

SHRINKING CITIES: EXPLAINING (LOCAL) GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

*André Mulder**

*Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Real Estate & Housing,
P.O. Box 5043, Delft, Email: a.mulder@tudelft.nl

ABSTRACT: Cities all over the world are facing a declining population, often in association with the loss of jobs and overall economic decline. This paper will focus on (local) government response to the shrinking of cities, trying to explain why the authorities in various countries react in a different way. Using examples from Germany and Britain, the policies that are being developed and implemented and the involvement of private parties (in both the profit and non-profit making sectors) will be described. The question will be asked if different traditions in policy making and implementation, e.g. between liberal welfare states and conservative-corporatist states (as described by Esping-Andersen and others), can be used to explain different (local) government reactions.

KEYWORDS: shrinking cities, welfare state regimes, planning, national government, local government, private sector involvement

1 INTRODUCTION

Many cities in the industrialised world are shrinking: they face a declining population, often in association with the loss of jobs and overall economic decline. When there is a high vacancy rate of apartments, homes, factories or offices, shrinking becomes highly visible. The two causes that are often seen as the most important ones are changing demographic patterns, including low fertility rates, and 'mainly globally initiated economic transition processes from the industrial to the post-industrial society' [1] Some old industrial areas are amongst the hardest hit. Examples of these areas are the cities of northern England, Detroit and almost all cities in the former GDR.

Shrinkage can show itself at many levels. The population of the country as a whole may decline, as is the case in Germany and Japan. Still in a country where both the population and the economy are growing, some urban areas can be exempt from growth, as is the case in many northern English cities. Finally, the population of a central city can be shrinking while the urban region of which it is a part is growing (suburbanisation). Of course, these processes may occur in different combinations.

A declining urban population may pose problems for the remaining inhabitants, landlords, the business community and local governments. Local companies may find it difficult to attract staff, while the level of prospective customers is shrinking. For landlords it will be hard to let dwellings, owner-occupiers are faced with declining property values. Local authorities will have to cut spending, because of a diminishing tax base, but a certain level of services has to survive to avoid the area becoming even less popular.

In this paper I will first of all give a general picture of the population development in Europe during the next fifty years. In the following sections I will explore if government policies concerning shrinking cities can be explained by linking those policies to the concept of different forms of the welfare state. I will do this by comparing some of the policies concerning shrinking cities in Germany, as an example of a conservative or corporatist welfare state, and the United Kingdom (UK), as an, albeit controversial, example of a liberal welfare state. Features that both countries have in common include the decline of mining and industry and a divide between wealthy, still growing, regions and poorer and shrinking regions. Both countries are being faced with the problem of shrinking cities, although the national context is different: while the UK as a whole is still growing, Germany is becoming a shrinking nation. Also, the German Federal Republic inherited the eastern states (*neue Bundesländer*) from the GDR, after reunification, and with it the challenge to incorporate an area which had its own legal, political and economic system for several decades, into its own fabric.

2 THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

Europe can be described as an ageing continent. The average age of the population is rising, the number of children is falling, the number of the elderly is growing. The population of the EU as a whole is still growing, but the growth rate is decreasing. From about 2035 population numbers will be falling. At the midst of the 21st century, the European Union as a whole will show a decreasing population, as will many member states (see table 1).

Table 1 Total population (millions) of the EU and selected member states 2000 – 2050 [2]

	2008	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050	2060
European Union (27)	495.4	499.4	513.8	519.9	520.1	515.3	505.7
Germany	82.2	82.1	81.5	80.2	77.8	74.5	70.8
UK	61.3	62.0	65.7	69.2	72.0	74.5	76.7
Netherlands	16.4	16.5	17.0	17.2	17.2	16.9	16.6

The two countries featured in this paper show a divergent development. In Germany on the one hand, the population is already shrinking, albeit at a slow pace. This development will continue for the foreseeable future and shrinking will really pick up speed from the 2030s. For the UK on the other hand, earlier predictions of a fall of population numbers from 2040 onwards have been withdrawn. Only a few years ago the projection for the UK population in 2050 was 64.3 million, today the UK is expected to have 76.7 million inhabitants in that year. [2]

This shows that, as always, producing a population forecast is a highly uncertain business. For instance, the wish to have children of all individual households living in a county together is not a constant factor, but something that is influenced by cultural change. However, changing birth rates only show themselves in the total population development with a certain delay. Even more difficult to predict is the migration balance. At this moment, most EU-countries have immigration policies for non EU citizens that are much stricter than ten years ago. On the other hand, migration from the new member states to the already existing ones has increased. A new change of policy could have major implications for the development of the population, as could a new economic crisis or upturn.

3 THE WELFARE STATE

Most European countries have gradually developed themselves into ‘welfare states’. According to Esping-Andersen, the common feature of welfare states is that social rights are given to its inhabitants. ‘If social rights are given the legal and practical status of property rights, if they are inviolable, and if they are granted on the basis of citizenship rather than performance, they will entail a decomodification of the status of individuals vis-à-vis the market’. [3] Services are available to anyone who is entitled to them and do not depend on for instance the working past of the individual.

However, not all welfare states are the same. Esping-Andersen [3] mentions three forms of welfare state:

1. Social-democratic welfare states, like Denmark and Sweden, with a high level of services, based on need rather than the ability to pay.
2. Conservative or corporatist welfare states, like Austria and Germany, where services are usually organised and managed by professional organisations (rather than the state). Family support may also play an important role.
3. Liberal welfare states, a group consisting mainly of Anglo-Saxon countries like Australia and the USA. The United Kingdom shows several features of a liberal welfare state (alongside some features of a social-democratic welfare state). State services are providing a safety net and not much more than that.

The work by Esping-Anderson has inspired many housing researchers, because it provides some sort of an answer to the question why different states have different ways of interfering in the market economy and of promoting the welfare of their citizens.

However, when trying to build upon his work, a housing researcher will have to face several problems. One of these problems is that the classification of welfare states as such is unclear. This concerns both the exact criteria that decide into which box a country is being put and the fact that some countries are not clearly labelled. A second problem is that Esping-Andersen hardly studied housing, but concentrated on (other) social policies. Housing researchers, wanting to build on his work, have to 'translate' it into housing problems and housing policies. This is a tricky exercise.

As Malpass puts it, the housing – welfare state relationship is complex. Housing is often considered as being one of five key public services, the others being health, social security, education and personal social services. However, he continues, this is an arbitrary list 'which is open to challenge, and it is arguable that the welfare state should be seen as a policy stance rather than a bundle of public services. ... The retention of a large market sector in housing, in contrast to the arrangements adopted for health and education, is widely recognized as a reason for noting that housing occupies a distinct position within the welfare state.' [4]

Kemeny states that 'large differences can arise between welfare sectors in the power balance between diverse interests.' [5] Following this line of thinking, a welfare regime can be seen as a combination of sector regimes, each with its own characteristics.

When considering the housing sector on its own, other classifications than that of Esping-Andersen may seem more appropriate. After analysing OECD data on the level of owner-occupation and the level of mortgage debt, Schwartz and Seabrooke [6] suggest four ideal-types of countries:

1. corporatist-market, with a high level of mortgage debt, a high level of owner-occupation and a large social rented sector; Germany would be part of this group;
2. liberal-market, with a high level of mortgage debt, a large owner-occupied sector and a quite small social rented sector; the UK is an example of this group.
3. statist-developmental, with a low level of mortgage debt, an average to small owner-occupied sector and an above average social rented sector;
4. familial, featuring a low level of mortgage debt, a large owner-occupied sector and a very small social rented sector.

When comparing this grouping with Esping-Andersen's welfare regimes, both the social democratic and corporatist/conservative groups break up. Take for instance the Scandinavian countries, often considered of all having strong social democratic roots. However, Denmark finds itself in the corporatist-market cluster, Sweden and Finland in the statist-development cluster and Norway in the liberal-market cluster.

Still, after discussing several subjects mentioned by critics of the work of Esping-Andersen, Matznetter [7] for instance still tries to use his concept of welfare states to describe and explain Austrian housing policy (see below). And as Germany and the UK find themselves in different clusters as described by Schwartz and Seabrook, it seems not unreasonable to stick to Esping-Anderson's classification for the time being, at the same time adding some elements of competing theories where this seems appropriate.

Before looking into the German and UK response to shrinking, some propositions about the relationship between the type of welfare state and policies concerning shrinking cities will be formulated. This will provide a framework to discuss German and UK government policies.

4 GOVERNMENT POLICY CONCERNING SHRINKING CITIES: WHAT MIGHT BE EXPECTED?

After discussing the initial book and subsequent publications by Esping-Andersen, Matznetter [7] sums up four characteristic attributes of the conservative welfare state:

- 1 a social-insurance-based fragmentation of welfare entitlements;
- 2 corporatist forms of interest intermediation;
- 3 a pro-family bias in welfare provision;
- 4 resistance to change.

Austria is usually considered as being a conservative welfare state. Matznetter concludes that the framework given above does hold for the Austrian housing policy:

- 1 Austrian housing policy is a fragmented one, with clear differences to be noticed between tenure type and type of developer (for example local government or private company), but also between the provinces, which each have their own housing policy;

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- 2 Corporatist networks can be seen at work between developers and political parties, especially at a provincial level;
 - 3 Austrian housing policy is focussed upon the family, both by favouring young families and by supposing that family funds (for instance money saved by older generations) will be invested;
 - 4 Austrian housing policy is slow to adapt.

In a liberal welfare state, state intervention can be described as providing a mere safety net. For the housing sector, this would probably mean that the government hardly interferes on the housing market as a whole, although the safety net will probably include a relatively small social housing sector.

In the UK the social rented sector comprises about 17 % of all dwellings, which is much higher than the percentage in other liberal welfare states. Indeed, according to Anderson, interventionist policies of early post-war Labour governments 'could be readily characterized as social democratic/socialist'. However, by 1990, the UK had changed from the social-democratic welfare state that it was in the 1940s-1960s, to a liberal welfare state, as defined by Esping-Andersen. [8] Successive Conservative governments, lead by Margaret Thatcher, had targeted sectors where state influence was huge. For the housing sector, this meant for instance the selling out of social rented dwellings owned by municipalities (council houses) under the 'right to buy', while the building of new social housing almost came to a standstill.

To get a better understanding of housing policies in a liberal welfare state, it may be useful to have a look at the work of Kemeny, who distinguishes two types of policy models concerning the rented sector: a dualist and a unitary type of policy. Dualist policy would mean that different institutional characteristics can be found for the privately rented and the cost (or social) rented sector respectively. The cost rented sector is relatively small, usually managed by the state, while competition between the cost and the privately rented sector is limited, with both sectors catering for different types of households, probably with different incomes as well. The rented sector as a whole (both privately and cost rented) is relatively small. The privately rented sector is protected from competition by the cost rented sector, while owner-occupation is being stimulated. Where a unitary type of policy exists, both rented sectors would have more in common. [5]

Doling [9] notes a close match between the membership of Kemeny's two groups and the classification by Esping-Andersen. Countries with a dual housing policy usually at the same time belong to Esping-Andersen's group of liberal welfare states. Countries with a unitary housing policy would more likely be social-democratic or conservative welfare states.

Following this line of thinking, some features about of government housing policy concerning shrinking cities in conservative and liberal welfare states respectively can be supposed:

- 1 In a conservative welfare state policies will be directed at both the rented and the owner-occupied sector, with both landlords and owner-occupiers receiving state support, although different rules and regulations will probably apply; in a liberal welfare state, more attention would be paid to a better performance of the housing market, focusing on the owner-occupied sector.
- 2 In conservative welfare states, more than in liberal welfare states, housing policy in shrinking cities will be focussing upon safeguarding the interests of families and of the building of new families.

We will now have a closer look at policies concerning the housing market in shrinking cities of Eastern Germany and Northern England, to see if these propositions can be upheld.

5 GERMANY

In Germany, population growth has come to a standstill, which is generally being seen as a forebode to shrinking (table 1). Some cities and regions already experience population decline, while others are still growing. Declining regions include the former GDR, including the capital Berlin, parts of the industrial Ruhrgebiet (Ruhr Area) and some other northern cities. Growing regions are mainly to be found in the southwestern part of the country, like Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg.

Even in generally declining areas like the former GDR, regional differences can be noticed. Some areas are only showing a small decline of population, or have overcome former difficulties and are now stable. Other areas still show a massive decline of population. Jobs and education seem to be the key words to explain these differences. Some 'islands of stability' offer attractive jobs and well-known educational

facilities (like universities). On a smaller scale, within cities, one can also distinguish between areas that are doing relatively well, like city centres and some of the surrounding inner city areas, and areas that are showing an above average decline, like high rise estates built under communist rule. [10] Indeed, some of the problems the eastern part of Germany is now showing, seem to be directly related to government housing policy in the former GDR. Like Hoscislowski points out, this included building dwellings at the wrong locations and building too many of them. Furthermore the majority of dwellings was of the wrong type. [11]

Leipzig shows the same development of many other East German cities. However, it would be wrong to assume that the fall of population only started after the fall of the German wall (1989) and reunification (1990), when the East Germans were free to move again. In fact, Leipzig has shown a continuing decline of population since the 1930s. However, this accelerated after reunification. During the 1990s, Leipzig (within the 1990 boundaries) lost 20 % of its population, with out migration to western parts of Germany and suburbanisation being almost equally important. At the same time, Leipzig lost 90 % of its industrial employment. By 2000, some 17 % of housing stock was empty [12], but with huge differences between neighbourhoods. Even though there has been a revival of the fortunes of many districts featuring Gründerzeit (late 19th century) buildings, the Leipzig Neustädter Markt neighbourhood has a vacancy rate of about 50 %. Even the other, more fashionable Gründerzeit areas still have 20 % or more unoccupied housing. [13] This can at least partly be explained by the way state subsidies were conceived and introduced. The first priorities were to renew city centres and to prevent high rise estates from developing into problem areas. Furthermore, the ownership situation of pre-war housing was unclear, as the original owners were entitled to regain ownership of their properties (disowned under communist rule).

By the year 2000 it was becoming clear that government investment in rebuilding the former GDR had not succeeded in stopping net out migration from the area. Empty housing and urban wasteland, once housing large industrial plants, were clear signs that something had to be done. As a result, the Stadtumbau Ost (Urban Reconstruction of the East) program was conceived. The aim of Stadtumbau Ost is to find an answer to the loss of urban functions and the resulting vacancy of dwellings and plots and to improve the viability of cities and of the housing market in the former GDR. Its two main strategies are the demolishing of vacant dwellings, in order to diminish excess supply on the housing market, and to improve neighbourhoods by renewal or maintenance of existing buildings, adapting the infrastructure and reusing urban wasteland.

During the first years of the Stadtumbau Ost program, much money went into demolishing vacant properties, both pre-war or early post war estates in the inner cities and high rise estates in the inner suburbs. Large landlords were putting pressure on the municipalities to get permission and subsidies to get rid of their housing estates with a large amount of vacancies, as these estates were losing them money. The revised version of the program states that only 50 % of funds can be spend on demolishing, while the other 50 % has to be spend on the improvement of neighbourhoods. [14]

Due to the overwhelming attention for large high rise estates, small private owners and locations in or near the city centre were hardly included in the *Stadtumbau Ost* program. However, this has now been acknowledged and more attention is being paid to improving for instance *Gründerzeit* neighbourhoods. Some small scale initiatives have already been in place for some years, like the *Wächterhaus* project in Leipzig, where people can use an empty home almost for free for a couple of years. Usually, these are large buildings at important crossroads, meaning that a small scale project can have an important impact. [15]

Table 2 Federal subsidies for (re)building cities [14]

Project	Main goals	Federal subsidy (million Euros)
<i>Soziale Stadt</i> Social city	Improve participation and quality of life in neighbourhoods with a combination of problems, like high unemployment, lack of education, infrastructural deficits and tension between different communities	150
<i>Stadtumbau für die Anpassung an den</i>	Decrease number of empty dwellings	East: 121

<i>demographischen und strukturellen Wandel (Stadtumbau Ost / Stadtumbau West)</i> Urban reconstruction as an adaption to demographic and structural change	Upgrading of cities as places to live and work	West: 96
<i>Städtebaulicher Denkmalschutz für den Erhalt historischer Stadtkerne und Stadtquartiers in Ost</i> Centrally located monuments in the East	Retain and improve monuments, esp. in historical city centres	East: 85 West: 30
<i>Aktive Stadt- und Ortsteilzentren für die Innenentwicklung</i> Active city and neighbourhood centres	Maintain or reintroduce economic and cultural functions to city and neighbourhood centres, making them places to live and work	43
<i>Städtebauliche Sanierungs- und Entwicklungsmaßnahmen</i> Urban regeneration projects	Retain and improve buildings and their environment Regeneration of city and neighbourhood centres	East: 45 West: 45

Although *Stadtumbau Ost* and its sister program *Stadtumbau West* are the most important schemes as far as sums of money are concerned, they are not the only ones (table 2). With the exception of the *Soziale Stadt* (Social city) program, the focus is very much on improving the urban fabric (dwellings, infrastructure etc.).

6 THE UNITED KINGDOM

In the UK, housing market problems can be quite extreme in some areas where almost all industrial employment was lost. In 1999 was formally recognised by a report commissioned by the government. [16] According to this report, about 11.5 % of council housing (housing owned by the local authorities), 8 % of housing owned by registered landlords (housing associations) and 3 % of privately owned housing (both rented out and owner-occupied) was situated in areas with low housing demand. Many, but not all, of these areas were to be found in the Northwest (Liverpool, Manchester and surrounding and intermediate areas) and Yorkshire and Humberside. Economic decline and demographic changes were recognised as being amongst the main causes leading to low housing demand, with local factors like high crime levels and a poor environmental quality adding to the problem. Government response to this problem, and the pressure it was put under by local authorities and registered landlords, was to set up a number of ‘market renewal pathfinders’. These pathfinder areas are specific areas that receive government money to try and solve their housing market problems.

Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders are part of the ‘Sustainable Communities Plan’. This report states that ‘too many people do not have access to decent affordable housing in decent surroundings. Across the country there are still homes in poor condition occupied by vulnerable people.’ [17]

The problems that must be tackled are:

- 1 a shortage of housing that exists in parts of the country;
- 2 the opposite problem of housing market collapse in other parts of the country, leading to homes or even whole streets being abandoned;
- 3 the waste of Greenfield land;
- 4 people moving out of the cities to seek a better life in suburbs, creating urban sprawl.

To tackle these problems, the government increased the amount of money being spent on housing and urban renewal from £5,400m in 2002-03 to £7,740 in 2005-06. While eliminating the backlog of repair in the social housing sector remains a priority, a new policy tool is introduced: the housing market renewal pathfinder (HMRP). Initially the government created a £500m fund for a three year period, which was later extended for another three years with more funding (around £700m) available. Another extension of the scheme was announced in February 2008. Later that year, as part of a policy package to fight the consequences the credit crunch has for the housing market, it was decided to speed up projects, without making more money available, meaning that more money can be invested now and less in the years to come.

HMRPs are meant 'to transform the prospects of those areas worst hit by low demand through excellent design, high quality homes and public spaces. The aim is to make these areas attractive places to live, work and invest.' [18] In all, nine HMRPs were designated, four of them in the Northwest of England.

After analysing policy documents and public statements, Cameron noticed a 'changing justification for housing market renewal, from low demand to a modernisation agenda based on a notion of rising aspirations. Strongly linked to this agenda is an economic imperative concerned with restructuring the housing stock, in terms of tenure and value profile as much as physical quality, to support what is seen as a changing regional economic structure and labour market.' [19] After changing from 'brick and mortar' lead policies to a mix of social and physical policies in the mid 1990s, 'brick and mortar' seems to have returned in the form of HMRPs:

'Housing market renewal clearly returns the focus firmly to the transformation of place, a transformation to be achieved partly through bricks and mortar but partly too by changing the make-up of the population, with less emphasis than earlier place-based programmes on improvement for the existing population. Moreover, while it is a policy focussed on neighbourhoods, the developing rhetoric of market renewal tends to emphasise its contribution to wider-scale objectives, especially economic objectives. In that sense it can also be seen as contributing to the other major strand of New Labour's regeneration agenda: the engendering of a 'renaissance' of cities and their regions. ... What housing market renewal does promise, whether explicitly or implicitly, which is new in UK urban regeneration policy, is engineered gentrification and the replacement of a substantial part of the existing population by households with higher income and social status.' [19]

Indeed, the way the Manchester/Salford HMRP puts its long-term vision into words, can be seen as an example of this changing focus. Originally, the aim was 'to build stable, sustainable communities, where housing and social infrastructure meets the needs of all'. A few years later, the pathfinder's aim is 'to support the economic growth potential of Manchester City Region by creating neighbourhoods of choice that meet the needs of existing residents and are attractive to new and former residents.' And although 'the pathfinder has generally promoted mixed communities by improving each neighbourhood for existing residents', it is also noted that 'in some areas new homes are markedly different to the existing housing offer, and principally aimed at a more affluent market'. [20]

In many British cities, regeneration of the formerly rundown city centres and adjoining inner city areas, seems to have been quite successful. However, many regeneration projects feature almost exclusively small apartments. Many of them are empty. Exact figures are not known, but a recent estimate is that in Manchester at least 17 % of all city centre apartments are empty. This is not just caused by the present crisis, many experts think that too many small apartments have been built during the last couple of years.

This was put to a neighbourhood manager working for the City of Salford, Greater Manchester. 'The reason why apartments were built was that developers were responding to the market. The council can't prevent this if there are no special planning restrictions. It has not been council policy, but developers responding to the market. In [this area] almost all new dwellings are family homes. The council has a clear commitment to family dwellings, not just for the present community, but also to attract new families.' [21]

In this respect, the economic crisis may have helped. The building of new apartment blocks has almost come to a standstill, as private investors and project developers have lost interest. Housing associations, who in the UK still can get government money to build dwellings, can still manage to develop and build projects. So there definitely has been a shift from building apartments to building family houses. However, it is too early to say if this will last, as public expenditure will be under a lot of pressure in the coming years.

7 DISCUSSION

In an earlier part of this paper I supposed that, in a conservative welfare state policies would be directed at both the rented and the owner-occupied sector, with both landlords and owner-occupiers receiving state support, although different rules and regulations would probably apply; in a liberal welfare state, more attention would be paid to a better performance of the housing market, focusing on the owner-occupied sector.

Indeed, in Germany the Stadtumbau Ost program is not just focussing on the rented sector, the owner-occupied sector can benefit as well. However, so far this happened in only a few cases. The demolition

program, that is a big part of the total scheme, seems to be mainly in response to the problems that large landlords, who 'inherited' the bigger housing estates, are facing.

Looking only at its name, the English 'housing market pathfinders' would be aiming mainly at improving the performance of the housing market. However, these pathfinders are not just focussing on the owner occupied sector. Like in the German Stadtumbau Ost program, demolishing housing estates with high vacancy numbers, was an important part of the scheme. However, probably more than in Germany, the English 'housing market pathfinders' are also aiming at changing the tenure pattern of neighbourhoods, aiming at providing more owner-occupied housing. So there is a difference between the two countries in this respect, but is quite a small one.

The second proposition was that in conservative welfare states, more than in liberal welfare states, housing policy in a shrinking city will be focussing on safeguarding the interests of families. It seems that this proposition can not be upheld. Most of the German policies are aiming at solving problems like buildings being empty, a general decay of the urban fabric and financial problems of housing companies. However, during recent years the aim of keeping families within shrinking cities has been stated. In the UK, for many years developers had been free to develop apartments, often quite small and not suitable for families. Here also in recent years, a change towards the building of family homes can be noticed. This is made possible by a change of power from private developers to municipalities and housing associations, mainly caused by the economic crisis.

It can be concluded that German and the UK policies concerning shrinking cities have a lot in common. More work would have to be done to see if theories like the one developed by Esping-Andersen can help to explain the few differences that exist between the two countries. Equally, more attention has to be paid on exploring the ways policies at a national level trigger down to the regional and the local level.

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