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
- negligence 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
Urban resilience

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

Pre-disturbance functioning

Crisis

Negative influences of urban shrinkage

Endogenous resources

Creative strategies

Community action and networking
Social capital

Resilience
Transformation

New development path, adapted to altered environment

Financial resources
Expert opinion
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.