

# BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH CREATIVE STRATEGIES IN SMALL POST-SOCIALIST SHRINKING TOWNS

Milica Ljubenović

Ivana Bogdanović-Protić

Petar Mitković

Milica Igić

Jelena Đekić

- widespread phenomenon characterized mainly by population loss, which can be caused by different economic, demographic and spatial transformations from global to local level

## Shrinking post-socialist small towns

### Negative impacts:

- the withdrawal of state funding
  - the lack of interest of private investors
  - environmental degradation
  - weak position in the global economic system
  - neglect in national and regional policies, which favour larger urban centres and their development
- the prolonged period of economic stagnation, decreased income and deteriorated quality of life
- they need complex solutions; improving urban resilience is an alternative to growth

- considers urban systems as complex adaptive systems
- focuses on how to preserve and develop with change - on the ability of people, communities, societies and cultures to adapt and develop in an ever-changing environment
- the ability of cities 'bounce-back' and adjust to shocks and challenges

## Possible responses to disturbance in resilient system:

- **Adaptation** - the ability of the system to adapt to different influences and continue to develop along the current trajectory
- **Transformation** - the capacity to create a fundamentally new system of development when environmental, economic or social conditions make the existing system unsustainable

## Adaptive cycle

- cities cross different phases - exploitation, conservation, release and reorganization

**Shrinking cities** → the conservation phase, less flexible to negative influences; shrinkage represents a result of response to shocks

- the future needs to be reinvented based on the changing context
- their abilities and strengths may be different from the past
- the social components of the city (actors, interest groups) play a key role in achieving resilience

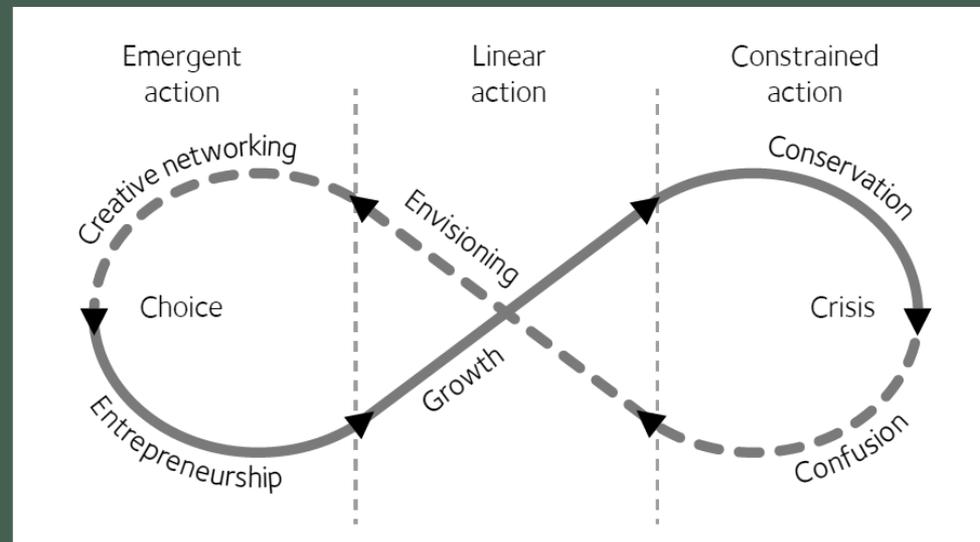


Figure 1: Adaptive cycle of shrinking cities (Schlappa and Neill, 2013)

# Creative strategies in small towns

- should be based on local qualities and implemented in order to achieve an attractive, viable environment for its own residents and to prevent further emigration

## Approaches:

- **physical approach** - focused on the built environment, mainly relies on programs and instruments of urban regeneration and revitalization
- **green approach** - based on the promotion of the quality of places and quality of life based on natural, historical-cultural and symbolic benefits
- **thematic approach** - based on the certain segment of cultural and creative industries (music, theatre, food)
- **integrated approach** - focused on attracting talent and creative industries through the application of integrated instruments with social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts

# Combining creative strategies and resilience - case study analysis

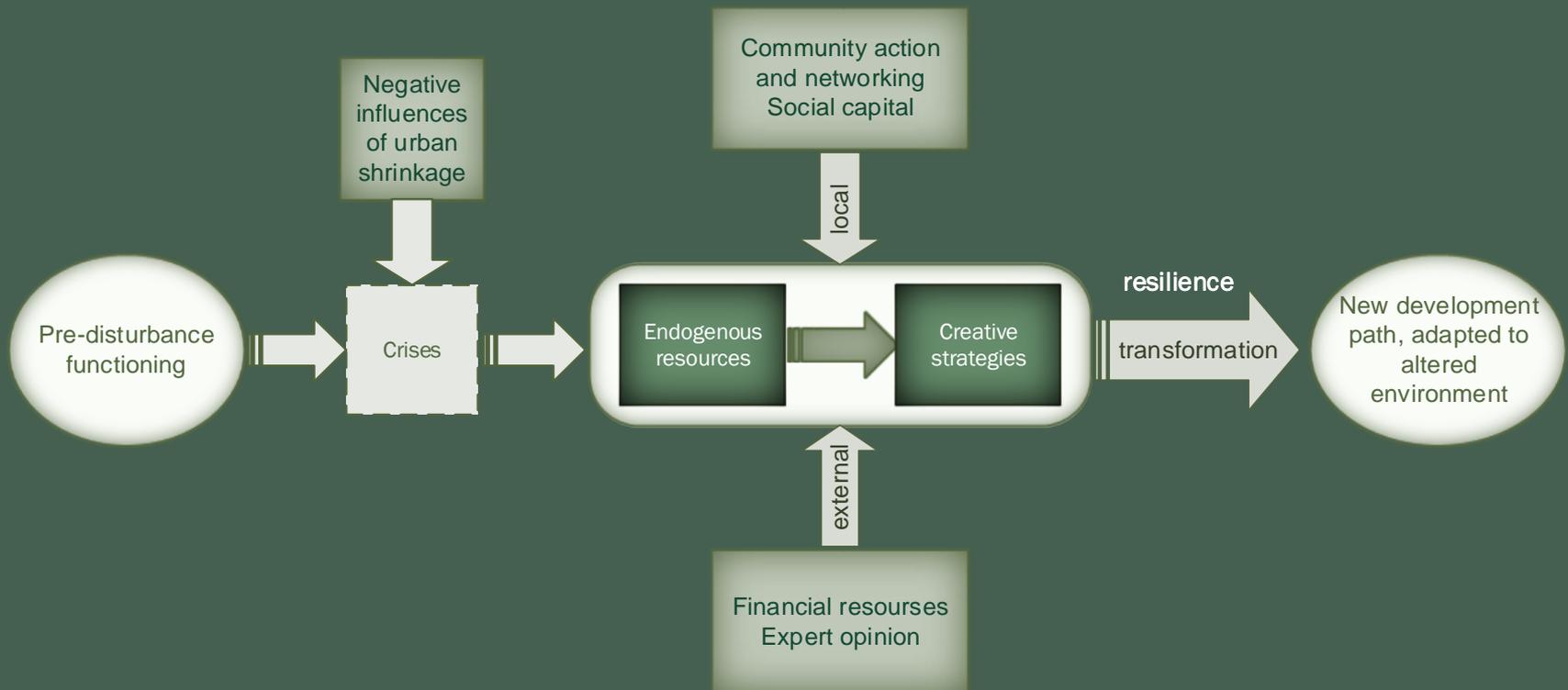
## Case studies:

- East Germany: Colditz, Grimma, Ostriz
- Estonia: Viljandi
- the main cause of shrinkage
  - economic restructuring after the fall of socialist regime → influenced unemployment and job decline → emigration as a consequence
- development paths:
  - the main goal → creating of an attractive environment as an alternative to the big cites
  - strategies → different creative strategies, based on endogenous resources and realistic strategic goals
    - they managed to respond adaptively to change and transform their development trajectory
    - applied strategies have mitigated their depopulation

# Local development strategies in case studies

TOWN	DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES	TYPE OF CREATIVE STRATEGIES APPROACH
<b>Colditz</b>	the development of services, tourism based on historic attractions - medieval castle, the Renaissance town square	combined physical approach -renewal and revitalization with thematic - cultural tourism
<b>Grimma</b>	shock event (flood) as trigger point for many renewal initiatives	integrated approach - physical renewal, cultural approach and community engagement
<b>Ostriz</b>	a new orientation of the town's development as an "ecological model"	green approach - promotion of the new town identity as place with a healthy environment energy self-sufficient
<b>Viljandi</b>	specialization in the field of culture and tourism - a combination of traditional industry and cultural cluster	thematic approach - establishing a strong cultural cluster around cultural institutions and an international folk music festival

# Conceptual framework for creative strategies approach in shrinking small post-socialist towns



- shrinking towns can finish an **adaptation cycle** and manage to preserve **resilient** development path → urban shrinkage can trigger a process of development based on new choices and opportunities
- **resilience** → creative change and system's capacity to adaptively respond to disturbance and support long-term positive dynamics
- **creative strategies** → should be based on the specific local characteristics potentials, according to which realistic and effective goals should be developed

**Small post-socialist shrinking towns** should not base their future development only on creative strategies. They need to be a part of a **broader integrated strategy** of local development and well connected with urban planning, economic policy, environmental planning as well as careful future population projections.

**Cooperation** and **networking** with other towns or cities is important in order to join their resources and share knowledge and experiences.