

IN SEARCH OF A NEW APPROACH FOR URBAN POLICIES UNDER SHRINKAGE TENDENCIES IN POLAND

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ABSTRACT

The new demographic, social, economic and cultural conditions that appeared in Poland after 1990 have crucially influenced the transformation of its cities in both quantitative and qualitative terms. One of the manifestations of those changes is an increasingly visible process of shrinkage of many of them. The overcoming of its detrimental effects will be one of the most important challenges for planning and urban policy in Poland in the 21st century.

This article seeks to identify new urban policy challenges that Polish cities have to meet in the face of advancing urban shrinkage. It starts with the presentation of theoretical issues concerning urban policy and urban shrinkage. Discussed next are the formation of urban policy in Poland and major aspects of the transformation and shrinkage of Polish cities after 1990. Special emphasis is put on the need to work out a new, integrated urban policy that would allow them to adapt to the negative demographic trends observed.

Keywords: Urban Policy, Shrinking Cities, Poland

JEL Classification: Z00

1. INTRODUCTION

The beginnings of urban policy in Europe are usually associated with the late 19th century and attempts to solve critical situations in rapidly growing industrial towns (Le Gales 2007, Parysek 2010). However, we can speak of an autonomous urban policy only with reference to measures taken in response to the crisis of the 1970s and '80s caused by the transition from the Fordist to the post-Fordist model of production and accumulation of capital in Western Europe and the United States.

Urban policy is a troublesome notion because, as Cochrane (2007) observes, "definitions of urban policy are elusive in part because the term appears so self-explanatory. It seems to be no more and no less than the sum of those policies that are intended to help cities or those living in them." The difficulties result, among other things, from the broad spectrum of areas of socio-economic life of cities to which urban policy applies, and from the fact that those are measures adopted at a variety of levels: national, regional and local. Generally, urban policy means "specific policies targeted at particular urban areas or groups within urban areas" (Harding 2007, p. 63).

Because cities and processes occurring inside them undergo a never-ending transformation, urban policy should also keep changing. Therefore there also appear new conceptions and theoretical approaches. The growth paradigm treating cities as "growth machines" (Logan, Molotch 1987), prevailing so far, was challenged at the start of the 21st century by new conceptions, for example "local governance" or "city as an entertainment machine"

(Swianiewicz 2005). The former, authored by John (2001), defines local governance as “a flexible decision-making model based on loose horizontal links among various actors (public and private)”. The policy conducted in this way rests on the process of learning and is innovative. It is open to other participants and creates a climate of cooperation in order to achieve common goals.

In turn, the author of the other conception, Clark (2003), stresses the need to adapt urban policy to the changing civilisational and cultural conditions. The new priorities of urban policy, he claims, should focus on such matters as boosting the attractiveness of cities (including their improved aesthetics) for the new class of talented and well-educated inhabitants (Swianiewicz 2005). This is also the approach advocated by Richard Florida in his well-known works (2002, 2005a, b).

However, one should be aware that a policy successful in one place may not necessarily bring the desired effects in another. As Musterd and Murie (2010, p. 332) emphasise, “cities and urban economies are not T-shirts that can be produced in much the same way across the world”. That is why the local specificity of a place should always be taken into account when preparing a strategy. As Musterd and Kovacs (2013, p. 14) put it, “Policy makers would be wise to incorporate all available knowledge about pathways and place characteristics, and how to capitalise existing networks”. That is why it is so important to gain an insight into the processes that take place in modern cities and to revise policies pursued so far in order to meet new challenges. Urban shrinkage is one of them.

The term urban shrinkage has not been defined precisely so far. In the literature one can find many examples of how it is understood. Großmann (2007) see it as a socio-spatial transformation occurring in the conditions of a steady decline in the population number. In turn, for Zborowski et al. (2012) this is a process connected with a social, spatial and economic restructuring of cities accompanied by a steady loss of their population. According to the definition adopted in the COST¹ Action “Cities Regrowing Smaller. Fostering Knowledge on Regeneration Strategies in Shrinking Cities across Europe” (CIRES), formulated by the Shrinking Cities International Research Network, (SCIRN): “A shrinking city is a densely populated urban area that has on the one hand faced a population loss in large parts of it (for at least 5 years, more than 0.15% annually), and is on the other hand undergoing economic transformation with some symptoms of a structural crisis”. This is the definition that will be used henceforth in this article.

The chief causes of urban shrinkage are demographic changes connected primarily with a negative rate of natural increase, the ageing of society, and migration. The questions still open are the identification and classification of the remaining factors responsible for urban shrinkage, and the choice of socio-economic indices characterising this process (Jessen 2012, Wiechmann, Wolf 2013, Jaroszevska, Strykiewicz 2014). The difficulty lies in the uniqueness of each city, its history, political situation, and socio-economic condition. As Wu and Martinez-Fernandez (2009) note, the same factors that underlie the socio-economic development of one city may trigger shrinkage in another.

Urban shrinkage has no single explanatory theory. The multi-aspect nature of this process makes it necessary to resort to many theoretical conceptions in order to get an insight into its mechanisms, pattern and effects.

One of the attempted interpretations relies on Myrdal's (1956, after Hoekveld 2012) cumulative causation theory where population decline - working on a ‘vicious circle’ principle - is both a cause and a result of urban shrinkage. The appearance of one negative impulse has a snowball effect, triggering successive undesirable processes and developments. To put it simply, a drop in the population number brought about by the emigration of young people (e.g. as a result of a deepening economic crisis) means a reduction in the number of

¹ COST - European Cooperation in Science and Technology.

the population of reproductive age, and the effect is a decrease in births. The disturbance in the age structure of the population of a locality thus created, accompanied by a persistently low total fertility rate and no inflow of new residents, leads to a further intensification of unfavourable demographic changes (in particular, the ageing process). This, in turn, makes the labour force dwindle and affects the local labour market, which generates further adverse effects. Understood in this way, the shrinkage mechanism shows a cumulative tendency and, left to itself, leads over a longer period to the reinforcement of negative consequences in many fields: demographic, economic, social and spatial (Strykiewicz et al. 2012). If there appear new external determinants, the process can slow down or accelerate. Theoretically, it is also possible that, stimulated by a new positive impulse, its direction will change.

An answer to the question about the nature of causes making a city or region shrink can also be supplied by a historical analysis. A study of the pattern and direction of evolution of social systems, the institutional context, as well as various events, choices and decisions from the past, can provide a deeper insight into the mechanism of shrinkage of a spatial unit (Bontje, Musterd 2012). This type of explanation relying on the interpretation of historical facts and employing a genetic approach is the essence of the conception known as path dependence (e.g. Arthur 1994, Boschma, Lambooy 1999, David 2000, Mahoney 2000, Gwosdz 2004, 2014). In this approach, shrinkage can be understood as an outcome of a solution adopted at one time. It is then reinforced, reproduced or transformed by successive chance events. As David (2000, after Gwosdz 2004) claims, this is a conception combining isolated, unique occurrences with more general growth processes of dynamic structures. It is well suited to study random, irreversible or hard-to-reverse dynamic processes - and those are precisely the characteristics of urban shrinkage.

2. URBAN SHRINKAGE IN POLAND

For the last two and a half decades, Polish cities have been undergoing an accelerated transformation in many dimensions, including material, functional and social ones. What affected the rate and direction of those changes were processes associated with Poland's systemic transformation, the advancing globalisation and internationalisation of its economy, and its accession to the EU, which opened up new possibilities of obtaining financial support. The transition of Polish cities from socialist to post-socialist units involved addressing many problems that emerged after more than 40 years of their operation in the command-redistributive system (1945-1989). The situation of cities at the start of the transformation process was different in each of them. On the one hand, the systemic transformation opened up new development opportunities for them, but on the other it meant threats resulting, among other things, from their weakness in the international arena. For many of them, especially those located in old industrial districts, this was the beginning of extremely difficult structural changes. The opening of the boundaries revealed a huge gap between Western Europe and the former East-bloc states caused by their economic isolation from the processes taking place in the world (Parysek 2005, Węclawowicz et al. 2006, Zborowski et al. 2012, Węclawowicz 2013). Polish cities had not only to cope with its effects and the heritage of the past epoch, but also to face international competition and the challenges of globalisation. In many of them past decisions had resulted in the appearance of barriers that made their development difficult in the later period - a typical case of path dependence.

The significant changes that took place in Poland over the past twenty or so years have not omitted the social sphere, either. One of the manifestations of those changes is the growth in spatial mobility that has greatly contributed to differences in the distribution of demographic potential. This includes both migration abroad, much more intensive after

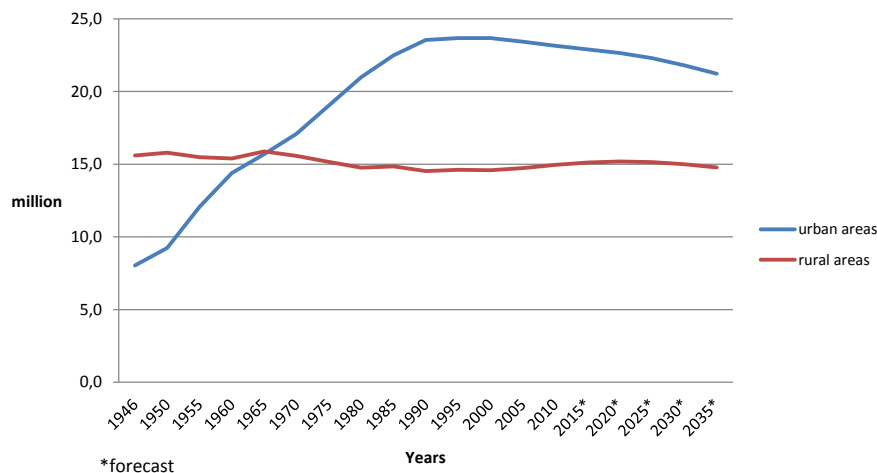
Poland's accession to the EU, and internal migration. In the case of the latter, we deal on the one hand with movement from peripheral areas to large metropolitan centres, and on the other, with suburbanisation. This last process involves loss of residents by a city within its administrative limits in favour of its suburban zone, which is often a cause of a decline of its downtown quarters.

Today suburbanisation is one of the most important processes moulding the settlement network in Poland. Unfortunately, it alters the space around cities in an uncontrolled and chaotic way, and produces a lot of problems, e.g. growing costs of building physical infrastructure, lower receipts flowing to the city budget, transport problems, and poorer availability of such basic public services as education, health care, or culture.

What distinguishes the modern transformation of cities is also a substantial demographic change known as a second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe, van de Kaa 1986, after Kurkiewicz 2010, p. 50). This process involves a unidirectional change in many types of demographic behaviour concerning marriage and replacement rates (Okólski 2005). Its effects include a change in lifestyle, the appearance of a new model of the family and household, a decline in birth rates, and an advancing ageing of society. As Kurkiewicz observes (2010, p. 51), the second demographic transition in Poland and other parts of East-Central Europe does not follow the typical pattern and lags a long way behind the West European states. As has already been mentioned, suburbanisation coinciding with demographic change has also greatly accelerated urban shrinkage in Poland.

The forecasts of the demographic future of Poland up to 2035 are alarming. According to the 2008 estimates of the Central Statistical Office (GUS), the country's population will decrease steadily, the decline rate accelerating with time (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Changes in the number of the urban and rural population in Poland over the years 1946-2035



Source: own compilation on the basis of GUS data

The mean annual drop in the population number, according to the GUS, will range from -0.55% to -0.12%. As is well known, this is not a process that will be distributed evenly in space; that is why it is so important to find what areas are going to be hit the hardest by the loss of residents. In the GUS forecast, it will be the urban population (and more precisely, the population living within the administrative limits of towns) that will account for the largest proportion of the anticipated decline by 2035 - as much as 90%. This process will accelerate after 2020 to an annual mean range of -0.69% to -0.27%. It will be accompanied by further undesirable changes in the age structure of the population, and in consequence by the advancing ageing of society and a decline in the number of women of childbearing age.

An analysis of changes in the urban population number over the years 1990-2010 demonstrated that out of the 829 cities² under study, 245 had shrunk, 251 were stable, and 333 had grown (Jaroszevska, Stryjakiewicz 2014) (Tab. 1, Fig. 2).

Tab.1. Cities with a growing, stable and shrinking population number in the years 1990-2010

Voivodeship	Number of cities	Growing cities ($>+0.15\%$ per year)		Stable cities (-0.15% to $+0.15\%$ per year)		Shrinking cities ($<-0.15\%$ per year)	
		number	%	number	%	number	%
Łódź	40	10	25.0	13	32.5	17	42.5
Mazovia	78	47	60.3	24	30.8	7	9.0
Małopolska	49	23	46.9	15	30.6	11	22.4
Silesia	59	7	11.9	16	27.1	36	61.0
Lublin	36	11	30.5	15	41.6	10	27.7
Subcarpathia	44	24	54.5	13	29.5	7	15.9
Podlasie	33	14	42.4	11	33.3	8	24.2
Świętokrzyska Land	25	3	12.0	7	28.0	15	60.0
Lubuska Land	40	17	42.5	12	30.0	11	27.5
Wielkopolska	108	67	62.0	33	30.5	8	7.4
West Pomerania	60	28	46.7	20	33.3	12	20.0
Lower Silesia	88	18	20.5	20	22.7	50	56.8
Opole	33	3	9.1	4	12.1	26	78.8
Kujavia-Pomerania	50	26	52.0	18	36.0	6	12.0
Pomerania	40	18	45.0	12	30.0	10	25.0
Warmia-Mazuria	46	17	37.0	18	39.1	11	23.9
Poland	829	333	40.2	251	30.3	245	29.6

Source: own compilation on the basis of GUS data

In 30 out of the 245 shrinking cities under analysis, the shrinkage was steady, i.e. in all five-year subperiods (1990, 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010) population loss amounted to -0.15% and more. This group includes such large cities as Katowice, Sosnowiec, Bytom, Zabrze, Ruda Śląska, Chorzów, Łódź, and Wałbrzych. They show both, high relative and absolute losses of residents. Their shrinkage triggers several unfavourable social, economic, spatial, and image-related phenomena which, left untended, lead to increasingly serious problems for their future development. The remaining 215 shrinking cities had at least one five-year period of stabilisation (changes ranging from -0.15% to $+0.15\%$), or even showed population growth in excess of 0.15% annually. In turn, the 387 cities classified as stable and growing recorded episodic shrinkage.

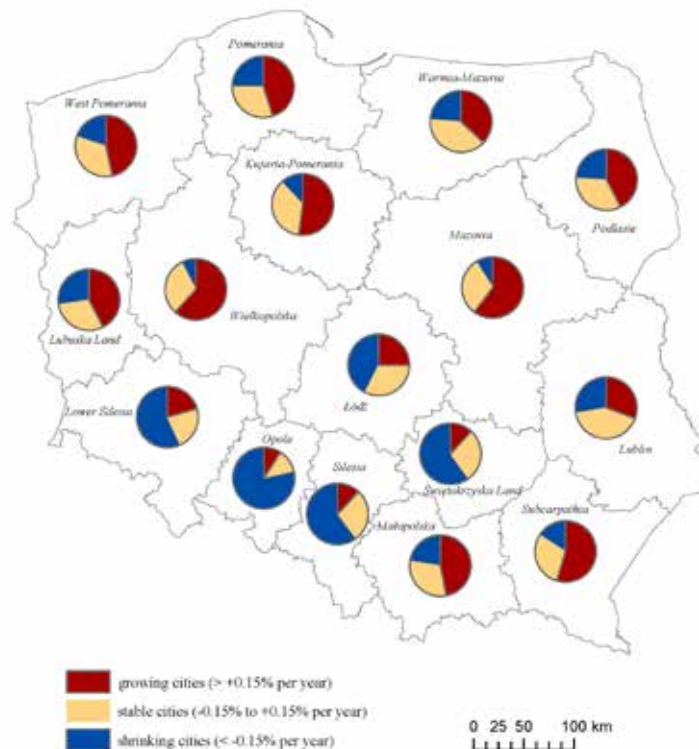
What necessitates the adoption of appropriate measures and strategies counteracting the deleterious effects of urban shrinkage is the fact that in 2010 cities thought to be shrinking had a total population of more than 9 million, accounting for as much as 38.8% of the population of all towns in Poland.

The above analysis of the situation of Polish cities, based among other things on unfavourable demographic trends, allows the conclusion that shrinkage has already got a significant effect on their development, and will also have it in the future. The analysis in this chapter has been narrowed down to population change as the most important measure allowing an assessment of the scale of this process. The results obtained are also a point of

² Data were collected for all urban communes (cities) and towns within urban-rural communes (the rural parts were excluded). Units created after 1990 were not taken into consideration.

departure for further studies concerning in particular the economic and social dimensions of urban shrinkage in Poland.

Fig. 2. Proportion of growing, stable and shrinking cities in voivodeships in 2010



Source: own compilation on the basis of GUS data

3. URBAN POLICY IN POLAND

From the year 1990, when self-governance began to form again in Poland, to this day, no formal strategy for the development of urban areas has been worked out. It is, in fact, still at an initial stage of formulation (Markowski 2013, p. 185) although, of course, this does not mean that there are no urban policy measures taken.

What affect urban development are steps adopted by public authorities at all administrative levels: central, regional and local; they assumed special importance on Poland's accession to the European Union. Regrettably, those have not been consistent steps so far. As Parysek (2010) emphasises, urban policy in Poland has never been:

- Autonomous,
- Implemented in an integrated way,
- Conducted in a systemic way within the hierarchical structure of units into which the country is divided, and
- Treated as a priority.

At the national level, regulations concerning urban policy are scattered throughout a great variety of documents; in 2010 there were as many as 42 strategic documents dealing with the country's development. This dispersal of records, which also refer to urban policy, made orientation very difficult and greatly inhibited conducting not only an effective urban policy, but also a policy for the development of the entire country. That is why a few years ago steps were taken to reduce their number. Today there are two major documents setting the urban policy framework: the National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020:

Regions, cities, rural areas (NSRD 2010-2020) and the Conception of Poland's Spatial Development 2030 (CPSD 2030).

The situation in urban policy regulation may change because the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development (MID) undertook to work out a National Urban Policy (NUP). In March 2014 the MID published a preliminary version of this document, which is also a first step towards integrating various measures and creating concrete instruments for conducting an effective urban policy. The most important goal of the document is "to enhance the ability of cities and urbanised areas to foster sustainable development, create jobs, and improve the inhabitants' quality of life". There is no doubt that the factor stimulating the preparation of NUP is the operational programmes within the framework of European multi-annual funds. In the new perspective 2014-2020, the involvement of cities and their functional areas is supposed to be greater. An important element in the funding of local governments will be means obtained under so-called Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI). This is a completely new instrument promoting a partnership model of cooperation among local governments in the implementation of common undertakings.

The preparation of NUP seems highly significant also from the point of view of changes and problems registered in Polish cities. Among the most important challenges they face are unfavourable demographic changes that, together with the bad economic situation, underlie urban shrinkage. Until very recently, the authorities responsible for urban policy did not seem to be aware of urban shrinkage as a problem, but this situation keeps changing slowly. The NUP draft may well be the first document identifying the challenges that face shrinking cities in Poland. There is no doubt that the fundamental condition of an effective policy in cities is the awareness and knowledge of the processes that take place in them, including urban shrinkage.

4. SHRINKING CITIES: CHALLENGES FOR URBAN POLICY

There is no one simple recipe for an urban policy conducted in a way that would counter the adverse effects of urban shrinkage. The strategies adopted often depend on how local authorities perceive urban shrinkage and whether they are resigned to the fact that the number of inhabitants will keep declining. The strategies can seek adaptation to the conditions of shrinkage and planning for shrinkage (Hollander et al. 2009), as in the cities of East Germany (e.g. Wiechmann, Volkmann 2012); they can also be oriented towards regrowth and treat shrinkage as a transitional stage; or there can be no measures undertaken at all - the process is ignored (Danielzyk et al. 2002).

There are various kinds of factors determining the stage of development and the character of the policy of a city. They include (Haase 2013):

- Existing governance systems/ cultures/ traditions,
- Political traditions,
- The issue being addressed,
- The nature of multi-level arrangements and relationships, and
- The availability and origin of resources.

It is almost certain that local authorities will not be able to cope with the effects of shrinkage of their city on their own. Hence it is necessary to engage all local actors in the task, including corporations, schools, business networks, local associations and supra-local government institutions (supported by European Union programmes and funds), academic circles, and (or perhaps primarily) the local community. It is the dialogue with residents, their involvement and knowledge of the problems and challenges resulting from the advancing shrinkage of their city that seem to be of key significance for the successful implementation

of a right policy. As Hospers emphasises (2013, after Lowndes et al. 2006), to encourage greater resident involvement the so-called CLEAR approach might be useful:

- Can do (have enough knowledge, skills and resources to participate);
- Like to (act from a “sense of place” and belief in the community);
- Are enabled to (are well-supported by government to participate);
- Asked to (are approached actively by stakeholders to join in);
- Are responded to (can see that their activities make a difference).

Thus, it will be necessary to build confidence in steps taken by local authorities and make an effort to increase the participation of residents in measures implemented in the city where they live. First, however, urban shrinkage must stop being a taboo in their perception (Wiechmann 2008) and there must be a change in mentality. As Hospers (2013) states, for a local government growth has usually meant power, hence, while many local leaders are aware of urban shrinkage and adopt policies to cope with its negative effects, for fear of losing voters they often treat it as a “silent process” (Cunningham-Sabot 2008). That is why local governments, planners and political leaders must realise that shrinkage need not automatically imply the fall of their cities. On the contrary, with a suitable policy and resident involvement it may lead to a rise in the level of living and the city’s qualitative development. One can therefore agree with Panagopoulos and Barreira (2012, p. 289) that “planners and political leaders must continue to make efforts to understand the characteristics of shrinkage and develop methods to manage this decline in a planned and creative way that will sustain the quality of life of the remaining population”.

In Poland the awareness of urban shrinkage is still low, but this has started to change. Especially in the last few years one can observe that the discussion about challenges posed by urban shrinkage slowly becomes part of public debate (Zarządzanie ..., 2013). One can also identify measures - taken mostly at the regional level - intended to cope with the negative effects of this process. For example, in Opole voivodeship, in which Jaroszevska and Strykiewicz (2014) found that as many as 78% of cities were shrinking, a Special Demographic Zone has been set up. Among its most urgent tasks are halting the outflow of young people by creating attractive jobs as well as greater assistance to young families (e.g. nursery-kindergarten care for children) and to senior citizens (Sebesta 2013). Another example of a growing awareness of local decision-makers concerning the unfavourable demographic processes is the “Plan to counteract depopulation in Łódź voivodeship. Family, Children, Work”, designed in 2013. Łódź voivodeship, and in particular its capital - the city of Łódź, are units especially heavily hit by the shrinkage process (cf. Fig. 2).

So far, the above examples have been isolated cases. Still missing are comprehensive regeneration strategies that would integrate the ‘hardware’ (housing, infrastructure), ‘software’ (image, governance) and ‘human resources’ (social and economic structures) types of intervention (Wiechmann 2013). An important challenge will also be making residents themselves more involved in the life of their cities, and in particular in the working out of a common vision of their development and its directions in the conditions of shrinkage.

5. CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that urban shrinkage will be a major challenge for the future urban policy in Poland, hence a discussion about a strategy counteracting the detrimental effects of this process seems to be highly topical and imperative. Of key importance for the future of many Polish cities will be the creation of visions of their long-term development in the conditions of shrinkage. The visions should accommodate the fact that shrinking cities are also units that age faster than the remaining ones in demographic terms. This will additionally make it

necessary for them to adapt not only to the conditions of a dwindling population, but also to the advancing process of population ageing.

In general, Poland has no specific strategies and policies to cope with urban shrinkage. However, after the first years of the 'transformation shock' when a host of problems appeared following the systemic change and the opening of the borders to the socio-economic processes occurring in the world, the authorities were forced to seek new solutions and regulations to assist those cities and regions that were especially threatened with an economic crisis (the population decline was usually left aside). It is only now, after almost 25 years, that the focus of attention of urban policy starts shifting to demographic problems. One can also hope that an introduction of integrated measures accommodating specific local conditions of urban shrinkage will be one of the priorities of NUP.

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