust, and clearly focused conceptualization of urban shrinkage as a transferable concept for different frameworks, but to be careful and specific with its application to any concept not only in the ECE context. We suggest differentiating between process, causes, and consequences of urban shrinkage.

Introduction and Objectives

During recent decades, cities in East Central Europe have been associated mainly with post-socialist transition and catch-up modernization toward Western structures. Urban change was, accordingly, supposed to go along with continuous growth in terms of population, economic power, commercial function, and the improvement of infrastructure and amenities. In this vein, post-socialist urban development had been assigned to the “special case” category, and was considered to be hardly comparable with the “rest of Europe.” Throughout the 1990s, it became more and more obvious that the neoliberal assumptions of a simple replacement of institutions and mentalities, and of a simple convergence toward Western-style, post-Fordist modernization were not sufficient to adequately interpret the transition and post-transition processes (Grabher and Stark 1997; Bridger and Pine 1998, 3-7; Burawoy 1999, 303; Hann 2002; Bradshaw and Stenning 2003, 12-14). In our article we argue, therefore, that such a perspective is no longer up to date. Recently observed demographic trends that apply to cities throughout Europe have led to urban shrinkage, a new pathway of urban development that is shared by cities throughout the whole continent and beyond (European Commission 2007; United Nations 2006; Oswalt and Rieniets 2006).

Up to the present, research has been focused on capital cities that more or less show the above-mentioned developmental trends (Kostinskiy 2001; Altrock et al. 2005; Stanilov 2007). Other urban pathways in East Central Europe have remained out of sight. This is especially true for second-order cities that find themselves confronted with developments beyond growth. Rather they are characterized by demographic features such as population losses, ageing and out-migration. Set against overall European development, this trajectory is by no means unique. Recent research has identified 40% of all European cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants as shrinking or losing population over short-, medium- and even long-term periods (Turok and Mykhnenko 2007). Accordingly, post-socialist Europe forms a new “pole of shrinkage” with three out of four cities showing population losses (Mykhnenko and Turok 2007, 47).

Most terms and theoretical concepts in urban research these days originate in the Anglo-American debate. Yet urban shrinkage took root in the eastern German context, where it became prominent after 2000. The term describes the massive post-reunification population losses of the cities and towns in eastern Germany, due to job migration, suburbanization, and negative population growth. This has led to structural housing vacancies, and has forced ageing and oversupply of infrastructure (for an overview see Großmann 2007a; Kabisch 2006; Bürkner, Kuder, and Kühn 2005). The term has only very recently entered the international debate, through the work of German researchers and architects, such as the “Shrinking cities” project (Oswalt 2005, 2006). Turok and Mykhnenko (2007) used it in a cross-European study on the long-term population development of big cities. The results of both endeavours clearly show that shrinkage has become an “ordinary” pathway of urban development in Europe. As we will argue, “urban shrinkage” qualifies better for the international debate than terms such as “decline” or “decay,” which relate rather to economic downward processes with their spatial and social consequences. The result of the eastern German experience is the discovery of demographic influences on urban development, leading to proactive approaches in both research and planning, whereas the Anglo-American debate was dominated by the desire to turn decline around back into growth (Großmann 2007b; Pallagst 2005).

Set against this background, this article discusses the question of how far urban shrinkage applies to cities in East Central Europe. Does the shared socialist past and current post-socialist reality allow for a transfer of this concept to explain what is going on here today? In addressing these questions, the article touches on the more general issue of the benefits and limitations of the transferability of scientific terms and concepts. It is first of all intended as a position paper, reflecting on concept building and on selected empirical findings, such as the situation of Polish and Czech cities. To avoid the trap of producing a simple textbook transfer, our aim is also to sharpen the concept itself, by discussing the specifics of urban shrinkage in Germany, the Anglo-American context, and East Central Europe.

The article is organized as follows: the first section expands on the transferability of scientific terms and concepts in a more general way.

Then the term and concept of urban shrinkage, as it has evolved from the eastern German context, is introduced. A third section brings in the British and North American experiences for a first transfer of the concept; and section four reconsiders the eastern German experience. A fifth section applies the concept to cities in East Central Europe, using Polish and Czech cities as examples. Finally, we discuss to what extent urban shrinkage can be transferred, and what conclusions can be drawn concerning the concept itself.

Transferability of Concepts – Ambitions, Prospects, and Constraints

To answer the question of to what extent the concept of urban shrinkage as it evolved in the eastern German context can help to explain recent processes of population loss in East Central European cities, some reflections about the transferability of scientific concepts in general should be made.

In urban studies, as in any realm of research, concepts and terms are usually developed against the background of a specific empirical context. Certain observed phenomena call for explanation, and thereby encourage the evolution of new terms or theoretical concepts. Whether it is Simmel's observation of the *Blasiertheit* (blasé attitude) as being a certain attitude that he considered typical of the *Großstädter* (city slicker), the inner city "zones of transition" defined by the Chicago School, or whether it is the observation that similar processes of upgrading inner city areas coincide with an exchange of residents that leads to the concept of the invasion-succession cycle, or later the concept of *gentrification* – it is important to underline that all of these concepts emerged from specific empirical contexts.

Once these concepts prove to explain phenomena in the context of their origin, they start to travel around the academic world, where they are tested in other empirical contexts. The main challenges of transferability are those of applicability, appropriateness, and a common language of measurement (Mossberger and Stoker 2001, 814; Steinführer 2004, 106-116). This is especially true in cross-national research. As Johnson (1998, 1) points out: "In perhaps no other subfield of social

science and research are issues of methodology and measurement as open to challenge and criticism as when they are applied in cross-cultural and cross-national settings.” When comparing different national or regional case studies, the question is, are we really comparing equal things, and are we transferring concepts to relevant cases? (Burawoy 1999, 305; Steinführer 2005).

According to Sartori (1991), there are four problems of transferring knowledge, terms and concepts: the problems of parochialism, misclassification, degreeism and concept stretching (Mossberger and Stoker 2001, 814-815). *Parochialism* refers to the tendency to continuously invent new terms, or to use existing ones in an unintended way. *Misclassification* applies when important differences between processes are ignored. Degreeism means that qualitative differences between cases are denied; instead they are all presented in a merely quantitative manner – as matters of degree, and not of quality. *Concept stretching* involves removing aspects of the original meaning of the concept, so that it can accommodate more cases.

For instance, the concept of *gentrification* originated in North America, where it was described for the first time by Ruth Glass in 1954, but it has since then been applied to many European cities. These days, it is still a prominent concept in researching and explaining the socio-spatial changes in post-socialist cities. This example meets some of the challenges mentioned above, specifically avoiding the pitfalls of misclassification and concept stretching (Skora 2005; Standl and Krupickaite 2004; Atkinson and Bridge 2005; Bernt and Holm 2005).

In addition, cross-cultural research does not simply mean a one-way transfer of knowledge; it always involves improving the original terms and concepts, and providing feedback even to their context of origin (Steinführer 2005, 95-96; Mossberger and Stoker 2001). Reflecting on the shifts of *urban regime theory*, a concept transferred from the Canadian to the European context, Stoker (1995, 66) claims that, “Studies need to move from theory through empirical application and then back to theory.” In doing so, theoretic concepts either show their limits or prove to be able to explain phenomena in different contexts. Most commonly they experience shifts and changes caused by the specifics of the context that were incorporated in the concepts in the first place. According to Stoker, this reconfiguration of theoretic concepts and

redefinition of terms during their adaptation to other empirical contexts is an essential part of conceptual work. The aim of this work is to develop robust and flexible frameworks for further research.

In short, when we apply it to these other empirical contexts, transferability raises questions such as, to what extent is the “old” concept appropriate to explain the “new” phenomena? Where are the significant differences? Should the concept be reformulated to match the context it is applied to? We will come back to these questions in the discussion.

Urban Shrinkage: A Newly Evolving Concept?

Urban shrinkage is a term that began to spread round the world starting – for a change – in East Germany. First coined during the West German discourse of the late 1970s (Göb 1977; and later and most prominently Häußermann and Siebel 1988), it attempts to describe a type of city that, following its economic decline, faces population loss, and therefore provides a new subject to urban sociology (see also van den Berg et al. 1982, 44). This claim was based on the empirical context of old industrial regions in Germany such as the Ruhr area. Yet the opportunity to undertake scientific discussion on this topic was ignored by the broader research community until new hotspots of “shrinking cities” appeared about a decade later in the eastern part of Germany.

The empirically observed emergence of vast numbers of housing vacancies all over eastern German cities in the late 1990s, accompanied by a sudden drop in housing prices, provoked a political and scientific discussion that is best characterized as an intense niche debate, since it was at first treated as a dramatic but specifically eastern German phenomenon that does not apply to cities in other places. After years of no progress, a report from a state commission initiated the public discourse in 2000 (Pfeiffer, Simons, and Porsch 2000), by suggesting a state-sponsored demolition programme to reduce vacancies. What had happened? After decades of housing shortages, there was suddenly a massive oversupply of flats in all kinds of structures: in the old housing stock – whether refurbished or not – in pre- and post-war estates, as well as in large housing estates from the socialist period.

Examining the causes of these vacancies, three main sources were discussed: out-migration because of economic breakdown in a large number of formerly industrialized cities, an overall decline in birth rates to below-mortality rates, and suburbanization (Lang and Tenz 2003; Hannemann 2003; Bürkner, Kuder, and Kühn 2005). Hannemann (2003, 18-19) emphasized the processes involved by exaggeration, speaking of “Deökonomisierung” (the erosion of the economic base), “Depopulation” and “Deurbanisierung” (disurbanization) – three trajectories of a downward spiral which led to shrinking cities. A trend not found in most definitions, but contributing significantly to the evolving housing vacancies, was the state-sponsored building and refurbishment activities during the 1990s. After the revolution, 420,000 flats in the old neglected housing stock were vacant because there were technically uninhabitable. By 2000, about one million flats had become vacant. (Pfeiffer, Simons, and Porsch 2000, 10, 17).

A huge part of the discussion focused on the effects of shrinkage, which were perceived differently depending on the interests and perspectives of the commentators. The *political and administrative* actors concentrated on the consequences of population decline: oversized infrastructure – such as one million vacant flats, unnecessarily large sewer systems, underused schools, kindergartens, and public transport system – and shrinking municipal budgets. *Planners* discussed the appropriateness of planning instruments and discussed a shift in planning paradigms. Under the conditions of urban shrinkage, planning would no longer steer growth by guiding and restricting investment. Now, one needed to manage shrinkage, to reduce the city in a planned way, instead (Weidner 2005). For the first time, existing housing stock is demolished with the only purpose being to reduce housing oversupply, and not to rebuild the stock according to new plans and purposes. Vacant plots and areas are left behind, usually turned into various kind of green space. At the same time, land consumption went on at the outskirts of the cities, although recently it has shown some signs of slowing down (Köppen 2005; Nuissl, Rink, and Steuer 2005).

The *media* focused on job-related migration as the source of these vacancies. National media especially often reduced the phenomenon to households moving to places where they could find work, leaving behind empty prefabricated blocks in declining cities and regions (Großmann

2005; Wiest 2006). The *real estate actors* spoke about a cyclic decline in the housing market that sooner or later will cycle up again. *Politicians and administrations* faced in their work far-reaching questions and decisions: Where do vacancies occur? On what parts of the city should investment be focused? What parts can be given up on in the long run? By whom and with what instruments can the city be reduced in a planned way? Can it be shrunk from the outside in, at all? Until now, cities have rather experienced a perforation of the city structure, rather than a governed contraction (Lütke Daldrup 2001). Demolition efforts go on but they are not likely to turn around housing markets. Instead the cities and their housing markets start to differentiate into areas of investment and areas of disinvestment – sometimes next to each other. This is accompanied by intensifying residential segregation, in particular of low-income groups, even if these trends are far from a polarization of socio-spatial structures. Vacancies and rising segregation have opened discussions about downward-spiralling neighbourhoods.

The innovation of the debate about shrinking cities in eastern Germany, however, is the discovery that demographic trends which have gone on for years had been simply overlooked until vacancies became an issue of public and professional interest. After centuries of urban growth and the resulting one-sided patterns of perception and interpretation, demographic forecasts assume nowadays that population decline in the cities will continue on account of changes in fertility. The average age of inhabitants will rise continuously; urban populations are ageing more or less rapidly (Bürkner et al. 2007). What differs significantly from debates in other contexts is the notion that this is not just a short-term phenomenon, but a future trend for a lot of cities, especially in developed countries. Today, dealing with the effects of urban shrinkage has become a daily business for many cities and towns (Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung 2003, 2004). Unlike experiences with population decline in the US or the UK, questions of coping with or adapting to urban shrinkage dominate the discussions today in both research and in practice, rather than the search for a silver bullet to turn around cities' fortunes. This is due first of all to the strong focus on demographic processes that – in either scenario – suggest that the population decline will continue.

Besides talking about problems and difficulties, another path of the debate discusses the positive effects and opportunities for the cities. Arts projects have celebrated kinds of newly evolving “spaces of possibilities” (Oswalt 2005 and 2006; Schröer 2002). Whether or not one agrees with these positive notions, this kind of debate has departed greatly from the assumption that the only acceptable kind of city development is urban growth. Even contributions that evaluate shrinkage in a negative way have, nevertheless, accepted that it is very likely to happen to a considerable number of cities, and therefore needs to be managed.

The demographic turn in scientific and in planning approaches led to an initial transfer of experiences and planning approaches from eastern to western German cities. Ironically, this has meant that the debate has returned to those old industrialized cities in western Germany, where the term “shrinking cities” originated from in the classic texts of Häußermann and Siebel of the late 1980s. In Germany, urban shrinkage has lost the status of being a specifically eastern German phenomenon. Rather, it is assumed that cities in the West will sooner or later face similar developmental trends (Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung 2004).

Transferring the Concept of Urban Shrinkage – Diversifying the Debate

German researchers took the initiative in introducing the debate on urban shrinkage to other contexts. Their search for comparable cases of shrinkage has led to a re-examination of phenomena described as “urban decline” or “urban decay” in Western Europe and North America (Beauregard 1995). In those places, old industrialized cities – such as Sheffield, Manchester, or Liverpool in the United Kingdom, and Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Baltimore in the US – have lost population due to economic restructuring, after the breakdown of traditional industries like coal mining and steel production. On top of industrial decline, suburbanization has reinforced these trends, which started approximately in the 1960s.

The “Shrinking Cities” project (www.shrinkingcities.com) was the first large-scale international arts and research project to transfer the

term “urban shrinkage” to other empirical contexts. Case studies were conducted in Detroit, the Manchester-Liverpool region, the Halle-Leipzig region, and in Ivanovo in Russia – this last an example of socialist industrialization that left behind emptiness after the transformation to a market economy. The outcomes of this project were both academic and artistic: books, conferences, art projects, workshops, and an exhibition that still tours around the globe. The project initiative was German, the coordination was based in Germany, and the project also was funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation. No wonder then that the term “urban shrinkage” was applied to all the cases in this study.

In 2006, an international symposium on Shrinking Cities was held in Dresden, discussing case studies from France, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Australia and Mexico. This symposium was followed, in 2007, by another at the University of Berkeley (Shrinking Cities International Research Network 2007), where an international group of researchers discussed various case studies from Japan, the US and around the globe.

The discussion of the British and American cases in their national contexts – which has seen contributions over the course of a few decades – uses a different terminology and has its own specific foci. Similar to western Germany in the 1980s, the debate concentrated on economic issues and strategies intended to economically revive the cities. The more or less explicit goal was to turn around population loss, the decay of neighbourhoods, and declining municipal budgets. “Urban decline” and “urban decay” became terms dominating this discourse. There the negative, emotional impact is even higher than in relation to the term “urban shrinkage.” The emergence of the physical decay of neighbourhoods was automatically linked in discourse to issues of race and poverty (Lang 2005; Pallagst 2005; Großmann 2007b).

In the US, attention was especially paid to the population loss caused by suburbanization. The case of Detroit became a significant example of the so-called doughnut effect. Waves of suburbanization left behind decay, blighted areas, and even vast, empty fields in former inner-city neighbourhoods. Burned-down buildings, houses in the later stages of decay, empty overgrown fields, and single still-occupied streets or houses dominate the picture. At the administrative borders between the

suburbs and the city, this picture changes, and vibrant and well kept communities appear (Gallagher 2004, 242-248). In cases like Pittsburgh, suburbanization hit the administrative city not as heavily. Blight and decay occur only in certain areas, usually in the black and poor neighbourhoods first. Pittsburgh is also an example of a city where urban shrinkage and suburban growth has led to conflicts in issues of governance. Problems of equity in tax revenue, and infrastructural expenses have remained unsolved for years, leading to an almost bankrupt state of the city's budget (Miller 2002). In these American contexts, population decline due to low fertility rates did not play an important role, since both Detroit and Pittsburgh are immigration destinations, with most immigrant families showing higher birth rates.

Reconsidering the Term “Urban Shrinkage” and the Eastern German Experience

The comparison with American cases points to one decisive difference: the influence of demographic trends on urban development. In eastern Germany, demographic “discoveries” clearly showed that urban shrinkage is not a dependent on only economic development. This is, in our point of view, the main difference between the concepts of urban decline as it was discussed in Western countries in the 1970s and 1980s, and the eastern German experience. Decay and decline are not analytically suitable names for this pathway of urban development, since they involve even stronger negative notions than shrinkage. Therefore, rather than transferring these more negative terms to other, international contexts, from our point of view the term urban shrinkage has applicability in the international context.

Nevertheless, population decline seems to be a kind of focal point of the development of shrinking cities, no matter what processes caused it. Many of the problems discussed in context arise from shrinking populations: housing vacancies, decay and blight, underutilization of the technical infrastructure, and correspondingly rising maintenance costs, at a time when municipal budgets are shrinking. The extent to which these problems occur is directly related to the extent of population decline.

After looking at these international cases, the specifics of the eastern German experience become more obvious. Eastern German urban shrinkage represents a special case of post-socialist transformation characterized by an overlapping of simultaneous processes. Deindustrialization and subsequent out-migration, as well as suburbanization contributed to a negative migration balance. At the same time, massive drops in birth rates after the reunification of Germany led to a negative natural population development. Together with the simultaneous heavy investments in housing stock and technical infrastructure that was encouraged by high tax revenues, the overall population decline led to significant housing vacancies that then became the starting point of the “shrinkage” debate. Economic decline, suburbanization, population decline, and disurbanization are not parallel characteristics of shrinking cities: they are interlinked processes, one being a consequence of the other. In the cases considered, shrinkage is a multidimensional development with different pathways. Migration processes due to deindustrialization and suburbanization are elements of all the Western European cases. Demographic change is becoming more important all over Europe, but it is not yet as relevant for cities in those countries that are destinations of migration (United Nations 2006).

A first systematization of urban shrinkage would therefore involve distinguishing between causes, process, and consequences. Global trends with local consequences lead to population decline, which is at the core of the process of urban shrinkage. Population decline can be driven by migration as well as natural population development. It then – together with further building activity – leads to a mismatch of the cities’ capacities with their respective densities of usage and demand. The consequences can vary significantly. Cities with clear social differentiation and residential segregation show selective neighbourhood decline, while others might become perforated across the entire city.

Post-socialist cities share a lot of the features discussed, for example the demographic “shock” after 1989 (indicated e.g. by “lowest-low” fertility rates dropping below a total fertility rate of 1.3 children per woman; Kohler, Billari, and Ortega 2002), economic restructuring and decline, in some cases out-migration due to rising urban unemployment, and ongoing suburbanization. The next section will investigate whether in East Central Europe there are cities that, according to the outline developed so far, would qualify as shrinking cities.

Urban Shrinkage Meets Post-socialist Transition – Applying the Concept to East Central European Cities

A recent study at the University of Glasgow concluded that three out of four cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants in the post-socialist countries are shrinking. The authors summarize the situation thus: “the absolute and relative position of cities has deteriorated sharply since the fall of state socialism. Shrinkage rather than growth or recovery has become the dominant trajectory” (Mykhnenko and Turok 2007, 2).

But the perception of scholars and officials is rather different. Since housing prices are skyrocketing in Poland and the Czech Republic at the moment, and the construction of new housing estates is booming, the common perception of city development is far away from the idea of shrinking developments. When discussing the eastern German experience, it is usually treated as an exceptional case, not comparable to others. “We don’t have these problems that you have in eastern Germany” is a statement we have come across a number of times in our field work. Sensitized by the eastern German experience to demographic development, we suggest a different point of view (see also Haase et al. 2008).

Eastern German and East Central European cities share a socialist past and the experience of post-socialist transition with its far-reaching economic restructuring. Just as in eastern Germany, the revolution in the political and economic systems resulted in a massive and sudden decline in birth rates. At the same time, the mortality rate stagnated and even increased. After the fall of state socialism, fertility rates dropped dramatically, due to rises in childlessness and postponements of marriage and childbearing. Vaishar (2006) showed for the Ostrava region trends very similar to those of eastern German cities. Additionally, there is an increasing impact of migration in different forms and directions, including a strong suburbanization trend (Sýkora and Ouředníček 2006). This has led to a drop in population, and to ageing city societies.

As in all the contexts discussed here, old industrialized regions are hot spots of population decline. These cities lose population due to job-related, age- and gender-selective out-migration; but also, the natural population decrease is larger than elsewhere as a result of the increasing death surplus. Łódź, for instance, between 1990 und 2005 lost 11% of its inhabitants; Katowice, 16%; Sosnowiec, 15% (see table 1). Also, Czech

Table 1: *Population decline in selected Polish and Czech cities*

City	Population development 1990-2005		Causes of population decline
	absolute	relative	
Poland			
Łódź	– 81,000	– 11%	Death surplus, out-migration, intraregional migration
Katowice	– 50,000	– 16%	Out-migration, death surplus, intraregional migration
Sosnowiec	– 33,000	– 15%	Death surplus, intraregional migration, out-migration
Bytom	– 26,000	– 11%	Out-migration, death surplus, intraregional migration
Poznań	– 22,000	– 4%	Death surplus, suburbanization
Gliwice	– 15,000	– 7%	Out-migration, death surplus, interregional migration
Bydgoszcz	– 15,000	– 4%	Suburbanization, death surplus
Czech Republic			
Brno	– 26,000	– 7%	Suburbanization, death surplus
Plzeň	– 12,000	– 8%	Suburbanization, death surplus
Ostrava	– 21,000	– 7%	Out-migration, death surplus
Olomouc	– 7,000	– 7%	Suburbanization, death surplus

Sources: GUS [Główny Urząd Statystyczny]: Ludność. Stan i struktura w przekroju terytorialnym. Warsaw, various years; ČSÚ [Český statistický úřad]: Vývoj základních demografických ukazatelů ve vybraných městech. Prague 2006.

cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants lost about 7-8% in the same period. Population losses are stronger within the administrative boundaries of cities, while suburbs continue to grow; this affects both infrastructure and municipal budgets. However, particularly in recent years, the population decline in the bigger Czech cities has slowed down; currently one could rather speak of – in absolute quantitative terms – a “stagnating” number of inhabitants

Urban shrinkage is not in fact a new phenomenon in East Central European cities, and has not only arisen in the post-socialist transition. Since the end of the 1970s, old industrial cities in Poland like Łódź, and cities in the Upper Silesian industrial area have been experiencing population decline. This was then reinforced by structural changes after 1989, when new engines of population decline, like suburbanization and job migration, appeared in cities such as Brno, Ostrava, Poznań, Cracow and Bydgoszcz (Haase et al. 2007).

Shrinkage is not only part of the present for most eastern European cities; it might well be their future too. According to the prognoses of national statistical offices, the population of cities – especially in Poland – will fall dramatically (see table 2). The population prognosis of the Polish national statistical office (GUS) claims that populations will further decline until 2030; in some Polish cities rather dramatically (up to 30%), and in some Czech cities rather steadily (approximately 5%). Independent of the necessary methodological discussion about the reliability of these forecasts, urban shrinkage is a fact, not fiction in East Central Europe.

In the long run this will affect labour and housing markets, the use of social and technical infrastructure, budgets and the socio-spatial patterns of the cities. Since the populations of East Central European cities are not expected to reproduce themselves, possible growth can only arise from new waves of in-migration and – as a qualitatively new phenomenon – (foreign) immigration. At the same time, the further spread of rampant suburbanization needs to be counteracted. In different contexts, the quantity of population loss and its consequences might be more or less dramatic. The future development will show what types of cities are affected, and to what scope (Haase, Kabisch, and Steinführer 2006).

But there are also important differences between Polish and Czech cities in comparison with shrinking cities in eastern Germany. The main difference is that housing vacancies are not yet an issue, nor is infrastructure oversupplied. The housing markets are still rather tight, and so the real estate markets and new construction projects in the bigger cities are booming. The housing markets continue to differentiate, with suburban districts growing, and spot-gentrification occurring in parts of the inner city. There is a tendency to restructure older built-up areas. Large housing estates differentiate into better and worse addresses, depending on the age of the estates – the older the better – and on their images, which depends on the quality of their surrounding landscape and in great part on their ownership structures and related resources for restructuring and maintenance (Murie, Knorr-Siedow, and van Kempen 2003).

Finally, there are neighbourhoods in the cities that have been neglected for quite a long time – areas that are stigmatized as “problem places home to problem people.” In the Czech Republic this applies mostly to

Table 2. *Population in selected Polish cities (2002), with prognoses to 2030*

City	Population (2002) in thousands	Population forecast until 2030
Katowice	325.0	–28%
Sosnowiec	231.5	–25%
Gliwice	202.6	–25%
Częstochowa	250.9	–23%
Gdańsk	461.7	–21%
Bydgoszcz	372.1	–21%
Łódź	785.1	–21%
Kielce	211.8	–21%

Source: GUS. Prognoza ludności na lata 2003-2030 (www.stat.gov.pl/dane_spol-gosp/ludnosc/prognoza_ludnosci/index.htm; access date: 19.2.2007)

districts with a high concentration of Roma people, in Poland to inner city districts that are home to what officials call the “pathology.”

When talking about the influence of population decline on a city to present, experts mention a catch-up to Western norms of average housing space. Households of three generations that were once forced to live in one flat may now satisfy their “hunger for housing.” Since only better-off households are mobile, we suppose that under conditions of population loss, further spatial and social fragmentation might occur in these cities, leading to pockets of growth and simultaneously to pockets of decline.

Discussion and Outlook

The application of concept of urban shrinkage fosters awareness of demographic issues, and the possible futures of East Central European cities. It thereby proves an initial explanatory power across contexts. The consideration of migration patterns and demographic shifts bring a certain set of cities into the focus of research on urban shrinkage: those larger cities that are not capitals, that are – or were – older industrial centres, and share the experience of a breakdown in their industrial economic base. As long as the focus of research that compares cities internationally remains on capitals and “catch-up” modernization in

post-socialist societies and cities, developmental trends which depart from the growth paradigm stay out of the spotlight. Yet there are already some works which talk about “demographic stagnation” (Andrle 2001) or “depopulation” (Parysek 2005, 99, 104; who euphemistically also calls this “qualitative growth”), but the quantitative growth paradigm still forms the most important frame for urban development.

Reconsidering the pitfalls involved in transferring concepts from one context to the other, we summarize:

Concerning *parochialism* – the tendency to continuously invent new terms or to use existing ones in an unintended way – it would bring international comparative research on urban development forward to focus on just one term, instead of using “decline” and “decay” in the English-speaking context, “shrinkage” in the German context, and “stagnation” or “depopulation” in the eastern European context. We suggest working on a good, robust conceptualization of urban shrinkage. Out of all the terms, it is the least stigmatizing, yet still clearly names the phenomena: the opposite of city expansion. Thus, the “invention” of yet more terms to describe the population losses in East Central European cities leads no further. Instead of separating out all pathways of shrinkage according to their different causes and consequences – for example, “weak market cities” or “perforated cities” (Brophy and Burnett 2003; Doehler 2003) – we instead suggest developing a qualitative typology based on those clusters of shrinking cities which have a similar complex of causes and consequences. The core dimension of urban shrinkage should therefore be the factor at the heart of all these processes: a rather long-term loss of population.

But not all losses of population automatically qualify as urban shrinkage. It would be *misclassification*, to apply the concept of urban shrinkage to all cities in East Central Europe that lost some population in whatever small timeframe. If a city loses population, but does not show any of the characteristic consequences of urban shrinkage, it is not at this moment a shrinking city. So it is not yet clear whether it will be meaningful to apply the concept to the larger Czech cities at any future point in time. A recent analysis of the case of Brno demonstrated that, in spite of some population losses between 1991 and 2005, the city cannot be classified as “shrinking” (Maas 2007). If demographic prognoses suggest a future drop in population numbers, as in most Polish cases,

then these cities are likely to become shrinking cities – but we have argued that the significant difference between processes of shrinkage and other pathways of urban development is the question of whether a decline in population numbers leads to a mismatch between usage and physical urban structures. To call this kind of urban development something like a “slight shrinkage” would be a case of *degreeism*, denying important qualitative differences.

Urban shrinkage should, however, not be confused with regional shrinkage. Shrinking cities do not only occur in regions that lose population as a whole. They might also occur in growing regions, or in growing metropolitan areas. The most impressive example of this type of shrinkage is the case of Detroit. Since suburbanization is one of the predominant development trajectories of cities in East Central Europe, this route should be carefully observed, especially in cases where the national population does not reproduce itself. Applying the concept of urban shrinkage to just one particular neighbourhood in a region would be case of *concept stretching*.

The transfer of the concept of urban shrinkage into research on eastern European cities shows, in our point of view, clear benefits. First of all, the concept might challenge “business as usual,” the strong research focus on capital cities that dominates international debates. The transfer leads to new questions that integrate the demographic dimension in classic fields of research such as residential segregation, neighbourhood development, housing research, and so forth. Processes that have been overlooked and ignored for a long time in eastern Germany might get early attention and informed policy responses in East Central European cities.

Also the concept of urban shrinkage benefits from the transfer. The population development so far seems to qualify as a core indicator to describe the process of urban shrinkage independently of the actual causes. The eastern German debate mixes the description of the process with causes and consequences. Also the description of urban shrinkage as a downward spiral is too narrow, and hinders international debates about shrinking cities.

We suggest a differentiation between process (at the core), and causes and consequences (in the frame) of urban shrinkage. So far, economic restructuring seems to be one major cause worldwide, affec-

ting cities that have or had their economic base in the fading industries. Also, falling fertility rates prove to be a common source of urban shrinkage in most countries and cities of Western Europe and North America. Looking at the consequences, these cities seem to develop inner-city peripheries: areas of disinvestment – whether in the form of industrial brownfields, neighbourhoods in decay, or clusters of vacant houses. The social and technical infrastructure becomes underused. First, kindergartens, and then schools close down. Planning strategies need to shift from steering or limiting growth, to the management of shrinkage.

Still, one needs to carefully look at the differences between cities and national contexts. One of the challenging questions in conceptualizing urban shrinkage is, at what point can a city be classified as a shrinking city? What size population loss in what time period is significant, and what phenomena are core to shrinking cities? Due to historic and other context specific factors, the socio-spatial patterns in shrinking cities are different. For instance, the presence or absence of minority populations might make all the difference for neighbourhood pathways that share many common features otherwise. The performance of the national economy, the state of regulation of housing markets, the property ownership structures, and so forth – are all very decisive in steering the development of a specific shrinking city. Also, similar findings in different contexts do not necessarily need to have the same causes, for instance when interpreting housing vacancies.

A lot of research still needs to be done. More case studies might shed light on the phenomena and causes of urban shrinkage. We appeal for the combination of large-scale socio-statistical analyses with qualitative micro-scale research in order to understand the specific pathways and to qualify the concept. Cross-national cooperation will be beneficial in detecting blind spots in research perspectives, and raise innovative questions.

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