CHAPTER 12 :

PLANNING RESPONSES OF SHRINKAGE IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC'S LARGEST CITIES

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Introduction[1]

As in Central and Eastern European cities, Slovakian cities are also facing shrinkage. Decades of ongoing urban growth have been replaced by long-term urban population decline since 1989. Wide-scale de-industrialisation, housing construction collapse, as well as different family and migration behaviour have accompanied the post-socialist transition. In the absence of explicit urban policy imposed by the central state, these new development processes pose a serious challenge to urban governments. This chapter analyses the extent of the planning framework have used and deals with various aspects of shrinkage. It also identifies that existing planning documents are not sufficiently used for clearly identifying shrinkage processes in cities. At the same time, the potential of local planning is not sufficiently utilised for setting the context of different kinds of development priorities and efficient measures to deal with shrinkage.

Slovak Republic's context

Shrinkage in cities is not frequently researched in the Slovak Republic; however, authors that have outlined selected demographic features include Slavík et al. (2005), Finka and Petríková (2006), and Bleha and Buček (2010). The intention of this chapter is to raise awareness of shrinkage in Slovakian cities; however, a good indicator that this has already begun to occur is the reference of shrinkage in the main local planning documents. "Planning response" is among the growing fields of interest within the "shrinkage" debate (Wiechmann, 2008, Hollander et al., 2009, Pallagst, 2010). In this contribution, this chapter focuses on shrinking is cities with a population above 50 000 between 1996-2009, which includes 11 of the largest Slovakian cities (including the 2 largest cities of Bratislava and Košice) (Table 12.1). Eight of these cities serve as seats of regional self-governments, including the capital city of Bratislava, with the exception of Martin, Poprad and Prievidza (Figure 12.1). Approximately 25% of the Slovakian population live within these cities.

Table 12.1. **Population size in the biggest Slovak cities**

City	Population (as of 31 December 1996)	Population (as of 31 December 2009)
Bratislava	452 288	431 061
Košice	241 606	233 880
Prešov	93 147	91 193
Žilina	86 811	85 252
Nitra	87 569	83 692
Banská Bystrica	85 052	79 990
Trnava	70 202	67 605
Martin	60 917	58 166
Trenčín	59 039	56 514
Poprad	55 303	54 433
Prievidza	57 395	50 351

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (1996; 2010), "Annual data on population dynamics" (in Slovak), available at *www.statistics.sk*.

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Figure 12.1. **Cities with population above 50 000 in the Slovak Republic, 2009 (within regional borders)**

Source: population data provided by Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2010), "Annual data on population dynamics" (in Slovak), available at *www.statistics.sk*.

Over the last decade, the planning framework has expanded significantly at the local level. This has been achieved through improved management approaches in fields like spatial development, business support, local workforce, transport infrastructure and city marketing. This chapter focuses on the management of shrinkage within selected planning documents adopted at the local level in the Slovak Republic. Three types of plans that cover shrinkage are: **master plans** as key documents in territorial planning, **programmes of economic and social development** representing strategic development planning, and **community plans of social services** focusing on social services. As official documents required by legislation, they are adopted by city councils and provide the main regulatory framework for not only the local government but also for other parties active in local life. Eleven programmes of economic and social development (for all the cities in the sample) and nine adopted community plans of social services were analysed. Five master plans that were adopted or revised within the last decade were also evaluated. Due to the fact that planning documents cover an entire area of the city, we debate shrinking within this spatial framework.

From a demographic point of view, urban shrinkage is a reality in the Slovak Republic. The number of inhabitants is decreasing in most of its 138 cities. During the analysed period (1996-2009), the population of cities decreased by almost 100 000 inhabitants, while a further 100 000 inhabitants live in rural settlements. Approximately half of urban population loss is caused by population developments in 11 of the largest Slovakian cities. All of these cities with more than 50 000 inhabitants lost between 1.5% and 7.5% of their population between 1996 and 2009. A negative migration balance and a decline in the total fertility rate have lead to the overall decrease of population. Population has been redistributed from cities to rural settlements especially residential suburbanisation, which has expanded in the majority of larger cities' hinterland. The population dynamics have improved in Bratislava over recent years, thanks to growth in migration (Bratislava has had a positive annual migration balance since 2005) as well as natural increase since 2006 (mostly because of the positive economic development and new workplaces). In addition, from 1996-2009 all 11 cities recorded an increase in mean age, with some having a mean age already above 40. A decrease in cities' population combined with population ageing can be considered the most alarming issue, especially from the point of view of financing social services.

Shrinkage in local planning documents

The two basic approaches to shrinkage that should be included in planning documents are: *i)* clearly identifying shrinkage. This is the role of the planning documents' analytical sections. Among the results, there should be data and other evidence confirming the existence of shrinkage. Clear identification includes characteristics of its dynamic nature, which are necessary for any planning considerations; *ii)* the adoption of new development priorities, appropriate measures, tools, etc. should be reflected in more regulatory oriented and executive sections of planning documents. This is especially the case within the "programming" sections in programmes of economic and social development.[2]

The analysis of primary demographic identification of shrinkage in the analytical sections of planning documents[3] revealed that not all available plans satisfactorily fulfilled this expectation. Most had elaborated demographic analyses containing an overview of basic indicators of population dynamics and structures. However, only a few cities had adequate population forecasts based on the application of the cohort-component method (a more precise method of population projection taking into account the age and sex distribution of the population), with a sufficient explanation of introductory assumptions and accompanied by a transparent and logical presentation of the results. The dynamics of population change in most cities fluctuate annually. In some cases, only a few years after the adoption of their plan, real population development is already different. Therefore, depending on their analytical sections, the significance of the level of shrinkage awareness is hard to achieve. Only a few cities know in detail the scope of shrinkage they are facing.

An examination of the interaction between shrinkage and planning in cities was based on selected, frequently mentioned shrinkage issues. These include: land use, housing, technical infrastructure, social facilities and services, as well as local finance (following e.g. Wiechmann, 2008; Hollander et al., 2009; Moss, 2008; Wolf and Amirkhanyan, 2009). The aim was to evaluate the extent of the planning/programming sections of local documents that contain a shrinkage-induced course of action. It was the assumption that despite the frequent lack of adept identification of shrinkage, that unintentional shrinking-related planning priorities and measures within planning documents could help reduce the impact of shrinkage. We respect the fact that the concept of shrinking is more or less unknown in the Slovak Republic, but partial measures can be adopted because of selected process evaluation (e.g. land use changes).

One of the most visible links to shrinkage processes concerns land use especially related to de-industrialisation. Large areas of former industrial plants are now vacant and disused in cities. While those areas close to city centres are often already restructured and given new functions, large pieces of unused and derelict land inside the compact urban environment remain. Some cities have attempted to classify them as brownfield locations and plan to detail specific projects for their future use by the business sector.[4] At the same time, new industrial locations (such as industrial parks) are being prepared for construction or as land reserves in master plans. All such land-based activities are part of undertakings to attract new investors within new workplaces. In many cases, new investment inflow is the foundation for calculated future growth, despite accepting longer term development difficulties. Often new development

2. Programmes of economic and social development as adopted in the following cities: Banská Bystrica, Bratislava, Košice, Martin, Nitra, Poprad, Prešov, Prievidza, Trenčín, Trnava, Žilina.

3. Master plans as adopted in the following cities: Bratislava, Nitra, Prešov, Prievidza, Trenčín.

4. Besides their own resources, local self-governments can obtain support for their brownfield locations revitalisation projects from EU funds. They focus on redevelopment, technical infrastructure modernisation, land clearance and the elimination of environmental burdens in these locations.

objectives are formulated within already built-up areas of a city. Preference is given to available vacant land and the compact city form of development, e.g. in housing construction.

In comparison to other countries (especially Germany), housing is not considered as an important feature of shrinkage in Slovakian cities (such as the problem with vacant houses). Large-scale housing privatisation occurred in the 1990s whereby most housing is private and is considered the direct responsibility of citizens. Citizens' housing needs are supported by various tools introduced by central state and local governments (such as support of savings in building societies, technical infrastructure subsidies, social housing construction, and land availability). From the urban shrinkage point of view in the Slovak Republic, large socialist housing estates are the most vulnerable. Planning documents emphasise the need for their regeneration, modernisation, or improving their energy efficiency. Cities are interested in the humanisation of these housing estates' living environment to prevent their degradation. Housing estates have a large role to play due to the housing shortage within Slovakian cities. New housing construction had declined particularly during the 1990s in the absence of housing support tools during the early period of economic transition. Nevertheless, planned extensive new housing locations will probably be under reconsideration by local self-governments in future plans, based on exaggerated population growth forecasts in current plans.

A capacity growth-based approach is applied to technical infrastructure planning in cities. Plans mostly focus on solving infrastructure needs in areas of new development, replacing older infrastructure, and completing missing environmental infrastructure (sewage networks, water cleaning). There is a lack of attention to the dangers of infrastructure overcapacity, even though it already exists. Capacity growth-based planning relates to the perception of development reserve and good potential; however, wider considerations on infrastructure capabilities are absent.

Population decrease also results in financial losses for local self-government and a threat to public service provision. Programmes of economic and social development include analyses of local self-government finance (incomes/expenditure flows and structure, property base and indebtedness are inevitable for formulating financial measures). An important source of local finance is personal income tax – 70.3% of the total amount is distributed to local self-governments in the Slovak Republic. The tax is distributed according to the official number of permanently registered local residents. Changes in population numbers immediately affect the amount of funds transferred from this tax to local budgets. Lower populations have had a negative financial effect on particular groups of inhabitants, for example, pupils at local schools, whereby the transfer of resources from the state budget for education is calculated predominantly on a per pupil base. Therefore, the decreasing number of pupils results in fewer resources for local education networks placing financial pressure on sustaining existing school facilities. Many cities also lack the resources to cope with certain shrinkage-based issues such as the regeneration of old industrial land, or investments in social services, for example the elderly. Despite the outlined logical links, more direct local financial aspects of shrinkage are not taken into consideration.

The examination of community plans of social services[5] concerning the elderly population and families with children (sometimes as families in crisis, as pointed out in several plans) revealed that considerably more attention is being paid to the elderly population. Cities frequently stated insufficient capacities and a lack of diversity in service provision to the elderly population. Many plans identified unfavourable demographic developments as a threat to local social service provision. Cities' plans stated the immediate need to increase capacities, whereby investment is needed for the construction of new facilities for the elderly. Often the strategy is to reduce waiting lists for various facilities serving elderly citizens and/or conversion plans such as transforming facilities serving children to facilities serving elderly citizens.

5. Community plans of social services (2009-2010) as adopted in the following cities: Banská Bystrica, Košice, Martin, Poprad, Prešov, Prievidza, Trenčín, Trnava, Žilina.

Cities' community plans of social services also focused more on preventing crises within families, to assist families with handicapped children, etc. rather than on a proactive family policy that could potentially improve development through children and family-oriented measures (e.g. increase the number of places in pre-school facilities, more free time centres, support of single-parent families, more social housing, not mentioning possible pro-natality measures).

Conclusions

The issue of shrinkage should be moved to the forefront of the scientific and political debate on urban development in the Slovak Republic. Although population development analyses confirm the shrinkage of cities, there is a lack of a wider debate on this issue. This is due to the perception by planning authorities that the impacts of shrinkage are mild and less complex in nature (for example, there is no problem of vacant housing, as a typical feature of shrinkage in many countries), as well as the absence of cities facing very pressing and wide-ranging shrinkage-related challenges. There is a longer term underestimation of the impacts of shrinkage on cities. Urban shrinkage has also been overshadowed by long-term dominant post-socialist transition and the transformation debate. It confirms the fact that there has been no wider attention given to the concept of shrinkage in Slovak social sciences. The move to the post-transformation period offers the chance for many new scientific concepts in urban development, including shrinkage.

The traditional growth-based nature of local planning has to be challenged. Plans at the local level are prepared as documents "drawing" positive future developments. Being not only professional but also political documents (adopted by city councils), among their traditional roles is to formulate optimistic growth that offers positive expectations. Although city councils are already forced to adopt shrinkage-related decisions under the pressure of population development or financial pressures (such as school closures), these impacts are not extensively included in the planning documents. Less positive decisions are adopted outside the existing planning framework, i.e. outside the systematic preparation for such a situation (they are initiated under the pressure of momentary development, operational and financial analysis). The role of planners and other professionals is to persuade the local political elite that plans should be more realistic and should be used to better prepare for real situations and not to give the illusion of future growth. Plans need to have a more balanced awareness of the future.

Despite a suitable general framework, planning at the urban level does not provide a sufficient practical tool to address shrinkage in the Slovak Republic, and in most cases, it is overlooked in planning documents. The Slovakian case confirms that planning documents and related policies do not reflect current urban development trends, but are reactive (with delays), as identified by Wiechmann (2008). There is a strong need to improve the analytical sections of planning documents in order to more precisely identify city demographic dynamics for future planning purposes, such as shrinkage processes. Improving the analytical sections also means inviting specialists to elaborate more sophisticated analyses and forecasts. Shrinkage is a serious challenge for the Slovakian planning system, and planners are not yet prepared for "non-growth" development and adaptation to shrinkage. Urban planners, city representatives, and officials are not prepared to think systematically about different development priorities, or new kinds of measures suitable for shrinking cities. A more extensive theoretical debate and research on shrinkage, subsequently followed by new guidelines for elaborating local plans is needed in the Slovak Republic.

Key recommendations for policy makers:

- The quality of local population forecasting has to be improved. This can be achieved by involving demographers/geodemographers well trained in population forecasting with elaborating plans, or by central state-initiated population forecasts being elaborated by specialised institutions experienced in such kind of forecasting (e.g. for all cities). This could improve the quality of planning in general (in all types of plans).

- Planning documents have to be more realistic. A positive influence would gain extensive citizens' participation, leading local stakeholders to become directly involved (from private and non-governmental sectors) in the preparation of the plans, as well as by external professional review of plans prepared for adoption by the city council (for example, two or three external experts). It could increase awareness of shrinking within the local community and help to adopt more realistic measures.

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