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Volume 1 ▶ International Research

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SHRINKING CITIES

Volume 1 ▶ International Research

Edited by Philipp Oswalt for the Kulturstiftung des Bundes

Shrinking Cities is a project of the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation) in cooperation with the Project Office Philipp Oswalt, the Museum of Contemporary Art Leipzig, the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, and the magazine *archplus*.

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PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

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FOREWORD

Cities play a central role in the development of societies. They serve as a crystallization point and a motor for social and cultural transformation. In the international context two opposite trends in urban development have become particularly apparent: on the one hand are the cities in Asia and South America which are growing exponentially, and on the other are the “shrinking cities” characterized by a decreasing population—both possibly heralding the most important forms of urban transformation since the beginning of the industrial revolution. These two types of cities have led to significant changes in our understanding of cities and urban development.

The above-mentioned transformations in our cities present us not only with economic, social, and planning challenges, but above all with a cultural challenge. For this reason the “Kunst und Stadt” (Art and the City) program was initiated by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation) with the aim of broadening our cultural perspective and the kinds of questions we ask as we grapple with the meaning of urban transformation for modern societies. We hope to thereby close a gap in debates that have thus far been carried out primarily from the perspective of economics and sociology. Right before our door here in eastern Germany, the problem of shrinking cities has presented itself with particular gravity. We decided it would therefore be appropriate to begin the Art and the City program, which comprises six different projects, with the Shrinking Cities project. It explores the causes, effects, and cultural perspectives for cities that are shrinking by taking four different urban regions as examples: Detroit, Halle/Leipzig, Ivanovo, and Manchester/Liverpool. Planned to extend over the course of three years, the project allows an international team of curators, architects, artists, cultural anthropologists, city geographers, and cultural scholars, in collaboration with local experts, to study the cultural dimensions of shrinking cities and to present its results to the public. It was particularly important to us, however, to go beyond a mere presentation of the cultural backdrop and field studies in order to develop productive, or perhaps even controversial, approaches and innovative models, or even visions, as tools for understanding the phenomenon of shrinking cities. The expectation we had for the first exhibition and corresponding publication was that it would be possible to confront the stereotyped image of the shrinking city as a cultural and social wasteland with examples of the civic and cultural potential of these cities.

Through the Shrinking Cities exhibition and publication, the topic has already reached a wide audience. This is also demonstrated by the many national and international cooperation partners supporting the project, including the following, to name just a few: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (German Federal Agency for Civic Education); IBA Stadtumbau Sachsen-Anhalt in Germany; the Liverpool Biennial, the Arts Council England, and the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, Birmingham, in Great Britain; the administration of the

Ivanovo region and the city of Yuzha, as well as the Russian magazine *Project Russia*; and the University of Detroit Mercy and Wayne State University in the United States. The considerable interest demonstrated by the public and the broad national and international press coverage are further evidence of the importance and timeliness of this issue.

The exhibition and the publication complement each other: in the exhibition, four urban regions and their particularities are addressed in detail and compared; the publication delves further into the questions raised in the exhibition, putting them into a thematic framework. The cultural history of growth and shrinkage serves as the context for examining the following subjects: the cultural effects of labor migration (“Moving Cities – Unstable Places” and “Growth : Shrinkage – Dynamics of the Periphery”); new forms of everyday and economic utilization (“Everyday Survival – Do It Yourself”); myths, identities, and utopias in the marketing of shrinking cities (“Imaging the City – Cultural Representations”); and the role of artistic production and new lifestyles (“Space Pioneers – The Avant-Garde of Shrinking”). These are only a few of the central issues. The concluding chapter outlines the remaining work to be done within the project, including the necessity of rethinking the social, cultural, and urban planning structures, values, and models used to address the phenomenon of shrinking cities (“Deconstructed Values – Mentalities in Flux”).

We are very pleased to present this English edition of the project’s findings, which will bring our work to an international audience. We hope this will generate new impulses in the European and international debates on shrinking cities. Because shrinking cities are a global phenomenon that will continue to present a social challenge for some time to come, we feel that a dialogue is needed now more than ever. This publication is an important contribution to these debates.

We would like to thank the chief curator Philipp Oswalt and his team, as well as cocurators Nikolaus Kuhnert (*archplus* magazine, Berlin), Kyong Park (International Center for Urban Ecology, Detroit), Walter Prigge (Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau), and Barbara Steiner (Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig), for their outstanding work, and we wish them much success with the second phase of the project. Stefano Boeri (architecture theorist, Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, Venice), Christine Hannemann (sociologist, Humboldt-Universität, Berlin), Wolfgang Kil (architecture critic, Berlin), Joachim Krausse (cultural scientist, Fachhochschule Sachsen-Anhalt, Dessau), Ulf Matthiesen (city and regional researcher, Institut für Regionalentwicklung und Strukturplanung, Erkner), and Ulrich Pfeiffer (urban economist, empirica, Berlin/Bonn) have supported the project as advisors and offered productive guidance. We would like to thank them wholeheartedly.

We hope you find these readings inspiring and insightful.

INTRODUCTION

Philipp Oswald

“Shrinking cities”—a problematic term. It seems at first to simply point to a phenomenon: the decline of the urban population and economic activity in certain cities. But behind this term are hidden various causes, processes, and effects that the words themselves do not reveal. There is also growth in the process of shrinkage: it results in excess spaces, buildings, and obsolete properties. Despite their diminished utilization, shrinking cities continue to sprawl beyond their borders and thereby undergo a twofold thinning out: less activity is spread out over a greater space. Often that which is shrinking is embedded in a larger process of growth: not only the society as a whole may still be growing overall, but shrinking cities—for example in the rust belt in America’s Northeast—are often located within agglomerations that continue to grow (see the chapters “Moving Cities” and “Growth : Shrinkage”).

And yet the term “shrinkage” does refer to an essential change: the epoch of growth has come to an end. Since the beginning of industrialization around two hundred years ago, the population, economy, prosperity, and cities of industrial countries have all grown steadily, and usually at a rapid rate. Growth has become an expectation. The epoch of modernity was characterized by comprehensive growth, and this growth is at the heart of modern ideas, concepts, theories, laws, and practices. Thus, colonization, the founding of cities, permits for building construction zones, new development areas, expansion, building booms, urban growth, and density became key concepts in modern urban development. For the past two hundred years, city planning has been almost exclusively focused on the process of growth. The same is true for the economy, which is why there is a theory of growth in economics, but no theory of shrinkage. This historical epoch is approaching its demise. The populations in the old industrial countries such as Italy, Germany, Japan, and Russia are beginning to get smaller, the process of urbanization has reached its zenith and is declining, and, though the economy is still growing minimally, employment rates have been falling for some time. Polarization is taking place spatially as well as socially: not everyone profits from growth, and societies are increasingly being divided into winners and losers. Shrinkage in one place feeds growth in another. The process of shrinkage we are seeing more and more of is not simply a reversal of growth. Rather, the growth is replaced by a sideward drift of societies, whereby the opposite trends of growth and shrinkage can run parallel.

Like growth, shrinkage implies a transformation process that is temporally limited. Some cities will disappear, others will lose substance over the course of several decades and stabilize at a lower level or perhaps grow again. Just as growth was not always experienced as a positive process—think of housing shortages, the crises following unification of the German Empire, the pollution of early industrialization, and the slums in today’s megapolises—shrinkage will not always be experienced as a negative trend in the long run.

It will lead—as growth did—to fundamental transformations that will bring about new guiding principles, models of action, and practices, ultimately resulting in a new orientation for society.

What is otherwise only experienced on an individual basis or garnered from statistics becomes readily apparent in cities. Social processes manifest themselves in the spatial constellations of the city. Thus cities have always been read as an expression of social situations and are important for our understanding of ourselves, for our self-reflection. This raises certain questions: What do shrinking cities express culturally? What social forces are behind them? What kind of mentalities, ideas, and practices are responsible for creating them? Only this type of self-reflection can yield an adequate approach to dealing with these issues.

Shrinking cities are not a new phenomenon. In the development of modern metropolises, the phenomenon appeared around fifty years ago and was initially interpreted as a singular aberration limited to a particular place. Up until today the approach has been to avoid this new challenge, and a whole arsenal of euphemisms has sprung up in order to disguise the core of the issue. We speak of “city redevelopment” rather than “de-urbanization,” or use the phrase “areas in great need of restructuring” to indicate blocks marked for demolition. Even the phrase “shrinkage as a new potential” has been coined. The term “shrinking cities” was long frowned upon and has only recently entered into public debate.

Shrinkage as a New Potential?

The motto “shrinkage as a new potential,” hailed by politicians, journalists, and city planners in Germany, usually implies the idea that the shrinking results in a new urban core, a compact city representing the ideal of European urban development. It is hoped that the undesirable phenomenon of suburban sprawl will finally be put to an end. But in reality what is happening is just the opposite—and it is being promoted by large state subsidies. The vacant buildings in eastern Germany are countered largely with new construction sites. With populations and economic activity declining, cities are spreading out horizontally and thus thinning out even further. In the city centers, buildings and whole blocks are increasingly abandoned, whereas in the outskirts business parks, shopping malls, and new residential neighborhoods with single-unit houses are being developed. It is a development similar to that in Detroit since the 1950s, where 80% of the population lives in suburban areas outside the city limits, while large segments of the inner city have become overgrown with grass, evolving into quasi-idyllic pastoral scenes.

The idea of shrinkage as a new potential can be understood as cynicism. Shrinkage is initially a negative development for the majority of the population, which manifests itself most immediately in their flight. It is the active population, the younger and more mobile, that moves away because it sees better prospects elsewhere. At the same time, shrinking cities and the excess space they generate are seen by other social groups as a form of potential.

The trouble with many previous concepts related to this issue is that they are concerned merely with the superficial symptoms of urban development—for example, vacant buildings—and do not probe the breadth and depth of the problem. This is particularly true of the very necessary but inadequate German state subsidy program *Stadtumbau Ost* (Urban Restructuring in Eastern Germany), in which the essence of the proposed action is nothing more than a blueprint for demolition.

Causes

The phenomenon of shrinking cities is the result of various transformation processes. With regard to the development of eastern Germany, these include above all deindustrialization, suburbanization, postsocialist transformation, and demographic aging (see the chapter “Global Processes of Shrinkage”). Thus, for our international comparison we have focused on case studies of urban regions in which one of these phenomena is particularly manifest (see the case-study inserts). The region Manchester/Liverpool is compared on the basis of deindustrialization. This region—comparable in size with the former East Germany—is part of the old industrial belt of northern England, which has many other shrinking cities. The region encompassing these two cities is characterized by an extreme polarization between zones that are recovering and those that continue to decline. After decades of crisis, new plans of action were finally developed which were at least in part successful.

The Detroit metropolitan area serves as an example of shrinkage due to suburbanization. The city of Detroit has lost around one million inhabitants—about half its total population—over the last fifty years, although the region itself has grown considerably in this period. The city is still shrinking today and represents one of the most extreme examples in the American rust belt.

Ivanovo lies 300 kilometers northeast of Moscow in European Russia and is exemplary of postsocialist transformation. Despite the collapse of the textile industry concentrated in the region, as well as poverty and demographic decline, the area in fact shows less pronounced signs of shrinkage than many other cities in Russia in the High North, the Russian Far East, or Siberia. With its relatively moderate climate and—for Russia—a rather early urbanization and industrialization starting in the late nineteenth century, the region is particularly well suited for a comparison with eastern Germany. It represents a rather unspectacular example of the many postsocialist cities and areas that have shrunk since the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc.

Because of its low birthrate and a high life expectancy, Japan is the fastest-aging and thereby also the fastest-shrinking society in the world. In the context of this catalog it thus serves as an example illustrating demographic changes.

All four of the development tendencies described in our international comparisons can be found in modified forms in eastern Germany. The case study of the region Halle/Leipzig demonstrates developments in different directions, including rapid shrinkage (e.g., in Bitterfeld/

Wolfen and Weissenfels), relative consolidation (e.g., in Leipzig), and growth (e.g., the periphery along the A9 expressway).

This comparison serves many purposes. We can learn from the ways in which other societies have dealt with the problem, and we may come to understand our own situation not as an exception but as part of a more general trend, thereby putting the issue into a new perspective and yielding new insights. In such a comparison not only do similarities and parallels become apparent, but fundamental differences are also revealed. This is true even for analogous phenomena that may be caused by completely different circumstances. Whereas urban farming has arisen in Russia as a result of the basic need to survive, in the United States it represents a living social utopia of small, dedicated groups and in eastern Germany a state measure to beautify fallow lots.

The Cultures of Shrinking Cities

Specific to shrinking cities is dramatic transformation brought about without local intervention through construction. The utilization and programming of urban space undergo fundamental change, yet without initial physical changes taking place. Our conventional ideas and concepts of how to respond fail here, but some surprising indigenous developments have sprung up. This becomes most apparent with urban subcultures. It is striking to note how many new directions in music have emerged from shrinking cities: techno was invented in Detroit, and much of British punk, techno, and house music came out of Manchester and Sheffield starting in the late 1970s. This has left its mark on urban development. The revitalization of Manchester's inner city would have been unthinkable without the music scene there, which was able to transform the downtown area's image from a dilapidated industrial center into a metropolitan cultural oasis (see the chapter "Space Pioneers").

Among the practices that arise in shrinking cities are many that have to do with everyday life, such as the above-mentioned urban farming, the plundering, stripping, scrapping, and vandalizing of vacant buildings, and the reorganization of public space, for example due to a retreat into private spaces or the rise of parking-lot and gas-station urbanism. Western Europe is now also increasingly faced with phenomena such as informal economies, unplanned development of spaces, and "low-standard spaces" otherwise associated with threshold or developing countries (see the chapter "Everyday Survival").

Can Planning Even Help?

The shrinking of cities is an unintentional phenomenon. It is an unplanned side effect, the indirect result of political and economic decisions, circumstances, and processes that lie beyond the spheres of architecture and urban planning. Previous attempts to shape the process of shrinkage have been inadequate and have often failed because the conventional means and tools of city planning and urban development, if they are at all available, are not able to tackle the problem (see the chapter "The Myth of Planning").

This means two things. First, the factors in a given society which cause or significantly influence the process of shrinkage must be examined. The discussion thus moves away from the discourse of urban planning and toward a dialogue on values and political questions, which can lead to other ways of approaching the issues (see the chapter “Deconstructed Values”). What do we make of property laws that hinder desirable urban development? What do we make of immigration laws that substantially exacerbate the problem of demographic aging? What do we make of subsidies for mobility and suburban development when this kind of funding allows existing resources to waste away and cities to become fragmented? What do we make of employment policy measures that silence and disempower people instead of empowering them?

Weak Planning

Faced with the phenomenon of shrinkage, urban planning is merely reactive because—unlike with growth—it has little influence on the main forces at hand: deindustrialization, demographic change, or even suburbanization. Instead of heroically failing or passively capitulating, we must search for new ways to intervene in urban planning. It is toward this end that the Shrinking Cities project has endeavored an extensive analysis. We must first try to understand the specific, unique development of these cities in order to be able to intervene in appropriate ways. If we accept this as the starting point, our plan of action must be based on the idea of “weak planning.” This weak planning will increasingly use “soft tools” because often cultural development, forms of communication, and the rise of social networks and processes shape urban development more than construction itself does. City planning will thus not become obsolete, but will be based on different presuppositions and use different means.

Urban developers are used to “developing” a city by undertaking construction—of infrastructures, districts, buildings. But shrinkage is a form of urban transformation that occurs in a radical manner without any initial changes in the local physical space in which it takes place. This raises the question, on the one hand, of whether the relationship between space and utilization should be rethought and/or whether the ideas of space and utilization themselves should be rethought. On the other hand, the question arises as to whether or not there may be other forms of intervention in addition to the classic mode of development through construction which can influence the way in which a city develops.

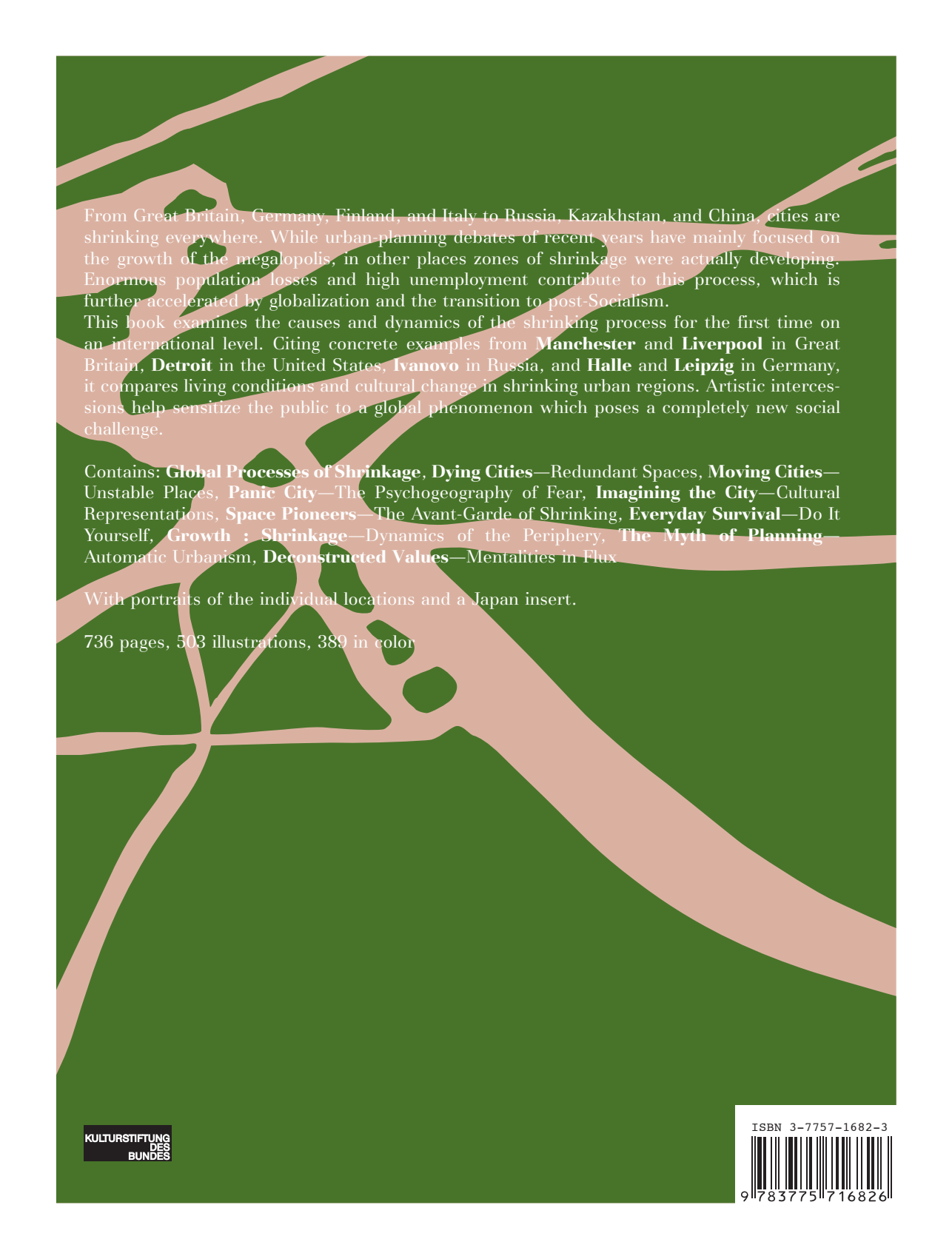
A fundamental shift in emphasis from the physical conditions to the social configurations and to questions of use is gradually being perceived and accepted by various actors. An example of this can be seen in a statement made by a banker during a workshop in the context of the Shrinking Cities project: “When granting loans, I am not interested in a pile of stones, but rather in the people who are behind them.” Contemporary city marketing, which arose as a way of tackling the crises of deindustrialized U.S. cities in the 1980s, also has responded to the relevance of mental images for urban development. The city-planning debates in Germany have also recently seen a shift from “hard tools” to “soft tools”—

for example in the initiation of a program called Soziale Stadt (Social City)—even though this has until now usually taken the form of social work as a means of crisis intervention in conflict-ridden districts rather than the form of a real instrument for future-oriented urban development. In the context of shrinking cities it will be necessary to understand the “soft tools” as an essential and integral part of city planning.

Moving from Crisis to Innovation

The debates about the crisis of shrinking cities will serve as an impulse to develop new concepts and models. The situation was similar at the start of classical modernity. The search for alternatives to the shocking living conditions of workers led to innovative solutions at the beginning of the twentieth century, which inspired new developments in architecture internationally. It is interesting to note that the development of a new architectural language and of new typologies for the construction of buildings and cities was not the only result of these endeavors. Equally important was the formation of new actors, such as cooperatives serving as property developers; new legal, planning, and financial instruments; and a radical new understanding of municipal tasks—and ultimately a new model of society.

The *Shrinking Cities* project understands itself as contributing to a broad debate that will continue in the coming years and decades. The project pursues different approaches that sometimes run counter to each other, focusing on cultural themes and international correlations. The goal is to pose new questions, enable new perspectives, and formulate new approaches. Expectations that the project will produce ready-made answers or even “the great solution” are in our opinion misguided, because they are based on the classical myth of planning. A productive approach to urban shrinkage can only be successful if it is part of a long process, one that utilizes heterogeneous means and forges new paths. In November 2005 the project will present the results of its second phase of work—devoted to developing relevant plans of action—by publishing a second volume and organizing an exhibition in Leipzig.



From Great Britain, Germany, Finland, and Italy to Russia, Kazakhstan, and China, cities are shrinking everywhere. While urban-planning debates of recent years have mainly focused on the growth of the megalopolis, in other places zones of shrinkage were actually developing. Enormous population losses and high unemployment contribute to this process, which is further accelerated by globalization and the transition to post-Socialism.

This book examines the causes and dynamics of the shrinking process for the first time on an international level. Citing concrete examples from **Manchester** and **Liverpool** in Great Britain, **Detroit** in the United States, **Ivanovo** in Russia, and **Halle** and **Leipzig** in Germany, it compares living conditions and cultural change in shrinking urban regions. Artistic intercessions help sensitize the public to a global phenomenon which poses a completely new social challenge.

Contains: **Global Processes of Shrinkage**, **Dying Cities**—Redundant Spaces, **Moving Cities**—Unstable Places, **Panic City**—The Psychogeography of Fear, **Imagining the City**—Cultural Representations, **Space Pioneers**—The Avant-Garde of Shrinking, **Everyday Survival**—Do It Yourself, **Growth : Shrinkage**—Dynamics of the Periphery, **The Myth of Planning**—Automatic Urbanism, **Deconstructed Values**—Mentalities in Flux

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