

# **The Governance of Shrinkage: a Prime Challenge for the Development of Europe's Urban Regions**

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## **ABSTRACT**

As a result of uneven economic development, migration and demographic changes, a growing number of European cities and regions have been facing long-term population loss during the last decades. The “shrinking city” is thus becoming a new normality bringing about numerous consequences for urban structures and space, planning and governance.

Recent research being carried out by the authors on a number of old industrialised regions in Europe (parts of eastern Germany, Upper Silesia, Northern Moravia, Northern England etc.) made obvious that the trajectories of local governance arrangements in shrinking regions differ greatly from their prosperous counterparts.

Firstly, population decline and decreasing demand lead to numerous problems for the maintenance and functioning of the housing market, of infrastructural facilities and social services. Secondly, shrinkage often goes together with a declining demand for already developed land and built environment and causes considerable changes in the urban form. Subsequently, new conditions for planning are created and local decision-makers are in need to replace established paradigms and find new ways to secure the attractiveness of their cities and regions. Subsequently, new agendas for urban politics are created and in most cases “coping with decline” becomes an important issue in local politics. Secondly, local coalitions are more dependent on resource transfer from the national scale, giving the national level a major importance. This background changes the conditions for urban coalition-building so that as a result we find “grant coalitions” rather than “growth coalitions”.

In the paper, we focus in a first part on the identification of challenges created by long-term decline or shrinking for urban regions and their underpinnings, taking different European urban regions as examples. Based on this, we will discuss in a second part the implications brought about by these challenges for various realms of urban governance and planning.

**Key Words:** governance, shrinking cities, European urban regions