

Governmental approaches to address urban shrinkage

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This chapter elaborates different governmental approaches towards dealing with the issue of urban shrinkage. We have chosen three countries with contrasting institutional and policy contexts to illustrate how this shapes local responses by SMTs to shrinkage. Urban policy in the United Kingdom, for example, is characterised by a focus on economic development which is seen as the key to address social and environmental problems. Germany's urban policy is informed by the regeneration of industrial areas, demographic change and unification of East and West Germany. Japan's urban policy is characterised by nationwide-balanced development focusing on economic development and demographic change

Japan

The Japanese administrative system has three levels: the national government, regional or prefectural and local government. There are 47 Prefectures, each having a similar structure and responsibilities. These include regional and sub-regional provision of services that are above the municipal level, for example health, transport and spatial planning. Municipalities are responsible for the provision of all local services that are funded through taxation, including utilities such as water and energy, schooling, local transport and urban planning. Importantly municipalities are also responsible for welfare provision which includes childcare and adult social care, the latter being funded through a combination of local and national insurance schemes. While local and regional governments have comprehensive responsibility for the provision of welfare services these tiers of government have little room to manoeuvre. National government formulates policies, sets priorities and standards which are delivered by local government. Regional prefectures have a dual function of providing essential services that are above the municipal level and to co-ordinate the implementation of national policy between local governments but have no powers to distribute national government funding according to locally determined priorities. This makes Japan a centralised state with a strong centre and unified regional and local administrative structures designed to deliver national policy (Hattori, Kaido, & Matsuyuki, 2017).

Japan's population peaked in 2010 and has since been declining. It was 125.7 million in 2019 and is expected to decrease by 6.6 million or 5.3% by 2030. The ratio of people over 65 years of age was 28.6% in 2019 and is expected to rise to 31.2 percent in 2030. Long range forecasts predict that Japan's older population will continue to rise to 38.4% by 2065 (Cabinet_Office, 2018). This translates into 35.6 million people 65 years and older in 2019 with the peak expected in 2040 when the older population will be 39.2 million. Japan is arguably the fastest ageing country in the world at present with a dramatic rise in urban

settlements that are shrinking (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2016).

Unlike other countries where urban shrinkage is a recognised problem, Japan's cause of urban decline is a low birth rate, a rapidly ageing population and ongoing migration to the capital Tokyo. Since 1970s rural areas have encountered outmigration of economically active populations, a process called 'kaso' (too less). Local municipalities tried to stop and reverse the population decline but with little success. In 1962 the national government set a policy goal of "the Nationwide Balanced Development". but the further shift to the service sector has resulted the ongoing population concentration in Tokyo and other metropolitan areas. Economic migration is compounded by the loss of population through natural ageing. The problem of national population loss was first recognised as a national policy priority in 2014 by the 'Masuda report' whose main author was a former minister of Internal Affairs and Communications. It said that out of 1,700 urban settlements 896 towns and cities would disappear by 2040 if the current trajectory of population migration and absolute loss was not changed (Masuda, 2014). This came as a shock to municipalities, especially those that were identified as being at highest risk of becoming superfluous shrinkage. In 2014 the government launched the 'National Long-term Vision' (Cabinet_Office, 2014). The target was to maintain a national population of 100 million in 2060, a fertility rate of 1.8 and a correction of population concentrations in the Tokyo metropolitan area. In the following year Japan's government launched the 'National Comprehensive Strategy' designed to support job creation in local cities, migration flow to local cities, seamless support for marriage, childbirth and child rearing of the young generation, and strengthening of regional cooperation between local municipalities within a prefectural area. To implement this policy local municipalities were asked to develop a 'Local Population Projection Vision Report' and a 'Local Comprehensive Strategy' to tackle the impact of demographic change.

The majority of municipalities receive their revenues from national government which is allocated according to a formula that does not take into account specific local challenges. Oversized infrastructures and services, surplus buildings and land put severe pressures on local budgets resulting in most municipalities facing severe revenue deficits. Reducing or 'rightsizing' infrastructure was recognised by national government as a key issue and in 2014 the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications requested that all local authorities produce 'Comprehensive Management Plan for Public Facilities and Infrastructure' (Ministry_of_Internal_Affairs_and_Communications, 2019). This plan was intended to address four key issues: an analysis of the current state and future requirements of public *facilities*-a comprehensive management policy for public facilities; identification of priorities and methods for achieving them, together with the identification of appropriate procedures for implementation. In other words, first of all, they are required to recognise the current situation related to public facilities, formulate a basic policy for restructuring, and prepare the internal system of the municipality to deal with the problems that are identified (Nishino, 2015b). By 2017 nearly all municipalities, 99.4 percent of them, had developed

such comprehensive strategies to tackle shrinkage and demographic change .

In parallel the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism asked local authorities to create a 'Location Normalization Plan' for local land use . This plan would identify priority areas for residential and economic activities which would receive governmental support in future. Government made available resources to support the relocation of facilities and municipal housing, demolition of vacant houses, greening of former housing or industrial sites, as well as support for agricultural businesses. The preparation of this plan was not a statutory duty and only 250 out of 1,718 local municipalities submitted theirs to national government by May 2019 (Ministry_of_Land_Infrastructure_Transportation_and_Tourism, 2019).

While municipalities seemed eager to create the plans and strategies that government had asked for, implementing them is fraught with difficulty. The first and perhaps most profound problem is the lack of integration of different strategies at local level. The 'Comprehensive Management Plan for Public Facilities and Infrastructure' is led by the finance departments of municipalities, while the 'Location Normalization Plan' is led by the planning department. The former is initiated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications and the latter is by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism in national level. Very few municipalities created a strategy that integrated service and land-use planning in the cases where this happened it was done prior to national policy mandating municipalities with the production of separate plans (Nishino, 2015a). The second hurdle is that local government receives little additional financial support, for example to compensate private property owners if the demolition of their house would be important in rightsizing the urban area and infrastructure. The third challenge is that inhabitants resist any attempt to reduce their local services. Although local authorities own schools, public housing, leisure and care centres it is almost impossible to obtain political support for such measures. Not only are elderly residents resisting the 'thinning out' of services in their immediate neighbourhood, it is not uncommon for officials responsible for services targeted for closure or reduction to initiate opposition to such plans. Political representatives also avoid championing the reduction of services because they have no means to compensate their voters for such losses. Residents have high expectations about the quality and accessibility of public services and a poorly developed culture of self-help and volunteering. Combined with a centralised approach towards policy development that lacks integration at national level local government struggles to developed holistic responses to one of its most pressing problems.

United Kingdom

Contemporary political and institutional structures of the United Kingdom are characterised by the absence of a codified constitution and a complex territorial composition. The United Kingdom consists of four countries: Scotland, Northern Ireland,

Wales and England each with divergent systems for regional and local government, creating a 'quasi federal' administrative system (Gamble, 2006; Hazzel, 2004). As governmental agencies, programmes and local policies are established by the Assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland, the Scottish parliament and the central government the UK presents a complex and dynamic web of institutional arrangements (Kingdom, 2003). However, the UK government in London is both the centre of political decision making and its approach to policy development and implementation is seen by some as a hyper-centralised structure. Local authorities, for example, have very limited room to manoeuvre and rank among the lowest in regard to revenue raising and spending powers within the OECD countries, below Romania and Ukraine.

With a population of 56 million England is by far the most populous country of the UK which current has an overall population of 65 million. England's population density and industrial heritage makes it the subject of much of the UK's urban policy. The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 are the main statutory instruments controlling spatial development in England. Traditionally local government defines development and regeneration priorities but more recently directly elected mayors and assemblies of metropolitan regions provide an intermediate level of governance that shapes economic, social and spatial policy. However, central government is the main source of funding for social, physical and economic regeneration initiatives and over the years has created, and also dispensed with, an array of centrally controlled initiatives through which policy objectives were pursued. In the early 2000s this included urban regeneration companies, business improvement districts and regional development agencies (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003). This included the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder initiative aimed at stimulating housing markets in areas with high unemployment and low housing demand, especially parts of northern England where deindustrialisation resulted in large scale job losses. The scheme supported demolition of residential and commercial buildings and the construction of new dwellings to attract economically active populations back into towns struggling with long-term decline. It quickly became subject to criticisms that it fostered gentrification through the replacement of existing populations with households with higher income and social status (Cameron, 2006) and was absorbed in 2008 into the Homes and Communities Agency which brought together a wide range of government led housing and regeneration initiatives. This agency was abolished in 2018 and replaced by Homes England, a non-departmental public body working on behalf of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

While UK urban policy tends to be subject to frequent changes in priorities, and the agencies that pursue them, a continuing theme is the prioritisation of public investment to stimulate economic growth. Increasing economic growth is seen as the key that unlocks responses to social, economic and environmental problems. Put simply, areas that have very limited opportunities for economic growth also receive limited government investment. This

has profound consequences for attempts to put urban shrinkage on the agenda because the dominant policy discourse is about economic development, not addressing the problems arising from long-term urban decline (M. Bernt et al., 2013).

Difficulties in putting problems associated with urban shrinkage onto the political agenda can also be explained by the fact that England's population is expected to grow by 5% between 2018 and 2028 from 56 million to 59 million. Like other European countries the UK has a low birth rate but a higher degree of inward migration than its neighbours. Two thirds of the anticipated population increase in England is expected to be from external in-migration. Over the same period the percentage of the population that will be over 65 years of age is expected to increase from 18% to 21% (Office for National Statistics, 2020). While overall there does not appear to be a pressing need to tackle population decline in urban areas we find marked regional differences. Many industrial northern cities and coastal towns around the country experienced dramatic population decline in the 1990s and early 2000s and it is these areas that are forecast to have the weakest population growth. While large cities in the northern regions have seen a revival and show growing populations, jobs and economies, many smaller towns across the country languish in state of stagnation or decline.

The phenomenon of urban shrinkage also receives little attention in UK research and policy. Apart from case studies of individual larger cities and cross national comparisons (for example Haase, Bernt, Grossman, Mykhnenko, & Rink, 2013; Pallagst, Wiechman, & Martinex-Fernandez, 2013; Turok & Mykhnenko, 2007) we could find only one study that explicitly focused on analysing the extent of urban shrinkage and decline in United Kingdom (Pike, MacKinnon, & Coombes, 2016). This study uses the term 'relative decline' to denote urban settlements with weak or low growth that is almost exclusively found in northern England. Focusing on 74 'primary urban areas', the study urban settlements of between 100,000 and 5 million inhabitants and found that absolute population loss from the 1980s and 1990s had been compensated by population growth from internal labour migration and external inward migration in all but 2 urban areas studied. Yet 43 out of 74 cities studied showed indicators of 'relative decline' over long periods of time, such as high levels of unemployment, low skills among residents of working age, abandonment and dereliction. Since then the government launched a range of new initiatives aimed at supporting regions with weak economic growth. One targets SMTs, the Towns Fund (Ministry of Housing, 2019b) and another small retailers, the Future High Streets Fund (Ministry of Housing, 2019a). The rationale for their creation is to share economic growth more evenly across England, not to tackle urban shrinkage or, as the study we referred to puts it, 'relative decline' and 'uneven growth'.

These recent initiatives might go some way to address economic problems of declining towns, but their narrow focus suggests that they are unlikely to alter local labour

and housing market dynamics, deal with abandonment and dereliction or the social problems that dominate service provision. However, English towns have struggled with long-term decline for several decades and in the absence of government support created self-help mechanisms to plug gaps left by the withdrawal of industry and lack of government support through coalitions and collaborations with charities, community groups and local businesses. Three brief examples can illustrate this: Stoke-on-Trent, former centre for ceramic industries with 380,000 inhabitants, hit the headlines in 2013 when it announced its intention to sell 33 neglected houses for £1 while making a £30,000 loan available for refurbishment (BBC, 2013). The scheme was immediately oversubscribed and repeated with 25 properties in 2017 thus tackling a classic housing problem in declining towns entirely with local resources. ACTion Cumbria was founded in 1948 to encourage volunteering for social and environmental causes in this sparsely populated part of England. A rapidly ageing population and dispersed public services led to the creation of one of the first community transport schemes where volunteers have provided a vital service for vulnerable and isolated people for over 20 years (Lawler, 2018). Mablethorpe is a seaside town of 12,500 residents that had its heyday at the beginning of the 20th century. The rail link was closed in 1970 and the last bank branch closed in 2019. 41% of the population are over 60 years old and 36% report a long-term illness. 30% of Mablethorpe's residents live alone, mostly pensioners. This is the context in which local churches created the 'Good Neighbour' scheme in 2019 to connect volunteers with people in need of assistance with day to day tasks such as shopping, housekeeping, doctor appointments, dog walking and such like. The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the growth of this service with local businesses, charities and health care providers making financial donations to help fund the work (Churches Together Mablethorpe, 2019).

In summary, the UK is a country where urban shrinkage does not express itself through absolute population loss but a gradual shift from prosperity to decline. The top-down approach of the UK government promulgates a focus on economic development which, despite some recent policy initiatives, leaves SMTs searching for responses to pressing social, environmental and economic problems. In doing so SMTs are creating responses to complex social, economic and environmental problems based on collaboration across institutions and societal sectors and local resources.

Federal Republic of Germany

Founded in 1949 the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was divided into East and West Germany until 1989. In 1990 Germany was united and the FRG now consists of 16 federal states each of which has its own government that is elected separately from the federal government. The federal states share similar powers and structures. Most statutory responsibilities are discharged by local governmental institutions which have a similar structure across the federal states and operate within tightly regulated legal frameworks.

The prominence of constitutional laws and legal frameworks makes the FRG a classic example of a state that is governed by legal statutes (Merkl, 1999).

Germany's population currently stands at 83 million and is expected to decline to 82 million by 2040. Germany has one of the fastest ageing populations in Europe with one third of the population being 65 years and older by 2050 (Federal Statistical Office, 2016; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020). Population dynamics in former East Germany are very different compared to West Germany. The federal states in the former east have the lowest rate of industrial employment among European member states and low fertility rates. While economically more competitive areas in West Germany keep on growing, it is not difficult to find towns and cities in East Germany that lost 25% of their population in the 20 years after unification (Wiechman & Volkmann, 2012). However, SMTs display a continuous absolute decline in their populations across the country. Between 2005 and 2015 47% of medium sized towns (population 20,000 – 100,000) and 60% of small towns (population 5,000 – 20,000) registered an absolute population decline. The federal government recognises this as a specific urban policy challenge and maintains funding programmes specifically targeted at strengthening their infrastructure, enhancing town centres and supporting the provision of residential property (Bundesregierung, 2016).

In response to the dramatic rise of vacant residential and commercial property triggered by a dramatic rapid outmigration following unification the federal government introduced the 'Stadtumbau Ost' programme in 2002. The aim of this 'urban restructuring' programme was to strengthen urban settlements by demolishing dispensable urban structures and re-furbish housing stock. Between 2002 and 2015 €1.59 billion were provided by government of which €581.5 was used for the demolition of approximately 400,000 apartments and €831.7 for upgrading properties with the remainder going on infrastructure improvements and securing vacant buildings (Bundesregierung, 2012). The Internal Building Exhibition in Saxony Anhalt (IBA) was established at the same time to explore ways of dealing with urban shrinkage in SMTs through non-growth oriented strategies (IBA, 2010). In 2004 the federal government created a similar programme for the western part of Germany. The Stadtumbau West programme aimed to strengthen towns and cities by supporting the upgrading of residential property, removing or re-purposing derelict land and industrial infrastructure and improving open spaces. Tackling urban shrinkage was not the primary objective. In 2017 the two programmes were merged into one national regeneration programme, Stadtumbau, which is the main instrument to pursue national urban policy aimed at sustainable urban development and challenges arising from demographic, economic and environmental change (BMUB, 2014; Bundesministerium des Innern für Bau und Heimat, 2020).

The subsidiary principle makes local authorities important actors in regard to urban planning and in this they are supported by powerful lobbies such as the German Association

of Towns and Cities, the German Association of Towns and Districts and the German Association of County Councils. However, as regional governments are required to match-fund federal regeneration funding they have a controlling position in regard to the identification of priorities that are to be addressed locally (Nelle et al., 2017). A critical analysis of the implementation of the Stadtumbau Ost programme shows that regional and national government frequently collaborated more closely with large property owners' associations than local authorities. Bernt (2017) argues that the main challenge of restructuring the urban fabric was not a lack of funding but making key actors collaborate locally. Large municipal and private housing companies became powerful actors in shaping the programme because they could deliver large scale interventions quickly. Despite specific provisions for private owners and local communities in the creation of integrated urban development plans, a corporatist culture and the pressure to show quick results became a barrier to the inclusion of smaller municipalities. (Benke, 2010; M. Bernt, 2009; Mathias Bernt, 2010). While small towns had limited access to the generous Stadtumbau financing they benefit from a dedicated governmental funding stream that recognises a widespread shrinkage problem and enables municipalities to create responses to them.

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